

No One Deserves To Live In A Closet

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](http://archiveofourown.org/works/4580658) at <http://archiveofourown.org/works/4580658>.

Rating:	Teen And Up Audiences
Archive Warning:	Creator Chose Not To Use Archive Warnings
Categories:	F/F , M/M , F/M
Fandom:	Harry Potter - J. K. Rowling
Relationships:	Draco Malfoy/Harry Potter , Luna Lovegood/Pansy Parkinson , Terry Boot/Hermione Granger
Characters:	Harry Potter , Draco Malfoy , Hermione Granger , Ron Weasley , Luna Lovegood , Rita Skeeter , Pansy Parkinson , Ginny Weasley , George Weasley , Narcissa Malfoy , Andromeda Black Tonks
Additional Tags:	Writer Draco Malfoy , Good Draco Malfoy , Anxiety Attacks , Post-Hogwarts , Not Epilogue Compliant , Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder - PTSD , Nightmares , Adult Hermione Granger , LGBTQ Themes , Muggle/Wizard Relations , Asexual Character , Asexual Relationship , Emotional Hurt/Comfort , Fluff and Angst , Asexual Harry Potter , Cute Kids , Adoption , Adopted Children , Orphans , Family , Mental Health Issues , Celestina Warbeck Bashing
Language:	English
Stats:	Published: 2015-08-15 Completed: 2015-08-30 Words: 135,190 Chapters: 30/30

No One Deserves To Live In A Closet

by [ChannelTheFlannel](#)

Summary

After the war has ended, Harry Potter and Draco Malfoy live very separate lives. Harry makes furniture and volunteers at an orphanage. Draco runs a record shop and writes articles for The Prophet. They both try to avoid public attention, but for very different reasons. Draco suffers from anxiety disorder and fears rejection, even when he knows he's changed for the better. Harry still has PTSD from the War, but he mostly just wants some privacy, and to live a life being someone more than the Boy Who Lived.

When the two meet again for the time after the trial, things start to change. Draco is beginning to redeem himself and come out of his shell, and Harry is realizing his purpose again without the War to control him. The two start to work together for a common cause, making sacrifices for what they believe in, but also starting something new... together.

Notes

All of the characters, spells, and locations that are part of the Harry Potter world belong to J.K. Rowling.

If only she really were just kidding, though, and then all my ships would be true.

This story (or the original article at least) was inspired by [this tweet](#) by JK Rowling.

See the end of the work for more [notes](#)

The Article

Harry dreamed.

He was tied to the stone in the graveyard, screaming in pain as his arm was cut open. He did not notice that it was a fully formed Voldemort, and not Peter Pettigrew. Golden webs filled the air around him, and he saw green flashes in front of his eyes as his hand was being cut off by the Dark, Voldemort morphed into the corpses of the people he loved. Dumbledore, Lupin, Tonks, Fred, his parents.... Then Ron, Hermione, Neville, Ginny.... It was more painful than the hand. It was more painful than everything else. His dream self was released from the stone, and his face buried in the wretched gray earth, and he convulsed in despair.

Then, a tapping sound. It broke through his sobs, like shards of sunlight. He realized, slowly, that the tapping and the light were real, and he was in his bed instead of the graveyard ground. His sobbing stopped as he told himself it was only a nightmare.

It had been nearly five years since the Battle of Hogwarts, and the nightmares never ceased. Neither did the tapping just then. It was coming from his window, growing louder and more urgent. Harry rolled over, dragging himself out of bed to see what it was. A large, black owl with orange eyes was staring at him through the glass, looking agitated.

It was Ginny's owl, Martimus. He had what looked to be today's edition of *The Prophet* in one of his talons, waving it about. Harry sighed, and opened the window. The owl hopped over the window sill, and thrust the paper into his hand, pecking him hard as he did so. Wincing, Harry unrolled the paper, and a small piece of parchment fell out. As he bent down to pick it up, Martimus took the opportunity to peck the top of his head, and then flew out the window without waiting for a response. Rubbing his head, he watched the owl fly out, and then read the note.

Harry,

I know you hate The Prophet, but I think you've ought to read the article on page 4. Once you're awake enough. We both know you're still in bed, you bum.

—Ginny

He frowned. What was possibly in the papers that he would want to read? They hadn't done another article on his toiletry shopping, had they? He honestly didn't know why they still bothered reporting on him. It had been four years since he defeated the Dark Lord—he was old news now, and by no means a hero any longer. Harry Potter was an average guy, who happened to need copious amounts Dreamless Sleep to keep the nightmares at bay. So, what?

Rolling the newspaper up and tucking it under his arm, he made his way downstairs to the kitchen to make himself a cup of tea. The kitchen at Grimmauld Place was large and empty, sullen with unending shades of brown for everything in it. The sunlight broke in through the window, lighting up the paper as Harry sat down at the round, wooden table.

The front headline was *Weasleys' Wizard Wheezes Cheers the Chudley Cannons*, with a picture of their newest line of fireworks exploding into fiery copies of the players' best moments at the end of a match. Harry smiled wryly as he wondered how they managed that, and if they'd show as much support for Ginny when she played against them for the Holyhead Harpies in the next week. She had become quite the star, and had a fan following that made for an excellent pool of both men and women for her to date from. "Only the non-crazy ones, though," she had assured him.

Harry had broken up with her not long after the Battle of Hogwarts, when the post-war passion had worn off and they realized they were better off as friends. Not long after that, Ginny had joined the Harpies and soon found she rather liked girls as well. Just for fun, she had later dragged Harry off to a muggle gay bar with her, and he ended up having the best snogging of his life with an art student named Glen (without even needing to be drunk!), and ended up dating him for three months. It wasn't until Glen dumped him and Harry tried dating women again that he realized that he was completely gay.

He had a sneaking suspicion that this article had something to do with that. He'd had a good four years in the closet; he knew The Prophet would figure it out eventually, even if he kept that part of his life in the muggle world. He fought against a surge of anxiety as he turned to page four.

Luckily, and surprisingly, it wasn't about him. But he wasn't that far off, either. It was an article about the presence and silence of queer members in wizarding society.

Some Very Queer Misconceptions

Submitted by Adam Pennom

A stroll through Carkitt Market will take you to the Hopping Pot, a pub known to most for its fine Wizard's Brew and fizzy orange juice. Among gay and lesbian wizards, however, it's known as one of the few LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and trans) safe spots in all of wizarding society.

"It's quite a shame, really," said Judith Hemwaddle, the new owner of the pub. "You don't see many open spaces for people like us, you know what I'm saying? You don't really see it anywhere else—witches with witches and wizards with wizards, I mean."

Most of us don't see much queer representation in the open wizarding world. Even if you don't notice, however, they're there: you see them in magazines, on Quidditch teams, on the street, and maybe in your own home, and yet their existence and habits are things we rarely talk about. You might recognize the names of some of the more famous members of their ranks: Albus Dumbledore, former Headmaster of Hogwarts and Chief of the Wizengamot; Cormac McLaggen, heartthrob and frequent model for Witch Weekly; Luna Lovegood, CEO of Amortentia Fasion Design; Myron Wagtail, vocalist for the Weird Sisters; and Gwenog Jones, Captain of the Holyhead Harpies.

Yes, all of these famous witches and wizards are "out" as gay or lesbian. And, believe it or not, so are many other magical people. According to a recent St. Mungo's study, 1 out of every 10 witches and wizards are naturally attracted to people of the same sex. Put into context, that would mean that there is at least one lesbian or gay student in every year for each house at Hogwarts.

So, if it's so common, why don't we see it? Why don't we discuss it?

One theory, according to Hermione Granger (a Ministry employee and well known advocate for equal rights in the wizarding world), is pureblood prejudice. "It's a common belief that homosexuality is a result of 'poor breeding' or having muggle ancestry, because muggles are a lot more vocal about it," she explained. "That's ridiculous, of course. There are plenty of gay purebloods as well, they're just more likely to repress it, or be forced into an arranged marriage anyway."

Many other magical people feel the same way. Most "out" lesbian and gay wizards will seek out muggle partners because they are much easier to find, and it is easier to be involved in the lifestyle in more accepting muggle communities. Compared to Magical London's single LGBT spot (the Hopping Pot), Muggle London has several hundred "gay bars."

"It's important to remember that it's not an exclusively muggle phenomenon. Magical people are just as likely to be born that way as well," told Healer Aura Yaxley, heir to the pureblood Yaxley family. "It's also important to remind people that it's not a disease or a problem, and even if it were, it's not something that can be changed. You can repress it, of course, but that only causes damage to mental health."

Yaxley, who works at St. Mungo's as a mental healer, says she receives many patients who have tried to hide or change their sexuality, and says that it results in very damaging effects to both the mind and magic. She has been pressing the hospital to issue an awareness campaign about sexuality in young witches and wizards.

Healer Hamlyn, head of the hospital's mental health department, agrees that something needs to be done. "Trying to deny or hide something as big as your sexuality puts you at risk for harmful magical substance abuse and addiction, along with putting you at risk for depression, which puts a dampener on your magical abilities."

Back at the Hopping Pot, Judith Hemwaddle has her hopes up for the future of gay and lesbian wizards and witches. "If muggles are okay with it, how hard should it be for us?" Hemwaddle has a point. As wizards, we tend to think we do things much better than muggles (and we usually do). Why is it, then, that muggle society has done a much better job accepting and talking about sexuality? Why do muggles have such fewer misconceptions about homosexuality? If wizards do it so much better, then we should be able to do better, too.

Harry read the article slowly, amazed to see that kind of thing in the press. On a selfish level, he was glad there hadn't been a lick of information about him in the entire article. (Though he was surprised that Hermione was in it. He decided he'd floo call her about it later and ask her about it.) On a less selfish level, he was pleased about the attempt at spreading awareness, and the usage of medical studies as proof to debunk pureblood prejudice. It was several things that mattered to him, all in one. He applauded whoever had written it.

His eyes scanned the page and fell upon a short paragraph at the bottom.

Editor's note:

**Adam Pennom is a pseudonym. He has submitted several articles critiquing wizarding*

society, anonymously to /emThe Prophet. emHe has yet to reveal his actual identity. Our editors would love to know more about this mysterious reporter, as all of his articles have been received very well. If Pennom is out there, we would like him to know that we would love him to be part of our team.

Strange, he thought. Why would he be hiding his identity when he obviously could have a great career as a writer?

Harry shrugged, relating to the need to be anonymous. His last few months (mostly devoid of public attention) had felt blissfully close to invisibility, as there hadn't been any word of him in the papers. He wasn't sure why, though. He had kept quiet, spending time in the muggle world, and going everywhere under glamours and fake names. He had a feeling that was about to change, though. The article had inspired him in a way, and he thought he might use his Boy Who Lived influence to stir things up a bit.

He smiled to himself as he cast a tempus charm, and realized he had to make a delivery in an hour. Better get ready, he thought.

Draco Malfoy awoke with a groan.

He was lying on the uncomfortable cot in his flat, which was situated on the floor in the flat above his shop. He hadn't been living there long, which explained the lack of furniture. He decided he needed to fix that soon, now that he no longer lived in muggle London, and wouldn't be returning to the Manor. He had moved out once Lucius was taken to Azkaban, and he and his mother decided it just hurt too much to live there anymore. The memories of the war and of Voldemort contaminating their living space had hurt too much. No one would have believed them about that, though, if they hadn't saved Potter from the Dark Lord in the final battle.

He thought too much about the War. It changed everything. Now, Draco was just trying to get back on track and start his own life, free from Death Eaters and Dark magic and his father.

He had bought a shop in Carkitt Market a few months ago, and had lived in the flat atop his new business for only the past week. The money that he earned from the shop, he used to pay his bills and get him through training. He was going to become a Healer one day, to make up for all the pain that tainted the name Malfoy. He hated it, but he told himself that he would pull through. He had to, in order to prove himself. He saw no other way.

For now, though, he was satisfied running his record shop, even if too many people wanted to buy Celestina Warbeck albums, and even if he had to wake up on that bloody uncomfortable cot for now.

Soon enough, he was sure, he'd gather a more intelligent clientele and he would buy himself proper furniture. Clientele would take a while, but he decided he would go out and buy himself a bed and mattress before he opened the shop at eleven.

It would be big and comfortable—enough for two people, he thought. That wasn't being presumptuous, he assured himself; it was positive thinking and preparedness. Especially if

that article he submitted was published, and had the intended effect of encouraging gay acceptance—

Shit. The article. The article is being published today.

Draco had submitted nearly twenty articles as Adam Pennom, and yet every time one was published, he still felt incredibly upset and nervous. And he still kept submitting. He didn't exactly know why.

Perhaps it was because no one would listen to a Malfoy, and he wanted to be heard. And maybe he was nervous because he was afraid that people still wouldn't listen to him, Malfoy or no.

He had no idea what he had to worry about this time. All his articles had been received well before, and everyone he interviewed was under an Unbreakable Vow never to reveal his identity. But, maybe, it was because this article was different.

Maybe it was because no one talked about being a gay wizard. Maybe he crossed the line this time. Maybe this was where he pushed it over the edge.

He told himself to relax as he sat up and tried to get all the kinks out of his neck.

He reminded himself that he didn't even write anything personal as he put on his jeans and his dress shirt.

He assured himself that maybe the article wouldn't even be published as he combed his hair.

He lied to himself and said he was okay when he picked up *The Prophet* at his doorstep.

He forced himself to breathe as he frantically searched the paper for his article.

Page four.

"Not bad," Draco chuckled to himself as he skimmed over the article, suddenly relieved. It was the closest to the front page that any of his articles had made before.

He wondered what was so special about this one... Maybe it was because no one had talked about being a gay wizard before. He smiled to himself, rereading his own words, and not even feeling slightly remiss anymore.

Then, his eyes caught on the last paragraph. *The editors note.*

He cursed to himself, as he reread the note.

They want me to be on their team?

It felt as bad as a death threat. They couldn't possibly want him to write for them. This was a threat, it had to be. They were going to find out who he was. That's what this meant. They were going to uncover his identity, and then it would be all over the papers.

His inner journalist could see the headline already: *Former Death Eater Uses Anonymity To Brainwash Wizarding Public*

He cringed and shoved the thought away, using the breathing techniques he learned in training to prevent the panic attack from worsening. He couldn't let his anxiety ruin this for him—he wouldn't.

But then again, this could change everything.

People loved his articles. They wanted to hear what he had to say. He could be heard. He could bring honor back to his name this way, couldn't he? By spreading good word and news, he could prove he wasn't all that bad. He didn't have to deal with horrid wounds and contagious diseases and mentally ill patients to be a redeemed member of society this way...

But he remembered that people didn't like reporters. They were slimy, sneaky bugs like Rita Skeeter. Everyone that people loved—*like Potter*, he thought wryly—hated reporters. He wouldn't be renewing his name. He would just have more people hating him.

No, it was best to stay in the shadows. It was best people didn't bother him. It was best he stayed out of the way.

Dismayed to be brought back to reality, he pulled a coat on over himself, cast a few glamours to hide his more obvious Malfoy features (even if only muggles saw him), and apparated into muggle London to buy himself a proper bed.

And maybe not open the shop today.

And maybe get drunk.

And even better, maybe get laid.

As he materialized into the alleyway near the muggle furniture store, he cast away the maybes, and reminded himself that he couldn't let Draco Malfoy's life be affected by Adam Pennom's life. He had responsibilities, and a more sophisticated clientele to develop, after all.

He shrugged his coat up further, because it was cold out here in mid-January and the sunlight had somehow changed to fog, and because he still felt uncomfortable showing his face in public, even if only muggles saw him.

The cement was hard and cold and gray under his feet, and the streets crowded and dark and loud, and the furniture store he was headed to was painted red and blue and warm and inviting. It was small and privately owned, but he knew they would have what he wanted, because he had been there before and bought some lovely handmade oak shelves for his record shop.

Just because he had resigned to buying muggle things didn't mean he had given up quality. Besides, he found the personal touch of things crafted by hand versus magic was endearing.

And he didn't have to face anyone that might accuse him of being a death eater.

The small black door jingled when he opened it, and was greeted by the smell of wood and apples when he entered the shop. There was a strange heavy feeling in the air, and he briefly wondered if there was another wizard nearby. His stomach dropped in panic, and his hands shook as he tried to close the door. He took a few more deep breaths, and reminded himself that he was under glamours, and it was unlikely he would encounter anyone he knew. Beyond that, he had no reason to be afraid anyway.

"Hello!" He called into the shop, not listening for a response as he dodged through the narrow pathways through the eclectic collection of hand-carved wood furniture. He kept on breathing, trying to calm himself. His anxiety was getting out of hand, he knew. He was just going to have to ignore it.

He smiled and lost his train of thought as his eyes fell on a beautiful bed frame, carved from a reddish wood and varnished to a soft shine. It still smelled of cut wood, and feet were carved like tree trunks. The head of the bed looked like a wall of branches reaching for the sky. It was something that he could have imagined at the manor, except it was so much brighter, so much more hopeful.

A voice called out from behind him. "You like that one, huh?"

Draco nodded, not taking his eyes from the wood. "Yes. It's amazing. I admit I have a soft spot for well carved wood. Call it my weakness," he said quietly, touching the bed frame. He felt that same heavy feeling of magic again, and he felt that the person behind him was a wizard. He didn't care, though—the woodwork was too exquisite to be magic-made, he knew.

"Well, I'm flattered. I made it myself, you know. Just dropped it off here," the man said.

Draco looked over his shoulder, catching a glimpse of brown, messy hair and bright green eyes. His stomach flipped—*damned anxiety again*—because the man looked like... like a familiar wizard, but at closer glance, the face was unfamiliar, and the hair a few shades too light. He thought the man was attractive, but he looked away and remembered he wasn't here to fulfill any maybe's about getting laid.

You've work today. Focus.

"Fine job you did, too. What will it sell for?" asked Draco, as the other man shoved his hands into his pockets and stood next to him.

"Dunno. You'll have to ask the shop keeper. But just because you like it so much," the man confided, leaning in a friendly manner, "I'll tell you I think its' worth 700 galleons. She'll try to sell it to you for more, though."

Draco stiffened, unsure if it was because of the breath on his neck or because this man had just said "galleons" in a muggle shop.

"This isn't a wizarding store, though," Draco protested, looking the man in the eye.

The man's expression changed slightly, and he took a step back and laughed. "I was fairly sure you're a wizard, though. You look familiar... and your wand is fairly noticeable, too."

Draco flushed, and fiddled with the magic wand in his charmed shirt pocket, fairly sure he hadn't meant the type of wand Draco was thinking of. It was just that maybe in the back of his mind again, he assured himself.

He pushed the thought away, and glared at the man. "That was risky, though."

He laughed again, and elbowed Draco in the shoulder. "I like taking risks. The name's Harry, by the way. Yours?"

Draco's eyes widened, and he swallowed hard. This man wasn't Potter, surely... Or he would recognize the face. If Potter was using a glamour to change his face, he wouldn't introduce himself with his bloody first name, would he?

No, he's a fucking Gryffindor. He loves taking risks. Of course he would. Draco thought.

Then, he thought, *Oh shit oh shit oh shit. What if he knows its me and he's playing a game? What if he tells everyone I'm shopping in a muggle shop?*

Draco breathed again, and reminded himself to keep his poise. He met Harry's eye. "Adam." He said calmly. The man smiled curiously. It reminded him of someone, but then more words came out of Draco's mouth in an unexpected rush. "You look familiar, too. Like Harry Potter." That wasn't as calm. He hadn't meant to say it.

He panicked again. He also realized he had said his pen name. *Shit.*

Harry's face turned red, and the now apparent glammers fell. "You got me. Don't tell anyone, though. This is my secret job. Can't have the papers finding out," he stage-whispered, leaning in conspiratorially. Draco's eyes widened.

"You're insane, Potter. You must *want* to be found out; you were hardly trying with the glammers. Or the name. Or the magic. Or the obvious Gryffindor nerve," Draco spat. The words just kept on falling out. That tended to happen when he was with Potter, he knew. Though he wasn't nearly as harsh now as he had once been at school, he wondered if it gave him away.

Potter winked, and smiled—no, he smirked. Since when did Potter know how to smirk?

"Give me some credit. It's not like you tried much harder," he muttered, and leaned in a little too close again, to whisper into his ear.

"Malfoy."

Shit. It did give me away. Draco felt his stomach twist in all sorts of unnatural ways and he was shaking—probably a mix of rage and anxiety, he knew. Since when did Potter have the right to act so Slytherin like that? It wasn't natural. The encounter was becoming absolutely horrible.

"What tipped me off?" Draco demanded.

Potter shrugged, the smirk and the conniving-Slytherin appearance melting away to the usual annoying Gryffindor brazenness. "You still look like you. Talk like you. And the bed frame is something in accordance to your tastes, is it not?"

Draco shook his head. It felt like a dream. Potter was acting strange. He didn't let his confusion reach his voice, however, instead gathering old schoolboy ice to line his words with.

"Potter, you don't mean to say you were thinking of me when you made that bed?"

At first he smirked, but then he almost cringed at how much like his old self he sounded. He was trying to change, after all. And Potter was the one person who could surely taint his image.

Potter looked like his old self, too, and his cheeks flushed red again. He wasn't the mystery man of a few minutes ago, joking about visible wands and leaning in too closely. He no longer had the upper hand, and was acting like the brash, flustered Potter he knew from Hogwarts. Draco didn't know how he felt about that.

"I think about a lot of things when I work my wood."

With that unexpected response, Draco let out a bark of laughter, and Potter blushed even more.

"That isn't what I meant!" he exclaimed.

Yes, Draco definitely had the upper hand here. But that didn't mean he was going to abuse it, like he would once have. As satisfying as it was for Potter to admit (even accidentally) that he thought of Draco when he worked his wood, Draco had matured. He had grown past this ridiculous competition between them.

Show him you've changed.

Draco assured himself it was only for the sake of his image. If Potter didn't have so much influence, he wouldn't have worried about his opinion of him.

"I know, Potter. I think I goaded you into that," Draco admitted. Potter opened his mouth to say something, but Draco interrupted him. "This isn't Hogwarts. We're obviously different people than we were. We're also trying to live out own secret lives now. So let's forget this unfortunate encounter, and move on, shall we?"

Potter nodded. "Brilliant."

Neither of them said any more, and Draco turned around to leave. But then Potter grabbed his arm, and Draco felt his stomach twist in horror or something else. People didn't grab him.

"Draco," Potter mumbled, as if using his first name could

Draco shrugged Potter's arm away. "Harry," he replied, meeting Potter's eyes with forced contempt.

"Aren't you going to buy my bed?" Potter—Harry—asked.

"Well, it is rather nice. I suppose I'll ask the shopkeeper for the price," Draco answered, dropping his gaze, and walking past him to get to the counter.

He noticed Harry followed him. He briefly wondered if the shopkeeper would notice the difference without the glamours, but he realized she was so old it probably wouldn't make a difference.

"Gloria, this friend of mine is interested in the bed I just sold you. Think you could sell it to him for a discount?" Potter—no, Harry, wasn't it?—flashed the old hag a winning smile, and she blushed.

"Well, if it promises a faster sale, then of course! And because you're such a charmer, dearie."

So, that was how Draco bought the fine bed for a reasonable price without dipping into the tainted fortune.

How he bought Harry Potter's bed.

And it got worse. Potter cast a *notice-me-not* spell on the shopkeeper (and of course he could get away with it, he was Harry-bloody-fucking-Potter) so he could shrink the bed (so much for handcrafted, non magic quality) and stick it into Draco's pocket.

Then, when they were out of the shop, *Harry Potter* turned to face Draco and offered his hand to shake.

I've wanted this since I was bloody eleven, haven't I?

Draco shook Potter's hand.

"Old rivalries put aside, then?" Potter had asked, and all Draco could do was nod, stuff his hand back into his pocket, and apparate back to his flat without saying another word.

It was the best and worst day of his life.

Mattresses

Harry blinked, and Malfoy had apparated away.

What the fuck is his problem?

He shook his head, and figured that it was just Malfoy being Malfoy. Though that wasn't entirely true—he had apparently matured a lot since Hogwarts. Hell, hadn't he even just apologized? That was certainly remarkable.

Harry found himself smiling, and he shook his head and turned around. He decided he'd go for a walk; he knew a tea shop he liked wasn't too far away.

As he walked on the sidewalk, and cars buzzed past him occasionally on the dark pavement, he thought back to what had just happened in the furniture shop.

He had gone in to drop off his latest creation, and then he chatted with the shopkeeper, Gloria. Then, he heard that *voice*.

The voice that taunted him at school all those years.

The voice that he had been so suspicious of.

The voice that had saved his life.

He hadn't seen Draco Malfoy in three years, since he testified for him and his mother after the war. But you don't forget the voice of a person you once hated, the person who you owed a life debt to.

So, when he heard that voice, he had to make sure that it really was Malfoy. *In a bloody muggle furniture shop of all places*. But there he was: the blond hair and the thin, tall figure.

There was no mistaking it, even if there were some glamours hiding the pointy nose and chin.

Bloody shame, he had thought, before he stopped himself. Surely he was only thinking that because *no one* should need to hide themselves, and *not* because he liked looking at Draco Malfoy's face.

But Malfoy had liked the bed he'd made.

Malfoy complimented my art.

If that wasn't a compliment, he didn't know what was. It almost made up for the fact that he himself had possibly acted slightly flirty (just to annoy the prat, of course) and then made a few offhanded dick references (completely on accident).

Malfoy had bought the bed, and apologized, and Harry had offered his hand and put old differences aside.

But then the bloody git had disappeared out of the blue. One minute, Harry was feeling his warm hand and smiling up at the (still) very Malfoyish face, and thinking everything was changing.

Of course Malfoy had decided to go and vanish and ruin the moment, he thought.

After a second, Harry realized he had walked straight past the tea shop, and it was because he was thinking of *Draco Malfoy* of all things.

As he turned around to enter the tea shop, he realized it wasn't anything new, thinking back on it... After all, he had obsessed over him all sixth year, and then worried about him being a Death Eater throughout the war, and then devoted a whole three months trying to help him win his trial.

Of course he thought about Malfoy. He had been a big part of Harry's life.

He entered the tea shop, and the strong smell of pastries and hot brew distracted him for a moment. He ordered a cup of herbal tea and ordered a slice of apple pie, because it was a muggle shop and obviously there was neither pumpkin juice or treacle tart.

And Harry really, *really* liked apples, when he thought about it enough. So, then he was thinking about apples, green apples specifically... and then he was thinking about Draco Malfoy again, for no apparent reason at all.

He took a too hot sip of his tea, and choked a bit. The handsome man at the counter leaned over.

"You alright there?" he asked with concern. Harry looked back at him, and smiled and nodded. He remembered just then why he liked this particular shop, but he wasn't in the mood to flirt with the man this time. Instead, he ate some of his apple pie (which suddenly wasn't as tasty anymore), and decided he needed to leave.

He paid at the counter, and realized he still had to see Hermione, and ask her about the article. Before exiting the shop, he checked the clock and saw that she'd be off work in an hour, so he thought he would apparate back to Grimmauld Place. He would floo call her when she was home.

He left the shop and found a discreet spot to disappear from. When he had done so, he materialized back into his kitchen at Grimmauld Place. There, he stared at the article on the table, and he promptly forgot about Malfoy. He remembered the beginnings of the plan in his head, the ones he'd thought of before he had left to drop of that bloody bed frame.

He was Harry Potter, The Boy Who Lived. He was also The Boy Who Had Disappeared From Recent News, and The Boy That The Media Couldn't Get Enough Of. What the wizarding public at large didn't know was that he was The Boy Who Was Secretly Gay. He didn't know exactly how yet, but his plan was to announce that last part publicly. If Harry Potter came out, no one could ignore the fact that wizards could be gay.

Forget Dumbledore and his private infatuation with his worst enemy... An openly gay *hero of the wizarding world* could change everything. There would be awareness campaigns all around, LGBT wizard help lines, magical gay bars...

He could make a difference with this, he knew it. Of course, that would require escaping his wonderful, private bubble of no publicity. There would be articles, interviews, photos, posters... You name it, and Gay Harry's face would be on it.

It would mean sacrificing the hope of having a private love life.

Or, at least until the craze dies down, he thought. There would also be people who would call it a publicity stunt, a way to get back in the news after months of no attention.

Well, yeah. That's exactly what it would look like.

But it would be worth it, and it definitely wouldn't be the first time it happened to him. Harry had dealt with frequent (and often negative) publicity since he was eleven years old, after all. And if there was one thing that Harry knew how to do, it was to be a sacrifice. He was okay with that.

For the next hour, he excitedly imagined how better everyone's lives would be. He was zealous over the idea of making a legitimate change for the rest of the wizarding world.

He was also, admittedly selfishly, imagining how much easier it would be for him to find a date, and what it would be to be out in the open about who he was attracted to. He was tired of hiding under glamours in muggle pubs, even if he would have to give up all of his privacy to finally stop the hiding.

He checked the time again. Finally, it was time to see Hermione. He threw some floo powder into his fireplace, and said, "Granger residence." Then, he stuck his head into the soot and embers, ignored the terrible smell, and called out to Hermione.

"Mione! Mione? Are you home?"

He heard footsteps, and Hermione shouted, "Give me a minute!"

He waited, and she showed up in her living room wearing a bath robe, her hair all wrapped up in a towel. When she saw him, she smiled.

"Oh, Harry." She shook her head. "You always have the worst timing. Come in."

He wasn't put off by the robe (he had seen her in much worse states), and so he climbed through the fireplace and into her living room, dusting the unpleasant soot off of himself.

He took a seat with her on the couch. She sat cross-legged next to him, and leaned against the sofa's arm to face Harry, who decided to perch on the opposite arm of the couch. It was how they always sat; it was tradition by now.

"Harry, do tell me why you're smiling like a fool." Hermione laughed, tilting her head to the side to get a better look. Harry could smell her shampoo, and was suddenly self conscious of

how unclean *he* smelled. *And I saw Malfoy while smelling like this!*

"You read the article in the Prophet this morning?" he asked, deciding to get straight to the point.

"Of course, Harry. I'm in it." She scoffed, frowning at him. She didn't seem to be upset, though.

"So, why didn't you tell me about it? Who's this Pennom guy? Just tell me about it," Harry pleaded, realizing that he really was smiling like a fool. He didn't know *why* he was so excited. It was just some bloody article, with a possibly gay reporter, after all.

Hermione obliged him, however, to the best of her abilities. "Well, I'm under an Unbreakable Vow to reveal Pennom's identity," she explained with a frown, "but I suppose I can tell you about him. The Vow will prevent me from saying anything I can't."

Harry nodded at her statement, leaning forward. "So, spill," he ordered.

"Well, Pennom is gay," she stated, shrugging as if it were obvious. "He's fairly closeted, though, which is why he remains anonymous. Among other reasons of course," she held her hand to her head, as if the Vow was hurting her so she didn't say more, "which I apparently can't specify. But he takes great interest in promoting equal rights, obviously. He's also adamant about becoming a helpful member of society. He's a good man." There was a peculiar look on her face.

Harry had a feeling she knew something he didn't.

"Is he young? Handsome?" Harry asked, feeling excited. Hermione raised her eyebrows, and smirked. She *definitely* knew something.

"Yes to both. I don't doubt you'd like him." She shrugged innocently, and looked Harry straight in the eye. "Too bad I can't introduce you," she deadpanned.

Harry groaned. "Hermione, you're cruel! Cruel." He clutched his hands to his heart in mock pain, and almost fell off of his perch on the couch.

Hermione snickered, and Harry lowered himself to the actual cushion, smacked her arm teasingly, and mimicked her cross-legged position.

"So, where was the interview? What else did you talk to him about?" he inquired.

"The Hopping Pot, of course. We chatted about astronomy and"—she winced again—"apparently I can't tell you that. But we talked about my work with SPEW, and my advancements in the Ministry. Did I tell you that I got a promotion?" Her face lightened with pride.

"Yes, yes you mentioned the promotion. Congrats. More about the writer, though," Harry insisted. His mind was on a single track right now.

Hermione grimaced. "Harry, I get the feeling you're planning something foolish. Would you mind explaining your giddy excitement now?" She demanded, and Harry knew he wouldn't be able to argue with her.

"I was planning on coming out. Publicly. With an interview and everything," he confessed, lowering his gaze.

"Why, because you think it would enable you to meet the author?" Hermione demanded, looking cross.

Harry felt his cheeks flush. "No, as an awareness campaign. Come on, Hermione," he pouted. "I have a good reason for this. I figure that if *I'm* gay, then they can't ignore that people like me are out there. And think of all the hope it would give all the young witches and wizards. They wouldn't feel so alone if they knew their hero was queer, too." Harry used a few half-hearted gesticulations to get the point across.

Hermione nodded pensively. She waited a moment to speak, and Harry bit his lip impatiently for her approval. Finally, she spoke.

"I'll help you, Harry. I know your motives are pure. And you're right; it would be huge. But are you sure you want to do this, and risk all your privacy?" she asked, reaching out for his hand.

Harry squeezed her hand and nodded back earnestly. "You know I'll do anything to help the people who need it, Hermione. This means a lot to me." He looked away, and stared at the beige carpeted floor. "And... and I need to do something. Something big. I may like the privacy, but I can't just sit and watch the world fly by."

Hermione nodded with understanding. "You should have chosen to be an auror. Then you wouldn't have to do things like this to get your adrenaline kick." She was only half-teasing, but it still stung a little.

"You know why I didn't do it. I can't have them accepting me without any training just because I defeated Voldemort. And they would have put me on all the easy, publicity missions—they couldn't risk killing their Boy Who Lived. I would have just been their figurehead." Harry scratched the back of his head, realizing how much he had wanted to say.

"And I know I can do better than just arrest kids playing around with the minor forms of the Dark Arts." He frowned, remembering the few months he *had* spent with them. He had mostly investigated old, "haunted" buildings and barged into arrest the bad guy at a crime scene that everyone had already taken care of.

Hermione leaned over and hugged him. "I know, Harry. Now let's figure this out."

They ended up talking for several more hours, and ended up deciding that he would have to wait a few more months before dropping the "g-bomb" on everyone.

He would reintroduce himself to the media slowly, and they would have someone on the inside leak articles about him into the public sphere. That way, they could control what

everyone found out about him, and when.

Harry didn't mention how excited he was that Hermione thought she could get Pennom to do it... At least for the big coming out article.

She mentioned something else about Pennom and helping him, but he didn't understand what she was going on about.

When they finished outlining their plans, it was already 7 o'clock, and Hermione decided to ordered take out for them. They lounged in her kitchen, eating boxed sushi and drinking white wine, and talked about their lives in recent events.

Hermione still wasn't talking to Ron after he dumped her six months ago (for Padma Patil of all people), and she was having a "miserable time trying to find someone new to date."

She said she didn't want to go into the details, and he felt like she was hiding something again. But he let her talk about the details of her promotion instead—she was certain she was on her way to becoming the head of the Department for the Regulation and Control of Magical Creatures. In several more years, at least.

"So, now you know all about my life... Anything new with you, Harry?" she asked him with a wink.

Harry smiled goofily, and he knew it, so he tried to control it. He didn't know what was up with himself lately, and he didn't want it to be obvious, so he cleared his throat and talked about something else.

"Well, I've been working at the Orphanage on the weekends. The kids—the kids are so innocent, and sweet. They remind me a bit of me when I was their age, you know? I just want them to know that it's okay, that they'll be okay. That they'll be loved, that they are loved. I want them to turn out to be good, strong people." Harry babbled on, burying his face in his hands.

The Orphanage was small, and had less than two dozen children. Some of them lost their parents in the war. He just wanted to adopt them all, save them all... But he couldn't. He *could* visit them as much as possible, though.

Hermione nodded, pain and understanding showing in her eyes. "Do you think you'd like to adopt one day, Harry?" she asked. "Have a family and all."

Harry shrugged, and swirled his wine. "I dunno. It's not like I can have my own biological children anyway—and I don't want a surrogate. But I can't see myself adopting a kid anytime soon, you know? I don't have anyone I want to do that with right now." He flushed, and remembered Malfoy for some reason he couldn't comprehend.

"How's your dating life going, then?" she inquired, the glint in here eyes returning.

Harry flushed even more. "Oh, you know. I go to the muggle gay bars. I snog people I barely know. I feel empty and dismal. The usual." He scoffed. He never found anyone he just

wanted to have sex with, and he never found anyone who wanted anything more than *just* sex. He wanted something different than that, but he couldn't find it.

Hermione rolled her eyes and sighed. "I know the feeling. Anything else interesting?" Again, she showed no interest in elaborating upon her love life.

Harry looked up and met her eyes. "I, uh, I saw Malfoy today. Draco Malfoy. H-he's changed," he confessed. She raised her eyebrows in response, as if this were very interesting indeed, but she let him continue. "And has great taste in furniture. And he's still fucking *gorgeous*." The last words tumbled out unexpectedly, and he held his hands over his mouth and gasped.

Hermione raised her eyebrows even further and smiled knowingly. "I did ask about your dating life. So, you like Malfoy, do you?" She snickered at him cruelly.

"N--well, yeah. I mean, I don't know. Bloody hell, I can't stop thinking about him." Harry felt compelled to answer everything she asked, which he realized wasn't quite right, and not quite unfamiliar. "Hermione, did you spike my wine with Veritaserum?" he demanded.

Hermione smirked. "Yeah, I did. Wanted to see if there was any hidden motive behind your coming out plan."

Harry gaped. "That's illegal!" he cried.

Hermione rolled her eyes. "Oh, like you haven't broken the law, Harry." She stood up and grabbed his shoulder. "It's getting late. I think it's time to send you home, yeah?" She pulled him out of his chair and towards her living room.

Harry only glared at her as he made his way to the floo. "What are you going to do now?" he asked as he pulled out a bag of floo powder.

She looked thoughtful for a moment, as she often did. "I think I'll owl Penom."

After apparating back to his flat, Draco had realized he hadn't even bought a mattress for his new bed. So, after returning the bed to its proper size, he apparated back into muggle London to buy a mattress.

To a large scale mattress store, where I won't meet any old Hogwarts enemies, thank you very much. He didn't want to think about Potter.

Or how confusing he was.

Or how different he had become, or how he was still the same ridiculously brash Gryffindor.

And how he was probably straight. Draco groaned to himself at that. He couldn't allow himself to brood over ridiculous facts like that. Besides, what did it matter that Potter was straight? Draco didn't care.

He didn't care at all.

He stormed into the huge, warehouse-like store, terrifying a muggle mother and child with his foul mood. He composed himself a moment later, apologizing to them coolly for shoving past them.

He focused on his breathing again as he walked through rows and rows of mattresses. Who needed that many bloody mattresses, anyway?

They were just mattresses.

He spent the next two hours in the ridiculous mattress store all the same, with his ridiculous thoughts of Harry Potter.

And his own ridiculous refined tastes were not satisfied with a single brand-name mattress.

Wizards do everything better. He thought bitterly. Like Potter's bed frame. *But not gay acceptance, remember?* Draco's thoughts were drawn back to the article, and wondered what people thought of it. If there would be outrage, agreement, or if it would just be ignored. Would the editors for The Prophet track him down?

Draco realized he had been laying on the same mattress for the past five minutes like some oblivious fool.

He sat up, figuring he must have liked the mattress well enough to forget he was laying on it for so long, and so he decided to buy it.

He tried not to think about how many other *people* (people, not simply muggles, he reminded himself) had laid on those mattresses, and he tried to vanish the feeling of filth accumulating on him.

He bought the mattress in the proper size for the bed frame (Potter's bed frame, he remembered, almost giddily), and he used muggle money to do it. For the second time that day. He smiled to himself, declaring himself a changed man. Which he truly was.

Just a few years ago, after the trial (where Potter had testified for him!) he wouldn't have fathomed it. But here he was.

Draco scolded himself for such sentimental, sappy thoughts. He also scolded himself for allowing them to continually drift back to Potter. His usual ice towards those kind of thoughts was melting.

He shrunk the mattress and apparated back to his flat. He realized that it was already two in the afternoon, and he had not yet opened the record shop. He sighed, and decided he wasn't going to today.

Instead, he fixed the mattress onto the bed, and took a long, hot shower to clean off whatever *filth* that had accumulated from laying on the practically public mattresses. Honestly, who came up with *that* idea?

He came out smelling like apples and cinnamon (apples from shampoo and cinnamon from his body wash) and feeling perfectly refreshed. He wrapped himself in his soft white towel,

and sighed again dramatically as he remembered he had not opened the shop, and wouldn't still.

He then remembered the *maybes* from before, and decided he might oblige them get drunk and laid later in the evening.

In the meantime, he made his bed with his silk sheets that he still had from the Manor. They felt as good as new, and luckily, they fit the new bed perfectly.

He wouldn't have known what to do if they didn't; one does *not* try and transfigure silk sheets into a different size.

Unless one wanted to destroy the thread count and fabric texture, which Draco *certainly* did not.

The bed made, adorned with silk sheets and cashmere blankets and a goose feather comforter, Draco felt satisfied that his downsized living space was by no means cheap quality.

That is, if one ignored the lack of all furniture besides a kitchen table and a few chairs. At least he had kitchen appliances, and he used them often.

Learning to live without house elves was more entertaining than he had thought; Draco had discovered that he loved cooking, even if he wasn't exactly talented with it.

Which reminded him--it was mid afternoon and he had yet to eat anything. His stomach grumbled, and he set to cooking a proper meal.

He opened his magically cooled ice box to find several blocks of tofu (a muggle food that resembled a spongy white block that he had taken a surprising liking to), various types of produce (mainly onions and cabbage), and a bottle of balsamic vinegar.

Making a mental note to go grocery shopping later, but feeling disinclined to go out again quite yet, he threw copious amounts of all of it into a pan and hoped for the best.

It tasted surprisingly good.

Draco patted himself on the back for that. He hadn't reached gourmet levels just yet, but he certainly was creative.

He wasted the next several hours listening to every record he had in the shop and imagining what other furniture he would need to fill his flat with.

And thinking of Potter and his ridiculously beautiful furniture.

When the sky had long gone dark, and Draco was done moping around his home, he changed into his nicest casual clothes and apparated back into muggle London to find himself some handsome man to buy him drinks and shag later on in the evening.

The fog was still out, and it was utterly freezing, but Draco hadn't thought to wear a coat. He often wondered why muggles just didn't wear robes; it was much less layering to think about

anyway, and they were certainly much warmer, even if they weren't as good looking.

The latter thought was reinforced, once he entered the nearest gay club and found a bloke with a nice arse and a tight pair of pants to show it off.

Yes, muggles *were* much better at the whole gay thing.

The music was crass, and it was nothing he would have sold in his record store. The lighting gave him a bit of a headache, too. He drowned out that disappointment with several cheap alcoholic drinks that some fellow in a suit had bought for him, and then he was drunk enough to snog him silly.

But it didn't feel right.

He wasn't what Draco wanted. Draco wasn't coherent enough to know exactly what (or who) he wanted, and he wouldn't have known if he were coherent enough anyway. So he moved on to another man, but he didn't feel right either, and by the end of the night Draco felt like he had tried more men than mattresses.

And he didn't even let anyone get him to second base.

So, he cast a sobriety spell on himself and safely apparated home, disappointed in his inability to get himself laid—but it was really everyone else's incompetence, he decided.

He was also vaguely aware of the satisfaction that he had brought no one home to desecrate his silk sheets and his plain old muggle mattress and the bed frame that he now permanently had decided was still Harry's.

After he had washed the taste of the alcohol out of his mouth, he made his way to his bed. He was interrupted, however, by a tapping at the window. He peered closely to see an unfamiliar owl perched on his window sill, and he let it in anyway.

It gave him it's letter, and he gave it an owl treat from the jar in his kitchen. He patted its head, and wondered who would be owling him so late at night.

His stomach lurched as he saw the name written on the envelope. *Adam Pennom*.

Was it The Prophet? Had they found him already? Did he really need to open it? There was the familiar imagery in his mind of wolves snapping at him, and a fluttering, cramping feeling was twisting in his stomach. He felt the beginnings of a panic attack, but he just took a deep breath and opened the letter.

Pennom,

I've got a job for you. I need you to cover a story for me. Well, it's for Harry. He said he saw you (well, your normal identity) today— but don't worry, I didn't tell him about the article. We need you to release a slow and steady stream of articles on him for the next few months. We'll tell you what. I understand this is far below your caliber (I know you prefer much more deep subjects than celebrity gossip), but I promise it's for the greater good in the end. And it will help you prove your self. If you're willing, I'll schedule a meeting between you and him

and he can tell you what he needs written. I'm afraid I can't tell you any more than that; we don't want you letting anything slip until you've sworn an Unbreakable.

Regards, Hermione Granger

Draco wasn't sure what he had just read. Was Granger offering him a job? To report on Potter? And a possibility to redeem himself?

And another chance to see Potter, he realized. Maybe he was still a little drunk, because it seemed like it was an offer that was just too good to refuse.

Gifts

It had been a week since Harry had visited with Hermione, and their plan had yet to take action. He had not had any stories about himself leaked, and nor had he met the mysterious Pennom. He was almost itching to begin, even if beginning meant having his face plastered all over the papers and losing any scraps of privacy he had gotten so wonderfully used to.

On the bright side, however, he had finished carving another piece. It was a small coffee table, and he had once again he had incorporated the image of trees into the work. There was one leg for the table—a thick trunk carved around the sides to look like bark. He had taken a thick slab of wood from an even wider trunk and used that as the table top. He had varnished and polished it, and towards the end of the process, he had used magic to replace some of the rings in the wood with green glass.

He wouldn't be selling it in a muggle shop, of course. The magical crafting made it something that wizards would be more interested in buying.

He didn't know where he would sell it, though--it was too rugged to look good in most wizarding homes, and it wasn't eclectic enough to fit in with the rest.

The green reminded him of the Slytherins at Hogwarts, though, and it gave him an idea.

He didn't know who their new head of house was, or even what kind of furniture they'd like, but he thought it would be worth a try. He would send it to them as a gift of sorts. A peace treaty. He remembered hearing about all the new prejudice that was being held up against the house, and he thought this could at least work as a bandaid.

Of course, people had always thought Slytherins were sly and wicked, but now, people were charging them as Death Eaters just for the House they had been sorted into.

It was a bit like the whole thing about persecuting gays because they were born that way. In the same way, Slytherins couldn't help being Slytherin.

So, he thought he could jump his plan into action by sending the table to the Head of House. Hermione wouldn't like him to do it without consulting her first, but he thought it was a good idea. Perhaps he was a little naive and hopeful with the image he had of Inter-House cooperation, just like he had the image of inter, er, sexuality cooperation.

Even if the papers didn't catch word of it, it couldn't do him any harm to let the Slytherins know he had gotten over things with them years ago.

He cast a lightening charm on it (shrinking would ruin the wood and glass work), and boxed the thing. He decided it was best to send it with a note, just in case the Head of Slytherin was wondering why Harry Potter would be sending them a gift.

For the Head of Slytherin House:

I carved this table with Slytherins in mind. I could think of no other place to send it, so I'm giving it as a gift to you. Take it as an apology for all my own wrong-doings against your House, along with all the unfair things I have thought or said. It was wrong of me to think that all Slytherins are sly or cruel or vindictive, and I should hope that such false assumptions will one day be laid to rest.

There is more to your House than just Dark, just as there is more to Gryffindor than just Light (and of course, these sets of things are not mutually exclusive).

If you ever have any issues with House cooperation, or perhaps false accusations of serving the Dark Lord, feel free to contact me, and I will do what I can to help.

Yours truly,

Harry Potter

He attached the letter and took it to the Owl Post Office in Diagon Alley, without a care in the world as to who saw him. He hadn't even worn any glamours. He didn't know quite what had gotten into him, but the giddiness felt lovely.

Once that was done, he had apparated to the orphanage.

It was a house near the ocean, where the beach was rocky and the waves were wild. There was rarely a sunny day to be heard of there, but the house was always warm, the matron always cheery, and the children were (for the most part) happy.

If there was any mistreatment, any hidden abuse, or any harm done to a single child there, Harry would snuff it out and have the responsible culprit removed.

He had done it before, and he would do it again. He didn't like to think of the details of that case, but as soon as he had found hidden bruises on several of the children, he used his celebrity powers and called in the Ministry. The caretaker at the orphanage at the time was put on trial and sent to Azkaban in a matter of months.

Contrary to Dumbledore's insistence that Harry stay with the Dursleys, the wizarding world at large did not stand for the presence of child abusers.

And with that kind of zero tolerance policy, Harry was fairly confident the children were safe.

He made his way up the humble dirt pathway to the house, and stood on its large patio to knock. He could hear various bells and whistles from the inside, and soon the door was swung open.

An army of children stood at the door waiting for him.

Behind them, Madam Humpop stood with a matronly smile on her face, adorned in her usual magenta robes. She was young, probably in her mid thirties, and she wore her raven-colored hair in a large bun.

"Harry, darling! We've all been waiting for you to come and visit. It's been nearly a week, you know." She smiled brightly, and scooped up the shortest child so he could have a view of Harry, too.

It was Sel, a small muggleborn child of five years whose parents had been some of Voldemort's victims in the war. Even if he hadn't already shown signs of magical abilities, that would have been enough for the orphanage to want to take him in.

"Oh, I know. A week is too long, isn't it?" Harry asked, entering the foyer and closing the door behind him.

He knelt down to be face-to-face with those he was visiting. Directly in front of him was Sylvia, a seven year old with feathery blond hair and dark gray eyes. She was staring at Harry with awe, and then she broke out giggling. Harry smiled at her, and she turned around and ran to hide behind the Madam.

She really was too shy.

Then, Seth--who was four and had just come to the orphanage a few months ago after his muggle parents refused to take care of him--ran at Harry and hung on his neck. Harry wrapped his arms around him and stood up, holding him and stroking his bright red hair.

"Hey, there. Did you miss me, Sethers?" he inquired, hefting the little guy up so he could see his face.

Seth nodded earnestly. "We made you pants," he announced, his little face intense and eager.

"Pants?" Harry asked them.

Ebele, a half-blood four-year-old with dark brown skin and bouncing ebony curls, shook her head.

"We *drew* you some pants. Come and look!" She cried, and the rest of them scampered after her. Harry raised an eyebrow at Madam Humpop, who didn't offer him any help.

He sighed, and followed after him as quickly as he could with Seth trying to climb up onto his shoulders. He was led into the art room, where there were canvases covered in finger paint and lumos charms that made the room look to be lit by early morning sunlight.

The walls were painted a light green, and in the center of the room was a large canvas that the rest of the kids were huddled around.

Harry placed Seth gently on the floor and went to investigate. The painting was, evidently, of pants. It was also finger paint, and had appeared to be of a group effort.

The "pants" were primarily orange, with splotches of green and red and pink all over them. Harry made a fake gasp and theatrically crumpled to the floor, which caused some of them to laugh and others to look nervous.

Harry sat up and smiled as brightly as possible. "Oh, they're beautiful! Absolutely beautiful! You should submit this to Luna Lovegood!" he cried.

The Lovegood reference was lost on all but the ten year old Kara and the eleven year old Tanner, who looked at Harry like he was crazy.

"Who's Luna Lovegood?" Phillip, eight years old, squeaked.

"She makes beautiful clothes and sells them, of course!" Harry explained. Several of the kids began chattering eagerly at that

. Melanie, who was seven and spent her time doodling cats and telling stories about them, took Harry's hand and said solemnly, "Then we need to find her and have her make these pants." Several other children nodded in agreement.

"If Harry likes them, we have to make them so he can wear them!" Seth cried eagerly, and then ran out of the room. Most of the rest, until only Kara and Tanner and Sel in Madam's arm remained.

"You're stupid sometimes, Harry." Tanner laughed.

"Now you'll actually have to wear them," Kara added, shaking her head.

Harry flushed red, knowing that they were right. He would probably end up owling Luna and asking her to make the pants, just because he knew it would thrill the kids.

He got up and stumbled after the kids, determined to keep up last week's promise of eating whatever Seth and his friends cooked for him.

Seth had taken an especial liking to Harry, and ever since he had arrived at the orphanage, he had made everything a much more interactive experience. Harry felt like he shared something with the little boy, growing up in an unwanting muggle home himself.

He would do anything for them, all of them, and they knew it.

They were waiting for him in the kitchen. Seth and Ebele were arguing over what they should make, and Phillip was helping Melanie read the titles of the cookbooks. Sylvia was struggling to reach the flour jar on the counter.

"Do you need any help?" Harry asked them, giving Sylvia a boost. She squeaked in surprise, and the rest of them gave him a resounding "no," so Harry let them be.

"We're cooking for you, Harry!" Ebele reminded him. She gave Seth a playful shove when he protested that he was in charge, so he should do the talking, and Phillip interrupted with the reasoning that he was the oldest, so he should be in charge.

Harry took a seat at the table, which was one of the first tables he had made, and had given to the orphanage. There were several of his pieces in the orphanage, including a grandfather clock that was charmed to alert him if anyone in the building was in danger, no matter where

he was. He had reasoned that so much of his work there, a piece of him would always be there for the kids.

He watched with a smile on his face as the kids scuttled around the kitchen, pulling out obscure ingredients and mixing them into bowls. He was sure he wouldn't be smiling as much once they had finished making their concoction, but for now he was happy to be around the kids.

After a few minutes, he felt queasy watching them find the absolute worst combinations to use. He had a feeling Seth and Ebele especially would be good at potions when they went to Hogwarts.

However, he wasn't interested in watching them for much longer, so he conjured a piece of parchment and a quill so he could owl Luna about the pants. He would Replicate the painting and send that, too, just so she would make the exact pair for him.

Dear Luna,

How are you? I know we haven't spoken in months, but I'm assuming that you're doing well. I saw your name in the paper the other day... I'm glad to hear that you're one of the "famous members" of our queer little group. I have a favor to ask of you.

You remember the orphanage, don't you? Well, the children have designed me a pair of pants, and they insist that I find a way to wear them. Would you mind producing a pair for me? I will pay you in full, of course.

With thanks,

Harry P.

When he had written the letter and tucked it into his pocket, he was presented with a large glass of thick white sludge that smelled of flour, and a plate full of what looked like potions ingredients and leftovers from breakfast. He fought back a grimace, and ate at it with false gusto. They cheered him on, and Seth even tried some of the flour-drink (though the bugger actually liked it).

These tykes are lucky I love them so much.

It had been a week since Draco had responded to Granger's owl about writing articles about Potter. Of course, like the fool he apparently was, he had accepted eagerly, saying in not quite as many words that he would write whatever Potter wanted him to.

He wasn't sure if he should have interpreted the lack of response as Granger thinking him pathetic for groveling, or that she was suspicious of his motives after such an ardent response.

Despite his moping, however, he had managed to be productive. He had sold three dozen records (fourteen of them being Celestina Warbeck, sadly) and had put an ad in his paper for

his shop, which had increased his business by almost twofold (that was only half a lie because of the almost).

He had also done sixteen hours of Healer training that week, but he still refused to admit that he was enjoying it less and less. It was suddenly unappealing compared to the idea of a career in journalism. Even if it was Potter-centric journalism.

Because honestly, *that* wasn't anything new. Potter had been first on his mind for years, hadn't he?

Suddenly, the door to his shop opened, and he nearly jumped out of his skin when he saw it was Granger. She met his gaze, and looked around the shop and its cobalt blue walls and oak furnishings.

"Nice shop," she said coolly as she walked past his brand-new shelves that were full of wizard punk rock, smiling and shaking her head. She turned around to face another shelf, and picked up an acoustic album, checking for its price with care.

"Thank you, Granger," Draco replied, running a hand through his hair, and wondering why it was Granger coming to see him instead of Potter.

Did Potter not want to see him? Was Granger was playing as his owl?

Draco fought back a scowl, wondering what he had done to deserve Potter's aversion.

Well, a lot of things...

Granger brought the album to his counter. "You should add some muggle music to your collection," she suggested, meeting his eye testily.

Draco shrugged. "I've thought about it, but I'm not entirely sure they would work on the average wizard's record player," he replied, wondering if she was looking for any signs of the old, muggle-hating Malfoy. "I've charmed an old muggle record player to work without electricity to solve the problem, but it's still a prototype. Who knows; I might figure it out eventually, and make a fortune off of it."

Granger furrowed her brow and nodded, probably wondering what use Draco Malfoy of all people would have for a fortune. Instead of commenting, however, she asked a question.

"Why did Pennom interview me for his article?"

Draco frowned, wondering why she was asking. Perhaps she was suspicious of him? This was still Granger, after all, even if Draco himself had changed.

"Because of your work with SPEW," he said, deliberately saying it as word and not the acronym. "I, or he, knew you cared about equal rights for the house elves, and of course you're familiar with the muggle world, so I knew you would have something to say about gay rights. You *always* have something to say." Draco couldn't help but add the last bit.

Granger tilted her head, moving on to a different track. "You haven't said the word 'mudblood' once since after the trial. You even agreed with me and blamed pureblood stigmas for the LGBT wizards issue," she stated. "What changed, Draco?"

Draco shrugged. This was beginning to feel like an interview... Or an interrogation. "I decided that I didn't need to act like a Death Eater," he told her solemnly. "I didn't need to please my father anymore. I need to make up for what I did." He didn't know why he felt inclined to divulge this information to Granger of all people, but she was easy to talk to.

And she could help land him the article (the fact that it was going to have him spend time with Potter was completely irrelevant, he assured himself).

"And why write as Pennom?" Granger pried.

"I needed a clean slate. No one will listen to Draco *Malfoy*." He scoffed, taking the record from her hands, and ignoring how much it hurt to admit those words to her. "Are you going to buy this?" He demanded, meeting her gaze with a sharp glare.

Granger ignored him, however, and met the stare with her own cool measure.

"So, you wouldn't consider telling The Prophet your identity?" she inquired, her piercing stare never ceasing.

Draco then averted her gaze.

Is this a test?

He wasn't sure what the correct answer was, so he decided he would focus on giving her the honest one. *Did* he want to tell *The Prophet* who he was, though?

He wanted to be respected, of course. But no one would respect Pennom if they knew that Pennom was actually him-- Draco Malfoy, former Death Eater.

"If some miracle allowed me to do so by keeping my writing's credibility, then yes, I would consider it. I would like to be recognized for my writing."

It would leave me much happier than carrying on with this whole Healer business.

He didn't know if that was the answer Granger was expecting, but he had the feeling it was the right one.

"I think that can be arranged." Granger smiled. Or was it a smirk?

Why are all these Gryffindors suddenly smirking?

Not that it mattered. He had said the right thing, hadn't he?

"How?" Draco demanded. The questions, "Why?" and "Would you still have me write for Potter?" remained unspoken.

He fiddled with the record in his hands, spinning it around nervously.

Another question arose: *Why would you want to help with that?*

But he didn't ask that one aloud either.

"How?" Granger asked, rhetorically. "By using Harry, of course. If the Boy Who Lived endorses you, who can argue with him? We'll have someone else write that article, of course. We can't have you writing articles promoting yourself— as much as you may enjoy that."

That hurt almost as much as the time she had hit his face all those years ago, though he wouldn't admit it. Did people still really think he was so self centered?

Granger turned away for a moment, muttering under her breath. "No, no. We'll have to have another set of articles entirely to be published. Oh, Harry won't like this. But it will have to do. Perhaps I can contact someone from The Quibbler..."

"What other set of articles, Granger?" Draco demanded, feeling a mix of motions stirring in his stomach. He was awaiting for the one that would settle as dictated by Granger's response.

"About you and Harry, of course. We'll have to make it appear as though you're friends, and that Harry supports you, and so on and so forth." She explained absently.

"And why would we want that?" Draco demanded. He wasn't sure what he thought about all this...

"So you can change your image. So Adam Pennom can become Draco Malfoy." Her tone was curt, but her proposition was also helpful.

Draco was still skeptical. That was a big offer.

"Why are you doing this, Granger?"

Granger frowned, as if she wasn't entirely sure. "Because you've changed. And it will help Harry with his plan if you write for him as Pennom. And it will help you if you don't have to hide as Pennom anymore."

Draco's eyes widened. *Does someone really care?*

He couldn't believe that Granger was offering this olive branch, and an opportunity to work with Potter to boot. To clear his name. He almost choked.

"Thank you, Granger."

"Hermione," she corrected him.

"Of course. Hermione." He coughed a little, the friendliness feeling strange.

"I'll let Harry know where your shop is, and he'll come and talk to you tomorrow?" she asked, looking at him and searching his face for permission.

"I'm afraid I can't tell him it's you quite yet, because of the Vow, but he'll know soon enough." She continued, "Just chat with him a bit then, I suppose, and explain the situation to him. I'll have spoken to him about it, too, of course. And I'm sure ideas for an article will come eventually if you do just talk with him."

Draco nodded, absorbing the influx of information. "Of course. Thank you again, for everything." He stammered.

Hermione cleared her throat. "Well, I'm off to talk to Harry. Take care, Draco."

Draco watched her leave, realizing all at once that she hadn't bought the record, and she hadn't explained the exact nature of the articles about him or Potter, and that neither of those things mattered because tomorrow he was going to talk to Potter and he would be writing an article... and that maybe he had just made some new friends.

He took a deep breath, and told himself to relax. He would keep the shop open for a few more hours, and then he'd go relax, cook some dinner, and work on the record player.

Hermione left Draco's shop, satisfied that she had not made a mistake in asking him to write the articles for Harry. She was curious, however, what Harry would think when he discovered that Pennom was Draco.

He certainly seemed interested in the prospect of the mysterious writer last week... And that probably wouldn't change, she realized. Harry had seemed fairly infatuated with Malfoy all throughout their Hogwarts years, and in sixth year especially.

Repairing Draco's image would be easy, she realized, if Harry truly was fond of him. She smiled mischievously as she imagined the uproar if the two came out at the same time: Harry as gay and Draco as his reporter. Even better, if she could somehow get the two together.

Oh, yes, it was a brilliant plan.

She could make a break through in wizarding LGBT rights using Harry's name, clear Draco's name and establish a proper career for him, all the while curing both of them of their loneliness. She felt like some sort of mastermind, as she apparated to the building of *The Prophet*.

She entered the building, with high ceilings and flying envelopes and the smell of freshly printed paper. It would have been an altogether lovely experience, she decided, had she not realized that the woman at the reception desk was Padma Patil of all people.

She fought a grimace, and walked up to the desk with all the dignity she could muster.

"I'm looking for Terry Boot's office, please?" she asked. She had never been to his office, but they spoke of his work often. They were... *close*.

Padma looked up and met Hermione's eye with a look of fear, but she cleared her throat. "Of course, Granger. Going to kiss another important person's ass, are we?" She spat, most likely

forgetting that it was her job as a receptionist to be polite to incoming visitors.

She was referring to Ron and Harry, of course- though it was really Padma who was doing the ass kissing. Hermione had made all her friends before they were famous. Padma ate the scraps.

Hermione only raised an eyebrow, and Padma flinched under her gaze, giving in to answer. "Fourth level. Room 412."

Hermione nodded in response, and made her way up to the fourth level. She found Terry's office with ease, and swung open the door. He was absorbed in his quill and paper, and only just looked up to see who had barged into the office, but gave her a big smile all the same when he saw who it was.

"Hermione, darling! I wasn't expecting to see you here of all places. Have a seat; what can I help you with?" he inquired, patting his desk.

Terry was a wonderful fellow; he had always been very smart, and had been of a huge assistance in Dumbledore's Army. He would also be very useful now, considering he was in complete charge of the celebrity coverage in The Prophet.

"Hello, Terry." She smiled at him professionally, showing him the intent of her visit. "I was here to chat with you about that thing about no longer reporting on Harry Potter."

She paused to watch his expression as he let her continue. "Things have... changed a little. I was wondering if you'd be willing to personally cover a few specific articles on him in the next few months."

Terry's face lit up. "Of course, Hermione! Any press we're allowed to do on Harry will do great for the newspaper, I'm sure. What do you want me to write about?" he asked, pulling out a fresh piece of parchment.

Hermione pursed her lips. This was where things got tricky.

"Well, Terry, this first one won't be about Harry. I need you to publish an article about Draco Malfoy and his new record shop. And I need you to refrain from using the phrase 'Death Eater...' or anything else that could be negatively associated with him."

She could practically see the cogs and wheels in his head turning, as he wondered what her motives could be.

"Okay, love." He sighed, looking at her with a confused but happy expression. "I don't know what you're planning, but I trust you. Do you have anything particular in mind?" he queried, jotting a few things down.

"I was thinking something like, *Draco Malfoy seeks fresh start at Carkitt Market*," she suggested.

Terry frowned. "You're smart, Hermione, but you really ought to work on your headlining skills," he teased. "I can send someone over to check out the shop soon, though, and I'll have

the article ready whenever you want."

"Can you manage tomorrow?" Hermione asked.

Terry gave her a pained smile, but forcibly perked up. "I could add it in. Won't be front page news, though."

"Of course not, thank you, Terry. Are we still on for dinner on Tuesday?" she asked. She had been seeing him regularly for the past four months, but they kept it quiet. She hadn't told Harry in the fear that he would connect it to the fact that he had dropped out of the papers as of late.

"I can't see why not. See you then, love." He stood up, and gave her a quick peck on the cheek. "And I'll be seeing more of you at work, too?"

Hermione smiled warmly, pulling away. "Oh, yes, definitely!"

She just loved how easily her plans fell into place.

The Record Shop

The day after he had visited the orphanage, Harry had decided to sleep in. He had stayed there all afternoon and long into the evening. After trying their horrendous experimental meal, he had taken them outside and taught the bigger ones how to fly on a broom. Sel, the tiniest but not the youngest, had been sad that he wasn't allowed to fly, so Harry had made it up to him by reading him to sleep.

Then, he helped the Madam with the babies in the nursery. There were only a few, but it still pained Harry that any parent could give up a child so small. He cradled a little one to sleep, wondering if the Durseleys had been so kind to him when he was dropped on their doorstep. He doubted it. Finally, he had gone home and slept, and dreamed of a happier childhood, and planned to sleep very late.

Naturally, the plan was foiled when Hermione flooded into his house at eight in the morning and demanded he get up.

"Harry! You've got to get up," she insisted, leaning over him.

"Nnnngghh..." He groaned behind closed eyes, pulling the covers over his head.

"I've set you up a meeting with Adam Pennom," she snapped.

Harry sat up immediately. He looked at Hermione with wide eyes. She was standing in his doorway with her arms crossed, looking disappointed.

"Really?" Harry asked, climbing out of bed. She shielded her eyes as he found some pants to put on.

"Yes, he's meeting you today. He's willing to write for you," she said, hands still over her eyes. "He doesn't have any clue why we need him yet, so you'll have to tell him."

"And why is that again? I mean, him, specifically." Harry was fully dressed now, and she looked at him curiously as she pursed her lips in thought.

"Because of the article, of course. He's bent, too. I mean gay, sorry. I just think he's the right person! Okay?" Hermione was stammering, and she looked as though she was on the spot.

Harry took a few steps closer. "*That* article isn't supposed to come out for another few months though. Isn't that what we said?" he asked. He wasn't complaining at the chance to meet Pennom, but he was suspicious at her sudden jump towards it.

"What are you planning, Hermione?" he demanded. She sounded like she was hiding something. Oh, she could be vicious at times, and was excellent at devising plans and strategies, but she was no good at hiding things from her closet friends.

"Nothing!" She pouted. "Nothing at all. You're both just shrouded in mystery right now. When you both step out into the light, it will have the intended bang effect."

Harry narrowed his eyes. "Fair enough," he said, though he didn't believe her, and it didn't answer his question at all. "Give me some time to shower and have breakfast, and then I'll be ready to go, yeah? What time is he expecting me?"

"Not until the afternoon. Take your time. I'll wait for you downstairs."

Harry listened to her, and took a generously long shower. When he was done, the bathroom reeked of peppermint, as it always did. There was something off about the showers in the Black home—everyone who used it came out commenting on a different scent, regardless of the aroma of the soap or hair products they had used. Ron had always said it smelled of currants, and Hermione said lavender. Glen, his ex, had thought it smelled like the ocean, and had questioned Harry about the quality of his water. Harry couldn't tell him it was magic, of course, so he told him that he was just imagining it, proving it to him the peppermint smell that remained after his own shower.

Harry flushed as he remembered Glen suggesting they try it together to prevent the smell. He cast the thought away, however, reminding himself not to romanticize the relationship; Glen had been toxic, even if they had had some fun times... though none of those times were in the shower, or even in the bedroom, he remembered wryly.

Sighing, he dried his hair with a towel. He exited the bathroom and redressed himself, this time with more care now that Hermione wasn't watching. He was vaguely aware of the nagging desire in the back of his head to impress Pennom... Which was purely for publicity reasons, of course. He laughed at himself.

Of course it wasn't. He hadn't *properly* been with another gay man in what seemed to be an eternity, and Hermione had said Pennom was young, handsome, and gay. There were a few (possibly misguided) romantic motives behind his dressing nicely, and Harry found himself almost as excited as if it were a date. He practically skipped downstairs to the kitchen, where Hermione had thoughtfully prepared some toast and eggs that she had placed a Warming Charm on. Harry grinned cheekily.

"Thanks, 'Mione," he said, seeing that she had not forgotten to leave out the strawberry jam for him. He sat down and began spreading his toast with it. Hermione snorted.

"You do know you have four open jars of that stuff, don't you?" she asked, watching with disapproval as he spread his toast with copious amounts of the red preserves.

He took a big bite out of his toast, and said, "You can never have too much strawberry jam."

"You're certainly in a good mood, now that you're awake," she commented, pulled out a chair next to him, and buttered her own toast.

"Mmhmm. A good shower will do wonders. Have you got anything more on Pennom for me?" Harry inquired, taking another bite that was more jam than toast.

Hermione just rolled her eyes. "Of course. He's the man of your dreams and he's dying to meet you," she snapped, her voice saturated with sarcasm.

"Really?" Harry asked, oblivious to her tone. He dropped his toast. Hermione only snorted. "No, you prat. Is that what you wanted to hear, then?"

Harry flushed red, and muttered a resigned, "Maybe."

She sighed in response. "Oh, Harry. I don't know what to tell you. Besides that you're meeting him in the Cobalt Records in Carkitt Market, and you'll have to explain what you want from him." She replied and rubbed her temples. She gave him a pointed look, obviously willing him to not ask him for any sexual favors.

"It's like you don't even know me, Hermione!" Harry laughed, though he didn't quite blame her for her concern. He had been acting pretty desperate as of late, though he wasn't going to be asking for any *sexual* favors.

"Just, don't be too surprised if he's not everything you've hoped for," she said, almost cryptically. "I don't know what kind of images you've built up in your head," she added with a shudder.

Harry shook his head adamantly. "I haven't been fantasizing, Hermione!" he protested.

She held her hands up in the air, and stood up. "I won't judge you, Harry. But I do have to get going to work. It's nearly noon, you know." Without further warning, she apparated away, and Harry cast a tempus charm to see if she had been correct. He shook his head. Either he had slept in very late, or he had spent far too long in the shower.

He would apparate to Diagon Alley once he had finished his breakfast, and then walk his way over to Carkitt Market. Who knew; maybe he'd stop by the Hopping Pot.

Draco dreamed.

He was in a room full of objects. Unwanted objects, cast there without consideration or thought. He had spent plenty of time in that room, and not only because it was the Room of Requirement. He was not alone in the room, this time.

"Don't kill him! Don't kill him!" Draco had screamed, unsure if he was protecting Potter or himself by saying it.

Vincent had hardly listened. He cast a spell. Then, there was fire, fire shaped like the beasts from his childhood nightmares. Then fire shaped like his father, fire shaped like himself. It devoured the room, burning and scathing and destroying.

But he was flying, flying away from it, clutching to the dark haired boy on the broom, who had not been killed.

Vincent burned.

Draco awoke with a start, the words don't kill him still playing on his lips. He breathed heavily, clutching his chest and the reassuring truth that he was awake, and the fiendfyre was gone, and he and Potter had survived. He had had the dream dozens of times before, but in the past week, after seeing Potter again, the dream had not left him alone. Every night, he awoke sweating and panting and praying that not another person had burned.

It had always helped to strengthen his resolve. He would set things right, he thought, and the dreams would go away. Which brought his thoughts back to Potter. That had been happening a lot lately, he realized glumly. It was disturbingly much like his Hogwarts years. Now, his head revolved around Potter— Potter's furniture, Potter's friends, Potter's article. And today, he would be seeing him again. He wasn't sure if he was dreading it or if he was terribly excited (hopefully the former).

Draco rolled out of bed and set himself to washing up, and then tidying around his flat. And then probably the shop, too. Not that it wasn't immaculate anyway; Draco was a very orderly person, and he kept his shop rather organized, if he were to say so himself.

After another shower (with more apple scented products), he made breakfast for himself. He tried a fancy porridge recipe from a muggle cookbook he had bought at a "thrift shop" a few weeks ago. It ended up turning purple from the usage of berries, which bothered him a bit, so he tried casting a charm to remove the color. It worked, which pleased him. He had a strange penchant for white-colored foods, and the memory of his mother telling him to "eat the rainbow" nagged at the back of his mind. He just sniggered. That had become true in a different manner entirely. A false justification, perhaps, but Draco cared more about enjoying his food, and the rule that his food was mostly pale was essential to making that happen for him. *A food rule*, his therapist had called it.

Once he finished his porridge, Draco opened his daily copy of The Prophet. The front page was something about Celestina Warbeck, which naturally made him cringe. Upon further investigation, however, it was rather interesting. Apparently, a muggle had accidentally found a portkey and ended up at her concert. She had invited the hapless fellow on stage to sing A Cauldron Full of Hot, Strong Love, after which his memory was erased. Draco shuddered. He had a sneaking suspicion that even more people would be coming into the shop for that record now.

Does it never end? If it didn't bring me so much profit, I would remove her records from my shelves completely. Sighing dramatically, he turned the page. Then, he froze...

Speaking of the shop, on page three:

Malfoy Heir Starts Anew With Record Shop in Carkitt Market

By Calla Gallows

For the past three months, Cobalt Records has sat quietly across the street from the Hopping Pot in Carkitt Market. Customers come and go to get their music fix— the shop offers music of all kinds, including records from up and comings like Wicked Punk, Celtic Chanters,

Hallowed Howlers, Werewolves on Diagon, and Zombie Crystal. The eclectic selection also includes a (rather limited) selection of classic artists Celestina Warbeck and The Weird Sisters.

Little have its customers known, however, that the shop is run and owned by Draco Malfoy, the son of the notorious Death Eater Lucius Malfoy. While his father is now imprisoned in Azkaban, Draco Malfoy won his freedom in 1999 after months on trial, with the helpful testaments of Harry Potter. A quote from the 1999 coverage of the trial shows Malfoy saying, "I didn't choose to be a Death Eater. It was thrust upon me by my father and the Dark Lord. I was expected to fail." Malfoy had continued to attest to his innocence, saying, "I was forced to hurt many people. I even said some very hateful things. But that isn't me now. I can and will get past this. I can change."

Many people will remember Harry Potter's say on the matter, which made front page news in February of that year: "Everybody deserves a second chance. Including Malfoy and his mother, both of whom saved my life. There's good in them, even if I didn't see it when I was younger."

Four years later, Malfoy has kept to his word. There have been no reports of him performing the Dark Arts or committing any crime. According to one Auror Weasley, "Malfoy's gone alright, I suppose. Last I heard of him, someone planted doxy eggs on his house." So, is Draco Malfoy truly a changed man? A misunderstood victim, even?, given the reported amounts of assault to his person whenever he enters the public eye. T

his reporter went to investigate his shop undercover just yesterday to find out. Malfoy sits behind his counter, scribbling notes onto a piece of parchment. He is dressed in muggle attire, though slightly formal. He barks out a welcome, absorbed in whatever he is writing. This reporter hovers around the shop, which is completely devoid of Dark artifacts, though not lacking in muggle memorabilia. As I pick up Celestina Warbeck's new album and bring it for purchase, Malfoy scowls. "Not another one," he sighs, taking the record. "Anything but another one of these. Even the Hogwarts Choir."

Upon asking him several more questions, this reporter has come to the conclusion that the only thing worthy of suspicion from Draco Malfoy is his apparent lack of taste in music. Upon further interrogation, I discovered that he believes that "Warbeck isn't music," that "yes, muggles are quite fascinating," and that I "ask too many questions." Otherwise, he lives a quiet life living above his shop, staying low, and visiting the muggle world. As far as former Death Eaters go, Draco Malfoy appears to be fairly harmless. Go visit his new shop; you're bound to find an interesting record or two.

-CG

Draco dropped the paper and took a shaky breath. He knew it could have gone much worse, that they could have brought up much worse details from the trial. That didn't change the fact that for the past four years, he had been dreading the day that he was finally reported on. And, of course, he knew that Hermione had told him that she would make it happen... But he hadn't expected it to come so soon. Why did it have to come so soon? And why did it have to be on the shop?

Well, he knew enough about journalism (and Granger) to know why. Before they started reporting on any other movements, they had to reintroduce him to the world's eye. But, it still meant not being able to hide under glamours when any risky customers came in, and that he couldn't get any more sympathy tips now that people thought he was an heir, and perhaps it also even meant that there would be some more intentional doxy infestations.. but he knew that it had done something to clear his name. He just wished there were a different way to go about it.

Regardless, the article wasn't half bad.... Even though that reporter was an airhead. He remembered her, and cursed him for not realizing she from the press sooner. If he had known, he would have said something more redeeming.

He stood up, folded the paper in half, and wondered if Potter had read the article. If Potter had already figured out that he was Pennom— Hermione had already told him where the meeting was. He was *bound* to figure it out. Unless he's still as daft as he was in school.

Draco sighed and shook his head. What would happen would happen; he could only hope that Potter would keep his mouth shut until they spoke. In the meantime, he decided he would work on his record player a bit, and then open up shop early. He hoped he wasn't being presumptuous in hoping that the article would at least bump up his sales.

The record player sat in an esteemed spot on the shelf over the hearth in his tiny sitting room. It was the only piece of furniture in the room, besides the black leather chair that he had bought a number of days ago. Draco reminded himself again that he needed to go and buy the rest of his furnishing; he had been living there for nearly three weeks now, and he had yet to completely move in. In retrospect, he should have furnished it before he moved in. He had owned the shop for months prior... he just hadn't been expecting to need to move in.

He picked up the record player. It was very muggle—a black, square box that was only a few inches tall. It was nothing like wizarding record players, which resembled muggle record players from over fifty years ago. This was new. He had to lift up a lid to place in a new record, and there was no visible horn to project the sound. His—no, the person who had given it to him had said something about there being speakers on the inside, but he had yet to figure out how those worked.

His goal with the record player was to be able to convert it to magical energy instead of electricity, so people who lived at places like Hogwarts (or anywhere else with strong residual magic) could use it without worrying about frying the hardware. See, I'm getting it! Draco thought. I know how to use words like hardware! He wasn't sure quite what hardware was, but he knew that it was his problem as far as the magic went. His other problem would be getting people to like it. Wizards liked strange, flouncy looking things like the old record players. Why settle for this boring old box when they could use their old one just as easy? Never mind that it took up less space or was more portable; wizards didn't usually have those kinds of problems. There were always shrinking charms, or lightening charms, or extending charms...

But he was still determined to make it work, even if it was just for his own personal use. He could use it without worry in his flat above the shop, though he wasn't quite sure why. As soon as he brought a gadget downstairs, into the shop, it snap, crackled, and died. He usually

just left it there; the small children who came into the shop were always fascinated. There were lamps, portable music and game players (too tiny for him to even bother trying to work on), a telephone, and even some interesting muggle toys that were supposed to talk (but obviously didn't anymore). Most of them came from the thrift shops he loved to visit, but the rest came from his old flat with—with—

Fuck.

He closed the record player. *I can't avoid thinking about the asshole forever.* A lot of the things came from the flat he shared with his ex, Matthew. They served as constant, little reminders, but he did well ignoring them. Not now, though.

Matthew, who ran his own record shop in muggle London, not far from the Leaky Cauldron. Matthew, whom he had dated for four months without realizing the bastard was fucking with every man and woman on the block. Matthew, who had finally broken it off with Draco because he had too many secrets (he was a wizard, of course he did!). The irony of it still stung, considering the other man's own secret life spent sleeping with anyone with legs.

But that was three weeks ago, and Draco was already over it, he told himself. It hadn't bothered him much, and he wasn't going to let it do so now. He had to open up shop, anyhow.

Down the stairs he went, more aware of his muggle attire than usual. With a flick of his wand, he unlocked the door, and the sign in front of his shop now said *Open*. He was a few hours earlier than he was normally open on a Monday, but he had confidence that the article would send over plenty of people who didn't know better.

He was right, of course. He only had to wait a few minutes before his first customer entered. He looked a bit older than "middle aged," with shamelessly sported gray patches in his curly black hair and beard. He hovered excitedly in front of the records, choosing five after ten minutes of indecisiveness. As he came to the counter, he presented his choices to Draco.

"How much for these?" he inquired, his voice keen and bouncing.

"Er, for the lot of them?" asked Draco. "Twelve galleons total. Because you get three galleons off for buying five."

The wizard nodded, pulling a handful of galleons from his pocket. "I read the article in The Prophet, you know. So glad to see that you've overcome your past and become a contributing member of society," he grinned, not noticing the offense in his words as Draco winced. "I mean, a *record shop*," the man said, looking around in awe as if he were standing under the dome of the Hagia Sophia.

"Mm, yes. Thank you," Draco muttered.

But the man wasn't done. "I haven't been in a place like this since before I went to Hogwarts!" he exclaimed. "Once I became a wizard, of course, I never really went back to muggle things... But I guess you just miss stuff like this. Not that there aren't any other music shops, but this one feels right. Feels properly muggle."

Had anyone said the phrase "properly muggle" to Draco five years ago, and meant it seriously, he probably would have laughed in their face and cast a hex. But Draco only smiled, and said, "It's a pity I haven't any muggle music to sell. But I'm working on it."

He spun back to face Draco. "Really?" he asked, pale green eyes alight. "How? Are you enchanting their records? I hear they've started using things called seedies instead."

Draco almost shrunk under the fervent excitement the other wizard was radiating.

"CDs, yes. I mean, no. I haven't a clue how I could get those to work without muggle technology. But I'm trying to get one of those newer record players to work off of magic."

The wizard nodded excitedly. "Yes, yes. Well, I'm sure I'll be back to see it when you're done. The names Auror Micheals, by the way."

"Thank you, Auror Micheals," Draco replied. He hoped the man would leave soon, as there were a few more people beginning a queue behind him.

The auror smiled brightly. "Yes, sir, Mr. Malfoy." He turned around to leave, and called over his shoulder, "I'll see you in the papers, I'm sure, you brilliant young man!"

Draco flushed slightly with embarrassment, and was left smiling, because it was also the most positive interaction he had ever had with a customer. The smile faded, however, as the next person in line had come to buy not one, but two Celestina Warbeck albums. He took their money without a word, muttering a half hearted, "Have a nice day," as they left.

After that, he had sold twenty albums before noon, which broke a new personal record (pun not intended). Many people came requesting to hear a sample of the artists listed in the article, which they had never heard of before.

Draco wondered why the reporter had chosen to endorse those particular artists; they weren't terribly popular. Maybe she was trying to make a point: Draco wasn't selling that many Top Hits, so there had to have been something off with him. He didn't mind, though. He was grateful for the new, more interesting clientele.

Well, for the most part.

A lot of people he had gone to school with had come in and bought more Celestina Warbeck albums, which had to have been a deliberate effort to spite him. He was glad when they sold out, no matter what that had meant. He wasn't restocking.

And finally, fifteen minutes past one o'clock, Harry Potter had wandered into his shop.

Yes, wandered was the right word—Potter was looking fairly lost, and also trying to act overly casual. Was he aware that meetings were generally mutual affairs, and he didn't have to act like he wasn't there to see him? Unless, of course, he hadn't figured out that Draco was Pennom. In fact, Draco didn't even think Potter noticed him yet. Which stung, considering he had found Draco with such ease in the muggle store, even with his glamours on.

Draco cleared his throat. "Hello, Potter," he said smoothly. "You know, its usually considered courteous to greet the shop keeper upon entrance."

Harry looked up from his ambling through the shop. "Oh, Draco! Hello. I hadn't seen you there." He moved closer to the counter. "I didn't know this was your shop."

Draco leaned forward on the counter to watch him. *What game is he playing at?*

"Yes, it is. In fact, they announced it in *The Prophet* this morning," he said casually. "Wasn't really my wish, of course, but it brought me plenty of new business. I take it that's not why you're here, though?" Draco asked, raising an eyebrow. Two could play oblivious.

"Oh, no. I don't read *The Prophet* often," Harry confessed, finally meeting Draco's eye, and clearly not stating his motives. This aggravated Draco. *You can't have everything handed to you on a silver plate! Just bloody tell me you're here to meet Pennom, you spoiled prat.*

Then again, Potter didn't know he was Pennom.

This could be fun, Draco decided.

"Oh, well, I'm in it quite often. Just last week, I was on page four," he boasted, thinking he couldn't have been more obvious.

Potter rolled his eyes. "Draco, I thought we weren't playing these games anymore."

"What games, Harry?" Draco asked, with false innocence, but honest confusion.

"This! You, boasting about how bloody great you are. Not all of us care about fame, Draco," Potter whined, turning to pick up a Werewolves on Diagon record and avoiding eye contact.

"It's called having a conversation, Potter. Besides, I thought you were trying to get back in to the paper," Draco replied, sounding as good-natured as possible. Potter dropped the record, and looked at Draco with fury. Draco didn't see the need for the animosity...

"Malfoy!" he snapped. "I never wanted to be in the bloody papers, no matter how much thought I was an attention whore or no! And that certainly hasn't changed!"

Draco stared in silence. He didn't know what he had done to invoke this sudden rage.

"I thought we were past this, Draco. I tried being nice to you in that furniture shop. I tried to make amends. But no, first you had to suddenly apparate away, and now you're acting just like you did in Hogwarts! Except now, you're so bloody calm and nice about it—you don't even sound angry!—and it's bloody infuriating!" Potter was gesticulating madly now, and Draco could feel his magic swirl around the room. The lumos he had used to light the shop began to flicker.

He couldn't think of what to say in response, and Potter continued talking without him.

"This is ridiculous. Pennom isn't even here... Maybe he's in the Hopping Pot... Yeah, of course he is, I'm twenty minutes late!" Potter grumbled, turning to leave.

"You won't find him there, Harry," Draco said, thinking that using his first name would calm him down. Potter spun back on his heels.

"Really? Did you see him? Did he tell you where he was going? Why didn't you tell me that?" he demanded, the fury only subsiding slightly.

Draco rolled his eyes. "You clearly weren't listening, Potter. *I'm* Adam Pennom."

The Plan

"Oh," said Harry, feeling terribly stupid.

Oh.

All at once, as if in a tremor, he felt his anger vanish. "Oh," he repeated. He realized that everything that Draco had said had hinted at having Pennom's knowledge. So, it wasn't Draco just trying to irritate him.

"Yes, Potter. *Oh* is right." Draco sighed, standing up straight, and taking his elbows off the counter.

"I told you to call me Harry."

"I had assumed that changed when you assumed that *I* hadn't changed," Draco replied with a grimace.

Harry felt his ears go red, as it came to his attention that the misunderstanding had been entirely his own fault. Despite the fact that he had been the one to suggest that they put their pasts behind them, Harry was the one still stuck in the past, assuming that Draco was the same, old, stubborn prat. When it was really Harry who was still the stubborn prat.

He turned even redder, and had a sudden desire to become a turtle and tuck himself into a shell and hide. "Right. I'm sorry about that. Call me Harry, I insist. And I'll call you Draco. Unless you want me to call you Adam Pennom. Wait, no. That's stupid. I'll call you Draco," Harry stuttered, and fumbled with his shirt collar, feeling shameful as he dug himself into a deeper and deeper hole.

Draco sighed. "Alright. I suppose there was no way you could have known I was Adam Pennom beforehand, anyway. I should have been more obvious... Clearly, introducing myself with my penname last week was not enough. Nor was my mention of being on page four of *The Prophet*. Or my expression of my knowledge of your desire to be published." Harry heard the unspoken and sarcastic *still as observant as ever, Potter* snuck into that, and he supposed he had deserved it. He had been rather daft about it.

"I'm sorry, Draco. I guess I was picturing Pennom to be... different. I never imagined you of all people to be writing articles criticizing pureblood prejudice... Or about gay wizarding rights..." Harry paused as the words processed in his head, and the realization hit him. "Holy fuck, Draco! You're gay, aren't you?" He asked incredulously, realizing too late what he had said, and that it probably came off the wrong way.

Draco narrowed his eyes and gave two unenthusiastic claps. "Congratulations, Harry. Something I didn't have to spell out to you in red ink. Unless you want me to explain my sexuality more clearly?"

Harry shook his head. "No, Draco, you don't have to... That's perfectly alright. Really."

Draco stepped out from behind the counter gracefully, and stalked towards Harry, looking, suddenly, very intimidating. "What's that, *Harry*? You're not afraid to hear about me talk about being *gay*, are you? Because if you happen to be *homophobic*," he practically spat the word from his mouth, in same way he once would have said the word *mudblood*, "I'm afraid I won't be working with you." Now directly in front of Harry, he looked down at him and glared at him expectantly. Harry took a step back and waved his hands in the air in defense.

"Gods, Draco, no! It's not like that. Not at all," he protested.

Draco didn't look convinced. He opened his mouth to respond, but Harry interrupted him and continued. "I'm not a homophobe! Quite the opposite, really. Or else I wouldn't have asked you to write this article. Or flirted with you in the furniture store!"

Draco smirked, and Harry realized what he said too late. "So you *were* flirting," he said smugly, and crossed his arms. The prat was obviously pleased with himself—pleased that Harry had been flirting with him.

His inner sixth year silently screamed, and then squealed.

Harry swallowed. "Yeah. I tend to do that. With men. Because I'm gay, too. Now, can we move on to why we're actually here?" he pleaded, biting back the urge to add a spiteful *Malfoy*. Even if he did blame the other man for feeling completely embarrassed, there was no need to continue with the animosity.

"Of course. What did you need Pennom to write about? Hermione said she couldn't explain until I swore an Unbreakable."

So, it's Hermione now, is it? he thought. Instead of that, though, he said, "Why in Merlin's name would you need to make an Unbreakable Vow?"

Draco shrugged, apparently calmed now. "You know more than I. If you'd prefer, I can swear an oath by something else. A binding contract, if you will."

Harry, still bewildered as to why Hermione thought this was as serious as to have him make an Unbreakable Vow, nodded absently. "Sure, okay. Of course. I'll need you to swear that you don't divulge any of the information that I tell you, unless I ask you to do so. And that you won't use any of the information against me." He explained.

Draco put a hand over his heart, the image of drama. "I swear by the name of Merlin, on my magic, and all things powerful, that I will keep Harry Potter's secrets, and share them only when told, and to use them honestly, and never against the said Mr. Potter." He announced solemnly, and took a sweeping bow at Harry's feet.

"Still dramatic as ever, I see."

The other man rose to his feet. "I'll make an Unbreakable, if you prefer. That's what I had Hermione do when I interviewed her."

Harry frowned. *So that's it. She wanted it to be even.* "No, that won't be necessary. And I won't be telling anyone who you are, either. You can trust me. I trust you," he said, shuffling his feet.

Draco took a minuscule step forward, and whispered, "That's risky, though."

Harry felt his heart fluttering in his chest and pounding in his ears, but he didn't skip a beat with his response. "I like taking risks."

Draco smiled, apparently satisfied. "Bloody Gryffindors," he muttered. He looked around the room, and then back at Harry. "Do you want to have a seat upstairs? I can close up shop. I've sold enough Warbeck albums for the day."

Harry raised an eyebrow. "Sure. You're not a fan of Celestina?" he asked.

Draco shuddered, and turned to close the door. "Merlin, no. I despise her. If you read *The Prophet*, you'd know that, though."

"You said you're in the papers a lot?" Harry asked casually, remembering the boasting comment from earlier.

"Pennom is. I wasn't until this morning. Quite a shock, really, though I suspect your Granger girl had something to do with it," Draco laughed wryly, and cast a charm to lock the door.

Harry nodded, but something else caught his attention. "Hey, are these my shelves?" he asked, recognizing the woodwork as his own. He remembered them—the oak was imported from America, so he had spent a pretty penny on it, and he had spent hours polishing the shelves into the deep curves that made for an irregular, swooping base.

Draco snapped his fingers, and the *lumos* charm lighting the shop darkened. "How terribly embarrassing." He sighed. "It would appear that I am a bigger fan of yours than I had originally thought." Without waiting for a response, he began leading the way upstairs.

Harry's first thought was that he was flattered. His second thought was that Draco walked rather well. Neither were thoughts he was comfortable with acknowledging, however, so he just followed Draco up the stairs without pondering them too much. The stairs were wooden and creaky, and he felt slightly claustrophobic going up them, like he was climbing up a box. The top opened up to a low roofed sitting room, which only had a leather chair and a shelf (or a mantle, he supposed) over a small, neglected fireplace. A muggle record player sat on top of it.

"Pretty bare in here, huh? Doesn't seem much like you," Harry commented.

"I just moved in a few weeks ago. I, er, had a rough break up." Draco's face twisted in discomfort, and Harry felt a sudden rush of sympathy.

"I'm so sorry. Say no more; I understand," Harry assured him. "Do you have a room with furniture in it, though?" he added, with a sly, teasing grin.

A look of earnest sadness crossed Draco's face. "Don't tell anyone, Harry," he whispered, "but I'm terribly poor now. They took everything after the war. I've a few crates we can sit on in the kitchen, but I'm afraid that's all..." His voice was small and shameful, and Harry felt sympathetic for him again.

"Draco, I—"

"And I'm afraid I can't serve tea, either. I do have a few bottles of sympathy tears that I've gathered from fools like yourself, though."

Then Harry realized the sadness had been all too dramatic, and the whisper had been a stage whisper, and he had believed for a single moment that Draco Malfoy was broke.

"Draco!" he hissed.

"Do you stop and give your condolences to *everyone* with a creative sob story?" Draco inquired with a grin. He led him into the kitchen, which was indeed furnished with a table and chairs. Along with muggle cooking appliances of every size and caliber, he noted.

Harry glared at him. "You tricked me!" he accused him, laughing all the same.

"You were the one who said you trusted me. I might not let out your secrets, but I'm still a Slytherin," he reminded him. He then pulled out a chair for Harry (who was not ignorant to the gesture), sitting down in one across from him. "But no, I'm quite well off. They only took the Dark artifacts; we still have the rest. Most of it goes to taking care of mother and pleasing her every whim, but I did use some of it to buy this building and start the shop."

Harry nodded. "That's good, then. I can't believe I believed you, though," he muttered. still off put by that. He was also unnerved by the fact that suddenly, it felt so easy joking around with Draco. He supposed it was natural; he had been doing it since he was eleven, just with a little more animosity.

"And you did!" Draco burst into laughter. "For Merlin's sakes, Potter, these clothes are designer! And you were with me when I bought that bloody bed!"

Draco leaned forward and guffawed in a most un-Malfoy-like fashion. Harry joined in with the laughter, feeling at ease.

When the laughter died out, he cleared his throat. "Down to business, then."

Draco stilled, and his face firmed again. Harry thought it looked better carefree and lit with laughter, but he didn't say anything. This was nice, too. *Bloody hell, did I just think that Draco Malfoy's face is nice?* He did, he realized, and was, once more, not surprised.

"Your article gave me this idea—and don't call it egotistic, because it's not—that we need more out gay wizards. More representation, more information, more acceptance. And I thought that—" A look of realization dawned on Draco's face, and he interrupted.

"Who better than Harry Potter for the job?" His face was still stony, but Harry saw a gleam of hope and excitement in his eyes.

"Exactly," he agreed. "I mean, Dumbledore and Luna are great, but it's not enough. We need the shock value of the bloody hero of the wizarding world coming out. It would make front pages everywhere."

"And you want me to write the article that does it," Draco assumed, folding his hands on the table.

"Yeah, I do," Harry confirmed.

"But why Pennom? He's just an anonymous name that occasionally shows up in the back pages." Draco frowned in concentration. "No one will take it with merit. They'd only use my article as an anonymous tip, and then they'd blow it up themselves."

Harry frowned. "I chose you--er, Pennom--because of the article last week. And yes, I did read it; a friend sent it to me. Anyway, you're obviously sympathetic with the cause. And you'd write something with meaning, yeah? It wouldn't be 'Harry Heartthrob Is Gay!' It would be 'Harry Potter Pushes For Gay Rights In Wizarding Communities.' Or am I wrong about that?"

Draco shook his head. "You're not wrong. For once. Honestly, can you see me writing for gossip magazines? But even if I do write that for you, it will drown out among an ocean of 'Harry's Big Secret' and 'The Boy Who Likes Boys.' For this to work, I can't be anonymous. I'll have to step out, don't you see? I'd have to build my reputation first."

"Oh." Harry paused in thought. "Well, would you have to go public? If you don't want to, you don't have to, right? Hermione told me we would have to let it out slowly, anyway, to reintroduce myself to the media. I've been out of it for a while, in case you hadn't noticed."

"I live for your headline articles, Potter." Draco deadpanned. Harry cracked a smile at him, prompting him to respond properly. Draco sighed and continued. "And I decided I don't want to remain anonymous; I talked to your Hermione about it yesterday. She's made a deal with some journalist to put me in the papers, too. To make me look good, so when we do make the big announcement, whenever it is, people will take me seriously." There was a look on Draco's face that he didn't like the idea, and Harry thought he even saw a spot of rebellion in it.

"So, you *have* thought this out," Harry drawled.

"Of course I have! It's all I've been able to think about. I just needed to hear it from you. If I do this right, Harry, I won't have to keep doing late night Healer training, just to prove that I'm a good person. I won't have to worry about getting hexes thrown at me every time I cross the street. Hell, I might even be able to find myself a wizard to date." Draco confessed, turning slightly red as he realized all that he'd said. He straightened himself, and looked Harry in the eye, as if waiting for a response.

"So, you'll do it?" Harry asked, choosing not to prod anymore at the sudden revelations from the other man.

"Yes, I'll do it. I'll suffer through the time listening to you boast about your life achievements, and I'll cope with the pain that will come with writing entire articles about you and how it relates to the good of the world. I'll do it for as long as possible, too, because when it comes out that it's Draco Malfoy that you've been confiding to all this long, I'll be famous for a good reason. Don't you see? I need it for the good press that Hermione's offered me. I need it because I want to be a writer, and this is my big chance. I need it because it will make people think I'm good."

Harry's eyes widened in shock from hearing all that from Draco in one go. He realized that they had to be honest with each other now, and they were going to get a lot closer. "Let's get started, then."

Draco let out a heavy sigh after he finished admitting all his motives to Harry. He wasn't sure when the last time was he had told a single person that much about himself. *Probably in therapy.*

And he listened with open ears as Harry talked all about himself. He talked about what he was doing with his life, mostly. Draco decided it made for good material. *Gods, the man volunteers at a orphanage! How quintessentially Potter can he get?* Draco thought, as Harry spoke with bright eyes and moving hands about his adoration for the small children he worked with. As he spoke about his letter to Luna regarding designing the pants, Draco felt a warm smile sprawl across his own face. *Stop it! I'm Malfoy, I'm ice.* He told himself, dropping the smile as he scribbled some more notes on his paper.

He talked about his woodwork, about the table with the green glass that he had gifted to the Slytherin head of house.... Did he hear that right?

"You gave a table to the Slytherin Head of House? And you don't even know who it is?" Draco demanded, shocked at Harry's stupidity.

"Yeah...? Was that a bad idea? Who was it?" Harry had an obviously concerned look on his face.

"Honestly, Harry. It's Horace Slughorn." He watched as Harry turned all red-faced and sheepish again, and almost smiled that warm smile again. Harry had apparently realized his mistake.

"He'll be upset that I didn't write a more personal letter. And he'll want to tell everyone, won't he?" Harry groaned, covering his face in his hands.

"He'll probably demand a personal visit, as well. Just so he can interrogate you as to why you're wasting all your talent carving tables and giving away free gifts." Draco snickered.

"Why didn't I even think of that?" Poor Harry was obviously feeling sorry for himself now.

"Because you're you. And anyway, I won't have to write about it." Draco added, feeling genuinely grateful. He honestly didn't think how he would manage writing an article about Potter's wood working without it seeming suspicious. And entirely unlike Penmom.

"What's that supposed to mean?" Harry snapped, looking concerned this time.

"It means that when Slughorn starts bragging, people will report on it, because you're still the Boy Who Lived, and you're still a bloody Gryffindor." Draco explained, feeling oddly giddy.

"I think it works out well this way, though. It's silly to expect me to write every article about you without seeming like some sort of stalker. And it's more fair this way—I've unknowns reporting on me, and you've unknowns reporting on you." Harry snorted.

"I'm starting to wonder why Hermione and I struck up this deal with you, if you're just going to let other people write the articles." Draco smiled and patted Harry's hand, like he would if he were a confused crup. "Oh, Harry. I'll still be here to write the final coming out article, like we agreed. You'll just have to wait for it. After all, you can't expect to completely own a distinguished writer like Pennom, can you?" He laced as much condescension into his words as possible, in part to throw Harry off, and in part to prevent himself from that warm smile and the warm feelings that came with it.

I'm a Malfoy. I am ice. He repeated, but he almost scoffed at himself. He didn't; he needed to keep his cool. Which he struggled with anyway, as Harry laughed that charming laugh again and met Draco's gaze with a steady eye.

"Of course, Draco. I can't own you. I'll just have you stick with the gay stuff, if that's all you can handle." Draco reddened, and felt his anger heat up (the only acceptable heat for a Malfoy). "Potter!" He hissed.

Harry just laughed, and he realized it was only a joke, but his pride was still hurt.

"I'm still not writing about your table, even if it is in the name of House Unity or Slytherin prejudice. It's far beneath Pennom." He sniffed, holding his chin high. Harry just laughed.

"Fair enough. But write something else soon, yeah?" Draco nodded, though he wasn't planning on writing anything about Potter. He obliged him anyway with elaborating. "Once your life becomes interesting enough to write about. The orphanage seems promising enough, though. I expect you to keep me updated on that."

Harry nodded, but didn't respond, and Draco realized that perhaps it could have been taken as a closing statement. He wasn't sure if he wanted to stop talking to Harry, though... As much as he hated to admit it, he was enjoying it. Teasing Potter was just so much *fun*. Especially when he knew he didn't have to worry about him hating him anymore.

"Speaking of interesting though... When did you send that letter to Slughorn?" Draco asked, reaching at strings to keep the conversation going.

"Two days ago. You reckon he's gotten it yet?" Harry asked, still looking concerned.

"I would expect a reply any minute." Draco laughed, noticing that the time was already past four o'clock. He had spent three hours with Harry, and it had only felt like minutes.

"Well, then I guess I ought to get going, then." Harry announced, also glancing at the clock.

Draco's stomach lurched as Harry stood up, presumably to apparate again. "Yes, I suppose so." he muttered, his throat feeling dry.

"Well, then I'll see you around, then? To keep you updated, I mean." Harry muttered, looking sheepish again.

Draco smiled. "Of course."

Harry took a few more steps away, and Draco abruptly stood and grabbed his elbow. "Wait. Harry." He said, as Potter turned his head to meet Draco's gaze, raising an eyebrow in an unspoken *Yes?*

Draco swallowed, letting go. "Don't be too long in coming to see me again. I-I've got to stay updated, you know." He stammered, feeling like a fool.

Harry just smiled at him. "Yeah, I know. See you soon, Draco." Then, he apparated away, and Draco wondered if Harry had felt the same way when Draco had done the same last week. *Probably not*, he thought glumly, slumping back into his chair.

Gods, what's the matter with me? He wondered, rubbing his temples with his thumbs. Since when was Potter allowed to make him feel this way? He was used to feeling angry with him, or at the very least envious of the git. He wondered if he would have felt this way—all smiles and warmth and laughter—if he hadn't wasted so much time at school feeling angry with him. He'd never know, of course. But, he felt himself make another resolve. He wouldn't waste any more time hating Potter.

Hermione hadn't had the chance to read the Prophet until that evening, and when she did, she fire called Terry immediately.

"Hermione, darling," he said when he saw her face in the flames. "I thought we weren't meeting until tomorrow night?"

She crawled out of the fire and into his living room, not even caring about the soot she was tracking all over his floor. "The article." She stated, plopping down onto the sofa next to him.

He set his writing aside and looked at her curiously. "Yes? What did you think?" He inquired innocently.

"I don't know," she muttered.

Terry raised an eyebrow, as if to say, *Since when did you not know something?*

"I mean, I think it's both good and bad." She clarified, scrunching her nose in thought. Terry thought it was adorable when she did that, she knew, and she wanted him thinking happy thoughts when she criticized the article.

"I thought it was good, even if it wasn't quite what I asked for," she confessed, and didn't wait for his response before she continued. "I mean, it put him in a positive light, for sure, but it kept mentioning the whole Death Eater thing. You know about word association, Terry! Even if you were saying he wasn't a Death Eater, if you say it enough times, that's what people will think about when you say it!" She exclaimed.

Terry smiled funnily, and leaned in to give her a quick kiss on the mouth. She made a noise in surprise, and exclaimed, "I wasn't done yet!" He kept on smiling, and muttered, "That's what I love about you."

"What?"

"You're not afraid to criticize me. And you actually want to talk, not just kiss all the time. I love it." He grinned, and she almost thanked him for not comparing her to other women (she hated that). But she still had a point to make.

"And anyway, why did you have Gallows of all people write it? She's completely daft! I mean, she spent half the article mooning about his lack of Celestina Warbeck," she complained.

He only rolled his eyes. "Oh, 'Mione. What's the big deal? I did what you asked, and made him look good," he whispered, and reached out to put an arm around her.

She sighed, and leaned onto his chest. "You're right. Thank you for that. It was longer than what I had asked for, and he might be upset, but he'll live."

Terry buried his nose in her hair, sighed, and pulled away. "Why do you care, anyway? You're not sleeping with him, are you?" he asked, looking down at her concernedly.

"No, Terry! Gods, no. It's nothing like that," Hermione murmured, placing a hand on his shoulder.

"Then what is it?" he demanded.

"Well, if you must know," she whispered conspiratorially, "I'm trying to get him and Harry to sleep together."

Terry widened his eyes. "No!" He gasped incredulously. "But, they're—they hate each other! Polar opposites! They don't even swing that way, do they?" He looked completely shocked, but Hermione could see the glitter in his eyes that meant he was dreaming up a new story.

"Don't you dare report on it! Not until I tell you. This is all part of a delicately balanced plan," she explained.

"Do tell." He grinned. "You always have the brightest ideas, love."

So, Hermione told him about her scheme to set the two up. It was the first time she had said the entire thing out loud, and she was quite pleased with herself. She hadn't fully pieced it together until yesterday, after her talk with Draco. First, she had to clear Draco's name. Publish a few articles about him, make him look good. Then, in the meantime, she would

have Dra—Pennom (the Unbreakable Vow still prevented her from revealing his identity) write articles about Harry in the meantime, reintroducing him to the public eye.

And then, by the time everyone was used to the both of them, there would be less outrage by the time the two were together. And everyone would be so in love with the pair together, that they would be completely on board with Harry's gay rights awareness campaign. By the time Hermione was done, she was smiling.

But Terry was confused. "That's brilliant, darling... Truly, I've said it before, you should have been a Ravenclaw... But I'm stumped. Where does Pennom fit into the picture? And, gods forbid, do you know his identity? And, hell, where does Malfoy even fit in?" he asked.

"Shh..." She pressed a finger to his lips. "It will all make sense in time. Just keep quiet about it, or I *will* kill you," she added, only half teasing. He was about to say something else, but she simply pressed harder against his lips.

"Ah, ah, ah. No arguing. Just write what I ask you to, and do it yourself. Publish it under someone else's name if you need to not look like a stalker. First, say nice things about Draco. Then, follow whenever he's with Harry. Every time you publish something about them, make it a bigger and bigger deal. It will all make sense in time." She leaned in to kiss him, and this time there was none of that *I love it that you'd rather talk instead of kiss*.

Instead, he just groaned, and mumbled, "I love it when you boss me around."

Hermione smirked. "I know," she whispered.

He groaned again, as if to say, *I know you know. You know everything*.

Her plan was going to work out perfectly, and it only helped that she had this wonderfully handsome reporter wrapped around her finger. *Much more useful than Ron*, her subconscious couldn't help but add.

Insecurities

Harry apparated out of Draco's flat with a pop, landing in the kitchen at Grimmauld place. He took a deep, steady breath, and allowed himself a wide smile.

That went really well.

He let out a big, dreamy sigh. Realizing how ridiculous he was acting, he wondered if he ought to pour himself a glass of wine. Then again, that might make it worse. He settled for a cup of tea. Too lazy to use a proper kettle, he heated the water with a spell and poured it into a mug with a tea bag. He couldn't stand to use loose leaves anymore—as much as he hated to admit it, he still looked for patterns in the dregs at the bottom of the cup.

He carried it into his sitting room, and was surprised when he saw two owls waiting for him there. One was a snowy owl with several purple feathers, which he recognized as Luna's. After she started her company, everything of hers had some sort of color added to it. It was hopping about the table, trying to get the other owl's attention. It was a Great Horned Owl, looking bitter and unimpressed with the younger owl's friendly advances. He assumed it was Slughorn's.

"How long have you two been in here? And how did you get in?" Harry asked.

Luna's owl hooted softly and nuzzled his hand as he reached out to take her letter. She reminded him of Hedwig, but he was not sad about it like he would have once been. He simply summoned his jar of owl treats, and gave her one. The other owl stamped a foot impatiently, and then thrust out the letter for Harry to take. He just barely dodged it biting him, but still he tossed it a treat of it's own.

Finally sitting down with his cup of tea, he opened the letter from Luna.

Dear Harry,

How lovely to hear from you! Are you well? Have you been wearing the necklaces I sent you for Christmas? They were supposed to keep the nargles away.

And thank you for the design of the pants! I'll have a pair ready for you in the next week. They're really quite brilliant! If you don't mind, I think I'd like to make more of them to sell under the brand name. I have a feeling they would be quite a hit. Oprhans designed them, you say?

Do feel free to stop by and visit any time. I love visitors.

Love,

Luna

Harry shook his head at the letter. Of course Luna loved the pants; this was the girl with the radish-shaped earrings (which she was selling now as well). Her idea to sell the children's pants, however, gave him an idea.

Dear Luna,

Yes, I'm quite well! It seems I have been meeting with a lot of my old schoolmates lately. I would love to drop by—I don't see many other wizards and witches that often anymore, which I'm sure you can understand. And I did wear the necklaces. I do think they worked, as I didn't make any foolish decisions around the mistletoe. So, thank you for that.

Of course you can sell them! In fact, I think the children would agree to design more for you. Do you think, however, that the profits could go to the orphanage? They really are lovely children, and they deserve much more. And perhaps if you advertised for what they are, it could help with your PR. Everyone loves a company that works for charity, and orphans are certainly a charitable cause.

I'll drop by Wednesday, if you don't mind?

Cheers, Harry

He finished writing the letter and gave it to the purple owl, who proceeded to fly out of his sitting room by means of the unlit fireplace. So that's how they did it, the dreadful creatures. Then, he opened the letter from Slughorn. His owl was waiting rather impatiently for him to finish reading it so he could get on his way.

Harry, my boy!

How excellent to hear from you. And how wonderful that you are showing your support of the Slytherins! I daresay we need it: my students have been getting a fair amount of hassle from the Gryffindors lately. Headmaster McGonagall is much more fair about it than good old Dumbledore was, but your word will be quite beneficial. I shall be telling everyone, you know. I already read your letter to the students in the Great Hall, and your table is on display in my Potions classroom!

What have you been up to, besides carving furniture? Surely, you've had some fantastic adventures. I can't imagine you staying in one place at a time. What is it? Dragonslaying? Undercover Auror work? Or perhaps you've become an Unspeakable? You must come and visit me soon. The Slug Club is meeting Wednesday evening, perhaps you should join us? I know it's on such short notice, but my students would love to meet you—the Boy Who Lived, and one of my prized students! We would love to hear about your exploits.

Potions Master and Head of Slytherin House,

Horace Slughorn

Harry groaned loudly. He was suddenly regretting sending that table... He was definitely going to be in the papers the next day. And because of Slughorn, no less. It wasn't quite how he envisioned the plan to pan out, but he supposed there was nothing he could do about it.

Slughorn had already announced it to the Great Hall, and if there was going to be a report on it, it had probably already been written.

But even worse than that, he was going to have to deal with Slughorn and his terrible "what-can-you-do-for-me" mindset. And, currently, all Harry had to offer was his furniture. Other than that, he knew, he had little more than celebrity power. Sure, he had once slayed the Dark Lord... But now? He kept to himself, played with knives and spells and wood, and visited small children. He had traveled to some exciting places after the War, and even did some diplomatic work, but beyond that, he was quite boring.

What could he say?

Anything, just write the damned response. The owl seemed to tell him. Harry glared at it, but summoned some more parchment to write on. He scowled, and summoned every diplomatic skill in his body. *This could take some work.*

Professor Slughorn,

I'm so glad you enjoyed the table and it's message. And I'm sure you know what a good deed like that can do for reputation, don't you? However, I can't say I'm altogether pleased with your announcing it to the Great Hall. Inter-House Unity is important, of course, but I would have preferred to make such an announcement myself... As I'm sure you've known, I hate when I leave it to the unknown variables to do my publishing. You do remember the horrible misconceptions written about me in my Hogwarts years, don't you?

My life has been fairly quiet of late. Mostly avoiding the press, though I'm sure that's about to change. I'm starting on a certain campaign, if you can keep a secret between you and me... You can keep a secret, can't you? I should love to tell you in person, if you'll be willing to keep quiet about it.

I'm afraid there's been no dragonslaying, nor any auror work (it simply just wasn't for me), and I still have hardly a clue as to what an Unspeakable does! In past months, I've been dividing my time between furniture carving and working at an orphanage for magical children. So many of them lost their parents during the war. I think I've earned this quiet time, though, don't you agree? After devoting my childhood to worrying about slaying Voldemort, I deserve some leisure time.

Of course, these first few years after the War weren't devoid in business—between testifying at trials, making diplomatic visits to foreign countries, and pleasing the adoring masses, I have been quite busy.

I look forward to seeing you Wednesday.

—Harry P.

He signed the letter with an annoyed flourish, and handed it to the owl. He was hopeful that Slughorn could read between the lines: *I'm not happy you made a big deal about this, and it would be valuable to both of our causes if you kept any further information to yourself. I've got something big in the making.*

Of course, Harry had no idea if Slughorn would think of his gay rights awareness plan anything of great concern. Apparently, not many wizards did, or else it would have been previously dealt with. Did the queer wizards and witches really not need the representation or the assistance? Then again, he supposed, not many people had taken steps against muggleborn discrimination until after the First War, and even then, great strides hadn't been made until recently.

He watched as the frumpy owl struggled up the chimney, lacking the swooping grace that Luna's colorful owl had. He smiled to himself, allowing a moment of humor after that strained letter. He thought it was one of the more Slytherin things he had done; there was more manipulation in that letter than he was usually comfortable with using. He wondered if Slughorn would appreciate that, or be offended. He supposed it could go either way.

Checking the time, he realized he had ought to have some dinner. He considered going to a wizarding pub, as he hadn't been in a while. But then, he thought it was best not to become reckless. Just because he was bound to be in the papers again soon enough didn't mean he had to rush himself back into the public eye. Opportunities would arrive soon enough. He settled on getting muggle takeaway from an Indian restaurant nearby, and then he would meditate on his publicity plan.

He felt a little shaken up after Slughorn's letter—was that really all he was? A celebrity? Of course, he had painted himself to have some value in his letter to Slughorn, but those were just fancy words. In reality, he had done no more with his life than what was expected from the Savior of the Wizarding World. Even this gay rights campaign was just him using his name to endorse something he believed in. He had never done anything more than just be Harry Potter. Was that what he really wanted?

At least when Draco had spoken up, he had done so anonymously, and yet his words still had made big news. He had also started his own record shop, and apparently was in training to become a Healer... At least he had made himself into something, and he was trying to redeem himself. Harry suddenly regretted calling him a slimy Slytherin all those times in school. Draco was much braver than Harry was. He was risking something every time he published something, and he was taking an even bigger risk allowing himself to be published about. Whereas, for Harry, it just caused him mild discomfort.

He couldn't help but feel pathetic.

It was the morning after his meeting with Harry Potter, and Draco would have thought that it would have been the first thing on his mind. It had been all night, dreaming about the way he smiled and joked and spoke about furniture and small children. He had been dreaming about what his life would have been like if he had seen Harry for that before, instead of just stupid Potter.

But now, his mind was in a different place altogether. His heart was no longer fluttering and swollen with ridiculous ideas about Harry Potter. His blood was boiling, his head was rushing, and tears were gathering in his eyes.

It was because of the front page of The Prophet.

Neo-Death Eater Group Attacks Muggles and Muggleborns Alike Across Britain, Nearly One Hundred Dead Or Injured

Last night, there was a widespread and organized attempt by a Death Eater inspired group (which has yet to be identified) to kill muggles and muggleborn wizards. The attack was carried out in the middle of the night. Individual families were targeted by small groups of the perpetrators. They struck households containing muggleborn children or parents, and none of the houses were guarded with anti-apparition wards. Hogwarts was not attacked, and nor were any other schools.

It is currently unknown how the locations of these families was gathered, but it is being advised that all non-pureblood families take extra precaution. Aurors have also yet to determine the motive behind the attacks. Several dozen households were affected by the attacks. The exact number has yet to be calculated, but so far 23 children were tortured by the pseudo Death Eaters, and 10 were killed. Likewise, almost twice as many parents (only muggle and muggleborn) were tortured, and thirty have been reported dead, leaving 17 children orphaned. This event is a tragedy, and the monsters who dared, so soon after the War, to—

Draco stopped reading. He didn't need to read anymore to know the rest, how the people felt, how enraged they were, how disgusting this was. He himself felt something coil inside his gut: a snake made of guilt and disgust. Suddenly, his meeting with Harry, at this very same table and not even a full day ago, felt very far away. Between the snake in his gut and the wolves prowling around the edges of his mind, he felt like he was lost in the wilderness.

He blinked away the tears, and put down the paper. *This isn't your fault, Draco.* His therapist's voice echoed in his head. *What you did is in the past. You can still make up for it.*

How did he make up for it? How could he make this better? Nearly a hundred lives had just been permanently affected by the same, petty pureblood preju—*no, hate*—that had once fueled his father's actions, and even his own.

He felt a panic attack rising in his chest, as the black wolves began to prowl away from their place in the shadows of his thoughts. His fists clenched, and his heart pounded erratically, and he could feel the veins in his neck swelling. His limbs froze, turned solid by that pathetic Malfoy ice.

He could not move, could not think. He was vulnerable, now. And, so, then the thoughts sprang at him, the wolves in the shadows, and he was defenseless to them.

They snapped at his insecurities, and he felt pains all over his body like physical wounds. The wolves spoke in snarls and yelps, their words sharp and cutting. He could not ignore them.

You are just as bad as them.

Now, everyone will have even more reasons to hate you.

You will never redeem yourself.

You deserve to hide for the rest of your life.

You thought you could fix this?

You thought Harry fucking Potter would be your second chance? He won't even look at you now, just you see.

No one loves you. No one trusts you.

Then, Draco snapped. *Lies*, he realized. *You're lying*. He forced himself to breathe steadily, and he imagined the wolves being cast away, like dementors by a patronus. And all in a moment, they were gone.

He slumped out of his chair, and he sat on the floor. His heart still pounded, and his body felt loose and disconnected. He could feel his pulse in an unnatural way, beating against the skin under his neck. He just kept on breathing, grounding himself in the now familiarity of the sensations.

Since even the War, he had been haunted by his own dementors like these. He had been pinned down by these panic attacks, these wolves, and this feeling of helplessness.

There were many reasons he avoided the public, and it was not just because of his fear of bad press or being hexed by a still-pained war victim. He kept to himself because the moment he felt someone looking at him, whenever he saw someone from the War, the guilt hit him. The panic came, and the wolves attacked.

He was usually safe when he was alone, or when he was running the record shop, because it was his own territory. Sometimes, however, he'd see someone that he recognized—a student he had antagonized in school, the relative of someone his father had tortured, or anyone else that had reason to detest him. When he saw those people, he'd cast a few glamours before they could recognize them, and he was safe.

But now that wouldn't work. Everyone knew it was his shop, that it was the 'Malfoy Heir' who was selling them their music. He wasn't safe—people could see him now. And they'd have all the reason to hate him after this attack. He—he was a Malfoy. He would be a target now.

He felt the wolves threatening to return, as if they smelled fresh blood. He felt his chest constrict again, but reason interrupted him.

Stop, Draco. Stop that right now. You can't let that stop you.

He thought of all the people that trusted him. His mother, safe and innocent in the Manor; Blaise Zabini, off hosting runway fashion shows in Austria; Pansy Parkinson, a multi-business tycoon and now in a long-term relationship; Judith Hemwaddle, across the street in the Hopping Pot; Hermione Granger, who was helping to fix his name; and Harry—Harry, who had sat with him for hours to talk, who wanted his help...

He would be fine, he knew. The wolves couldn't hurt him. All this meant was a little change in plans.

Draco pulled out a piece of parchment. He knew this wasn't how Harry and Hermione had planned this, that he was supposed to wait until Hermione's reporters had cleared his name before he revealed himself, that it was Harry who was supposed to be the activist hero... But Draco had an article to write.

This tragedy, this attack on wizards everywhere, posed a silver lining for him. He could console the wizarding public with Pennom's words, with his sound judgement.

And he would have to show them that Pennom was not the noble Light wizard they probably imagined, some Gryffindor or Ravenclaw... He would show them Pennom was Draco Malfoy... and he would clear his name. He would show them that there was hope, that they could pull through.

And the monsters who had done this? He would make sure that they *paid*.

Narcissa Malfoy had just sat down for her morning cup of tea. The record player that Draco had given her was playing a recording of a slow, melancholy piano piece. Her house elves buzzed around her in the kitchen happily.

Now that Lucius was gone, she found that she enjoyed their company, and she loved to watch them work. They really were such lovely creatures, strange as they were. As she stirred milk into her tea, a house elf passed her a copy of The Daily Prophet.

She smiled warmly. "Thank you, Henny. Do you think Draco has published another article yet? His last one was certainly interesting." She had known about that one beforehand, however. Draco had come out to her several weeks beforehand, and she suggested it be the topic of his next article. The way he had gone about writing it was slightly shocking, but in character for Pennom. *And in character for Draco*, she realized.

He had changed so much after the trials. She was grateful. She didn't want him to be anything like Lucius.

"Henny does not know, Mistress Malfoy. Henny cannot read," the house-elf replied, turning her head away sheepishly as she handed over the article.

Narcissa laughed lightly, her breath like bells. "Oh, of course. I forget, you know. Perhaps I can read it to you so you can know what it says," she suggested.

"Henny would be liking that very much, Mistress. But Henny must be getting back to work!" the small creature protested.

"Of course, deary. When you're finished, however, come and see me, and we can read together. I can't have you working all the time."

Henny shifted uncomfortably. "Yes, Mistress."

Naricissa sighed at the stubborn, uncalled for loyalty of the house elves. Sometimes, she wished they could all be like Dobby was. He was certainly interesting.

She picked up the newspaper, and she felt herself turn green the minute she saw the headline.

Those fools, she thought. *How can there still be people out there, willing to commit these hateful acts of violence?* As she read, she felt her rage bubble, and tears slid down her cheeks.

How could they do this? To children? As a mother, she was repulsed. She was shaking. Monsters.

What is this? The rise of yet another Dark Lord? Or perhaps, simply more cowards, joining together to have their petty revenge on the world. She sincerely hoped it was the latter. All the same, she didn't know what was worse: the rise of a new Dark Lord, or the rise of a new Dark order that found it necessary to harm children. Not that Voldemort hadn't done such things, either, but this seemed like a direct assault on family.

As a mother, her blood boiled over this sick tragedy. And then, she remembered Draco. Her son would be broken over this. One of the things that had changed after the trial—no, she thought, after he was made a Death Eater—was his stability. Guilt and anxiety had a strong hold over him, and he was so easily pushed over the edge.

She had to go comfort him.

If he had read the article already (and she knew he had; he always rose much earlier than she did), he would probably have collapsed from a panic attack. She hoped it wasn't the kind where she had to get the Healers to intervene. She didn't want that to happen ever again. She remembered standing over his bed in St. Mungo's, holding his stiff hand. His body had been frozen, as if under a Petrificus Totalus curse and his eyes—

Snap out of it, Narcissa. Your son needs you.

She calmly informed her house elves that she was leaving, and promptly apparated to his flat over Carkitt Market.

After The Fact

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

As soon as he heard word of the attack, Harry apparated to the orphanage. He knew the article hadn't mentioned it being hit... But he had to make sure.

As soon as his body was completely in order after apparition, and his feet were planted on the doorstep of the old building, he pounded the door with his fists.

"Madam Humpop!" he cried. He was panicking. What if they had been targeted? What if they were among the casualties? What if his beloved little orphans had been tortured or abandoned? What would he do?

His mind was playing out the worst-case scenarios, when the Madam finally opened the door. He felt as though he had been waiting for hours.

"Madam Humpop!" he exclaimed, heaving a sigh. "Is everything alright?" he asked, scanning her for injuries, and the hallway behind her for any signs of a struggle. There was none.

"Of course, Harry. I could ask the same of you. Did something happen?" she questioned, inviting him inside with a gesture.

"T-there was an attack. On muggleborns. Mostly children," he sputtered. Had she not heard?

Her face turned cold, and she nodded. "I'm aware, Harry. I have been informed by the Aurors that six more children will be arriving by tomorrow. I haven't spoken to the children about it, which was why I did not immediately assume that it was why you were here," she explained.

"O-of course. May I see the children? And can we not talk about it with them? I don't want them to worry." Harry whispered, imagining his own terror had he been Seth's age.

Madam Humpop smiled sagely. "We're on the same page, then."

As she led him to the kitchens (where the children were still having breakfast), Harry realized the orphanage was completely unprotected. "Where are the Aurors?" he demanded. "Aren't they going to protect you?"

"They didn't mention that there was a need to."

"Then, I'll talk to them. I'm close with Auror Ron Weasley—he's just become head of the department. He'll protect you," Harry told her.

Then, her sagely expression broke, and a look of sheer, unadulterated gratitude swept across her face. "You have no idea how much that means to us, Harry."

He didn't have time to respond, because he had entered the kitchen, and his seven favorite children in the world were waiting for him in the kitchen. There was not a hair on them out of place, and he was beyond grateful that they were safe.

"Harry!" they all cried--even the shy Sylvia and the too-cool Kara and Tanner.

"G'morning!" Ebele chirped, dropping her porridge in a rush to cling to Harry's leg. Seth was quick in joining the embrace, and even small Sel looked like he was considering climbing off of his chair to say hello.

Harry crouched down and wrapped the two into a hug, and soon Sylvia and Phillip joined them. He held them all tightly. "I missed you all so much!" He said quietly, stroking heads with his hands. He couldn't believe that someone could possibly ever want to hurt precious lives like these, but he knew now that there were people who would.

From her spot by the stove, Kara rolled her eyes. "It's hardly been a few days since you've seen us, you great fluff," she muttered.

"Language! Don't speak with Mister Harry like that. I'm sure he has his reasons," Madam Humpop snapped, joining her by the stove to resume the cooking that she had apparently abandoned to let Harry in.

Harry stood up, and Sylvia climbed into his arms. Down below, Ebele asked, "Why aren't you wearing your pants?"

Harry chuckled. "I am wearing pants. See?" He grabbed the fabric of his trousers. Seth shook his head. "No, Harry! The pants we drew you! You said your friend would make them for you." He explained.

Of course, Harry had known that. He widened his eyes in exaggerated understanding. "Ohhh! Silly me," He smacked himself in a forehead, earning a laugh from the children. "Yes, I spoke to Luna about it, but they're not ready yet. In fact, I think I'll be able to pick them up today!" He exclaimed.

He turned to Madam Humpop. "Luna Lovegood is another friend of mine. I have a feeling you've heard of her?" He asked, gesturing at the Madam's flowing, colorful robes. She just smiled at him. "Of course! She's my favorite designer."

Harry nodded, looking back at the children. "She's offered to create a line of clothes that the children design. I told her that you would agree if she gave all the profits back to you. It could make a lot of money, and I thought the kids deserved it." He explained.

Madam Humpop's eyes widened, and the older kids gasped. The smaller ones just looked around eagerly. "We're going to be fashion designers?" Sylvia asked.

"Yes, dearie, I should think so." The Madam whispered, looking quite dazed. "Oh, Harry, this is wonderful!" She exclaimed, wrapping Harry in an exuberant hug. "Think of what we could do! Bigger rooms, better bathrooms, more toys..." The woman looked like she could cry of happiness.

"New toys?" Sel asked. "But I like my badger! It was from mummy, wasn't it, Ma'am?"

Madam Humpop laughed. "Yes, sweet, it was. But we won't be replacing it, we'll just get him some new friends."

Sel seemed to lighten at that, and the other children did, too.

Madam Humpop walked up to Tanner and Kara. "And you two! You'll be enrolling in Hogwarts soon. I'll be able to buy you new books and robes. And proper wands!" She was truly elated now, and she attacked the two older kids in a gigantic bear hug. "Oh, this day is wonderful, after all!"

Harry could hear the unspoken words. *Even in spite of the attacks.*

He hoisted Sylvia up in his arms some more so he wouldn't drop her. She had her arms wrapped around his neck, and was burying her nose in the crook of his neck. She was breathing deeply onto his skin, and it tickled. Despite the fervent excitement in the others around them, she remained quiet and calm, as if unwilling to do anything that would interrupt the physical contact that these children so rarely enjoyed. Madam Humpop could only do so much, after all.

Maybe this will be another awareness thing, he thought. Maybe these children will be adopted soon. I can only hope...

He held her a little tighter, knowing how precious this was to her. He only wondered what his life would have been like if he had been shown this kind of affection, and smiled wistfully at the idea.

"I have an idea," he said to the kids. "Why don't we draw more pants? And maybe some shirts and dresses and robes, too." He declared. He didn't put Sylvia down as he led them all to the art room.

A few hours later, after he had spent time watching the children draw and giving out as many hugs he could, he went to Ron about providing more protection for the orphanage. "At least until those monsters get caught," he had said.

"I'll try, mate," Ron told him, patting his shoulder. "We're stretched pretty tight as it is, trying to figure out who did this. Most of the victims can't remember their attacker's faces... Either they were too young, or can only remember the vision of watching their loved ones get tortured and killed. Some were even put under the Imperius Curse."

Harry shuddered. "It sounds like something Voldemort would do. You don't think there's to be another Dark Lord, do you?"

Ron shook his head. "It seems unlikely. These were individual households. Not something that a Dark Lord is above, but for a first attack, there would have been something more

public. This was likely a group of sickos who missed out on the war. Or maybe just missed it. Some people love destruction like that."

A thick, tainted feeling pooled in Harry's stomach. "Don't remind me," he muttered, remembering Bellatrix Lestrange's love of Crucio. "Try and get some aurors there, though. I'll be there when I can, but I think they need more than that."

"Of course, mate. You spend a lot of time with them, don't you? Not that I would know—you've been out of The Prophet for months. And I'd say that you've chosen Hermione over me after we split," Ron added bitterly.

"Oh, come on, Ron! Don't be that way," Harry muttered. "If Padma hadn't tried to hex me away every time I tried to see you, maybe I'd visit more often! I don't see why she has to be so bloody protective of you."

Ron flushed red. "I hadn't thought of it that way." He muttered, hopefully realizing that his girlfriend was insane. "But you're well, then? And Hermione, too? You're not, well, you know..." He trailed off, and Harry looked at him quizzically.

"No, I'm not *seeing* Hermione, if that's what you're wondering. We're still just friends, and forever more we shall be that way. I swear." He assured Ron. "But, yeah. I'm doing fine. Working on a few new projects. I'm actually about to head over and see Luna for one of them," Harry explained.

Ron nodded pensively. "And Luna...?"

"Bloody, hell, no, I'm not seeing *her*, either!"

"Sorry. I just... Do you even *have* a love life? A man has needs, you know." Ron muttered, looking at the ground.

Harry sighed. "Just ask your sister about it. And, no, I'm not fucking her, either!" He snapped, before his old friend could comment.

"Alright, alright. I'll see you later, then?"

"Yeah, see you later. Congrats on your promotion, by the way," Harry told him, and apparated away with a snap to see Luna.

She lived in a big house not far away from her company's main office, in a town that was mostly wizarding, just outside of London. It was probably the same distance away as the orphanage, and once Harry arrived at her home, he realized how tired he was from all the apparating he had done that day.

He knocked on her door, and in a few minutes she came down.

"Harry! I just got your owl. I didn't realize you'd be coming so soon." She grinned, opening the door further to let him in.

"Oh, sorry. I hope I'm not intruding at all," he told her. The hallway of her house was different than he last remembered—the gaudy pastel purples and yellows had been replaced with more modest blue tones that complimented the white walls and marble floors.

"Not at all, Harry. How are the children at the orphanage? They weren't hurt by the attacks at all, were they?" she asked, leading him into a high-ceilinged living room. The couches were dark blue leather, and flames in the fireplace flickered blue as well.

"They're fine, thank Merlin. They wanted me to give you these, in fact," he said, handing her the clothing "designs" they had drawn. "Did you consider my offer? About giving them the profits?" He asked.

Luna smiled and shook her head eagerly, floating onto one of the couches. Harry sat across from her, as she summoned a blue footrest to prop her feet up on. She looked like the powerful business women depicted in *Witch Weekly* and *Powerful Witches and Wizards* magazine covers. *In fact*, he thought, *she probably has been on those covers before*.

"Yes, and I thought it was a wonderful idea. Especially after what happened last night," her airy, dreamy voice deepened in concern, "I think it would be necessary to direct our attentions towards the young victims. I already produced several dozen of the pants you asked for, if you'd like to try them on! And I'll get started on these right away, too," she said, flipping through the kids' drawings.

"Thank you, Luna," Harry said, smiling as she held up a particular drawing to the light. It was Sylvia's: a short, girlish dress with silvery swirls patterning it all over. "Mmhmm," Luna murmured. Then, more loudly, "I think I ought to visit these children sometime."

Harry smiled. "They would love that." He looked around again, still thrown off by the change in decoration. "Luna, your house looks so different. Did someone help you with it?" He asked, hoping not to sound rude.

Luna didn't even look up from the drawing. "Yes, Pansy did. She has a very different style than Hannah did. They're two very different people, I suppose," she said absently.

Harry remembered. Hannah Abbot had been living with her at the time; it must have been her pastel decorations. Had they broken up?

"Pansy...?" He inquired.

"Yes, you should remember her from school. She was in your year. We're together now, you see. Of course, you would *know* that if you visited more often, or read the papers," Luna laughed her tinkling laugh, the comment not containing any spite or malice.

He frowned. "Pansy Parkinson?" He asked, half in shock. He hadn't imagined them together, not in his wildest dreams. In school, she had apparently fawned over Draco... But then again, Draco had turned out to be gay, so was it a stretch for Pansy to be as well?

"Yes, Pansy Parkinson. She told me, more recently recently, that she had a crush on me when I was in seventh year, too, when she was returning for her eighth. Isn't that funny, the way

things work out?" she replied, inspecting the green-and-black striped pants that Phillip had drawn.

"Strange, yeah..." Harry muttered.

"I heard my name!" Someone from the next room called.

Moments later, Pansy Parkinson strode into the room, wearing a very revealing maroon dress. Her dark hair was cut short like a man's, and she had a lip piercing. She looked as intimidating as ever.

Once she entered the room, she froze. "Potter?" She asked, looking gravely confused.

"Yes, darling. He came to give me these designs. Aren't they lovely?" Luna asked, holding up the atrocious, multicolored suit that Seth had scribbled.

Pansy scowled, and leaned down to wrap her arms around Luna from behind the sofa. "Luna, lovey..." She whispered, incredulously, "These look like a child drew them! That can't do well for business, even if he *is* Harry Potter." She snapped, sending him a glare.

He rolled his eyes. "That's rather the point, Parkinson. They're done by the orphans I take care of. Luna has agreed to make them and sell them for charity."

Pansy's dark skin drained, but she straightened herself. "Well, that's a different story, I suppose. I can imagine these selling... Well, *some* of these selling. Why didn't you consult me first, though, lovey?" She asked, pouting slightly and sending a sharp glare to Harry.

Luna sighed, and set down the drawings. "We were... busy, remember?" She asked, looking up with glittering eyes at Pansy. Harry almost gagged, but didn't, out of respect for Luna. "And besides, even *I* knew this would be a hit. Well, I did this morning, after... you know... the attacks." She murmured, looking at Harry with sympathy and concern.

"Fair enough." Pansy sighed, and turned back to Harry with disdain. "Are you done here, Potter? Luna and I had plans, and I don't think you'd want to be here for them," she sniggered, and Harry wondered if Pansy didn't usually wear that revealing of a dress into public. He reddened a little, and nodded in agreement.

"Yes, yes, of course. I'll head out now. I should probably check in on Dra—a friend of mine," he saved himself, from revealing to *Pansy* of all people that he had been visiting with Draco. He didn't want her to take it the wrong way.

He had also just remembered Draco for the first time that day. He had been so caught up with the kids...

"Right, Potter. See you later. Or never." She sneered, but he couldn't help but notice she wasn't nearly as rude as she might have once been. She had probably changed, just like everyone else.

"Goodbye, Harry," Luna sang, holding Pansy's hand.

Harry nodded. "Bye!" He apparated out as soon as he could, Grimmauld Place in his head. He would owl Draco before he stopped by. He didn't know if they were on unplanned-visiting terms yet.

Once he was gone, Pansy leaned into Luna's ear and whispered, "You don't think he was going to check in on Draco, was he?"

Luna laughed. "Maybe. I'm sure the article that Draco interviewed me for interested him, don't you think?"

"Even if Potter *was* into that sort of thing, I doubt he has the brains to figure out that Pennom is Draco, though."

"Be nice, darling. And he *is* into that sort of thing, and that's why he would visit Draco."

Pansy groaned. "I can only imagine."

Draco was working like a mad man on a mission, writing his new article, when his mother apparated into his kitchen with a louder *bang* than he was used to. He jumped in his seat, almost spilling his ink.

"Mother! Couldn't you use the floo?" He demanded, his hands shaking and his hair on end.

"No, I could not. You keep it closed. And look at you, you're shaking. Are you alright, dear?" She asked hurrying over to embrace him.

Draco sighed. "Yes, mother. Why are you worried about me? I'm fine. I'm working on my next article, in fact. It's going to be amazing." He explained, smiling at her with assurance. If she worried about him, she'd end up hindering him, and he didn't have time for that.

"Darling, I read about the children in the paper this morning. I knew you'd be affected. You had a panic attack, didn't you?" She asked, cupping his face in her hands.

He pulled away. "No, mother, I'm fine. Please, just let me get back to work. Once I finish this, everything will be okay. I promise." He whispered, knowing his voice was cracking.

Narcissa shook her head. "Draco. You obviously had a panic attack, and not very long ago. Your pulse is still off, your hands are shaking, and you're writing as if there's no tomorrow. And with your state of mind, I'm sure you think there isn't." She admonished him, looking at the shaky, scrawled script on his parchment.

"Really, Mother. I'm better than ever. Once this article is published, I'll be perfect. I swear!" He knew it was futile, though. She was his mother, and she knew him better than anyone else, and certainly better than to fall for this.

"Draco," she whispered. "I worry about you so much. You're not thinking. You're being brash. You know you don't have to do this. Things are the way they are, and you don't have to go

and fix everything that goes wrong, all in order to be a 'good person.' And besides, we paid off all the people we needed to. Our name is—"

"No, Mother. Stop this. Our name can't be fixed by money, and you know that. That was how we were before, and people think we haven't changed! I can set things right, if I write this article, and I have to. People still think of us, of me, as sly traitors who use bribery to get what they want. *I can fix this*, Mother." He pleaded. "I can't be respected unless I do something to *earn* it. I have to do the *noble* thing. I can't build my reputation on a foundation of stacked coins."

Narcissa frowned. "You sound like Harry Potter, with all this Gryffindor brashness and talk of *nobility*."

Draco stood up, shaken and enraged by her words. Perhaps he was still on edge from the panic attack. "And maybe that's the right thing to do! Harry came out of this as a hero. People love him, all because he did the *right* thing. Don't I deserve that, too? If I do the *right thing* enough times, people have to change their minds! Maybe if I'm *brave* enough, maybe if I speak up for once, and do what I should have all along, I'll be forgiven." He lowered his voice. "I can't be silent anymore, Mother."

Narcissa was scowling now. "You're being foolish, Draco. You can't change what people think of you. You're a Malfoy, and you've been *branded*," she hissed, pointing at his arm where the Dark Mark fouled his skin. "You have to sit back and let things be the way they are. You can't do anything about this. Stop acting like a child."

"You think hope is foolish? Hope is *childish*?" Draco whispered, his voice broken, and tears pricked at his eyes. A new kind of anger burned inside of him, stronger than before. He closed his eyes.

"Get out. I don't need to hear this right now."

"Draco—"

"I said, get out!" he hissed, and the lumos charm lighting his kitchen flickered. A look of shock crossed Narcissa's face, but she nodded.

"Fine, son." She whispered. This time, when she disappeared, there was only a soft *pop*. It was pathetic, and it left a feeling of dissatisfaction inside of Draco—if it had been louder, it would have resonated with his anger. It would have *felt* better.

He bit his lip as several tears streamed down his face. He poured himself a glass of water, and resumed writing the article.

By the time the afternoon ended, it was done, his anger had cooled, and the winter sun was setting outside his window. He opened it, and a blast of freezing air entered. He sealed the article in a charmed envelope, and an idea struck him. Instead of walking to the nearby Owl Post Office, as he normally would have done, the open window made him think he might fancy going a bit further. To the main office of The Prophet, to be specific.

Maybe his mother was right. He *was* acting like a Gryffindor. He threw on a warm coat and cast a few glamours on his self (to appease his Slytherin self-preservation) that darkened his hair and softened his facial features. He tucked the big envelope under his arm. He felt strangely giddy as he skipped down the steps into his closed shop, and stepped out into the open air.

Carkitt market smelled like cooking food from the Hopping Pot across from him, and sounded of quiet evening chatter and music. The sky was a grey-violet color, the sun now reaching the end of its reign over the day. Draco suddenly felt more content, and more confident, than he had in years.

He didn't even cast a *notice-me-not* charm, and he found that he didn't need it. It was quiet out on a weekday evening, and the glamours prevented him from receiving too much notice. He took wide, confident steps, and people looked straight past him.

He saw several heterosexual couples walking down the street holding hands, and he was reminded of the article that had brought Harry Potter to see him. And his plan to come out publicly.

Draco found himself grinning at that, and because he was in such an excellent mood (which was ironic, considering the envelope under his arm contained an article addressing a horrendous tragedy), he felt inclined to explore the reasoning behind that.

Harry was gay. Harry knew Draco was gay, too. They were going to spend a lot of time together in the future, and it was all because they were both *gay*, and were advocating for awareness. In most situations, that would mean the two men were in a romantic relationship, didn't it?

Draco gave himself the liberty imagining what that would be like, and his smile widened even further. Having dinner with Harry, holding hands with him, holding him, kissing him... Draco paused to imagine what it would feel like to be wrapped in Harry Potter's arms, tongue tangled with his, perhaps even undressed... and he quite liked the idea.

Gods, I'm thinking of kissing Harry Potter, and it's not even for publicity reasons. Were I a few years younger, I would have hexed myself.

But then, his smile faltered. If he published this article, about the attacks and revealing his identity, would Harry still want him? Or would he have someone else write his coming out article?

Draco shook his head. *Of course not. He didn't pick you because you were going to write about his day-to-day and nothing else. That was Granger's idea. And it's not like she could have expected Pennom to write such frivolous stories anyway. And after this article, you won't need her as much to redeem you.*

You'll still get to write for Harry.

He felt a bit like a schoolgirl, practically skipping up the steps to the Prophet's main office. It was unnerving. He took a deep breath, straightened his spine, and dropped the smile.

I'm a Malfoy. I am ice.

Yeah, right.

He was Pennom, and he felt warm and bubbly, and he was about to publish an article about tortured children that could save his career, and he was becoming infatuated with Harry Potter. And he felt *good*.

Ice, my arse.

The receptionist was familiar. He frowned as he remembered who she was—she had gone to the Yule Ball with Harry. Or maybe that was the other one, he thought, as he remembered they were twins. Both of their names started with a *P*, but that was all he remembered. It didn't matter, he reminded himself. That was years ago, and she wouldn't recognize him, for the glamour.

"Can I help you?" she asked, sounding bored.

Draco nodded. "I'm here to see Mr. Aterneus." He replied. "I don't have an appointment, before you ask," he added, trying to sound as charming as possible.

Her lip curled, and she gave him a look as if she met idiots like him all the time. "You mean you want to see the Editor in Chief, and you don't even have an appointment?" She scoffed. "Listen, you're handsome, but we get crazy freelances like you a lot, and let me tell you, you won't find work here."

Draco raised an eyebrow. "Oh, I'm aware. But I've sent several articles in before, via mail of course. Twenty three, to be exact. Nineteen have been published. Are you familiar with the pen name Adam Pennom?" He asked, keeping his voice smooth and polite, despite her own biting tone.

She snorted. "You mean to tell me you're Pennom?" She asked, rolling her eyes. "I'm impressed with the letter thing, but you people usually try harder than that."

Draco was getting annoyed with this.

"I have the article here. Would you like to see it as proof?"

"That's standard procedure. Boss man has us check for the seal and magical signature, so we'll know right away. Are you sure you don't wanna back out?" She asked. He found her voice to be rather annoying.

"Positive." He handed her the letter, and she raised her eyebrows upon seeing the seal. She cast a spell on it, and a green, ghostly smoke appeared. She held it up to a piece of parchment, and then she stared at it in disbelief.

"M-Mr. Pennom." She stuttered, and stood up. "I'm so very sorry that I, er, was so rude to you. I can escort you to the Editor's office, if you like. I, er, guess I didn't expect you to look like this. You're so young," she added shyly.

Draco rolled his eyes. "I'm wearing glamours. So don't think you can sell my identity off to any of your coworkers. And I can escort myself to the office, thank you." He snapped, taking back the envelope and strutting past her.

He smirked as he left her gaping at him like a fish, and took the elevator to the top floor. He wondered how long it would take before everyone in the building knew he was there. Being such a successful freelance made him a big deal, he supposed. Especially since the editor had put in the paper that he wanted to know who Pennom was.

The Editor's office was not hard to find. It was a big door on the top floor, and "Cassius Aturneus" was printed in large black letters on the door. Draco had, of course, done his research, and it wasn't the man's real name. His real one was erased from all previous records, though the man apparently had nothing to hide. He had never been reported for any illegal activity, and his records were still available.

He knocked on the door, and immediately, a too-calm "Come in, Mr. Pennom," was given. Draco wondered how long he had in advance to prepare for his coming, and he smirked as he entered. When he opened the large, heavy double doors, he saw a man in his late twenties seated behind a large desk. He had neck-length, smooth black hair and pale skin. He was dressed like a muggle (which was now the fashion after the war and the rise of muggleborn equality), and one of his arms was covered in moving tattoos. One of his ears was covered in studded silver earrings.

He stood up to greet Draco, and he saw that he was tall and thin. He had a sly, searching smile on his face, and Draco had the feeling he was meeting a fellow Slytherin. Since he only appeared to be a few years older than himself, they might have even gone to school together at some point.

"Mr. Pennom. Pleasure to meet you. I've been waiting a while for this, though I wasn't expecting you to take my bait so soon." Aturneus said with a wink.

Draco shrugged. "Thank you, Mr. Aturneus. The situation changed, I'm afraid. I would have remained anonymous for much longer," he said.

"Call me Cassius. And why the anonymity, I wonder? Do you have something to hide? Ms. Patil was so flustered after your encounter that she accused you of being a 'scruffy old man under all those glamours,'" the other man laughed.

Draco frowned. "I wish it were so easy."

"So, a troubled past then. Well, have a seat, Mr. Pennom, or can I call you Adam? Let's talk about why you're here."

Draco took a seat. "Mr. Pennom is fine, until I decide whether or not I want to reveal my identity," he replied coolly, sliding the envelope across Cassius' desk. "I would like to submit this article, and have it published by tomorrow."

Cassius raised an eyebrow. "That's a lot to ask, Mr. Pennom."

"I know you've done it on shorter notice. Such as a few days ago, when an article about a record shop was published on, what was it, page two? This is bigger than that." Draco snapped.

Cassius narrowed his eyes. "Fair enough."

He began to read the article. Draco watched the editor's face closely. The man betrayed little, which only added to his suspicions that he had something to hide, as well. However, towards the end, he saw a single tear slide down the man's face.

"Surely it didn't earn that much emotion," Draco deadpanned.

Cassius met his eyes. "And more."

There was silence.

"You know why I always liked you, Mr. Pennom? Why I always published your articles?" Cassius finally asked, setting the envelope aside.

Draco only raised an eyebrow.

"You write from your heart. You write with emotion. You don't just report things, and you don't just write things to toy with other people's emotions. You're a layman yourself, and you speak to them. If I weren't such a coward, I could imagine myself stepping out and writing these things, too. Any respectable reporter would hope the same of themselves."

Draco nodded, choosing not to speak.

"Which is what I don't get about you. From one man in a mask to another, I don't see why you'd want to step out into public. But at the same time, why would you stay hidden? The people love you. Hell, I'd love to be able to write the way you write. But I can't, because my mask is different. People would still attach my name to me."

"And what is your mask, Mr. Cassius?"

Cassius smiled wryly. "The article you sent in last week, about gay rights. It really spoke to me. A lot of us, actually. It was the tipping point here at the office, the reason why we wanted to meet you."

"Are you implying that you and the rest of The Prophet are closeted as well?" Draco asked, keeping his face even.

"To an extent. You see, Mr. Pennom, as reporters, we all know that everyone has something to hide. For me, it's that I used to be a woman. I'm trans," Cassius said casually. Draco made no hint at his surprise, which earned a smile from the deep-voiced editor.

"When you wrote that article, it was like a dream. Here I am, hiding from my past. And you step up there, and write an article saying, 'Hey, everybody! There are people having to hide, and we're ignoring them.' And you made people feel pretty pathetic. You should read the letters we got," Cassius added, raising an eyebrow.

"I would love to."

Cassius laughed. "No one in wizarding history has brought it up like that. Not even Dumbledore, the old bastard. And you know what I think? I think it took the post-war mindset to even be able to bring that up. Most wizards, not even halfbloods, saw the nonsense in the whole pureblood/muggleborn divide until recently, let alone bring up sexuality."

Draco nodded. "I would have to agree."

"It also helps that the Editor in Chief is a young progressive fellow like myself," added Cassius with a wink.

"So you are the reason I'm published, aren't you?" Draco asked, cracking a small smile.

Cassius nodded, and then paused for a long moment, gazing at him pensively. "Who are you, Mr. Pennom? Would you be willing to show your face?"

Draco nodded, and Cassius' eyes widened. Draco cast a nonverbal silencio as well as a few other charms that would provide complete privacy. Then, he dropped the glamours.

"You're Draco Malfoy." Cassius whispered, apparently awestruck.

"After reading that last article, what were you expecting?" Draco asked, smirking.

Cassius shook his head. "I—I don't know. We went to school together, you know. I was four years above you, and in Slytherin, too."

"I knew it!" Draco cackled.

Cassius frowned. "Shut it. You probably don't even know which girl I was. And I'm not telling you, either. Anyway, I suppose it was just a shock. You were a real prick as a kid. I never thought you'd end up so openminded."

Draco blinked, realizing he couldn't even imagine what Cassius would have looked like as a man. "I don't think anyone was expecting it," he confessed.

Cassius laughed again. "I actually thought you were French, you know. Pen nom? I thought it was such a ridiculously obvious play on words."

It was not dignified with a response.

"Well. Anyways, why now?"

"The horror that was last night provided me an opportunity. I realized this article could clear my name, and much faster than the other option I had been offered." Draco explained, wondering if that would cause Cassius to question the honesty of his opinions in the article. It didn't.

"And what option was that?"

"I was offered a job by someone to write a very important article, along with a few minor ones pertaining to them, meant to be published in a few months. In return, an associate of theirs offered me a chance to clear my name by publishing a few positive articles about me." Draco explained. Cassius looked incredulous.

"You bribed *Terry Boot*? Who's so important that Terry Boot knows that you're writing for them?" Cassius demanded.

"Who in Merlin's name is Terry Boot? The associate is Hermione Granger." Draco replied, deciding he could let that part slip.

"Terry Boot's issued one of my reporters to write that bloody article... on request of his *girlfriend*? I ought to fire him!" Cassius snapped.

"Girlfriend? Granger's dating the reporter? This is news to me."

"That's my job," Cassius quipped.

Draco laughed wryly. "Of course. But in all fairness, it did boost my business. And, I may never sell another Celestina Warbeck album again!" He was rather cheery about that.

Cassius shrugged, and a sneaky look appeared on his face. "So, Granger offered it to you..." He speculated, "Who's close with Granger? Someone in the Ministry? Malfoy, I didn't think you were such a *sellout*." He sniggered.

Draco froze. *Ice. Don't give anything away.*

A lazy grin spread itself on Cassius' face. "Oh, no, Pennom. You're not a sellout. I'll figure this out," he leaned forward. "So, what do I know about Hermione Granger? The brightest witch of her age, they call her... Oh, this must be it; she's best friends with the Boy Who Lived, isn't she?"

This man is a slimy Slytherin, Draco thought. All the same, however, Draco's Malfoy ice melted, and his expression gave it away. It seemed that everything to do with Potter melted the ice, even if someone was just mentioning.

Cassius laughed. "What dirt have you got on Potter?" He had an amazed expression on his face, but he must have noticed Draco's panic. "Don't worry, I won't tell anyone. I can tell you're not out to hurt our savior."

"I'm afraid that's confidential, anyway," Draco scowled.

The other man knitted his eyebrows. "Fair enough. I won't tell anyone about it, I swear. I still want you to write for me, after all. Speaking of which, I'm assuming you want your name published with this article?"

"Naturally. That's why I'm here. Also, can I apparate out of the building?" Draco asked.

The editor snorted. "It's not as though we don't know where you live. Though, I suppose you deserve to remain anonymous for one more night... Yes, you can."

Draco stood up. "Thank you, Cassius."

"See you later, kiddo."

Curling his lip in agitation, he disappeared back to his flat.

Everything was waiting for him when he got home. The window was still open, and his table was still covered in parchment and ink. He did notice one new envelope on the table, however. He assumed an owl must have flown in through the window. He stiffened, and cursed himself for his carelessness. He picked up the letter, and opened it.

It was from Harry.

He decided that maybe he could leave his window open more often.

Draco,

Did you read the paper this morning? How are you feeling? None of us like the idea of the Death Eaters returning, but I can see how it would make things especially worse for you. If you need someone to talk to, I can come over. It's six o'clock now, and I won't go to bed until eleven at the earliest. Owl me back if you want to visit, and I can apparate over. I've got a bottle of firewhiskey to use up, too. It's been a long day.

—Harry

Draco didn't even hesitate. It was only seven.

Harry,

I'm home. Come over now. Firewhiskey is greatly appreciated. It better be good quality.

—Draco

He ignored the voice in the back of his head that said this was a bad idea.

Fuck you, Malfoy ice.

Chapter End Notes

Whoa, that was a long chapter! It took 4 hours to write, versus the regular 1 or 2. And there's way more dialogue than normal. Also, I apologize for all the articles and letters in here, but they're essential to the story. The chapter after the next will have Draco's big article.

Reviews are greatly appreciated. Let me know how I'm doing with keeping everyone in character, if the plot is making sense, if it's boring or not, etc. Thanks! ;)

Confessions

It was just past seven o'clock in the evening when Draco sent his reply. Harry heaved a huge sigh when he opened it up.

So I wasn't going out on a limb when I sent that.

He almost wrote a reply, but he realized he was expected to just come over. He quickly ran to a mirror to check his appearance—clothes were tidy, hair was not—and then threw on a nice-ish sweater. He almost forgot the firewhiskey, but remembered it at the last moment. He considered briefly that he had done too much apparating for the day already, but shrugged it off. He would be fine.

With the typical *pop!* he arrived in front of the street in Carkitt Market. The Hopping Pot, which he still had yet to visit, glowed warmly across the street and smelled of potatoes and alcohol. He turned around, and he saw the light was on upstairs in Draco's flat.

"Oi! Record boy!" He shouted. "I got your note!"

He saw Draco standing in the window, which was open. "No need to be so loud," he called down softly. "People will think you're a call-boy or something," he added with a hiss.

"Well, are you gonna let me in?"

"Patience!" Draco disappeared from the window.

Harry waited a minute, and the door to the dark record shop opened. He could see Draco's slim frame as a silhouette through the opening in the door. Harry went to the door.

"You *had* to leave your call boy waiting," he teased, a bit too loudly.

Draco hissed and pulled him in by the arm. "Weren't *you* the one to contact *me*?" He snapped, but Harry had a feeling he was joking.

"Yeah," he replied. "But it took you an hour to respond to my owl. What was keeping you?"

Draco led him up the stairs. "I think an hour is an extremely decent response time," he huffed. "Were you really so eager to see me, Potter?"

This time, Harry was very grateful for the claustrophobic darkness of the staircase. It meant Draco couldn't see his blush.

"But anyway," he continued, "I was speaking with The Prophet's Editor in Chief."

Harry reached the top of the stair case, and blinked both from the sudden light and in confusion. "Why?" He asked, sitting down at Draco's kitchen table, and setting down the firewhiskey with a *clonk*.

"I wrote an article regarding the attacks on the muggleborn families. And I wanted my name on it." Draco sat down, not quite across from him and not quite next to him, at the round table, and folded his hands. He looked rather regal.

That makes sense. "So, you're revealing your identity? So soon?"

Draco frowned. "That doesn't interfere with your plan, does it?" He asked. Harry paused, and realized he wasn't quite sure. Hermione was the master planner, not him.

"I don't know, actually. I chose Penmom for his credibility and his meaningfulness, you know? The way you write won't change, but people might question your credibility." Harry said. It wasn't accusing, but thoughtful.

"Ha," Draco scoffed. "It doesn't really matter, does it? Writing about you will lower my credibility anyway. People like Penmom because he isn't like the rest of the press, because he doesn't write those kinds of articles."

He paused. "In fact, I don't think I was ever going to write those kinds of articles. I just couldn't. I don't know what Granger was thinking."

Harry let out a small laugh. "I sort of figured that after our talk the other day. But you'll still write the big one, yeah?"

"Oh, of course!" Draco affirmed, shaking his head in earnest. "That is actually on my agenda—Penmom practically invented gay awareness for wizards." He laughed wryly. "The Editor said so himself. It only makes sense that I would be the one to write your article. The only deal I'm cutting is my deal with Hermione." He added, "I'm still doing this for you."

Harry tilted his head as butterflies assaulted his gut. *That was an odd thing to say.*

Draco seemed to think so too, as he wrinkled his nose. "I'm sorry. That sentiment was terribly Hufflepuff of me, wasn't it?"

Harry laughed in agreement.

"I think I *do* need that drink. I'm obviously exhausted." He shook his head and inspected the bottle of firewhiskey, apparently satisfied with its "quality."

"I wonder if you're even more Hufflepuff when you're drunk," Harry joked, taking the bottle as Draco summoned some glasses. He poured the strong liquid into some thick-bottomed cups, and each man took his glass.

After a swig, Draco smirked. "I guess you're about to find out."

"Cheers," Harry said, lifting his glass into the air, "to getting to know the real Draco Malfoy."

"Cheers." Draco muttered dryly. And then, with another wrinkled expression, "I hardly think getting me drunk is an adequate evaluation of my character." He swirled his drink, and took another gulp all the same.

Harry tried some of his own drink, and suppressed a cough (he had forgotten how strong it was). "Well, then, all the more reason to get to know you otherwise." He smiled, realizing how flirtatious it sounded.

Draco raised an eyebrow, and Harry had the feeling that it was his equivalent of a blush.

"So," he cleared his throat (Harry hoped it was because the drink was too strong for him, too), "the orphans are all well?" There was an edge to his voice, as if he were concerned he was stepping onto a dangerous topic.

"Oh, yeah. They're fine. I spent most of the day with them, actually," Harry forced down another swallow of the drink. "They drew a bunch of ridiculous looking clothes, and I brought them to Luna. She's going to sell them, and give the profits to the orphanage."

Draco nearly took a spit take. "That's atrocious," he sputtered. "No offense. I know you adore the children. But... Pansy actually is letting her do that?" He shook his head in disbelief.

"Not willingly, no. You knew they were together?" Harry asked, frowning in confusion.

"Hmm? Oh, yes. They were business partners first—Pansy really is quite fierce, she knows how to strike a deal. But I didn't find out that they were *partner* partners until I went to interview Luna for the article. Her sexuality was only a rumor before then," he explained.

"You and Pansy don't keep in touch?" Harry asked, remembering the way she fawned over him at school.

Draco laughed. "Gods, no. We were friends, but I can only stand her so much, you know? And when she found out girls were so much more receptive to her, she didn't need me anymore. Why? Do you keep in touch with Luna?"

"No," Harry admitted. "I really only owl her around Christmas time. She still sends me necklaces. I never wear them," he added guiltily.

"For *shame*, Potter!" Draco laughed. "They're probably priceless. I mean, if Lovegood calls it fashion... It's fashion. Quite different from when we were in school, don't you think?"

"I'm guessing you're still not a fan?" Harry asked, only half amused.

"Well, I don't exactly *look* like the radish earring type, do I?" Draco shot back, after taking another sip of his drink.

"No, I saw you more of a glow in the dark lingerie kind of fellow," Harry bantered, smirking.

This time, Draco really did spit take, setting his glass down with a *clank*. "As much as I think you'd like that," he deadpanned, "if anything, I actually favor the threstral-style leggings."

Harry set down his own mug to let out a raucous laugh. The alcohol was already kicking in, he noted. It was strong stuff. "So you *do* own a catalogue then?" He accused.

"Oh, like you *don't*!" Draco began to giggle, and Harry snorted.

"Hufflepuff!" He cried. "You're a Hufflepuff!"

Draco collapsed his head onto his forearms. "Alright, Potter, you win! I'm a bloody lightweight, okay? And I have never had firewhiskey before, in my *life*." He babbled.

Harry chuckled, reaching across the table to pat Draco on the hand that his head wasn't slumped on. "There, there," he teased. "I figured that out when you asked for 'high quality' and then settled for Ogdens. Everyone knows Blisshen's is the good stuff." He chuckled again, not taking his hand off Draco's.

"Unngh. I don't want it anymore. You drink the damned stuff, if you like it so much!" Draco whined.

"I don't like it either! That's why I brought it. I said I needed to use it up, didn't I?"

"You could have mentioned it was medical grade alcohol!" Draco moaned, and lifted his head from the table to meet Harry's eye. He didn't pull his hand away either, which made Harry quite pleased with himself.

"The burning does go away, doesn't it?" He asked, and Harry wasn't sure if the fear in his voice was fake or not.

"Yes, Draco. And if it makes you feel better, we *can* cast sobriety spells, too." Harry said, surprised at the lack of sarcasm in his own voice.

Draco sighed, and dropped his chin back onto his other hand, not breaking his gaze with Harry, who mimicked the motion. "No, I think this is the perfect level of drunkenness," he commented.

Harry grinned. "Yes, I quite like you when you act like a Hufflepuff."

"Well, you turn into a Slytherin, in case you haven't noticed!" Draco retorted, pulling his hand away to sit up and cross his arms like a child.

Harry sat up, too, but he left his hand where it was, in front of Draco. In case he wanted to hold it again. "You know, the Sorting Hat *was* debating between Slytherin and Gryffindor," he confessed.

Draco huffed. "It's no small wonder!" Then, "Why did Gryffindor win out?"

"Because I asked it to."

Draco rolled his eyes. "Oh, of course it will listen to *you*! Even *hats* favor you." He complained. When Harry couldn't think of a good response, Draco sighed loudly.

"Goddammit, Harry. You're such an idiot. You should have let it put you in Slytherin. We could have been *friends*. And Snape wouldn't have hated you as much. *I* wouldn't have hated you so much. Wouldn't it have been easier?" He looked like he was pouting.

"Do you really think so?" Harry asked, his heart fluttering in his chest.

"Of *course* I think so! That first year, I wanted so *badly* to be your friend. And then I resented you for rejecting me, all those years. And then my father forced me to be a Death Eater, and you almost killed me with that hex, and then I was devastated. I always thought you hated me, even after the trial. And out of the blue I find you in a furniture shop of all places, and you see through my glammers, and you *still* flirt with me!" Draco's face was growing redder and redder as he spoke, and then he broke off, holding his breath.

Harry was holding his own, too. He didn't know that Draco had felt that way.

"Fuck, I'm sorry Draco. I-I thought you were stuck up, but I never *hated* you. I was obsessed with you, really. You always had the best of everything, or I thought so. I felt like you were always looking down on me, so I *had* to be rude back. And then in sixth year—I thought you were a Death Eater—and I was actually so worried—and I didn't know what *sectumsempra* did, and I cast it... and I thought you would never forgive me... And then at the trials, after you saved my life, I had to make it up to you... And you still never spoke to me, until I saw you at the furniture store. And you're so *nice* now, Draco, it's bloody amazing. *You're* bloody amazing, I mean Penom is. I mean, you are too..." Harry was spluttering, and he buried his face in his hands.

They didn't talk for a minute. Harry just hid behind his hands, and he felt Draco's warm, drunken stare resting on him. He realized they had both meant what they said.

"Do you want to go to the bedroom?" Draco asked casually.

"W-what?" Harry stuttered, dropping his hands to stare at the other man in shock.

Draco's jaw dropped, and then he started laughing hysterically. Harry flushed red, and wondered if the man had just played him for a fool.

"Shit, Harry. That isn't what I meant, I swear!" He cried, still cackling like a hyena. "Fuck, gods. I meant that, would you like to *sit down* in the bedroom? It's the only place with furniture, yet." His face was flushed red from the drink and the laughter.

Harry blinked. "O-oh. Okay. Sure, then," he replied, still in shock.

Even if he meant it the other way, I would have said yes, he thought to himself. And it wasn't just the alcohol talking—he wasn't *that* drunk. He and Draco stood up.

As Draco led him to his bedroom, he attempted to redeem himself. "Merlin, Draco. For a moment there I thought you had turned into a Gryffindor."

Draco looked over his shoulder and grinned, hopping onto the bed with a plop and spreading himself out comfortably. "Nope, still a Slytherin." He smiled, now laid down flat on his back.

Harry sat down cross-legged next to him. "I see you're enjoying my bed." He commented, taking the liberty of staring at Draco's form.

"Hmmpf," Draco huffed, lazily smacking Harry's arm. "It's the muggle mattress that's so comfortable, you prat. The bed *frame* is just pretty to look at."

Harry just laughed, and Draco turned his head to the side to stare at Harry.

"You know what else is pretty to look at?" Draco asked.

"Me?" Harry joked.

"No, quit being such a wanker. Besides, *you're* the one that was staring at *me*," he added, with a look that said *Oh, yes, I did notice...*

"Well, then what?" Harry asked, defeated.

"Lay down," Draco commanded.

"What? Draco—"

"Shhh. I told you not to be a such a wanker. I promise I won't do anything," Draco murmured, rolling onto his back again. Harry sighed, defeatedly. "Okay."

"Brilliant." Draco said, snapping his finger and extinguishing the light.

"I'm starting to think you really are a Slytherin. First, you lure me into your bedroom by—"

"Shh, Harry! I'm trying to focus. I'm not going to rape you, so stop acting like such a twat!" Draco demanded, and then he muttered an incantation that Harry didn't think he recognized. Suddenly, the ceiling turned transparent, and they could see the sky.

"Er, Draco? This is London. The stars are covered by light pollution. And smog. And—"

Draco cut him off again, though. "Goddammit, Harry! Can you be quiet for another minute and just let me do my thing?" He demanded. "I know it's London..." He mumbled under his breath, and then he cast another spell. The clouds and the light pollution were no longer an issue, and they could see the stars as clearly as if they were on a hilltop under clear skies two hundred years ago.

"Wow," Harry whispered.

Draco let out a satisfied *hmmph*. "I'm not sure if you knew this, but Astronomy was my favorite subject. Besides, it's always best to talk under the stars." He whispered back.

"And there you go with the Hufflepuff again," Harry joshed, but he didn't really mean it. He was still in awe at the clear sky above him.

"So, what do you want to know?" Draco inquired.

Draco felt ridiculously warm on the inside. Harry Potter was on his bed, and they were watching the stars, and they were talking. Draco knew he was acting like a fool, and he was tipsy, but he didn't care. He was with Harry, and they weren't fighting.

"Why did you start the record shop?" Harry asked, staring at the sky.

"That's the best you can come up with?"

"Well, would you prefer I ask your favorite color?"

"No. And it's cobalt blue." Draco replied, feeling silly. "Which explains why I named the record shop, at least, right? But as for why... Shit, Harry. Give me a minute. My brain is a bit addled." He sighed, wishing he had drunk one less shot of firewhiskey. But then he heard Harry cast a very mild sobriety charm on him, and his mind cleared.

"Well, I'm still drunk," he laughed, "but now we're the same level of drunk now, right? Anyway. The record shop." Draco took a deep breath. He didn't know why this was so hard...

"After the war, I was afraid to be seen by wizards. You understand that, right? Except they hated me. So I spent a lot of time around muggles, especially in the bars. And in case you didn't notice, muggles have a wide selection of music. I hung around those kind of places quite often, just to listen to the music. It was nothing like the kind of wizarding hymns my mother taught me... I could actually relate to it, and I fell in love with music. Then I met..." He paused, wondering if he wanted to go on. He decided he would. "Then I met Matthew. He runs the record shop in Muggle London, just across from the Leaky. And he gave me a job with him, and I loved it. I made money from listening to music, talking about music... I could *live* in the music. And one day I went back to the Hopping Pot, and they were playing wizarding rock. Not like the Weird Sisters, but actual *good* music, like Smoldered Pumpkins or Day Old Runes... Anyway, I realized I could have my music, and I could have it with my magic." Draco took in a deep, shuddering breath, staring up as a meteor streaked the night sky.

"That's when I set up shop. I still lived with Matthew at the time, but right after I opened the shop in Carkitt... That might as well have been when we split. He stopped trusting me; he thought I was living a secret life from him. And of course I was! I'm a wizard! I couldn't..." Draco broke off with a breath. "And then I found out he had been sleeping around all along. So I left."

Harry let out a sigh. "Draco... I'm sorry. You deserve better. But I'm glad you have the shop now," he said.

"What about you?" Draco asked.

"What about me? You've gotta be more specific." Harry playfully nudged him with an elbow, and Draco tilted his head to look at him. Gods, he looks pretty in the starlight. What about him? What do I want to know?

"I don't know. Why furniture? Have you been cheated on? And do you think you deserve better? With your hero complex and all, one might worry you throw yourself at all the worst men." Draco joked, but then wondered if it had come off wrong. Harry didn't flinch, though.

"I dunno, either. I just started furniture a few years ago because it was easy to get lost in, I guess. I started going to all these vintage shops around London, and they had all these weird pieces. Not to mention Grimmauld Place is full of some... eclectic stuff," he saw Harry

shudder, and Draco could only imagine. Torture devices and cursed tables were the first things to come to his own mind.

"So, yeah. I just did it. And I would give it to the orphanage—the weird pieces, the kinds only kids can appreciate. They're the only ones to think to touch it, to play with it. And I charm them with all sorts of surprises, so if you touch here or there you'll hear bells or feel tickles or see fairies. All harmless stuff, and I've told them its there, so they're never scared." He explained.

Draco laughed—or giggled, he hoped Harry didn't notice—and then paused. "Wait... does this bed have any of that?" He asked, sitting up to touch the branches carved onto the head of it.

Harry laughed, grabbing Draco's arm to pull him back down on his back. "No, of course not! You bought it in a muggle shop, remember?" He asked. Draco blushed, and he was grateful for the dark to hide it. Then again, he was drunk, and he had probably been blushing a lot.

"Oh." He mumbled sheepishly. Harry just nudged him again. "Hey, if you want, I can set some charms on it next time I'm here? When it's brighter and I'm less drunk."

Draco felt himself smile. "Yeah." He murmured. *Next time.*

They didn't talk for a while, and they just stared at the stars. Draco didn't want it to be over, he realized. He didn't want Harry to go home tonight, and not even because he wanted to have sex... He just wanted to be with Harry. Which wasn't like him, he supposed. He wondered if Harry had sex a lot...

"Hey, you didn't answer my question!" He realized, turning over to poke Harry in the arm.

"Hmm?" Harry asked, tilting his head to look Draco in the eye. He blushed again, and turned back to the sky.

"I asked you if you'd been cheated on. And if you knew that you deserved better than someone who did that to you."

"I dont think that was quite the original question..." Harry mumbled teasingly.

"Oh, shut up. Same difference," he grumbled, and he realized that he really *did* want Harry to answer the question. "Well?" He pressed.

Harry sighed. "I haven't dated in a year or two, actually. Right after I realized I—well, you know— liked men, I dated a guy for a few months. And he was a complete arse." He paused, and Draco imagined him pursing his lips in concentration.

"And then I tried to date women again." He said.

Oh. Draco thought, suddenly dismayed. *Is he not...?*

"But it just wasn't right. I realized that not even what I had with Ginny was *right*. But it wasn't right with Glen either, you know? And I started to wonder... is there something *wrong*

with me? Why don't I get to feel what other people feel?" He choked audibly, and Draco felt something inside his own self snap.

"Harry." Draco whispered, and he grabbed Harry's hand. He thought the other man was crying, but he kept on speaking, through broken, ragged breaths.

"So I try, you know? I try and feel what other people feel. I look at other people, and I think *wow, that's a good looking bloke*, but I don't *feel* anything. I mean, I do, but it's not what other people describe when they meet someone, and *bam!* they want to have sex. I don't get that." He sniffed.

"At least with men, I still can imagine kissing and holding and being with, you know? But nothing more. And with women... They're good to talk to. They're good friends." Harry sighed, and Draco squeezed his hand. He wanted to say something, but that wasn't what Harry needed right now.

"You can think I'm crazy. I won't blame you. Everyone else does. I go to bars, and I'll banter and flirt with some bloke, and I'll think he's good looking... And we'll suck face, and it's fun, because I still want to have that connection, with men at least... but then he wants to take me home. And I never can, because it's just not what I want, to go that far." He made a sad sound in the back of his throat. "So, I'm gay... But I'm not."

Harry sighed, and sat up. "Fuck. I shouldn't have said anything. Now you know I'm broken. I'm drunk. I need to go home."

"No, Harry," Draco whispered, grabbing him by the arm, and pulling him back down again. "You're not broken. I promise." He assured him, pulling him to his side in an embrace. He held him tightly. "Please, I don't want you to think you're broken."

"Okay," Harry breathed, but he was still stiff. "Gods, it won't work this way, will it? Here I am, wanting to be the gay champion of the wizarding world, and I'm not even properly gay. You can't write the article now, can you? It won't work."

Draco could feel Harry shaking now. "Harry," he whispered, "have you ever talked to anyone about this before?"

"No." Harry choked. "I-I hadn't even thought about it this way before. I had talked to Ginny and Hermione about the whole preferring men thing, but I didn't even factor sex into the equation until you asked me to go to your bedroom and I realized—"

"Shhh, Harry," Draco whispered, not wanting Harry to admit to anything he would regret. "Look at you, you bloody Gryffindor," he teased, resting a chin on Harry's shoulder. He tried to be as non-sexual as possible... but he had never been in this situation before.

"You jumped into this awareness campaign without even thinking, didn't you? And you're probably concerned that it won't work now... But you're wrong. And you're not broken. Do you hear me?" He asked, whispering into Harry's ear.

"Yeah," Harry whispered back, and he scooted closer to Draco, which made him smile.

"You haven't had time to think about this, and you're scared," Draco told him, and Harry let out a small noise in agreement. Draco sighed. "But I've interviewed a lot of queer wizards. And there's more than one way to be gay," he laughed, both at the rhyme and the *sheer queerness* of the statement.

"And that's why we need an awareness campaign, Harry. Because even *you*, the bloody head of this whole thing, didn't even realize that you're *asexual*. You've gone on about how you want to be there to give the message, so people didn't feel alone or broken, and you didn't even think you could save yourself." He tapped Harry on the head. "You and your bloody hero complex!" He whispered teasingly.

"A-asexual?" Harry asked, stuttering. "There's a word for it?" He sounded shocked.

Draco readjusted himself so his arms didn't fall asleep under Harry. "Yeah, there is. It gets more specific, too. Asexual homoromantic means you're not sexually attracted to anyone, but you're romantically attracted to men. So, you still want to be with a man, you just aren't all that interested in shagging him."

Harry let out a breathy laugh. "Oh. That... that makes a lot of sense," he confessed. Then, Harry rolled over, to Draco's surprise, so they were face to face.

"Thanks, Draco." Harry whispered, his breath hot on Draco's face.

He smiled back, unashamedly, and said, "You got it, scar-face."

Harry smirked, and buried his nose in Draco's ear. "Shut up, ferret."

And Draco really did giggle this time, and he lost himself in Harry's arms, and Harry giggled back.

"This is okay?" Draco asked, after a little while.

"Mmhmm," Harry murmured, snuggling himself closer to Draco, "and I'm not even drunk. Anymore."

"Good."

"I did say I snogged men, didn't I?" Harry added, louder than he had spoken in a while.

Draco felt his face flush, and he knew Harry was close enough to feel it. He didn't care. He smiled widely, and thought, *Does that mean you'd be willing to snog me?* But he didn't ask, because the moment was perfect as it is.

"Wasn't I the asexual expert a few moments ago?" He said instead.

"Yes, but *I* have the experience." Harry's breath puffed into his ear.

Draco sighed. "Good night, Harry." He knew it wasn't presumptuous. He hoped it wasn't presumptuous.

"G'night, Draco."

It wasn't long before he felt Harry go loose in his arms and his breathing to go steady. He used wandless, nonverbal magic to summon a blanket, and the effort put him right to sleep.

The last thing he remembered thinking was that even though he knew things would be different in the morning, he didn't care. It's the most right thing in the world, to have Harry with him, right now.

A Lesson In Moving On

Chapter Notes

This chapter is very emotional a times, so I tried to balance it out with some humor. Also, the poem by Robert Frost is (obviously) not mine.

Harry did not dream. He awoke in Draco's bed, still wrapped closely in his arms. He was fully clothed, and for the first time ever, he was in someone else's bed, without feeling any regret. There was nothing about last night that he felt bad about—there was nothing he had done that he didn't enjoy, and there was nothing that he had done that he had not wanted to do.

Long story short, it was the first time he had woken up with someone else not feeling like he had been raped.

He liked Draco, too, which was a bonus. But, as much as he hoped last night had been something between them, he had a feeling it wasn't. Draco was just like everyone else, wasn't he? Draco wanted sex, even if he hadn't asked for it. He was just trying to comfort Harry... Someone like Draco couldn't want to be with someone like Harry.

But I'm not broken. And there are other people like me out there. He remembered Draco's words from last night, and decided he wouldn't let any self doubts ruin the moment. He let himself lay there, in Draco's arms, under the warm blanket (*where had that come from?*), and believe that it could be this way forever.

Then, Draco stirred. Harry felt his heart hammer in his chest, and he was worried that Draco would pull away, and become cold and closed off towards him. That he wouldn't want it to be this way. That he would be angry, just like everyone else, that they hadn't had sex.

But he didn't do any of that. Draco's eyes flickered open, and he smiled. He even pressed his forehead to Harry's, as he murmured, "Good morning." He kept on smiling, and Harry gave in and smiled back. He let himself return the embrace, reveling in the pure affection of the touch. It reminded him of the morning after cuddles he had gotten with Glen and Ginny and everyone else he had slept with, but without the distaste and unpleasantries of the night before.

"Good morning. You certainly look pleased, for someone who slept fully clothed." Harry commented good-naturedly.

Draco smiled grinned back, and sleepily placed a hand in Harry's hair. "I didn't have the nightmares last night." He explained, nuzzling himself back into his shoulder.

"You have the nightmares, too?" Harry inquired, noticing he was rubbing Draco's back, which the other man apparently appreciated. He groaned softly, and replied, "Yeah." He then dozed off for a moment, but soon took a sharp breath, and continued, "The fiendfyre. You're always so brave. You save me every time. But Vince still burns, because I couldn't..." he broke off, and Harry just held him. He felt something inside him clench: sympathy. He knew what those kind of nightmares were like.

"It's okay. I'm glad you didn't have the nightmares, then."

Draco grinned again, waking up just a little bit more. He expanded his shoulders a bit, as if to stretch, and let out a loud groan. "Not letting go of you yet."

"Okay."

Draco didn't talk for a few more minutes, and Harry kept on rubbing his back. After a little while, his breathing sped up, his eyes opened completely, and he was apparently, finally, coherent.

"You weren't a dream... You didn't leave." He said, looking Harry in the eyes with total clarity. He looked shocked and amazed.

"No. I couldn't. You had me in a bear hug," he replied jokingly. Apparently, though, Draco wasn't awake enough to understand that he was teasing.

"Oh, no. Gods, I'm sorry. Is this okay? I—I don't want you to do anything you don't want to..." He said, pulling himself away and looking wounded.

"No. I was kidding. I liked it, Draco." I like you.

"Oh. You did?"

"Yes. I said so. Many times."

Draco slowly curled back up, close to Harry again, but he was more cautious this time.

"Are you always grumpy in the morning?" Draco asked, touching Harry's hair again, carefully.

"I don't know. People don't normally talk to me this early. I haven't had any coffee yet. Or tea." Harry replied, smiling in an assuring kind of way. He didn't add that Draco was much *less* grumpy in the mornings than he was during the day.

"Okay. So you're not mad with me?"

"No, no. I'm very happy with you. I'm... I'm just a little in denial. Is this...?" Harry trailed off, wondering if it was fair to talk to Draco when he was so out of it. His answers when he was awake were likely to be very different from... whatever this state of incoherence was.

"Oh. Okay, then. If you say so. You said you like coffee? I can make you coffee. Wait here." Draco sprung out of bed, with as much *spring* as his sleep laden body could muster, and

Harry watched him in complete denial. This *had* to be a dream. Draco wasn't so... *nice*.

A few minutes later, Draco came back in with two cups of coffee and a much harder expression on his face. "Awake yet?" Harry asked him, raising an eyebrow.

"Mmhph." Draco grunted, his normal self almost returned. "How could you tell?"

"You're much less... fuzzy when you're coherent." Harry explained, taking the cup from Draco. The other man sat next to him, propped up by pillows at the head of the bed. "Your face is less sweet, too, less endearing..."

"You're still just as cuddly, though," Harry admitted, leaning into Draco as he wrapped his arm around him. He didn't seem to mind the commentary.

"Just because I'm not in dreamland anymore doesn't mean I like you any less." Draco snorted, taking a sip of his drink. "But I hate coffee. Why did I make this?" He muttered. "And I don't have a bedside table, so I can't put this down. So I have to drink it, because I don't want to move. Dammit, Harry!" He grumbled, taking another sip of the coffee, and visibly gagging.

Harry laughed. "You don't like firewhiskey, you don't like coffee... I'm guessing you don't like very strong flavors."

"No, I don't. I like things like tofu and porridge and green-tipped bananas. So, for breakfast, we will be having one of the above options, because that is all I have in the kitchen." Draco announced, holding his mug to his lips. He was about to take another sip, but Harry used his wand to levitate it back into the kitchen.

"No more coffee. I think I like you better without it."

Draco just made a grumbling noise, and took the two free hands as an excuse to resume cuddling Harry.

Harry finished his coffee, which was only mediocre, and eventually Draco pulled away. He placed a hand on Harry's chest to prop himself up, and looked him in the eyes. "I haven't even taken you to dinner, and you've already stayed the night. This isn't how I usually do things, you know."

Harry blinked. "Oh. So, are... are we...?"

Draco sat up completely. "Only if you want." He looked away from Harry and fiddled with his fingers. "If this is a one time thing... I'm fine with that, too. I guess."

Harry shook his head, taking the fiddling hands and holding them tightly. "Draco. We didn't have sex. This isn't like a one night stand. Or, at least, I hope it's not. It feels more intimate than that." He confessed.

Draco blushed, and Harry found it rather endearing, now that he was no longer drunk. Instead, he glowed from the mid-morning light.

"I didn't know if this was normal for you or not. I don't know everything." Draco muttered, folding his arms. Which was also endearing.

"No, it isn't. Usually... usually I get coerced into doing something I don't want to, or they do something to me that I didn't want. And then I leave as soon as possible." Harry leaned onto Draco's shoulder. "But... you wouldn't do that to me, would you? Because if you would, this won't work."

Draco wrapped his arms around Harry in a side hug. "I will never rape you, if that's what you're asking. Or force any form of sexual contact that you don't ask for or consent to."

"Is this real? This feels like it's going fast. But we haven't had sex... Draco, I'm very confused." Harry rubbed his forehead out of habit, where the scar once was.

Draco just laughed. "Relationships are more than just sex, Harry." Then, he stood up, and Harry suddenly missed his warmth. "Speaking of fast, Harry. My article was probably published this morning. I'll go get it, if you want to wait here."

"No, I need to get up eventually. It's probably late, anyway." Harry stood up, yawned, and stretched. He followed Draco into the kitchen.

Waiting for them were four owls. One with the post, two with letters for Draco, and another one with a letter for Harry.

"How did it know where to find you?" Draco demanded, looking over Harry's shoulder at the letter. Harry could feel the concern radiating off of him. Draco was clearly as private of a person as he was, and he clearly didn't appreciate the fact that someone knew Harry had stayed the night.

Harry frowned. "It's from Hogwarts. They always know where to find me," he explained. "My uncle tried taking us to a rock in the middle of the sea to escape them, once. It didn't work."

Draco raised both eyebrows. "*That* is a story I'd like to hear."

Harry chuckled as he opened the letter.

Mr. Harry Potter,

In wake of the attacks two nights ago, many of us have been left with rifts in our hearts. Hogwarts school has been devastated, though safe from any physical harm. As many of the students have lost family members and family friends, they are in need of guidance and comfort. As a person familiar with loss, and a person that the students look up to, it is requested that you come and speak to the students. As you have already scheduled a visit with Professor Slughorn this evening, we have assumed that you are available.

We are looking forward to seeing you, Mr. Potter.

Regards,

Headmaster McGonagall

Head of Hogwarts School

"What does it say?" Draco asked, now peering at his own letters. Harry sighed, feeling rather green at the prospect of public speaking. "McGonagall wants me to come and comfort the school. Give a speech, I think."

"On such short notice?" Draco asked, not looking up from his letter. He was frowning. He assumed they were responses to his article.

"You get used to it, being the Boy Who Lived. What about yours?"

"This one's from mother," he said, holding up a thick piece of parchment with elegant script. "This is from Hermione." He held up the other one, which was on Ministry-quality parchment, and had slanted, loopy writing. "Neither are happy that I wrote the article." He sighed loudly.

Harry knitted his eyebrows. "Let me have a look at the article."

Draco obliged, handing him the paper. Pennom's story was the front page. "Let me know what you think. I haven't looked at it since I wrote it." He muttered, taking a seat at the table. Harry sat next to him, not even hesitating to take his hand before he began reading.

Look Now, and Remember

*By Adam Pennom**

Naught but two nights ago, our first disaster since the Second War occurred. Naught but two nights ago, too many lives were lost. Too many children dead, too many left behind. Too many people, whose dreams will now be haunted by memories of torture. Of death.

In the months, the years before this night, we ignored the signs. We looked past the threat of danger, and threw our hats into the air, and we sang: "It is over! The war is over!" We had vanquished our villains and hallowed our heros, and all was well. And who can blame us? We deserved to be happy, to celebrate, to be free.

But it is never over. Evil still lurks in the corners of the night, and Dark always rests in the shadow of the night. In the wake of our celebration, we grew blind, and we did not see the monsters. We let them grow, we let them fester. As we rejoiced that they were defeated, they grew bitter. And now they have had their revenge.

So, look now, my friends, and see that this is what the world is capable of. Look now and remember that this is what happens when we forget.

To quote a famous muggle proverb: "Those who fail to learn history are doomed to repeat it."

What we saw two nights ago was a reminder of the days of the Dark Lord. What we saw two nights ago was grief, it was loss, it was suffering. It was ignorance. We cannot forget and hence forgive, lest we allow it to happen again.

Look now, and remember.

Remember the loss you feel, remember the anger, remember the grief. And do not hold onto it out of spite. Do not let it fester inside yourself, do not grow bitter. We cannot use things we merely hold on to.

If we move on, and still remember, we live our lives like it happened. We live our lives prepared to defend ourselves, prepared to fight.

To quote my fourth year Defense Against the Dark Arts professor, Alastor Moody: "Constant vigilance."

What we saw two nights ago was borne out of ignorance. It was borne of our habit to ignore that which we dislike, to pretend that all is well. It is like watching a weed sprout in your garden, and letting it grow because it is too small to make a difference. But soon, if you are not watchful, the garden is overgrown, and you must salvage your garden.

Look now, and remember.

Remember the children whose parents were killed. Remember the children who will grow up with scars on their skins and monsters in their heads. Remember the parents who will have lost the lives that they have borne, and will seek revenge. If we neglect them, if we forget them, we leave them for dead.

If we forget them, we leave ourselves for dead. If we remember them, we heal them, and we protect ourselves.

To quote the famous muggle poet Robert Frost:

"No one believed. They listened at his heart.

Little—less—nothing!—and that ended it.

No more to build on there. And they, since they

Were not the one dead, turned to their affairs."

What we saw tonight cannot be seen once and then be neglected. We cannot let this problem fade into nothing. If we were not among the attacked, we cannot sit by and carry on, because we, too will die one day, also.

Look now, and remember.

Let this be the last time that we try to forget and ignore our pasts. We cannot sit and pretend that there is not still prejudice, that there is not still hate. There are still entire groups of people who think that they can hurt other wizards just because they were born of muggles. There are still purebloods, halfbloods, even some muggleborns who will seek out and harm anyone who is "weaker."

To the survivors:

You are not broken. You will survive. We will not forget you. And we will not allow the people who did this to you pass by unharmed.

To the onlookers:

You are in control of your decisions. You can choose to ignore this, or you can take this as a call to action. You will be held accountable. And we will not let you become a monster, who can look at this, and forget.

It would seem to be a common theme of mine now, to tell you, "Look at what you have ignored! Look what you have forgotten!" Can you not see what forgetting has done? Can you not see what is bred of ignorance?

I have sat and watched a war. There were people who stood up, and were brave, and said, "Look what is happening! The Dark Lord is returning." And there were people who were afraid, who said, "Look away, and forget. It won't happen again." And there were people like me, who listened to their fathers and friends, who said, "No one is watching. Make it happen again." And people died. We watched people die, we let people die, we made people die.

Take it from someone who regrets: we cannot forget. I cannot forget the torture inflicted, the killed, and the maimed.

It is my responsibility, as someone who remembers, as someone who regrets: do not look away. Do not ignore, and do not forget.

This time, I will not look away. I will not ignore. I will not forget. I will not take advantage of the unwatchful (though others will), but I will warn them. If I do not warn you, I am still a criminal. I am letting you become a criminal, and you are letting the crimes be committed.

Please. Look now, and remember, so that it might not happen again.

Harry looked up at Draco, with tears in his eyes. "Draco... I..."

"What does the editor's note say?"

Editor's note:

Adam Pennom is the pseudonym for Draco Malfoy. This has been proven with handwriting comparisons and magical signatures. He submitted this after the attacks on innocent muggleborn families. This is not an article, as he would usually submit. This is art. This is an apology. By writing this, he has more than proven that he deserves a second chance. He has shown more heart than any of the other observers of this attack. We will not forget him or his message.

Harry finished reading it aloud, and he looked up and met Draco's eye.

"Draco. That is more brave than anything I or any Gryffindor have ever done." He whispered, dropping the article on the table to stand and give Draco a hug.

"You would say that, wouldn't you?" Draco chuckled, apparently unimpressed by his own writing.

"Hush. Let me praise you. I'm feeling very emotional. Thank you for writing that. Thank you for agreeing to write for me."

"I did both of those things to redeem myself. I'm still very Slytherin, despite what you've seen in recent hours." He protested, giving into the embrace and running his hands through Harry's hair.

"Hush! You're ruining the moment." Harry whispered, leaning in closer for effect.

"Was it really that good?"

Harry huffed. "Stop that. For a Slytherin, you're acting very humble. In fact, I think you're being a Hufflepuff again," he added, burying his nose in Draco's shirt rebelliously.

"I wrote it in the heat of the moment. I was devastated. I probably won't feel anything more until I hear your give your speech at Hogwarts." Draco sighed with his usual dramatic flair, pressing his lips to the top of Harry's head. The gesture did not go unnoticed.

"Whatever I say at Hogwarts, it won't be as good as what you've said in that article."

"Well, we knew *that*, Potter."

Harry pulled away. "*Where* is the emotional sap that wrote this article? Whom I woke up with this morning?" He demanded, shaking the paper in the air.

Draco frowned. "First of all, weren't you just mocking me for not being a Slytherin? And, for your information, that *sap* is hiding behind several layers of Malfoy-brand iciness and disdain. And he is *not* a sap. He simply likes reminding other people of their place, and their fault in current events. And he apparently really likes you, as well."

"But Draco! The *prose*! Where is the prose now?"

"*Harry*. Make up your mind. I need to be this emotionally distant to cope. Yesterday, I spent twenty minutes crumpled in a panic attack after I heard the news. Then I had an argument with my mother. Then I wrote that, crying, for several hours. Then I drowned the rest of my emotions in alcohol and talking with you and soaking in the ridiculously wonderful sensation of your embrace. And finally, I woke up acting like a sap after realizing I could be falling for you. Give me a few hours to bottle up my emotions and be sarcastic before I break down sobbing at your speech today. I do have a reputation to uphold."

Harry blinked. "Okay." He wasn't going to argue... But he was going to try and help.

Draco knew the article was impressive, of course. He knew the effect it would have on people. But he was a hypocrite, and he didn't want to think about it right now. Right now, he

was feeling selfish, and he wanted to get drunk again so he would have an excuse to talk nonsense feelings with Harry Potter. He didn't want to address a crisis, and he didn't want to think about it. Or address it at all, really.

Luckily, he had already done so, and he wasn't about to let Harry make him marinate in it any more.

Draco was usually like this, of course. He would write an article, be very excited about it, and then forget about it, or become overwhelmed by an unstoppable sea of anxiety and insecurity.

Right now, he was feeling anxious again. His biggest concern that more letters were going to come soon. He didn't want the criticism, the attention, or the fame. He wanted to forget he *wrote* the damn article, and for people to leave him alone.

"How do you *cope* with it?" he asked. He was slumped against his bathroom door. On the other side, Harry was showering and humming absently to himself.

"What was that? Are you still out there?" Harry shouted from inside.

Draco groaned, and buried his head in his hands. "I asked, how do you cope with the *fame*?" He shouted, louder this time.

"Oh." Harry turned the water off, and there was a few moments of silence. Draco waited, and then Harry came out into the hallway, dripping wet and wrapped in a towel.

Draco took a moment to appreciate a half-naked Harry, who proceeded to sit down across from him. Their legs, outstretched, overlapped each other.

"Your shower smells like apples. Everything you own smells like apples." Harry stated, scratching his soaking wet head.

Draco groaned again, because he was growing very frustrated. Ever since Harry had read the article, he had refused to admit the impending doom that would result from people knowing who he was.

Draco knew it was his fault, of course. His mother had been right, as she reminded him in her letter—he was acting like a foolish Gryffindor. He wondered if he should have waited a day or two after the article was published before he went and emotionally puked all over Harry, who was apparently very pleased with that event. This rendered him unable to properly answer any questions, because he was too busy being precious.

"That isn't what I asked."

"I know. I'm trying to distract you. Worrying doesn't do anything. It took me a while to learn that." He said, smiling that golden-boy smile. Draco loved it, but he also wanted to worry. But he also needed to stop that...

"When did *you* stop worrying?"

"Somewhere between having to steal an egg from a dragon and having to slay a Dark Lord." He replied, still smiling.

"You're not funny." Draco muttered, dropping his head into his hands.

"Maybe I'm not, but you don't see me worrying, so you? I have to give a speech to my alma mater in less than six hours, in an effort to console them over the loss of their friends and family. At said speech, creepy, adoring fans and outraged press alike will be waiting for me. And this is just after finding an article towards the back of the Prophet accusing me of being a bigoted, Slytherin-loving traitor." He said, standing up to walk into Draco's bedroom and put some clothes on.

"You were the one who sent the table to Slughorn!" Draco called after him.

"Exactly!" Harry chirped, not bothering to close the door as he dressed himself. The towel crumpled to the floor. Draco assumed that this meant he had permission to stare at Harry's backside, and he did just so.

"Exactly what?" Draco snapped, watching as the other man waited until the last minute to put his pants on. Harry joined him back in the hallway, offering a hand to pull him up.

"You need to accept the consequences for what you've done. You know that; it's what moving on and changing is," he explained, not letting go of Draco's hand. "You also have to distract yourself," he added with a squeeze of his hand.

"How do I distract myself? The anxiety is practically eating away at my brain."

Harry grinned. "I've been helping. Talking to you, letting you stare at me, touching you. See?" He asked, wrapping his arms around Draco's neck.

"You are the *biggest* flirt I have ever met," Draco murmured, sourly.

"You knew that since the furniture shop. I was a flirt with you in school, too, I just used insults instead. Now, make me that tofu banana breakfast you promised, and I'll tell you about what my magical shower smells like." Harry commanded, pulling Draco across the short distance to the kitchen.

"I don't think we're having tofu *and* banana. And why would I want to hear about your shower?" Draco realized he was whining, but Harry was being ridiculously cheery and helpful, so he had the right.

"Just do your thing. I'll do the talking."

"Yessir." Draco muttered, pulling out the ingredients for porridge. He filled a pan with water, turned on the stovetop, and pulled the berries and the milk out of the icebox.

"The shower at Grimmauld place is enchanted. Every person who uses it makes it omit a unique smell. For example, I smell like mint, and Hermione smells like lavender." Harry explained, watching Draco closely.

"Like amortentia?" Draco asked, realizing he had almost forgotten about his anxiety and self prophesied demise, between Harry and the cooking.

"Something like that. Though I think it has less to do with what you like and more to do with how you are. Like my ex. He was an arsehole, and he smelled like the ocean's backside. Even better, it kept him from coming to my house, he hated it so much." Harry explained. Draco could tell why he had been the elected teacher for Dumbledore's Army—the man really knew how to talk at people.

"Are you always this cheery?"

"That's not what you said this morning."

"That," Draco frowned, "was almost a sex joke."

Harry laughed. "But it wasn't. Anyway, I'm only so cheery because you're so glum. Once you're less doom and gloom, I'll tone it down a bit."

"Well," Draco smiled through clenched teeth, "I'm sure I'll feel better once I have breakfast."

He stirred in the berries, and without thinking, cast his decoloring charm.

"Why did you just use that charm?" Harry demanded, walking over to inspect the porridge. Draco pointed at the now white blueberry sludge.

"I don't like colorful foods."

Harry raised an eyebrow, and broke out laughing.

"What?" Draco demanded, slightly hurt. "I get enough shit about my eating habits from Mother. Not you, too."

"Draco," he wheezed. "I couldn't give a *fuck* about your eating habits. But you do realize that the charm turns your tongue the color of the food, don't you?"

Draco frowned. "No, it doesn't."

Harry continued laughing, though it had decreased in intensity. "Yes, it does. Your tongue is now purple. It was also purple the day I found out you were Pennom. Did you have this for breakfast then, too?"

Draco froze, hoping he was just lying, and cast a reflection charm on the wall. He looked in the reflection, and he saw that his tongue was, indeed, violently purple. *Violetly purple?*

He scowled in distaste, and turned back to Harry, letting the reflection fade. "How did you know that? And how long does it last?" He demanded.

Harry took a deep breath, and the laughing ceased. "I'm friends with George Weasley, remember? And it will probably last until tomorrow morning."

"No," Draco whispered. "My photos will be taken today when I come to your speech." He was mortified. "How have I not noticed this before?"

Harry smirked. *"Look now, and remember."*

Draco suddenly felt very, very sick.

Meeting the Wolves

Chapter Notes

Bear with me, guys. Draco's anxiety has just been backstory up until this point, and just like Harry's asexuality, it's an important part of the story. I know the plot's slowed down a lot, but I feel like these chapters are important. And, to be fair, there's some fun, cute stuff in this one, too. And, as usual, please leave reviews and constructive criticism! Thanks :)

Harry was extremely nervous about his speech. He was worried that he wouldn't know the right thing to say in front of all those people. What if he made things worse? What if he made a fool of himself? Whatever he could say, it wasn't going to be as good as Pennom's article.

He wasn't going to complain the Draco about it, though; the other man apparently had enough to worry about on his own. After the first two letters he recieved, from Hermione and his mum, he was already quaking. And more kept on coming after that.

"What do they say?" Harry asked. They were still in the kitchen. Harry was having more coffee and pretending to enjoy Draco's porridge, while the other man had already finished his and was drinking tea, which he liked weak and milky. Harry had questions about Draco's apparent food rules, but he wasn't going to bother him over it. Especially not now, when he was practically swimming in letters.

"I don't know... I don't know!" Draco cried, still unwilling to open a single one. "This is why I was anonymous before, Harry. I don't know what I was thinking. This was so stupid of me... I just jumped into it..." He slumped forward onto the table, cushioned by the thick pile of wax-sealed envelopes.

"What if they're praise, though? What if they're good? You won't know until you open them." Harry picked up the letter nearest to him. There was no name on it. "How about I read them first, and then tell you if you want to see them?" He offered, opening it.

"I don't care," Draco moaned. "As long as you don't lie to me and make me read any terrible ones without telling me first."

Harry sighed, and read over the script. The handwriting was elegant, but very slanted, and fairly hard to read. He could make the words out, though, and decided it was best Draco didn't see it. "That was no good. Let me try another one."

"What? Let me see it. It was bad?!" Draco snatched the opened letter from Harry's hands, and he read it over fervently, mouthing the words to himself. When he was done, he heaved a great sigh.

"Harry, you lied! That wasn't bad at all." He set the letter down with an almost satisfied look on his face.

"They called you a blood traitor and a fool," Harry replied, frowning. Perhaps they had different different definitions of "bad"....

"Exactly," Draco replied, ripping open another letter. "If these are all from angry purebloods, I did something right! These can't be all that bad, can they?"

"Draco. Calm yourself," Harry muttered, wondering where the ice man he was used to had gone. He had been much more expressive since last night, and he pinned it to Draco feeling comfortable with him. He had a feeling this was the real him, and the cool, composed Draco was just a facade.

"This one's from one of my father's old business partners. He wants to know in 'clear language' if I really blame it all on the purebloods." Draco scoffed. "What should I say? That I blame prejudiced hate that *happens* to come from the pureblood monopoly?"

He had an excited glint in his eyes, and Harry had a feeling he was seeing Pennom in him just then.

"*Incendio*," Harry uttered, making the letter catch fire in Draco's hands.

"Oi!" Draco snapped, dropping the letter onto his lap and stamping it out. "What was that for?"

Harry sighed as he pulled open another letter. "Lesson number one in fame: never reply to hate mail. No matter how tempting it is to put them in their place, it's a waste of time and energy."

"What about *fan* mail, then?" asked Draco, reading his next letter. "This person said they found my 'prose is an inspiring call to action.'" He grinned, and he looked as if he liked the sound of that.

"Not that, either. Then you'll have creepy, stalker fans who want to meet you." Harry frowned. Draco was either hot or cold when it came to anything, it seemed. Once he was over the fear barrier, he was like a toddler in a candy store. It concerned Harry.

"You know what, Draco? On second thought, let's forward all of these to *The Prophet*. I'm sure they have someone who's paid to take care of these. And they'll have you read the ones worth reading," he announced, vanishing the letters with a wave of his wand. The rest would go to *The Prophet*, later.

"Oh, good. *Now* you see sense." Draco sighed, standing up and stretching again. When he saw Harry's confused look, he smirked. "Oh, come on. I knew you were going to make me read them if I didn't want to, so if I made you think I had gotten over it, you'd leave me alone."

Harry frowned. "How...?"

"I *did* watch you obsessively during our school years. I know how you work. And, besides, I keep telling you that I am *still* a Slytherin." He looked like a cat, stretching luxuriously with a yawn, and then prowling over to Harry.

"Are you still anxious about all this, then?" he asked, as Draco stood behind him and began to gently rub his shoulders. He felt him let out a nervous, shuddering sigh, and his hands on Harry's shoulders faltered for a moment.

"I think that if I were alone right now, I wouldn't be standing," he replied, and he started massaging harder. "My pulse is hammering all over the place—just feel it. And all I can think about is people calling me a liar, accusing me of only wanting to be on the winning side. Like my father."

"And that's why you weren't afraid of the 'blood traitor' comments?" Harry questioned, rolling his head back, both in contentment and in an effort to see Draco's face. He lifted up an arm to feel his pulse--it *was* hammering.

"They're not who I want to win over. Once my father was in Azkaban, I didn't have to worry about them anymore." He stopped rubbing. "You don't think I'm a liar, do you? That I'm bad, a fake?" His voice had dropped to the same cracked whisper that Harry had used last night.

Harry stood up and hugged Draco, stroking his back to soothe him. "No, I don't. I testified at your trial, remember?"

He knew that Draco had only done the more horrible things he had done because his father told him to. He had come to see the kinder, more open minded side of him that had come to be without the negative family influence in his life. "Believe me. I know that people can change."

Draco squeezed Harry tightly. "How long until your speech? And is my tongue still purple?" he asked, smiling now.

"A few more hours. You don't have to help me with it, you know," he replied. He stood on his toes to look into Draco's mouth, pulling it open gently by his chin. He laughed. "And it's still very, *very* purple."

He felt Draco staring at him intently, and he realized that they were in a position to kiss. He felt his cheeks go hot, and the other man was still staring at him like a fool.

"Well, go ahead," Harry whispered. Draco's eyes widened in surprise, but leaned forward, and pressed a chaste, quick kiss to Harry's mouth.

"I may not have taken you out to dinner yet, but I think this is suitable enough for after breakfast?" He breathed onto Harry's mouth, taking another quick, moment-long kiss.

"Quite," Harry breathed back, not pulling away. He didn't want to. He didn't think he had been kissed that innocently since... Since Ginny. Except, then, it had just been touching lips, wet and strange, and more of a formality than anything. This felt warm and exciting, and

good. He would have wanted more, but he felt like this was perfect for where he was at with Draco now.

He dropped back onto flat feet, and he placed his fingers on the pulse spot in Draco's neck again. It was beating regularly now, and he wondered if the kiss had anything to do with that. He didn't ask, though, because Draco was staring at him with stars in his eyes, and he didn't want him to stop. Then again, Harry realized he was doing the same back, and he smiled.

"Do you always do it that way? Kissing, I mean," he inquired, dropping his hand away from the pulse.

"No. But it felt right, considering I don't ever do anything *else* this way," Draco laughed, finally pulling away, waving a hand in the air as if to encompass all of last night and the morning. "Do you?"

"No. I'm usually more drunk. And it's a lot less caring. And not as sweet. You're really sweet, do you know that, Draco?" Harry asked, turning away and suddenly feeling uncomfortable with all the intense eye contact.

"It must be all the sugar that was in my tea," Draco replied, and Harry didn't know if he was joking or not.

"I meant, like... endearing," Harry muttered, meeting eyes again.

"Oh, *dear*, I think I knew that. I just wanted to hear you say it."

And the sarcastic ice man is returning.

Harry rolled his eyes. "Do you have any parchment I can borrow? I need to work on the speech."

"I don't know. You were the one who vanished all the letters. We could have used the back of those."

Harry groaned, but he was secretly very amused.

The hours had flown by fast. Draco mostly spent them staring at Harry, who was right—distraction really *did* do wonders to dispel anxiety. Instead of worrying about bad press, nosy reporters, and the soon-to-come burdening expectation to write even more, he kept on thinking about Harry.

It felt like he was courting him, and it felt extremely old-fashioned. But he enjoyed it... a lot. And Harry appeared to as well. The kiss was a highlight, he thought. He could have giggled. What he had had with Harry in the past eighteen hours alone felt more sincere than anything he'd had before. It was nothing like the flings he had in the first few years after the war, and far better than the disaster he'd had with Matthew.

For Merlin's sake, I'm thinking like a lovestruck young girl.

He felt like he deserved it. This little bubble of happiness that Harry had kept him in was a perfect escape from the sadness and the tragedy of the muggleborn attacks. He wanted to hold onto the calm for as long as he could, before Harry stood to address the Hogwarts students.

But the hours were gone too quickly, spent daydreaming like that, and Harry had given up making peculiar, frustrated faces at his parchment. "I'm not writing any more. I can't. Are you ready to go?"

"I'm ready when you are," he announced, taking Harry's arm. "Which you apparently aren't. It's January. You need a coat," he chided, noting Harry's flannel shirt was all he had for warmth. "Let me find you a coat."

Harry only rolled his eyes, but Draco turned around all the same to rummage through his closet. He may not have taken the furniture with him, but he wasn't going to leave his outfits behind. He had a decent collection, and he was quite pleased with it. It only took him a moment or two before he had found a gray wool coat for Harry to wear.

"There you go," he said, finding Harry waiting for him still in the kitchen. He realized that he had been concerned that Harry would have apparated away without him. As he draped the coat over Harry's shoulders (who snorted as he pulled it on completely), he decided to voice his concern.

"Er, I am coming with you to Hogwarts, aren't I? You're okay with being seen with me?" Draco asked, suddenly feeling very foolish that he had automatically assumed he'd be coming, too. It wasn't exactly a public event.

Harry frowned. "Well, not as a couple, yet. If we're even a couple... Either way, you still have that article to write, and I don't think we want it published yet, do we?" he questioned, and Draco shook his head. "You can still come, though. It gives a good message." Harry continued.

"*Are* we a couple, though?" Draco asked, feeling foolish again.

Harry took his arm in his own. "We can try it out. Today has certainly been promising." He grinned, and Draco nodded in agreement.

"Should I wear any glamours?" Draco queried, still feeling worried. He held a hand to his mouth to cover his tongue self-consciously.

"You have nothing to hide," Harry assured him. Then, he apparated himself and Draco to the outskirts of Hogsmeade with a crack.

All was quiet and empty outside Hogsmeade. Not many people were out that they could see, and the ground was covered in a few inches of the late-January snow. The sky was overcast, and it was indeed chilly. He was grateful for his own coat, and that he had thought to give one to Harry. It was too long for him, and Draco chuckled.

"What?" Harry asked, not letting go of Draco's arm as they walked towards Hogwarts.

"Nothing," he replied, enjoying the simplicity of the moment. "I never would've thought we would have been here together, though."

"Neither did I. Last I remember was in third year, by the Shrieking Shack." Harry murmured. Draco frowned. He didn't remember such an incident...

"What are you talking about?" he demanded, watching as Harry's ears turned pink from something most likely other than the cold.

"I threw some mud at you when you, from under my invisibility cloak, remember? You made fun of Ron, and were being a git about Hagrid and your damned arm. So I chucked some mud at you and Crabbe and Goyle, and then my hood fell off. And you ran away." Harry was the one chuckling now, gripping Draco's arm tightly and looking up at him strangely.

"*Potter!*" he whined. "That really *was* you? I thought it was a ghost, messing with my head..." Draco muttered, reaching a hand to scratch the back of his head, as if the mud were still stuck to his skull.

"I think I hated you most that year, with your whining about your arm constantly... You almost got Buckbeak killed. We had to save him last minute." Harry sounded wistful now, if not slightly bitter.

"Buckbeak... The hippogriff? You mean that beast *survived*?" Draco asked, incredulous.

Harry slipped his arm out of Draco's. "Yeah, he did. No thanks to you, git."

Draco winced. "This really is a *lovely* date, Potter. Would you care to find further events to mock my old self about? What *else* did I do to you?" he sneered.

Harry was now a few steps ahead of Draco, despite his shorter legs. "Hmm," he mused, "The time in fourth year when you made those badges for me was fairly terrible. I can't believe you favored a Hufflepuff over me for the Tournament!"

"Gods, you had to mention the badges?" Draco asked, shaking his head. "Do you have how much *time and effort* I put into those damned things? Sitting on the floor of my dormitory, charming *each and every one* because I hadn't figured out mass charms yet. I wouldn't have put that much thought into doing something for anyone *else*." Draco laughed, fading out as he remembered that the other contestant, Diggory, had died.

Harry was apparently enjoying the jesting, regardless. "There you go again, Draco. Being endearing."

"Mmmh, yes. Are we done yet?" Draco was not interested in being reminded of his younger self's shortcomings. He was very aware that he was a vindictive little prick...

"Fine. But you know that it just speaks to how much you've improved, doesn't it?" Harry chirped, turning his head to wink at Draco.

He took a few brisk steps to catch up with Harry. "I'll show you how much I've improved, *Potter*," he grumbled, stuffing his hands into his pockets.

"Harry," he said, as he stopped walking. He felt the ice growing inside him, and he felt his heart rate go up.

Harry turned around to face him, looking confused. "What is it?"

Draco swallowed, and made a gesture towards both of them. "We're about to walk into Hogwarts. Together. *Wearing muggle clothes.*"

Harry grinned goofily, for not the first time that day. It was annoying this time, though. "I told you, isn't it strange?" he wondered, looking in awe. He didn't get what Draco was trying to say. This had nothing to do with *sentimentality*.

"No, Harry. It's *wrong!*" he snapped. "We can't do *this*," he insisted, gesturing at their clothes again. Why was Harry being so daft? Couldn't he see that this was a terrible idea?

"Draco, I know it's strange, but you cleared your name, didn't you? We're allowed to be friendly in public. Isn't this what you wanted?" Harry looked concerned, panicked even. He didn't get it. He was being stupid. It was so *obvious* to Draco.

Draco shook his head, and placed a hand on Harry's shoulder. "*This*," he said, moving a hand back and forth between them, "is fine." He took the hand off Harry's shoulder, realizing that he was shaking terribly, and tried to steady himself as he waved them vertically to point out their respective coats and trousers. "*This* is not."

"You... don't like our outfits?" Harry asked, tilting his head.

"Harry! You're *clueless!* You're in *muggle* clothes, and you're about to give a speech at *Hogwarts*. You might be *you, Potter*, and you're used to breaking the rules... But we have certain things in place for a reason! We'll stick out like a sore thumb. *Two* sore thumbs, *together*. We need robes, Potter!" Draco snapped, placing his hands on his hips. He was panicking now, he knew. He was on the verge of an anxiety attack.

Harry shrugged. "It'll make a statement."

Draco roiled. "*Statement?* What kind of statement? That we were raised by *wolves*? That we don't know anything about common courtesy?" Draco pleaded. Couldn't Harry just *agree* with him, and turn around with him so Draco could apparate home? He didn't want to come back. He *couldn't* do this.

Harry just rolled his eyes, and took Draco by the arm again. "Come on, you."

"You're a wild man, Potter! People like you are the reason civilization crumbles." Draco's voice was wavering now. Harry might not have understood it, but this was important to him. His pace was quickening, and the corners of his vision were blurring. He felt the wolves in the far edges of his mind starting to creep out, and he knew that his anxiety would take over soon if he didn't act.

"Get over it, you pureblood prat," Harry spat jokingly, dragging him along the pathway. Draco felt anger and fear and betrayal build up inside him. Couldn't Harry tell that he wasn't

okay? *It's not okay to joke at a time like this!*

"I *mean* it, Harry!" he cried. "If my mother could see me..." He sounded ridiculous, he knew. But there weren't words to describe what he was feeling right now.

It was no use, though. Harry Potter may have had no class, and he may have been totally clueless, but he was stubborn. He wasn't going to be late for his meeting with the Headmaster, and he certainly wasn't going to waste any time he could be helping people just so he could throw on some robes.

But it was Draco's only argument. He didn't want to tell Harry what was really going on.

"Draco, really. It's no big deal," Harry sighed, more quietly, but still relentless in pulling Draco towards the castle. "Stop horsing around about it, okay?"

"*No big deal?*" Draco was on the verge of breaking. "Harry, I can't. I'm sorry. I'm apparating home." He tried to pull his hand away, and he could feel his muscles clenching up.

"Draco, don't! We're here. If you try, you'll hurt yourself."

"I can't go in there! They'll see me, like this. After I just published the article, and it's not *safe*, Harry. It's not *right*." He insisted. They were right at the huge castle doors, and Draco would do anything in his power to keep them from opening.

"I don't understand." Harry said, his voice level now. "They're just clothes. Is something wrong?" He let go of Draco's arm and watched him concernedly.

"It's just anxiety..." Draco murmured dejectedly.

"*Just?* The same anxiety that's been happening all day? Is this *normal* for you, Draco?" Harry looked torn between keeping his distance and reaching out to touch Draco. Suddenly, he cast a silencio charm. "There's been a reporter following us. They can't hear us, now. They'll just think we've been arguing this whole way," he explained.

"How could you tell?" Draco demanded. He didn't even know where the reporter was now, let alone earlier.

"I was on the run during the war, you know that. I also trained to be an auror for a while, but that fell apart. That's not what we're talking about, though. Is this normal?" Harry demanded. Draco could see the hero in his eyes, the boy who would always put others first.

"It's just a panic attack." Draco whispered, focusing on his breathing. He knew there was no way out of this, so he wanted to at least make sure he was steady before he had to go in.

"Yes, and it's making you shake and pant and you won't go through these doors. What can I do?" Harry asked, tilting in his head.

"*Nothing.*" Draco hissed, looking away. He hated this. He hated how quickly it sprung up on him, and he hated that Harry had to see it. It had been threatening to happen all day, he realized. He should have known sooner that he couldn't go out. Especially not today, of all

days. The only thing that had been holding him together was Harry's distractions, and soon, Harry would be busy distracting and helping other people. It was miserable.

"Draco. What's this about? Is it the clothes? You were fine earlier..." Harry asked, knitting his eyebrows and crossing his arms. The man radiated concern, and it was inexplicably infuriating.

"No, it's not about the *clothes*, Harry. It's *everything*." He huffed. Judging by Harry's expression, that didn't explain anything. "It's just me, alright? This happens. A lot. It's why I don't go in public. The clothes thing was just a mask. I've been jittery and anxious all day, and I would have *known* this was a bad idea, but you were distracting me and I didn't want to be alone. Just let me walk back to Hogsmeade, and I'll go home."

"I don't think it's a good idea for you to be alone now, then."

Draco just crossed his arms and closed his eyes, wishing it would all disappear.

He heard Harry cast *finite incantum*, which ended the silencing charm. "I think I should take you to Madam Pomfrey." He decided, taking Draco closely by the arm again. "Will you come through the door? We can get you some calming draught if you come inside." He assured him.

Draco knew it was the only way, so he agreed. As if knowing his consent, the doors swung open. "Is the reporter still following us?" Draco asked, hoping they had so Harry wouldn't let go. *Gods, I'm a sniveling mess, aren't I? I need my hand held just so I won't break down.* The wolves snapped at the back of his mind.

"I don't think so. Come on, let's get you to the hospital wing."

Draco followed him closely. They passed several gaping students, and he tried to ignore them. *This isn't so bad*, he told himself. They're not staring at me. They're staring at Potter, aren't they?

He suddenly felt very grateful that his Dark Mark was hiding under his robes.

It didn't take long until they reached the hospital wing, greeted by a very frazzled Madam Pomfrey. "Mr. Potter, what are you doing in here? And... Mr. Malfoy?" she shook her head. "Do either of you need anything, or are you just feeling nostalgic?" She frowned as if she wondered what the two of them would be *nostalgic* over in the hospital wing.

Harry spoke quietly. Draco didn't know if it was for the sake of the other patients in the room, or to keep Draco's privacy. "Do you have any calming draught?"

The nurse frowned. "Harry," she muttered fondly. "I have dozens of students needing calming draughts right now. Do you know how many children have lost loved ones? I can't just give you some if you're feeling nervous about your speech," she scolded.

Draco shook his head. "It's for me, Madam." He whispered. She looked at him, and narrowed her eyes. Then, she gasped and took his hand. "Mr. Malfoy. You're drained, and shaking. Are

you quite alright?"

"No, ma'am." He muttered, not wanting to elaborate. He felt ashamed, being a grown man back for help from his school nurse.

He watched as Harry whispered something in Madam Pomfrey's ear. She looked alarmed at once, and squawked. "Have a seat, Mr. Malfoy," she commanded, and proceeded to shuffle off, presumably to find the potion.

Harry led Draco to one of the beds, sitting down next to him and holding his hand. "What did you tell her, Potter?" Draco hissed, finding himself quaking everywhere all at once.

"That I had decided to see you after reading your article and invite you to the speech. I had found you in this state after you received several threatening death notes, and took it upon myself to make sure you were alright." Harry whispered. Draco was hyperaware of his closeness, and his breath tickling his neck.

"Not so close, *Potter*," Draco hoped Harry would get the hint—there were eyes everywhere, and he wasn't ready to confront this in the papers tomorrow. "And really, how predictable," he added with false venom.

Harry just patted him on the shoulder, casting another silencing charm. "Come on, Draco, not now. You helped me last night, now it's my turn to help you again." He spoke sternly but softly. Draco knew what was coming next when he asked. "Have you ever talked to anyone about these panic attacks?"

Draco wasn't in the mood for any mushy feelings talks at the moment, but Harry wasn't going to be satisfied if he was ignored. "Yes, Harry. I went to muggle therapy, in fact. It was over a year and a half ago."

"And what did you learn?"

"They said I protect myself from the panic attacks by having an 'icy exterior shell' and treating others with 'harsh distance.' And that I have strange rules for myself. Like with the porridge. And the clothes," Draco took a great heaving breath, suddenly feeling like a weight had been taken of his chest and the knot in his gut untied.

"And you didn't have those barriers up today," Harry speculated.

"Right. I had you and your distractions. And it was okay when we were alone, but we got close to the castle, and all I could think of was everyone that hated me would be waiting inside the castle, to rip me apart... You know, it hasn't been *safe* for me here, after... Dumbledore..." Draco felt his voice cracking.

"I'm sorry, Draco. I'm still here." Harry's voice was soft and reassuring again, and Draco felt a warm smile sprawling onto his face.

"Thanks, Harry... I—"

Harry interrupted him by nudging him. "Heads up, ferret. Pomfrey's coming back," he whispered, forcing a menacing scowl on his face as he nonverbally cancelled the silencing charm.

"Shut it, Potter," he snapped. Then, to himself, *Were we not in public, and were I left alone to his charming thrall again, I might have collapsed into a Hufflepuddle by now.*

Harry snorted as Madam Pomfrey returned with a blue bottle. "I hope you two are behaving yourselves. You're much too old for these spiteful antics," she clucked, handing Draco the bottle. "Besides, Mr. Malfoy turned out alright, didn't you, dear? Your writing is quite impressive... It's no wonder you've had so many death threats." She said it casually... Cheerfully, even.

She turned to Harry. "You watch after him, now, at least until the day is done, Mr. Potter. You two can handle each other for that long, I'm sure."

Harry nodded earnestly. "Of course." He elbowed Draco in the ribs dramatically, prompting him to fake an angry huff. He then nodded in reconciliation. "Yes, ma'am."

"Off to the Headmistress, now," she instructed, then paused, smiling to herself. "That's right, too. It wasn't even a slip of tongue! Grown young men, and I'm still sending you both to the headmaster's office." She scuttled off to some other duty, and Draco chugged the potion all in one go.

"Better?" Harry asked, getting up again. He almost offered Draco a hand, but apparently thought different of it, now that he had less of an excuse. Draco stood with him, shoving his hands into his pockets and brushing shoulders with Harry.

"How *ever* shall I thank you?" he asked, hurrying to leave the hospital wing. Harry followed after him, and caught up with his longer strides.

"Just hold on until it's over," Harry said softly, stepping farther away from Draco as they heard footsteps from behind them.

"Mr. Potter!" a certain familiar voice called out.

They both turned around. It was Headmistress McGonagall, walking towards them at a brisk pace, still full of grace and power.

"And Mr. Malfoy. What a surprise." She raised a distinguished eyebrow. "I didn't think you would be coming... But Professor Slughorn had suspected. He has requested you go visit him in his office." She told Draco.

When neither Draco nor Harry made a move to separate, McGonagall frowned. "Mr. Potter, you may follow me to my office. Mr. Malfoy, you may go to Professor Slughorn, now."

Feeling like a child, Draco swapped concerned glances with Harry. "Go," Harry mouthed, and Draco walked away.

He tried to tell himself he would be safe from his wolves without Harry there to distract him.

Lost Children

McGonagall lead Harry into her office. The password was "speak boldly." On the inside, it was colored similarly to Dumbledore's office, in the familiar garish red and gold, but the decorations were different. It looked strange without Dumbledore's spindly, silver instruments. It wasn't much different from her office when she was Head of House for Gryffindor, though.

"It's wonderful to see you again, Mr. Potter," she said, inviting him to take a seat at her desk. Once he had sat, she sat across from him. She looked surprisingly comfortable there, though he supposed the regal woman suited power well. Dumbledore's portrait hung behind her (and not Snape's, he noticed), but he was not currently occupying it.

"Thank you, Headmistress," Harry said. "It's an honor to be here again. I hope you don't expect me to make a grandiose speech, however," he added sheepishly.

"You never were good with words, were you? But you can say the best things at the right times, and I'm depending on that leading ability of yours to summon the words for today."

Harry felt that she knew he hadn't prepared anything to say. He also had a feeling that her comment on his 'leading ability' was a jabbing comment on his recent lack of use for it.

"Speaking of people who are good with words," she said coyly, "what was Mr. Malfoy doing with you? And would you happen to know why Slughorn was expecting him?"

Harry frowned, thinking of what to say. He decided on the story he gave to Madam Pomfrey, just to keep things consistent. "I read his article this morning, and after I received your letter, I thought he might want to attend. I found him in his flat, drowning in letters. He seemed... shaken by a few of them, so I took him to see Madam Pomfrey," he explained, trying carefully to sound honest. "And here we are."

A strange smile spread on McGonagall's face. "There's no need to lie, Mr. Potter. The camaraderie between you two is unexpected, but I should think not entirely uncalled for. You two are not as unlike as you seem." She peered at Harry over the rims of her glasses, reading his expression carefully.

Harry squirmed uneasily. "Camaraderie?" he asked, staring at her desk.

"Mmm. Yes, Mr. Potter. A student came to me to report the 'muggle men holding hands in front of the castle doors.' She didn't, of course, know who you were, even when the castle doors opened for you," McGonagall explained coolly, and Harry flushed.

"He's not that bad, you know. We get along well. And he really did need comforting," Harry explained.

The Headmaster grinned at him. "I see you're not denying that you lied. Or the handholding," she added, pushing up her glasses and leaning back.

"Well," Harry stammered. "I... What do you know?" he asked, suddenly not wanting to reveal more.

McGonagall chuckled. "Not much," she said. "But if there is something between you and Mr. Malfoy, I won't share it with anyone."

"It's all new," Harry blurted. "I don't even know what it is... But we're both, well, you know..."

"Mr. Potter." McGonagall held up a hand. "My silence does not require your confidence. Your relations are hardly my business," she reminded him.

"Oh. Sorry," Harry murmured.

"Though I doubt Slughorn will hold the same restraint with Mr. Malfoy," she informed him, warning lining her tone.

Harry pondered the thought, wondering what Slughorn wanted with Draco. "I don't know how he knew he was here. It was a last minute thing," Harry thought aloud. "I hope he's alright. He really was quite shaken this morning. He's talking about his anxiety since we woke—"

Harry blushed when he realized what he was saying, and McGonagall looked quite red, too. "It's not like that..." Harry mumbled, fighting the urge to hide his face. "Anyway, he's concerned about the article, I think."

The Headmistress cleared her throat. "I think you have an audience waiting for you, Mr. Potter." She still had a curious look on her face, and Harry frowned.

"Is there anything else, Headmistress?" he inquired, wondering what was going on in her head. She was looking at him like there was something else she wanted to say.

"How have you been keeping yourself busy, Mr. Potter? You've all but disappeared from the papers," she told him, meeting his eye steadily.

"For most people, wouldn't that be a good thing?" he countered, just as evenly. He was worried she would start to lecture him on a waste of potential or something else like that.

She narrowed her eyes. "Perhaps. But for the extraordinary, it might come off as slack."

So, it is another disappointment talk...

"Headmistress, I assure you, I've not been slacking off. I keep busy making furniture and helping at a wizarding orphanage," he replied, but he realized it did sound rather dull. "I'll be back in the papers soon enough."

"Because of Mr. Malfoy?"

Harry frowned. "More or less. Is that a problem? We're working on a project together." He wondered where this was going.

"Hm. *Project*. Well, I wish you well, Mr. Potter. And I hope to hear from you in the papers soon," she added. "Shall I escort you to the Great Hall?"

"Thank you, Headmistress."

They left the office, and Harry allowed himself to swim in memories of the school as he made his way through the familiar halls. Instead of entering through the wide doors of Great Hall, however, she led him through a back door that led to the teacher's tables in the front.

The room fell silent when she approached the table. She stood in front of them all with a straight posture, looking out at her students with a fierce but matronly gaze. Harry stood behind her, and in front of him he saw a room of unfamiliar faces. He realized that the sixth and seventh years had probably been at Hogwarts when he was, but they were so grown now he couldn't recognize any of them.

A glance to either side of him showed no sign of either Slughorn or Draco, and he felt his gut twist in worry.

With all the attention on McGonagall, she took a moment to speak.

"Students," she announced, her voice under a sonorous spell. "In the wake of the recent tragedy, I believe that we could all use a bit of comfort. Harry Potter has come to speak to us, as I have reason to believe he can bring us hope and humor." She turned to nod at Harry. "Mr. Potter."

There was a murmur throughout the room—and of course there was; Harry was still the Boy Who Lived. He couldn't help but feel strange standing in front of the Hall, not among the students in their Hogwarts robes, but above them. He held his wand to his throat. "*Sonorous*." Then, he stepped forward to stand where McGonagall had been.

"Erm, hello," Harry greeted them with pursed lips and an awkward nod. There was a small chorus of giggling, and he dipped his head. "Laugh all you like," he told them, "but I think it takes practice to be able to stand in front of all of you like this. I'm not used to my voice sounding like this!"

There was some more laughter, and Harry smiled, feeling more comfortable. "I'm glad that you can laugh, though. That's good, that's coping. That's moving on. It shows you all have spirit, and you have hope." He looked around the room, his eyes resting on the Gryffindor table for a moment, and he felt a swell of nostalgia.

"I haven't been here much since the War ended," he told them. "I came a few times to help rebuild, and it was hard on me. This castle had been a good home to me, and it was hard to come here, to be home, and see it ripped apart like that. And I think that if we hadn't laughed when we rebuilt it," he paused, taking a moment to look at the pillars he had repaired, "this place wouldn't have been the same. It never will be, of course, but laughter is an essential part of recovery."

He saw a few students across the hall exchange glances, and he saw that they were the older ones. The ones who had been here for the war.

"For those of you who lost someone during the attacks, don't feel afraid to laugh. It's not a bad thing. You deserve to laugh, to be happy, to move on and heal. Sacrificing yourself to worry and sadness and loss does nothing." He told them, remembering his own days spent wallowing in despair after the war.

"And before any of you ask," he said, meeting eyes with a group of bright-eyes Ravenclaws, "allowing yourself to laugh isn't forgetting. Mourning is good, but moping isn't. When people tell you to remember, it doesn't mean you warp your life and make it a shrine to whatever trauma occurred.

"That leaves you with nightmares, insanity, and depression... Take it from me, the guy who killed Voldemort." He laughed wryly. "It takes a while for your life not to revolve around it. But you have to move on and live in the present. Your past is a part of you, but it's not you. You need to take the pieces of your past that are useful, and use them to make yourself up again. Like we did when we rebuilt this place.

"And I'm sure plenty of you have read the harms of ignoring your past," he added.

The older students, most of the Ravenclaws, some of the Slytherins, and a smattering of the remaining houses nodded in agreement. It seemed like many people had read Pennom's article.

"So you know all that," he said to them.

"But back to the topic of loss. It's something I'm familiar with. I grew up an orphan, and over the course of my childhood, I lost many adults that I looked up to. For those of you who lost parents, relatives, aunts, uncles, friends... I know what it feels like. You can talk to me, really. I'm not that big of a deal, once you get to know me," he added, and there was more shy laughter.

"Several children were made orphans after the attack, and that breaks my heart. I spend a lot of my time at Madam Humpop's orphanage, and she tells me that there will be six more children arriving after the attack. That's six children, younger versions of all of you, who have nowhere else to go. I hope that none of you are among the numbers. If you are... Please, come talk to me.

"I'm not all that great in front of crowds, and I don't really know what to say now that could help. But I want you to know that you can pull through this, and there are good people working to stop whoever started this mess.

"Thank you," he choked, stepping away from the center of attention. He felt the need to melt into the shadows all of a sudden.

McGonagall took his place. "Mr. Potter will be waiting in the side room for any of you that wish to speak to him. One at a time," she added. She turned around, and guided Harry towards the room that he had been taken to when he had been chosen for the Triwizard Tournament.

He felt stuffy, and a little dazed, just as he had then. The small fireplace was flickering, and she said something about fetching a few particular students first. He didn't quite hear. He was staring into that fire. Being in the room made him think of Cedric, of Voldemort... and his thoughts went from there.

"M-Mr. Potter?" A small voice asked.

Harry snapped out of his stupor, and saw that a small-looking Ravenclaw was standing in front of him. "Oh. Hi, there. I didn't notice you," he said, smiling as warmly as he could.

"That's okay," she replied, slowly sitting on the floor and crossing her legs under her robes. She was probably only a second or third year, he guessed.

"What's your name?" he asked her. He decided to sit down on the floor with her, just so they could be level.

"Amanda Hitch," she replied. "My mum and dad were muggles. My sister is seven. She was there when they were killed," she explained. Her voice was dry, but broken, he realized. She must have explained this to a lot of people in the past few days.

"I'm sorry," Harry replied. "You've probably had a lot of people ask you about this. Do you have a home to go to, now that... well..."

She sat up a little straighter. "Our other muggle relatives couldn't take us. So, we're going to the orphanage," she explained, and he realized her reason for wanting to talk to him. She didn't want to talk about her feelings or ask how to get over her losses.

"You want to know what it's like there?" Harry asked her. Her blue eyes widened, and she nodded eagerly.

Harry told her about the orphanage, about Madam Humpop and her matronly manners and her Luna Lovegood apparel. He told her about Kara and Tanner, and Seth and Ebele, and all the others. He promised her that it was fun there, and it was happy, and it was nothing like the terribly sad orphanages one reads about in books.

Once she had her fill, she stood up and bowed a little. "Thank you, Harry. Can I call you Harry?" she asked him shyly.

"Of course, Amanda. I'll see you this summer, at the orphanage." It did not sound nearly as glum as it might have, coming out of another context.

Next, an older Slytherin boy came in. His grief was different from Amanda's—his shoulders were slumped over and his eyes were dark with pain. He saw Harry waiting for him on the floor, and he sat down across from him.

"Mr. Potter. My name is Edwin Pellon. I'm a sixth year Slytherin. My mother was a pureblood, my father was a half-blood and a squib. They killed my mother, not my father," he said as soon as he had sat down on the warm ground. There was rage in his voice, and Harry had a feeling that no one had asked him about the event.

"My father owled me the night she was killed. It was only three days ago," he made a laughing sound that was half-sob. "He told me about what happened. How they came in, and they cast the Imperius curse on him, and they made him strike the first few blows."

Harry watched as tears streamed down the boy's face, and he slumped forward even more. "He said it was the first time he had felt magic in his body. The first time he had felt power. He said that if it weren't for the Imperius' emotionless bliss... he would have been happy." Edwin looked up and met Harry's eye. "What kind of a man says that? About hurting his own wife?"

He wasn't done talking. "I didn't want to go home and see him. I'm not going to, either. I can't forgive him. They poisoned him, didn't they? They came in with their Dark and they poisoned him. And no one expects me to care, because they think that just because I'm a Slytherin, I won't care. They think I'm Dark, too." He spat out the last words, and began to sob.

In that moment, Harry saw Draco in Edwin. He slid across the floor, and held the sobbing boy in a comforting embrace.

"You're not Dark, Edwin. Your father doesn't know what he's talking about, and you've a right to be angry. And I think it's a shame that no one has listened to you yet," Harry said assuringly, and Edwin let out a louder sob. He stroked the boy's back.

"I don't know how I can help you, because I haven't been where you are. But I believe you, and I know someone who can help. Do you know the name Draco Malfoy?" he asked him.

Edwin took a breath. "Yeah. He wrote the article that everyone's been buzzing about."

"Wait for me after everyone else has gone, and I'll introduce you to him," Harry told him, and Edwin looked up. Some of the grief was gone, but it was replaced with determination.

"Thank you, Mr. Potter," he said, standing up, obviously reluctant to leave. "There's a fair bit more waiting for you," he added as he stepped out the door, his dark eyes puffy and red.

About a dozen more students came through, telling Harry about a sibling they had lost, or an adult they loved that had died. Harry listened to every one of them, and each child's sorrow broke his own heart.

They all felt so alone. They all were so lost.

By the end of it, Harry was more determined than ever to go through with the publicity campaign. Not just with Luna's clothes for the orphans, and not just with the coming-out article with Draco. He knew what he wanted to do next, what the next article would be...

He would still need Draco's help, of course.

Then, he realized... *Where was Draco?*

It Takes A Lot To Know

Chapter Notes

This chapter is far shorter than normal, but only because it was originally supposed to be part of *Lost Children*. It took its own direction, though, and I like it better this way. I feel like the characters and the storyline have finally fallen into place now, and the story feels much less choppy. I hope you like this one as much as I did; it's probably my favorite.

The chapter title is based off of the "It Takes A Lot To Know A Man" by Damien Rice, because it's the song that I've been listening to the most while writing this. It works for this chapter.

Draco felt trapped in Slughorn's office. The Slytherin had never taken much interest in him before, and he didn't know what the man wanted now. Or how he had known Draco would be arriving.

He had been sitting at the man's desk for nearly half an hour now, swapping pleasantries. He didn't know why the old professor was beating around the bush—there were only a few reasons that he could want to see Draco, and none of them had to do with the weather or whatever else the old man was jabbering about.

Draco wanted *out*. The wolves could hide in every corner of the dungeons, he remembered. Places like this weren't safe for him. Not anymore.

"What do you want, Slughorn?" he finally snapped, interrupting the old man's monologue about decorating. "You have to want something from me, you always do. You're famous for that. So, what is it? My writing?" he demanded, glaring daggers across the desk.

Slughorn laughed. "Oh, good. I was worried you would actually suffer through all this. You're not boring, after all." He smiled, and stood up, pulling out a large, dark bottle. "Are you a fan of firewhiskey, Draco?" he asked.

Draco grimaced, and shook his head. *I'll only suffer through it again for a specific person, and he isn't you.* "No, sir. I'm not much for drink."

"Pity," Slughorn replied, placing the fancy-looking bottle on the shelf. "For another occasion, then." He returned back to his desk, and leaned back leisurely, with a glitter in his eye. "You know, Draco," he said casually, "I don't know why I didn't see your talent earlier. Of course, your potions essays were decent, and your father was an excel—"

"Don't mention my father. Lucius is rotting in Azkaban like he deserves, and I *won't* be compared to him" Draco interrupted.

"Oh, good. So you don't share his Dark tendencies, then?" Slughorn waited for Draco to shake his head in earnest disgust. "Excellent, then. No wonder Harry trusts you." He smiled pleasantly, but Draco could see the watchful look in his eye, waiting for Draco to reveal something.

"Sir?" Draco returned the kindred smile, but not forgetting the piercing gaze. He found that in situations like this, the ice was helpful. Waiting for the wolves to strike only made it easier to freeze. It was a bad coping method, as the muggle therapist had told him, because ice melts and shatters.

Draco wasn't concerned about that right now.

"Oh, come *on*, boy. I had a pair of eyes on you when you and Harry ambled up to the castle. You were arm and arm, and even from my location I could see the look in his eyes. I of all people should know, of course, the difference between boyish camaraderie and something else." Slughorn was smiling jovially now.

"I'm afraid I don't know what you're implying, sir," Draco said coolly, narrowing his eyes and folding his hands on the table. Slughorn mimicked the look.

"Oh, come on. I know you're Pennom—we all do. And Pennom happened to write a very *intriguing* piece on gay rights the other week, didn't he?" Slughorn raised an eyebrow.

"And *Pennom* will be the first to tell you that it's unfair assumptions like *that* which are setting the cause backward," Draco retorted, pulling his hands back onto his lap.

Slughorn laughed, but Draco wasn't sure what he found to be so funny. He waited for the old man to reply.

"I told you, I should know, Malfoy. I was young once, too, you know." Slughorn tossed Draco a wink, and he could have gagged.

Slughorn, young and *gay*?

"Don't be so surprised. Isn't it clear that there's been no room in my life for women?"

Draco didn't want him to go on. He was already on edge. The calming draught could only do so much for his anger and disgust, as much as it had kept the wolves at bay.

"Where are you going with this?" Draco demanded. "You're playing around with words. I don't like that. Words have *meaning*, Slughorn, and you're dallying around with them like they're toys to pass the time."

"Oh, *hello*, Mr. Pennom," Slughorn laughed again, and Draco was feeling greener by the second. "Fine, I'll cut to the chase. I don't really care if you're with Harry or not. But I do care about you're writing. I can see you're going to be big, my boy, and I regret not seeing it

sooner. I think you could carry a new revolution on your shoulders, become the dawn of a new way of thinking, and I want to be on *your* side of history when you start making waves."

Draco audibly snorted. He couldn't restrain himself, and he didn't want to, either. "Professor Slughorn," Draco laughed, mimicking the man's tone, "you're too late. Already, nearly twenty articles of mine have been published. I've already been discovered, and I didn't need sleazy connections like you to get there. I've started making waves, and soon, my name will be cleared. People will see me for who I really am—and I am *nothing* like my father." Draco stood up. "I don't see what you have to offer me, Professor. I have a plan, I have connections, and I even have Ha—"

He froze when he realized what he was about to say. "I think you've heard what you wanted to hear, haven't you? I think I'm free to leave now." He turned to exit, and Slughorn didn't protest.

He was still digesting the meat Draco had tossed him—and like any other snake, it would take a while.

Once he was out the door, Draco realized he didn't regret his words. Perhaps it was the calming draught, but it wasn't interesting prey to the wolves. Now that he was back at Hogwarts, where his anxiety had stricken him most often, he saw that he was much more in touch with the horrid beasts than usual.

He needed to get out of the dungeon, but he couldn't force himself to enter the Great Hall—there were too many memories, too many people, *too many*...

The further he was from the dungeons, the faster his ice melted. He found himself assaulted with sentimental memories, both good and bad. The good were things untainted by his father's influence—lessons, books, portraits. Draco was particularly fond of memories of things like the way the sunlight shafted through a classroom's window, or the way a spell lit the air, or a smile that brightened the hall.

As a student, he had only been an observer of the other happy things, like relationships, cheerful interactions, or inside jokes. His childhood had been based off of fear, anger, and jealousy. But things had started to change after the war... Once he realized he was independent of his father, and once he had realized he wasn't alone.

And Draco was an observer now, too. He watched as his memories of his lost childhood drifted away. He wasn't lost anymore, he realized. He had a life, a purpose, and friendships.

He continued to let the memories go, one by one. Until he reached a certain corridor, and stood in front of the door of a specific bathroom.

Sectumsempra!

Draco shuddered. *Not yet. I can't do that one alone. Not again.*

He could feel the wolves snapping at the back of his mind, snapping at the memories of Harry and how they had once hated each other. They hurt and they were real and they were

justified, but Draco didn't want to believe them. They were over now, and they didn't affect him anymore.

So, Draco ran.

He ran back through the hallways, towards the Great Hall. He ran with the wolves on his heels, but he wasn't afraid, because the calming draught was still searing his veins. Or maybe it was something else. Maybe it was the memories, the acceptance, the way that he was looking again and not forgetting. Maybe this was the acceptance *Pennom* had written about. That *Draco* had written about.

And when he made it back to the Great Hall, it was empty, and Draco had worn the wolves out. He saw a Harry-shaped silhouette across the hall—and he knew it was Harry-shaped because he remembered all the times at Hogwarts he had watched that frame—that was standing in the light of a doorway.

"Harry!" he called.

The silhouette lifted its head. "Draco!" he called back.

Draco didn't run, but his feet carried himself there soon enough. Harry was there, waiting for him.

"It's been hours, Draco. I was worried something had happened," Harry muttered.

Draco stepped into the light of the doorway so he could see the other man's face. There was no trace of anger there, so he didn't worry. He didn't have the ice to hold back the worry, anyway.

"I'm sorry," Draco replied. "I was remembering." He smiled, as if that explained everything, though he doubted Harry would understand.

"I was consoling students for their losses. There was a Slytherin boy that wanted to talk to you, but he had to leave. You were gone so long," Harry replied. His arms were crossed, and he wasn't looking at Draco.

"Why did you wait?"

"I wasn't waiting. I was *remembering*," Harry replied, but he flashed a look at Draco that said he *had* been waiting, too.

"Well, I'm okay. Much better, in fact. I think I needed to come here," Draco confessed.

Harry nodded. "I did, too. It made me realize what I wanted." He faced Draco again, and continued. "Helping those kids... It made me remember what makes me feel *alive*. I want to help people, Draco. I don't want them to feel alone."

"So, what will you do?" Draco asked him, watching the flickering firelight paint his face different shades of gold and pink. That was another kind of good memory.

"I want you to write another article. About the orphans. Awareness, again, yeah? And I'll do something to go along with the article, to fundraise. Luna's clothes are nice, but not everyone wants orange and rainbow pants," Harry explained.

He pulled his face out of the firelight, and Draco was almost disappointed, but he reached for Draco's hand in the privacy of the darkness. It was just as good.

"What were you thinking? A gala?" Draco asked, as they walked towards the exit of the Great Hall. He looked to the side, and the enchanted ceiling provided just enough starlight for Draco to see the pensive expression on Harry's face.

"Actually, yes. How did you know?" he asked, squeezing Draco's hand. Draco squeezed back, as they were exiting the Great Hall.

"It was the first thing I could think of, but that just goes to show for what I grew up with," Draco replied, finding a smile quirking at his lips again. He swung their hands a bit.

"I really was worried, you know. I was thinking how I was going to need your help... And then, I realized you weren't there. Edwin and I waited around for you, and I ended up talking to him and telling him what you might say. But I realized I didn't *know*," Harry confessed. The final set of doors swung open, and they were standing out in the open again. It was freezing, and Draco wished he had brought a warmer coat.

"We'll come back to talk to him. There's still some more things I need to remember," he replied, taking the first few steps on the path that would lead them off of Hogwarts grounds.

He didn't need to ask; he had a very strong feeling that he and Harry would be doing this together.

"Draco," Harry whispered.

"Harry."

"After you had the panic attack, I realized there's still a lot I don't know about you. I know the Malfoy from Hogwarts, but I don't know the Draco who I fell asleep with last night. And I realized that *you* hardly know *me*," Harry commenced the hand-swinging again, and he sighed. "I feel very close to you, but I don't know why. I want to *know* you."

Draco nodded, and he moved closer to brush shoulders with Harry. The stones beneath their feet glowed silver under the star-and-moon-light, and their frozen breaths came out in puffs like powdered crystals. It was yet another good memory.

"I changed a lot after the War," Draco responded, after a long silence. "We all did. That's why this is so easy, Harry. We share that experience, those memories"—he thought of the bathroom and the *sectumsempra*—"but there's still that feeling of something new. We're still uncertain of who we are, without the War to define us."

Harry nodded. "I suppose."

"So, what I'm saying is, you can't really *know* me, and I can't really know *you*, either," Draco murmured. "We haven't finished remembering, but we also haven't finished growing. We won't be done for a while yet."

Harry didn't respond, but instead let go of Draco's hand so he could hold him by the waist as they continued walking. Draco returned the gesture, and they continued on in silence.

Soon—*too soon*, he thought—they were out of Hogwarts' grounds, and they were free to apparate apart. But, they didn't. They stood there for a few minutes longer, contemplating the past twenty-four hours.

"I'll need a few days," Harry said out of the blue.

"Okay."

"To remember. And to plan. And to talk to some people." He broke away, to Draco's chagrin. He briefly touched his hand before separating completely.

"When I see you again, in a few days, we can talk about the article. And the gala. And each other."

"Okay, Harry."

"Goodnight, Draco."

"Goodnight."

Draco took in the last moment of Harry in front of him, shimmering in the crystalline light. Then, he disappeared away, all like smoke and mirrors. Draco hoped he had been more than smoke and mirrors.

He disappeared back to his own home, in the flat above the record shop in Carkitt market. He wouldn't need to spend the next few days remembering like Harry did. He would spend it learning. Learning about himself, about Draco *and* Pennom, when they were the same person all at once, to everyone.

And, then, Harry could know a little more, because Draco would, too.

Learning

Harry was halfway through his second day of rest after the speech. After the article, Hogwarts, after Draco. It was a lot to process, and he was taking it slowly.

Word had leaked out slower than usual into The Prophet, and it hadn't been until today that his speech at Hogwarts had been covered. As it hadn't meant much for anyone other than the students, it hadn't been covered extensively. There was a picture of him and Draco just after they apparated into Hogsmeade. Draco was chuckling, and Harry had smacked him lightly on the arm. The caption was *Harry Potter and Adam Pennom (Read: Draco Malfoy) Reminisce*.

It was innocent enough, and Harry had decided to cut out the picture and hold onto it. It was nice.

Though he hadn't noticed there was any reporter then. By the castle, yes... But there had also been a student, whom had reported to the Headmistress. There hadn't been any reporters to see the speech, however. The short article had only covered what had been relayed to it by students.

Harry hadn't spent *all* day thinking about the article, of course. He had spent most of the day before at the orphanage, and so today he had spent several hours working on his next new piece. It wasn't a practical piece, like his furniture; this one was just for aesthetic. It was just a sculpture, a tree that he had decided to carve a face into. Literally, this time.

But now, he was working on something else entirely. Or, rather, *someone*. Ron had come over for tea, and he wanted to know everything about Harry's life in the past however long they had sparsely spoken. It was directly proportionate to the amount of time Ron had been with Padma, and Harry hadn't been keeping track of that.

He loved Ron to death, and he still thought of him as his best friend. But the man could be awfully stubborn at times, and exceptionally thick. He had inelegantly avoided the mention of Hermione throughout the entire visit, content to babble about Quidditch and Auror work. But there was something clearly on his mind.

After a long period of time, he finally spat it out through a bite of chocolate biscuit.

"I spoke with Ginny yesterday. About your, er, love life." He announced all at once, his face immediately going tomato red. He set his tea cup down on the table, trying to avoid Harry's gaze.

Harry wouldn't have any of it. He watched him closely. "And?" He asked nonchalantly.

"She said that you, ah... that you like men," Ron mumbled. "That you're not actually into women," he specified, looking up. His blue eyes were opened wide, and he looked as if he still didn't believe it.

“Which is true,” Harry replied with a blasé expression. He didn't know what he could say without aggravating Ron. He wasn't sure how he felt about this kind of thing...

“Don't make me say it, Harry...” Ron muttered.

Harry's eyebrows shot up. “Say what?” He demanded. Was Ron actually *that* uncomfortable with him being gay? *Or asexual. Whatever I am...*

“That you *lied* to Ginny! And to me, and the rest of us!” He cried. His lips were pursed and his face was redder than before, and he leaned back into his chair with a huff.

“Oh.” Harry hadn't been expecting that. “Ron, it wasn't like that...” He continued. “*I* didn't even know then.”

Ron frowned. “I didn't ever even think that you were gay, Harry. Not even once did I suspect!” He exclaimed. “And then I sit down with Ginny, and she goes about it all casually, like she's known it forever.” He shook his head, apparently flabbergasted.

“She knew before I did, I think. She sent me to a muggle gay bar. And it just clicked.” Harry said it as if it were just a comment, but Ron took the statement to be of much more value.

“It just *clicked*?” He repeated. “Bloody hell, Harry... How does something like that *click*? How did you make it through *puberty* without noticing?” Ron was blustering, and he had apparently been thinking of this for a while.

“Did *nothing* tip you off?” He demanded.

Harry felt his cheeks go red as he thought about Draco, and how he had obsessed over him for a good portion of his adolescence. He didn't think that was a safe answer, though, so he went for something more quintessential and less specific.

“Not really, Ron,” he murmured, “I actually thought it was normal to stare in the Quidditch locker rooms. And being seeker, I had plenty of opportunities to *look*,” he teased.

Ron looked absolutely mortified. “Y-you didn't... stare at *me*, did you?”

Harry groaned and rolled his eyes. “Are you concerned that I was molesting you with my *eyes*?” he demanded. When Ron's expression didn't change, he pressed on. “No, Ron. I suppose you weren't that special. My eyes were busy on other people.” He huffed.

Ron's face twisted, and he looked somewhat disappointed. “Am I not good looking?” He asked, nearly crossing his eyes.

“Ron,” Harry muttered. “Weren't you just complaining about the opposite?”

He didn't respond this time, either. He looked as though he were pouting, actually.

“You're terrible, Ron,” Harry joked. “Pennom would love to have a word with you about it, I'm sure!”

Ron looked up, and he grimaced. “Yeah, I bet he would, wouldn't he? Considering he's *Malfoy*.” Ron spat.

This time, Harry rolled his eyes and moaned in frustration. “Oh, come on. He's not that bad now, you know.” He insisted.

“And I bet you'd know, wouldn't you? You're pretty chummy with Malfoy now, aren't you?” Ron was acting like a child, and Harry hoped he knew it.

“Oh, grow up, Ronald.” A new voice said, and both Harry and Ron spun to seek it out. It was Hermione, her head showing in the flames of Harry's fireplace.

“Hermione!” They both shouted at her.

“What are you doing here?” Ron demanded. He looked cross, and apparently ready to leave.

“Oh, I was here to see Harry,” she replied with a haughty tone that Harry wasn't used to hearing. “But if he's currently holding such distasteful company, I'll *gladly* come later.”

“No, that's quite alright, Hermione.” Ron insisted, and Harry was surprised to see that he was being reasonable. “You come right on through, and I'll leave instead. That's how we did it *last* time, wasn't it?”

Harry buried his face in his hands. This was dreadful.

“Stop it, you two! You're being ridiculous.” He snapped, glaring at both of them. “Hermione, get in here now. Ron, don't you dare move. We are sorting this childish nonsense out right now.”

They both looked mildly frightened, so they both obliged. Hermione stepped through the floo and sat down without another word.

“You two have been acting like idiots for the past however many months it's been,” he told them. “It's made my life absolutely miserable, and it needs to stop. We've all had fights before, and there's nothing different about this one.”

“Except maybe for the fact that we're all adults now, and that we should know better,” he added with extra sting.

They both flinched, and he nodded. “I want you two to apologize to each other. Just because you're not a couple anymore doesn't mean we can't all be friends again.”

Ron spoke up first. “I'm sorry, Hermione. I've been a right git lately.” Harry was satisfied to hear that he didn't blame Padma, but he secretly did himself.

“I'm sorry, too, Ron,” Hermione apologized. “It's not your fault that we had a rough breakup.” Harry knew that she blamed Padma, too.

Ron nodded. “And after my talk with you the other day, Harry, I broke up with Padma. I realized she had been ruining my life. She wouldn't even let me talk to my own *family*,” he

announced. “That was what did it. I told her I was going to see my sister, and she blew up at me.”

Harry and Hermione didn’t know what to say.

“Who knew,” Harry said at last. “She was rather quiet in school, wasn't she?”

Hermione nodded. “You never know what can happen to people. Sometimes they snap, and sometimes they grow stronger.” She resolved.

They all looked at each other, and sat in silence for a bit. They hadn't been together, just the three of them, in a while. And when they had, it was Ron and Hermione, and then Harry, the third wheel. The dynamics were different now.

“So,” Ron said at last. “You think Malfoy’s stronger, then?”

“Yeah,” Harry murmured, remembering the Draco he had recently started to know—the Draco who was endearing and soft spoken, who hid under a mask of ice, who had risked so much to be Penom. “He’s become quite impressive.”

Hermione snorted, and then giggled, and Harry became aware of the dreamy look on his face. Ron shook his head. “Wait, is he gay, too?” He demanded.

Then Harry started laughing, as well, and soon they all were holding their sides. It was like old times again, and they stayed together in Harry’s sitting room for another several hours. They rebound their old ties, and caught up with each other on their lives. Harry spoke of the orphanage, Hermione of her Ministry work, and Ron had several exciting stories of his Auror work out in the field.

It had become late, and Ron had to go home and see his parents. Mrs. Weasley was still upset with him for having seen so little of him in past months, especially when she discovered the full extent of the reasoning.

Harry and Hermione relaxed in the warmth of the fireplace, the room feeling quiet and a little empty with the new addition of Ron gone so soon. But they had other things to talk about anyway, and they didn't think he needed to hear them.

“I saw Draco’s article. It was beautiful,” Hermione spoke after a long time of silence, spent drinking tea and watching the flames.

“It was, wasn’t it?” Harry replied, his words not quite depicting how beautiful he thought it had been.

“Though, it may have slightly deviated from my original plan,” she added wryly. “He wasn’t supposed to reveal his identity for a long while.”

“The timing was right,” Harry told her softly. “You can’t tell a writer what to write, anyway. He would have done what he wanted to.”

She sighed loftily, sounding defeated. "I know," she pursed her lips. "But I had it all thought out. If only he had just written a few other articles as Pennom, writing about you... He could have kept on writing and building Pennom's reputation, while Terry and I wrote articles building Draco's, and it all would have lined up perfectly..." She trailed off, frowning. Leave it to Hermione to be wistfully remiss about plans gone off track.

Harry chuckled. "Pennom wouldn't write petty articles about me. And even if they were in his usual fashion—not that the last one was like any of the others—it would have been nothing like him to focus on a particular person as a subject. It wouldn't have worked."

"You're right." She admitted. "I... I just had this grandiose plans of you and Draco becoming shining images in the press together. I could see you blowing up the entire Wizarding World—metaphorically, of course—if it was revealed all at once that you were gay, and Draco was Pennom, and he had been writing for you. It would have been a huge scandal—"

Harry cut her off. "Scandal, Hermione? You sound like a journalist now." He teased her, but he was curious. He watched her with a thoughtful expression as she slowly turned red.

"Oh, I'm no good at this!" She exclaimed, pressing her face into her hands. After a moment, she looked up at Harry like a deer in the headlights. "I can't keep things from you! I've been seeing Terry Boot... romantically." She confessed.

Harry frowned. "What's that got to do with anything?" He asked her.

She groaned and growled all at once. "Oh, that's right... You don't read the papers much." She shook her head slowly. "Terry Boot is the head of celebrity coverage for The Prophet. Once I started going out with him, we agreed to keep you out of the papers. I thought it would help, and it did." She explained.

Harry was confused. "Hermione," he addressed her slowly, gathering the right words. "You're with him because you love him, right? Not because you want to help me?" He asked.

She became very flustered. "Harry!" She exclaimed. "I can't believe that you'd... you'd accuse me of selling myself out like that! It's like you don't even know me!"

"Maybe I don't. You've been keeping a relationship secretly from me for months," he told her.

"I'm sorry, Harry. I didn't want you to be mad."

"I'm not mad. Not if you're happy with him," he told her.

"Thank you, Harry." She said, calming down and picking up her teacup. She rewarmed it with a charm, and she stared at it for a long moment, waiting for Harry to speak.

"I spent the night with Draco. The day after the attack." He thought that perhaps to be even, he should be open with her, too.

Hermione's eyes rose from her tea, and she stared at him. "Really?" She asked.

“Really. Well, I suppose. We didn't have sex, you see,” Harry told her, wondering how to phrase what had happened. “We ended up talking. And we determined that I’m asexual. He promised that he wouldn't ask anything of me, after that.”

Hermione took a moment to digest the information. “I’m happy for that, Harry. So, are you two together, now? I know it hasn't been long, but...”

“But what?” Harry inquired, curious to know what she was thinking.

“Well, correct me if I’m wrong, but I think you’ve fancied each other since school. I was expecting this, actually, minus the asexual part. But the rest I had factored into the plan.” She spoke calmly, without the passion or the remorse from earlier. She had become very matter-of-fact all of a sudden.

“Oh.” It was all Harry could muster. She was right, he supposed. “Well, we’re still figuring things out,” he managed.

She smiled at him. “That’s wonderful, Harry. Do keep me updated.” She had a familiar look in her eye, and Harry realized that it was the same look he had seen when he had thought he fancied Cho Chang, and she had encouraged him. And then again when she had thought he wanted Ginny.

He hoped that he needn’t question her matchmaking skills this time around.

Draco had spent the past few days wandering around the city, in both muggle and wizarding parts. It was the first time in a very long time he had gone out without glamours, and it was strangely freeing.

It was also terrifying, of course, but he tried his best to ignore that.

And for the most part, he had no reason to be terrified. Either people didn’t notice him, or they waved a hello at him, or they stopped to tell him how they admired his work. He hadn’t expected any of these things, but he was slowly growing used to them.

It was like being out in the light for the first time (and really, it was his first time fully in the Light). He had nowhere to hide, but neither did anyone else. The wolves were skittish and unsure, as they had nothing to use against him, and his ice was having trouble staying frozen.

He felt surprisingly calm, out and about amongst the other wizards in Diagon Alley. It wasn’t much different from his shop, and most of the faces he recognized as customers anyway. There were even a few people from his training at St. Mungos, though he tried to avoid their gazes, as he hadn’t been in nearly a week, and had just sent in a letter informing them he would no longer be continuing his training. It was like a weight off of his shoulders. He didn’t need that anymore.

He had proven himself... Hadn’t he?

The doubt popped up when he had walked past Florean Fortescue's Ice Cream Parlour, and a family had begun to stare at him. He recognized them as a well-known Light Pureblooded family, and they were obviously skeptical of him. Their older two children had begun to whisper to their parents, and Draco heard the words coward and follower.

He didn't even have to guess to know that they were talking about him. He stopped walking as the wolves sprung at the new opportunity to tear him down, but he visualized chasing them away with another imaginary patronus charm. Once his head had cleared, he realized their whispering had grown louder and more urgent, and people were staring.

He was standing in the middle of the street, breathing heavily and staring blankly ahead. *I would stare, too*, he thought grimly.

He turned and gave a sharp look at the family, which froze their conversation. He nodded at them, and made a spur-of-the-moment decision he wouldn't have made but few days earlier.

He strode into the ice cream parlour, pausing a moment to look at the familiar warm colors and sweet smells. He rarely came here as a child—once a year until his third or fourth year at Hogwarts—but he still had fond memories. It was part of the continuing theme of the past few days, to revisit old memories.

Not to remember, but to learn.

What Draco learned when he entered the ice cream shop was that he loved the smell of sweet things, and that he had missed bright hues like orange and red, and that no one had expected neither Draco nor Pennom to be having ice cream cravings.

“Hello, young man,” the woman behind the counter, whom he had assumed to be Mrs. Fortescue, greeted him. “What can I get for you today?” she asked.

“I’ll need a moment to think, I’m afraid,” he told her with a half-rueful smile. “I haven’t had ice cream in years.”

She laughed like a babbling brook, and shook her head as she waved a scoop. “I should think not! You’re so thin.”

Draco blushed, and asked, “Would you recommend anything?” But only after he had noticed that he wouldn't be getting away easy with any plain white flavors. He vaguely remembered his therapist telling him to *step out the comfort zone*. He hadn't realized before that he had a comfort zone when it came to food.

But he figured that out fairly quickly as he began to feel very stressed and cornered, having told himself he was going to eat something not prepared by himself. It didn't help that all the ice creams were very brightly colored, and there was no plain vanilla.

“We have some interesting seasonal flavors. Would you like a sample?” The woman asked him.

He shook his head violently. “No, thank you. What are the seasonal flavors?”

“We have candy cane, chocolate peppermint, green peppermint, gingerbread, and sugar plum,” she told him cheerily.

“Christmas was over a month ago, though,” he told her with a frown.

“Well, there’s no need to be so persnickety, dear. They’re just flavors.” She retorted, appearing to be offended.

“My apologies, ma’am. I’ll take the green peppermint,” he requested, handing her a small handful of sickles. He chose the peppermint because it reminded him of Harry’s story of the enchanted shower (isn’t that odd to say), and it was all one color, which was a deep green that also reminded him of Harry.

He almost scowled as she served him ice cream, just because he realized he was being *endearing* again. *Does it never end?* He wondered.

Before he left, the woman called out to him, “Don’t mind the others, dear. I think you’re a wonderful writer.” He turned and stared at her with an open mouth for a moment, but then gave her a sharp nod of gratitude and strode away.

He cast a wary look towards the family before. He considered sitting down near them just to spite them, but he realized he had already done enough to risk pushing his anxiety over the edge any further.

Instead, he stopped to face them again, smiling at them with as much saccharine sweetness as he could muster. “The ice cream is delicious, isn’t it?” He asked cheerily. They just stared at him in shock, and he left leaving them looking like fools.

He kept on walking, feeling almost as confident as he had a few evenings ago when he dropped off his article and spoke with Cassius. As if summoned by the memory, he found himself in front of The Prophet’s main office.

He didn’t even think about it as he strode through the doors into the busy, tall-ceilinged building. His letters had been redirected to the office, and he decided that they had enough time to pick out any letters that he should read.

He saw that same awful receptionist at the desk. She looked rather frazzled—her hair was out of place and frizzy, dark circles were under her eyes, and she looked generally unwell.

“Oh. It’s *you*.” She snapped, looking up at Draco as he loomed over her desk. “I’m guessing you’re here for the letters. I’ve spent the past two days reading through *every. single. one.*” She closed her eyes, and took two rationed breaths. “I was supposed to be so much *more* than this,” she choked, speaking to herself.

Before she could start crying, Draco decided to get his letters. As much as a sap he had been becoming, he couldn’t muster any sympathy for her.

“Were there any noteworthy letters I should read?” He asked her.

She opened her eyes, which were now beginning to turn bloodshot red and slightly puffy. “A few,” she snarled at him, pulling out several pieces of mistreated parchment. “Sadly, I’ve had to swear to actually give you the good ones, and not just the nastiest hate mail I could find,” she sighed.

Draco blinked. “How thoughtful of you,” he muttered as he took the parchment from her, using the hand that wasn’t holding his ice cream. The receptionist was about to say something, but he disappeared on the spot before she could further frustrate him.

In a moment, he was standing in his kitchen again. He realized he spent most of his time there or in the shop—the all but unfurnished sitting area was lonely and dull, and a dark staircase sulked beneath it. He preferred the cheery, open light of the kitchen, and the window it provided. The only other room with a window was his bedroom, but it was also a little more lonely.

He stood next to his table, setting down the majority of the letters and taking another lick of the mint ice cream. He read the topmost letter.

Dear Mr. Malfoy,

My name is Edwin Pellon. I am in the midst of my sixth year at Hogwarts.

I recently met Mr. Harry Potter, and he advised that I speak with you, but you were apparently unavailable at the time. Mr. Potter did a fair job as a listener, but he lacked much relation to my current situation. He tells me that you might be more competent in that area.

My mother was a pureblood, and my father a squib. My mother was among the casualties of the attacks, killed by my father under the influence of the Imperius Curse. He claims to have enjoyed the experience, because he was able to feel magic.

Naturally, I am repulsed (though since calmed after speaking with Mr. Potter). No one has reached me after the tragedy because of my family’s Dark ties and my ties with Slytherin House. It is apparent that they cannot feel sympathy for me when they take me as a Dark wizard, which I am not.

Mr. Potter tells me you know something of redemption—which I have gathered myself, growing up hearing stories of your families (traitorous to both sides, so I hear) and then reading your writings. If you can find a second chance, I would like to see if I can as well.

If you could help me, Mr. Malfoy, I would forever be in your debt.

Yours in admiration,

Edwin Pellon

Draco frowned. He didn’t know what he could do for the boy besides offer to speak with him. Until then, he had no idea what the poor boy was going through, or by what means he could redeem himself.

Before he responded, he skimmed through the other letters. Three were simply “fan” letters from some very high-up Ministry officials, two were apologies from former schoolmates (though he had no idea what he had done to deserve it), and one particularly harsh critical note from another familiar name. He had a sneaking suspicion that it was the patron of the family who had been staring at him in Fortescue’s.

He sighed, remembering Harry’s words not to respond to fan or hate mail.

Edwin Pellon’s note was neither. He sat down to write him a note of console, and an offer to meet him.

After that, Draco learned that Pennom/Draco had more of a heart than either of them separately. He couldn’t help but wonder if it explained his recent sentimentality. Which reminded him, again, of Harry.

He hoped he was doing well with his remembering, and restrained himself from writing an owl to the other man, focusing on the matter at hand: Edwin.

Dear Edwin,

Thank you for your letter. I apologize for not being present to meet you the other night. I was busy reminiscing.

I do indeed know about redemption, or I am slowly learning. This is all very new to me, but I assure you—I know a lot about dealing with prejudiced assumptions. How pompous of me that must sound; after years of looking down on others and bullying them, after serving the Dark to harm muggleborns, here I am complaining of prejudice. I of all people deserve what I get, and I find myself lost in inexplicable gratitude for the grace I have been given as Pennom.

I doubt you have been as wicked as I. I hope not. There is still a chance for you, I’m sure.

For now, as hard as it seems, ignore your father. It does wonders, believe me. Do not be afraid to mourn your mother, but do not let her death destroy you.

That is all I can say for now. I am willing to rendezvous with you over your next Hogsmeade weekend. Inform me of that date, and we can make plans. Mr. Potter can or cannot attend, depending on your desires.

With best hopes,

Draco Malfoy

He signed the letter, tucking it into his pocket to be sent at the soonest opportunity. He picked up his colorful ice cream again, grateful for the charm that was keeping it frozen. He ate it slowly, deep in thought. When he had finished, it had grown dark, and he was tired. He decided it was best to clean up and go to bed.

Upon brushing his teeth in the mirror, he saw with horror that his tongue was still stained green, even *after* he had resisted the urge to cast the discoloring charm.

He could never win.

Kindred

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Harry,

Are you done remembering yet? I think four days has been long enough. I've spent the past two days running the shop, and it's gotten quite boring.

Perhaps you could drop by sometime today, and we could talk about your plans for the gala. Ha, I never thought I'd say that. You, planning a gala! Half of me wonders if you were even being serious.

Stop by anytime today. I'll be open.

Draco

Harry grinned at the letter. He had just spent the entire morning finishing the tree sculpture, but he had to admit he'd been wondering if and when Draco would ask to see him again. It had been surprisingly strange to spend four days without him. The mystic sentimentality he had felt the night they were at Hogwarts had since faded, at least on his part, and he was feeling slightly back to normal.

He had not forgotten the kiss, of course, or the lingering touches and promises of fair, romantic treatment. But once he'd given himself a few days to distance himself, his head felt clearer. He no longer felt as though he were tumbling into something with Draco too quickly, want it as he might.

He had needed the time for the logical part of his mind to take back over and to tell him that just because he had spent seven years at Hogwarts obsessing over Draco, and the years afterwards worrying for him, did not justify jumping into anything just because an emotional night had triggered *feelings*. He needed proof that it was more than just an old infatuation taking advantage of his loneliness.

But the minute he read the letter, he felt his heart skip a beat. He really did want to see Draco again, as much as the "logical" part of his mind told him he needed to stay away a while longer. Once that emotional part took over, he found himself thinking that his "logic" sounded like the self doubt he had felt that waking morning...

But be practical. He reminded himself, feeling like the third party to his own head. *You're there to talk about the gala with him. And it's hardly been two weeks since you met him again after the trials. This is still new; you still don't know him.*

But he had also spent his days away reading Pennom's articles, and he felt like that also gave him some sort of passage to knowing Draco's mind.

I'm hopeless. He thought dizzily, as he stepped outside to apparate to Draco's shop. He could apparate from the inside, of course, being the master to the wards, but he wanted to see if this was easier.

Snap, and he was standing inside of the record shop, feeling as though that had been much easier. He hadn't felt the need to apparate outside, as Draco had said he would be open.

"Hello." Draco greeted him, sitting up tall behind his counter. "You surprised me," he added.

"Sorry," Harry apologized, grateful that there was no one else in the shop to scare. It was completely devoid of customers, but there was some music playing softly in the background.

Draco must have noticed him tilting his head to listen. "Day Old Runes," he informed him. "One of my favorites, in case you wanted to know."

Harry smiled. "I think you might have mentioned it, actually," he replied.

"Oh. Well, I talk about my music a lot." Draco admitted with a shrug. "Do you want to go upstairs? I don't want to risk staying open another minute, or else I might have another middle aged witch coming in and asking where I keep my Celestina Warbeck..." He muttered, and Harry was humored to see him shiver in distaste.

"You really dislike her, don't you?" Harry asked with a smirk.

Draco turned towards the staircase, locking the door and extinguishing the lights with a wave of his wand. "Yes. I can't have anything so cheesy getting stuck in my head, you know," he replied. "Especially with how mushy I've been feeling around you lately."

Harry stopped. "About that, Draco."

Draco froze, and Harry could *feel* the ice rolling off of him. "What about it?" He asked, not turning around. Harry wasn't sure if he was feeling rage or fear roll off of the other man, but he decided that neither were proper emotions for what he was going to say.

Harry walked up close behind him, taking Draco by the arm like they had at Hogwarts. "Relax, I'm not going to tell you I changed my mind or anything." Harry assured him, intertwining their fingers through their already linked arms. "I just was wondering if you had seen the picture in *The Prophet*." He elaborated, choosing not to mention his "logical" mind's earlier protests to their relationship, as they seemed very far away and unrealistic to him now.

Draco laughed nervously, pulling out the newspaper cutting out of his shirt pocket once they had reached the top of the staircase and entered the dark sitting area. "Yeah. I really liked it."

Harry pulled him into the natural light of the kitchen, where he took out his own copy. "I kept mine, too," he whispered giddily. Draco laughed and squeezed his hand.

"You had me worried there, for a minute."

Harry pulled away. "You worry too much, you know." He told him, placing a hand on his shoulder. After a moment, he moved it up to feel the spot where Draco's pulse was beating,

slightly irregularly. "But, I still want to take this slow." He added. "It all feels strangely intimate."

Draco laughed, pulling away from Harry's hand. "Why?" He asked. "Because two weeks ago, you wouldn't have fathomed this?" He sounded slightly accusatory.

Harry shook his head, moved behind Draco, and stood on his tiptoes to whisper closely in Draco's ear. "Two weeks ago, I spotted you through glimmers and thought I'd do *this* to get your attention." He breathed onto Draco's neck, and he saw the hairs stand up a bit.

Draco shivered again. "Fair enough. But a single week ago, you were blowing up a storm in my shop and in denial that I was Pennom."

"And then the next day I spent the night with you. Because you happen to be rather charming," Harry told him, pressing a quick kiss to his shoulder.

"Endearing, I believe you said," Draco corrected him. "Anyhow, I suppose you've thought it all out, too. Do you want to talk about the gala now?" he inquired.

Harry chuckled, and sat down in one of the kitchen's chairs. "Yes, of course."

"What's so funny?"

Harry shook his head. "It's not, really. I was just thinking how much I hate these sort of events." He muttered, scratching the back of his neck, feeling slightly uncomfortable all of a sudden.

Draco wandered over to the cupboards and began making tea. "Well, luckily for you, I know a lot." He told Harry, pouring water into a kettle. "I'll help you, I promise. Even *if* I hate them just as much as you do."

Harry felt his cheeks go red. "I'd really appreciate that, Draco. But, before we get started on anything, I think you should know I don't want this to be your *conventional* gala." He started.

"Oh?" Draco didn't even look over. "That's no surprise, I suppose." Harry hoped he had just imagined the minuscule stiffening in Draco's posture.

"I was just thinking about it, and I had some ideas. I thought I'd run them over with you," Harry continued, realizing he might be stepping on eggshells soon enough. He knew that Draco was extremely uncomfortable in social situations, and he had just discovered that Draco had certain *rules* that helped him cope with these social situations. He wasn't sure if he would be overstepping any boundaries or breaking any rules with this.

"Well, spit it out, Potter. I can handle it," Draco's voice was only partially jovial, and Harry could still hear the wariness in his voice. "What is it going to be? A strictly no-clothing dress code? Or perhaps you plan on using paper plates and plastic cutlery."

"Well, not quite..."

"Wait." Draco set down the kettle. "You're not planning on having *Celestina Warbeck* as the entertainment, are you? Is that why you're being so cautious around me?" He demanded. Harry had a feeling he was joking, but he still didn't *know* Draco well enough to be sure.

"No, Draco! Gods, no, I wouldn't do that to you." He laughed.

"Then what *would* you do?" Draco asked innocently, pouring their drinks into cups and carrying them over to the table. He sat next to Harry and placed a warm hand over his. "I appreciate your concern, but keeping me on edge is possibly your worst offense."

Harry nodded in apology. "Right, sorry. Well, I don't know if you remember this, but I hate formal robes. And dancing," he explained.

"I remember the Yule Ball," Draco laughed, blowing on his tea to cool it. He paused a moment, and then set the cup down. "Wait, so there *will* be a no-clothing dress code?" His eyes widened, and he looked horrified.

"A no *formal* clothing dress code." Harry corrected him with a grin. "I was thinking we ought to require our guests should be required to wear the line of clothes the children designed."

"Merlin's pants... You *are* a wild man, Harry." Draco whispered with exaggerated awe. "What good will that even *do*?"

"Just think about it, Draco!" Harry exclaimed. "Luna has promised all the profits from the clothes will go to the orphanage. The purpose of this gala is to raise money for the orphans, along with the victims from the attacks. It will also promote the clothing line, which will increase money that goes towards the orphanage!" He was very excited, and Draco hadn't yet expressed a personal issue with the idea, which was good enough for him at the moment.

Draco shook his head. "It's a *gala*, Harry. As much as you like to mix things up, the people that you want to come are still high society, and they won't want to come to a *costume party*."

"You really don't think so? I think it could work." Harry told him. "I mean, think about it. The power is shifting to the younger generation these days. Wouldn't they enjoy this?"

Draco shook his head. "Would you willingly wear those garish clothes? Just because they're young doesn't mean they want to make fools of themselves."

Harry turned his palm upside down to squeeze Draco's hand. "I also wanted to have you in charge of the music, so we could hear something good. No boring, classical songs, yeah?" He knew it was a little low, using side handed flattery and a sweetly appealing smile, but he wanted Draco to be on board with this.

Draco narrowed his eyes, apparently noticing the diversion. He didn't let it slide, either. "Oh, yes, because we plan on having sophisticated conversation over my blasting music," he sneered, but he still squeezed Harry's hand back. "Just don't even bother calling it a gala. It's a party, Harry. A fundraising party." He laughed, shaking his head.

"Fine. Then we call it that. As long as we raise money, and I don't feel like a snob, and you enjoy yourself." Harry slid his arm up Draco's forearm, trying to give him reassurance with the touch. Draco only grimaced.

"I don't really like being touched there, Harry." He whispered pulling his arm away.

"Wha--*oh*." Harry pulled away, realizing that it was his left forearm, where the Dark Mark had been. He had almost forgotten that Draco had been a Death Eater. He had stopped thinking about Draco that way after the trial. "I'm sorry."

"It's alright. It's just a scar now," Draco assured him. "Anyway, the *party*." He added, offering Harry his right hand to hold instead. Harry continued with the gesture of gripping his forearm.

"So, if I manage to put it together, would you come, Draco?" Harry asked. "If there's anything that makes you... anxious or anything, you wouldn't have to go." He watched Draco with a concerned expression.

Draco smiled warmly. "I won't know until you've planned out the details. Which is why I intend to help you."

"Thank you, Draco."

"Thank *you*."

Draco knew he was grinning like a fool again, but he didn't care. He held his tea up to his lips to hide it feebly anyway. He listened to Harry babble on about his inane plans for the party, and his aloofness made it all the more *endearing*.

In all honesty, he thought Harry had lost his mind if he was convinced that he could bring together a group of influential witches and wizards with some tacky pajama-like clothes and wicked music. He was also convinced of doing it in Grimmauld Place, and that he would find some free house elves for hire to do the preparing.

"Harry," Draco interrupted him. "Grimmauld Place would only be appealing if this party was for Halloween, or perhaps Walpurgis night. And as far as I can tell, you want it much sooner than that, *and* you want to be successful."

"Yes. What's your point?" Harry asked him, pulling that sweetly confused face again.

Draco rolled his eyes. "You need a proper location. Somewhere *nice*, and somewhere that can host enough people for this kind of party. Even if it does end up to be completely ridiculous and informal, you need to at least put some consideration into where the event will take place." He explained.

"Well, what would you suggest?" Harry asked him.

"Malfoy Manor." Draco replied without skipping a beat. Harry raised his eyebrows.

"You don't think that's a bit risky?" He asked cautiously.

"I thought you liked taking risks," he snapped teasingly, but then noticed the concern etched into Harry's face. He remembered then that Draco wasn't the only one who had complicated history with the Manor.

"Of course, if the idea makes you uncomfortable..." Draco murmured, feeling Harry tighten his grip on his right forearm again.

"Actually, I was more worried about you. I didn't think you would go back there," Harry admitted with what seemed to be *sheepishness*.

"I don't, or I try not to." He replied. Harry would know why-- Voldemort had infested that house. It was tainted and full of painful memories, for the both of them, if he were honest. "But it's just one night. And if we just stick to the ballroom, and perhaps the outdoor grounds, enough decorations could mask it to be pleasant enough."

"Why?" Harry asked.

"Why?" Draco repeated. "Because it would add my name to the project. If it's successful, it will prove that the victims of the attacks have my full support, and that I hold no more grudges against muggles or muggleborns. And it's a nice revenue."

Harry shook his head in apparent disbelief. "Thank you, Draco. Even if you make it sound incredibly self serving." He added with a sly grin.

"Oh, it is. You should know that by now. I should be able to suffer through it, I think-- especially if you manage to get a good amount of calming draught for me." Draco added, remembering the beneficial effect it had when he had visited Hogwarts.

"I think that can be arranged," Harry replied, lifting Draco's right hand up in both of his own. "I just want to stop whatever that was that happened at Hogwarts from happening again."

"I call them the wolves," Draco blurted, not meaning to say that aloud.

"What?" Harry asked, looking perplexed as he took away one hand and twined his fingers with the remaining.

"When I have a panic attack, I visualize it as wolves. They prowl around in my head, and they snap at me. Sometimes, it helps to chase them away." Draco explained.

"Is that an Occlumency technique?" Harry asked, nearly wincing. Draco remembered that Snape had spent some time training Harry in it. Apparently, he hadn't enjoyed it.

Draco frowned. "I'm not sure, actually." He confessed. "Though it sounds like something Aunt Bella might have done. Not to help me, of course, but maybe to issue some control over me... Hmm."

Harry stared at him intently.

"Now that I think about it, my anxiety wasn't such a big problem until I had started training with her. When I started serving the Dark Lord," he added. "That must be it, then." He frowned, finding the revelation was neither satisfying or helpful.

"She taught you to use your own mind against you, then," Harry snarled.

"More or less, I suppose." Draco frowned.

"That helps to know, though, doesn't it? We could try and figure out some way to destroy it." Harry had a hopeful glint in his eye, and Draco couldn't help but admire his optimism after everything. Draco doubted the wolves could be done away with, and they gave their agreement to this with a series of painful snaps.

"Perhaps," he mumbled, rubbing the back of his head in attempt to quell the beasts.

"Is there anything else you want to tell me?" Harry asked him.

"Not now," Draco told him. "But I do have a question." He looked Harry in the eye and mustered his best *I'm trying not to compare myself to you but I have to know* face, which was my no means difficult.

"Shoot."

"How well do you function?" Draco asked him. "You seem fine, but after everything... I don't know if I believe it." From all he had seen, Harry was perfectly well off going into public, he just didn't like it. He didn't seem to harbor any fears or uncertainties. Harry just... *was*.

He felt Harry nudge him absently with his feet from under the table as he looked away from Draco's face.

"I'm alright now," he said. "The first two years were hard. All I did was grieve for months, and I developed an addiction to Dreamless Sleep potions in order to function. That was when there were still all the formalities: trials, ceremonies, parties, funerals, diplomatic visits... You know. Boy Who Lived stuff. It was really stressful, but I managed. The Ministry won't let me near any sleep potions now, though." He spoke wryly, and Draco had a feeling there was more to it than all that.

"That's all? Nightmares? Harry, even you aren't invincible. There was more," Draco insisted.

Harry shrugged, looking away. "I was depressed for a while. During the second year, there was a three month period where I never left the house." He looked uncomfortable. If he wasn't ready to talk, Draco wouldn't make him.

"If you're okay now, then I guess that's all that matters." Draco murmured, pressing a kiss to Harry's knuckles from over the table.

"I am," he perked up. "And you will be one day, soon. Do you think you've gotten any better? Since the trials, or whenever."

"Definitely. Once my father was in Azkaban, and I started venturing into the muggle world, it got easier. That was in the second year." Draco told him, and Harry seemed to like hearing that.

So, Draco spent the next hour or so telling Harry about the year he had spent immersed in traveling the muggle world. How he had traveled to Africa for a month and learned to live away from luxury. How he had taken a summer to backpack across most of Europe. How he had discovered his writing when he had kept a journal after spending a few weeks in Wizarding Berlin. About the road trip he had taken across North America, from Canada to Mexico. How he'd thrived in those far off places, without people to recognize him or judge him for what he had done in younger years.

He realized he missed traveling. He missed the freedom of the anonymity and not having to worry about keeping ties to other people. When Harry asked him if he'd give up his life now to do it again, though, he realized he wouldn't.

"No. I was running from myself then. The wolves weren't attacking then, sure. But that's because I was doing what they wanted." He philosophized. "I'm learning to accept myself now."

"So, you really are improving." Harry had beamed at him.

He supposed he was.

Harry had stayed with Draco late into the evening. They had moved from the kitchen table to the bedroom, and Draco had rested himself on Harry's chest, talking easily. They had chattered on about memories from school, how they had both obsessed over each other, how they had "hated" each other.

Draco found himself spewing his insecurities. How he still hated himself for having followed his father so blindly, how he felt as though he had to prove himself, how he was glad to have quit Healing training, but at the same time felt tremendously guilty. Harry had supplied with him with a constant stream of advice and assurance, reminding him that he had only been a child, that the past is gone, and how he had proved himself, and he deserved to be happy. Harry told him how brave Draco had been to tell the world he was Pennom, how much he had admired him for speaking up for what he had believed in.

Draco had needed it, he realized, as silly as it felt to need to be coddled like that. No one had ever been so encouraging or so kind to him. Not even his mother, who had been forced to raise him Lucius' way or face his wrath.

Harry had needed something different. As Harry had bled out his own insecurities--how he was nothing more than a name, how he was only a hero out of blind luck, how he had gotten out too easy after the war, how he felt he didn't deserve the adoration. He didn't need to be told he was good or worthy or forgiven. He had responded best when Draco reminded him that there was hope for the future, that he had to use his fortune and good name to become the do-gooder he wanted to become. He had to be told that it was okay for him to use his fame for good causes, though.

After hours of talking, Draco realized he and Harry weren't that different. They were both working for the same cause in order to win out over their past selves. They both wanted to be seen differently by the world. They both felt obligated to fix the way things were.

By the time the sun had begun to set, Draco had cast the charm on the ceiling to make it reflect the sky again. He and Harry were much less awake this time around, and they had fallen asleep again on top of the covers.

Draco thought he might never want to buy a sofa if the bed so successfully promised Harry's spending the night.

Once a Slytherin, always a Slytherin, he assured himself.

Chapter End Notes

I'm thinking of making a story based off of Draco's exploits and travels in the Muggle world. If you think you'd like to read it, let me know :)

Seven Days

Chapter Summary

A break from the usual flow of the story, just a collection of moments from a week the boys spend bonding.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Harry woke up in Draco's bed the next morning. He hadn't remembered falling asleep, but Draco had wrapped him in the topmost blanket for warmth. Draco was asleep under the sheets, pressed up next to him through the layers of bedsheets.

Harry un-burritoed himself, and took a moment to look at Draco's peaceful face. The sun was just rising, and the sky was lit with blue predawn light, and soon the sky would be painted red.

Something told him that Draco would not want to be woken at this early hour (and it certainly was early, considering the lateness of the winter sun). He made to effort to wake the sleeping man, but instead decided to join him under the soft sheets. Realizing he was still fully clothed, like last time, he pulled off his jeans and his flannel shirt, left in nothing but his briefs and undershirt. He climbed back into bed.

The sheets felt like silk, and he silently applauded Draco on his taste, considering the rest of the house (he shuddered as he remembered the dismal living room). He slid in next to Draco, who had also taken the liberty of undressing himself before tucking Harry in. He didn't want to wake Draco, but he also wanted to touch him, so he slowly pressed his body close and wrapped his arms around him.

Draco stirred a bit, and made a happy noise, but did not otherwise wake as Harry situated himself on the other man. He closed his eyes, fully intending to fall back asleep and wake up again with Draco.

He fell back into peaceful dreams, reveling in the easy affection he felt for Draco.

The previous day, Draco had woken up with Harry somehow under his sheets, barely dressed, and draped all over him. He wasn't sure how that had happened, but he certainly wasn't complaining. He had left shortly after they had both woken up, telling him he had promised the children (Seth and Sylvia were the names he mentioned) he would spend the day with him.

Today, Harry was back again. He was occupying Draco's leather chair in the sitting room, observing it with apparent distaste. Draco tried to ignore his commentary, as he sprawled himself on his floor and tinkered with his record player.

"There's no real light in here..." Harry muttered.

Draco grunted and cast another wandless *lumos* to sate him, using his wand to cast a new charm on the record player. It didn't take to it, and he sighed in frustration, sitting up.

Harry scowled. "That record player is the only thing in this room that's decent, and you're not even using it to play music," Harry muttered.

Draco rolled his eyes, and picked the record player up and put it on its place of honor on the board sticking out above the fireplace. "You sound like me. Please stop," he ordered, moving to perch on the arm of the chair next to Harry.

"Besides, you seem to like my chair enough," he added, using a hand to play with Harry's unruly hair.

Harry scowled and batted his hand away. "There are four things in this room, Draco. This chair and your muggle record player are the most interesting," he told him, getting up. "The single most interesting thing is not an object, and he happens to be quite moveable." Harry added, dragging Draco by the wrist into the kitchen.

Draco sighed. "You're much more affectionate when you're in my bed," he said dramatically, hoping Harry would soften up when they left the sitting room. Harry seemed to detest it, but he didn't know what to do to remedy that. Furniture was one of the few things Harry was very particular about, and Draco was not.

Harry breathed out a sigh of relief, walking to the counter to open the window. "That's better. And I'm plenty affectionate," he added.

Draco rolled his eyes again. "You might be *nice* a majority of the time, but you're only receptive to touch if you've been asleep for at least six hours." He was only teasing, because he knew he himself was also more agreeable in those first waking moments. He remembered yesterday when he had awoken from a dream about Harry, murmuring pet names into said man's ear.

He shuddered, but he knew Harry had loved it.

"And you're an icy bastard at all times except the first thirty minutes of your day," Harry accused.

Draco pouted, and he embraced Harry with affection leveled with only an old matron. "That isn't true, *darling*," he cooed in a falsetto voice. "You're the one being bitter, *dearie*. Have you eaten enough today, *sweet*?" He continued with the voice, pressing his lips to Harry's ear.

Harry shoved him away, but he was smiling like an idiot. "See, you're just sarcastic," he whined.

"C'mon, Harry. Drink a glass of water, and then I'll make you some coffee and pretend you didn't leave me waiting until two in the afternoon to see you." Draco coerced.

Harry shook his head, but began to open a few cabinets before he found the one with the glasses. "I didn't realize I was obligated," he replied as he turned on the tap for water.

"Well, now you are. At least once a day, just so I don't try and murder any more Celestina Warbeck fans or Pennom devotees," he tried to mask his desperate begging with the threats of violence, but he knew it was pathetic.

"Fine," Harry agreed. "I'll drink your coffee, but I do have to leave for a delivery, soon. And I'll try and make it tomorrow morning."

Draco smirked, and started the coffee. He could suffer through the putrid drink if it meant another while with Harry.

When Harry showed up at Draco's flat the next day at nine in the morning, he was sitting at his kitchen table and writing fervently.

"You really need a desk," he commented, sitting down next to him.

Draco looked up. "Would you sponsor that?" He asked urgently, a glassy look in his eyes.

"What?" Harry asked, realizing he was encountering Pennom more than Draco in the moment.

Draco blinked, and shook his head as if he were a wet dog. "Sorry. I was writing about the gala, and I was writing a sentence about your sponsoring it..."

Harry tilted his head. "You're writing an article on it? We haven't even planned it out yet." He didn't see how Draco could possibly write about something he didn't have information for.

Draco scowled. "This is an *interest* article, not the bloody activities list. It's a speculation piece, if you will, to see if people would be interested in visiting." He explained, waving his quill about the air exaggereatdly.

"Oh." Harry peered over at the parchment. "What've you said?" He inquired, finding Draco's green ink and fancy cursive a little hard to read.

Draco placed a hand on the paper, as if to cover it. "No one reads my unedited pieces, you understand?" He snapped, his face hardening like the Malfoy of old. Then, it softened, turning into the now familiar Draco.

"I've just said that we're doing this as a joint effort to help with the children. A bit of *ethos* about your efforts with the orphanage, but naturally my own efforts as well." Draco explained. "I hope you don't mind I'm mentioning that I'm the one putting it on and pulling it together." He added, looking sheepish.

Harry smiled. Draco could be funny like that sometimes.

"Yeah, sure. I'm the idea guy. But, speaking of efforts... Why don't you come by the orphanage with me tomorrow? Then, you can add in some *pathos* with sob stories from the kids so people can sympathize with them." Harry suggested, proud of his own vocabulary.

Draco raised an eyebrow, apparently impressed with the persuasive lingo as well. "I suppose that would be a good idea," he said with resign. "Though you should know that children usually dislike me." A dark look crossed his face, and Harry wondered if this was a point of contempt with him.

"I'm sure they'll love you, Draco." He assured him, patting his hand.

It would be an issue if they didn't.

Whenever Harry wasn't with him, Draco kept the shop open. He had considered taking down the hours signs, as it was hard to keep to his usual eleven-to-seven hours with Saturdays and Tuesdays off, when he had Harry constantly stopping by and demanding his undivided attention.

Well, he didn't demand it. Harry was also perfectly happy to mull about the shop and converse with customers, or just sit and stare at Draco or do word puzzles, as he had proven yesterday. Harry had stayed a few hours after he had opened the shop (on time, at eleven, because bollocks if Harry would stop him from opening up), enjoying the flow of people and Draco's music playing quietly. Harry had even suffered through a half hour of banter with jovial Auror Micheals, who interrogated him until he had proven worthy of Draco's presence.

It was ironic, really. Micheals was the only person who wasn't the other way around, he thought. Apparently the title of Hero of the Wizarding World wasn't enough alone for "genius writer", "generous soul," and "magnificent" Mr. Draco.

Draco smiled fondly as he saw Harry apparate in front of the shop at noon. He hadn't specified when he'd be coming, so Draco had warned any visitors that he might close shop at any moment. Technically, he would do that any day Harry visited (because closing was entirely different than neglecting to open all together), but at least today he knew Harry would be coming.

He met Harry at the door, turning off all the lights. Harry grinned at him with assurance, and Draco stepped outside for the first time in several days. He didn't leave his building much, now that he was living alone and back in the wizarding world. He only left to go to Muggle markets for groceries and the like, and less often to magical places. The only instances of the latter had taken place in a sequence of three days: the visit to the Prophet's building, going to Hogwarts with Harry, and his confident stride around Diagon, resulting in green ice cream.

He told Harry as much, and that he was nervous. Since the war, excursions to magical places were few and far between (especially in the months he had been with Matthew). He was slightly worried.

Harry took him by the arm. "We're just apparating to the orphanage," he ensured him. "No one who knows you will be there. Just the children, and they'll love you."

Draco pressed closer to him and nodded, as they disappeared with a *crack* loud enough to scare the neighbors. In a few uncomfortable seconds, they had materialized in front of a large house. Beyond it was a churning, gray sea. The house itself was pleasant enough, and a big, winter bare tree reached up towards the sky.

Draco realized with only mild surprise that it was the tree that Harry had based the bed off of. He didn't need to ask; it was so obviously something Harry would do. Maybe it wasn't even conscious.

Harry held his hand and led him to the door. "I hadn't expected it to look so.. homey." Draco confessed, as they stood in front of the door and knocked.

Harry laughed, his green eyes sparkling like he was in his element here. "Of course you think it's homey. You're used to mansions. Wait till you see the inside."

The door opened, and they were greeted by a garishly clothed matron and a swarm of children. Draco swallowed, and he felt the ice building, and he didn't think he needed it. The wolves made no presence; ever since the visit to Hogwarts (over a week ago!), he'd had mostly good days. Perhaps the wolves had been tired out.

Harry was all at once on his knees and falling onto the floor under a pile of elated children. *Gods, there's an army of them!*

One of them, who had a shock of red hair as awful as the Weasleys', had wrapped himself around Harry's neck. "Who's that?" He demanded, pointing at Draco. Draco widened his eyes, and slowly raised a hand into the air in greeting.

"Hi." He murmured. The horde of children writhing at Harry's feet all seemed to turn and look at him at once.

"This is my friend Draco," Harry explained, and used the arm that wasn't supporting the ginger toddler to take Draco by the waist and pull him into the house. The matron (Madam Humpop, Draco remembered) gave the pair of them a curious glance when Harry didn't remove his arm.

The child (who must have been part monkey) managed to maneuver himself from one side of Harry to another, until he had hung himself on Draco's own neck. Alarmed, Draco tentatively supported him with an arm.

Harry looked delighted, and looked at Draco expectantly.

The child was staring him in the face, with large green eyes that reminded him of Harry's own. "Hullo." Draco said to him, and the child broke out a bright white smile.

"I'm Seth!" The child informed him. "Harry is my favorite, but he's mentioned you before, so you must be alright, too." Seth said matter-of-factly. "And you can put me down now."

Put off, Draco gently (and carefully, children could be made of glass insides for all he knew) placed Seth on the floor. He immediately took to his feet and scampered a few steps away.

Harry introduced him to the rest of the children: Ebele, Sel, Sylvia, Phillip, Melanie, Tanner, and Kara.

There's only eight? The energy swarming around me makes it feel like a hundred.

He knew the basics of most of their pasts, and some of their relationships with Harry from listening to said man jabber about them at the drop of a feather. It didn't take much to get Harry on the topic of the children, and now he could see why. The man was glowing, basking in the attention of a bunch of miniature people who couldn't care less who he had killed or what war he had run or how he saved the world.

He loved them because they loved him just for being Harry.

And because of that, he tolerated the small, grimy hands that felt the need to touch *everything*. He congratulated them on drawings and paintings that looked like they could have been done by a horse with a brush in its mouth, and he didn't even let any sarcasm slip into his voice.

He even let them "cook" for him, and he didn't complain when Seth forced him to drink all of his "special drink." In fact, he hadn't even complained, because it followed all of what Harry called his "food rules," so he hadn't seen anything wrong with it. He hadn't been offered anything else they made (it was all too colorful and pungent smelling and diversely textured anyway), which he was grateful for. He wondered if Harry had spoken to Seth (the apparent head chef) before hand about his qualms with food...

The children, as energetic and unclean as they were, were very kind and polite to Draco. They were considerate and more observant than most adults, and they somehow could tell every time he was about to be pushed over the edge by something. They reminded him a lot of Harry, always asking things like "Is this okay?" and "Are you having fun?"

He wondered if it was just a trait children developed from losing their parents, or if it was a kindness that Harry had taught them.

Either way, he didn't mind it. He ended up having an in-depth conversation with the older two (Kara and Tanner, he remembered) about writing. Tanner had apparently read a few of his articles, and wanted to know how Draco got into the business. He couldn't really give them an inspiring tale of working for his dreams, and eventually climbing to the top, so he told them something equally as quintessential.

"If you love writing, then write. Write every time you think of something, and think of things a lot. To be a good writer, you need to have an internal dialogue like a book." He explained. They ate his words like they were ambrosia, looking at him with awe and interest that only ten year olds seemed to possess.

"Even if I don't want to write articles?" Kara asked.

"Of course. It's all just learning how to put down your words," he told them.

"Mr. Draco," Tanner had been taking notes on a piece of parchment, and he had just looked up at Draco again to speak. "Could you teach Kara and I sometime?" He asked.

"Teach you what?" Draco asked them.

Both of the preteens blushed. "Well," Tanner continued, "We've lived here most of our lives. Madam Humpop is our teacher, and she doesn't really know much about language."

"And they don't have writing classes at Hogwarts, I've heard," Kara added.

Draco nodded. "And you need someone to teach you the finer points of writing?" He asked them.

Tanner nodded earnestly. He reached out towards a copy of *The Prophet* on the table, and began pointing out different words and phrases and asking Draco to explain them.

Eventually, he found himself teaching grammar to the pair, and by the end of it, he had worn himself out. He hadn't realized how second-nature his writing had become; he hadn't consciously thought about compound sentences or Oxford commas or semicolons in years.

By the time Harry had decided it was time to go, he practically dragged Draco to the door, fighting off the children and telling them to leave the exhausted man in his arms alone.

"He'll be back!" Harry assured them. "He's hardly in a state to talk more, anyway."

Draco nodded. "Bye, Tanner. Kara. Have something written up when I come back, and use some of the things I taught you." He ordered. Harry pulled him out of the doorway.

"Draco, come on. They have to go to bed!"

After visiting the children, Harry had invited Draco to spend the night with him at Grimmauld place, but the man didn't seem very keen on the idea. So, Harry had led him home and let him sleep on his own, because he hadn't expressed desire for Harry to stay either. He had looked deep in thought, stewing in emotions and ideas. Before he had left, he caught that glint in Draco's eye that told him Pennom was busy behind those eyes, cooking up another article.

He had come early the next morning, bearing with him a bag of coffee grounds, because like his taste in furniture, Draco's taste in coffee was tear-jerkingly pathetic. He had begun to just apparate into the shop, because Draco's magic seemed familiar enough to let him in through the wards. He wasn't sure what that meant, but he didn't mind.

He climbed up the staircase, closing his eyes at the top so he wouldn't see that horrid sitting room that invoked rage from his inner interior designer. He counted the paces to the kitchen and opened his eyes.

He found a passed-out Draco slumped over his table, face buried in scrawled on parchment. Dropping the bag of coffee grounds on the table, Harry placed his hands over the back of the chair and leaned over Draco, peering at the papers to see what he could read. He tried to

reach out to take a piece of the parchment, but he had stirred Draco, who rose from his chair slowly but forcefully, like a wave.

"Ungh. Harry. Don' read my papers," he mumbled, leaning on the chair so his back crushed the hand that Harry had left on the chair. "N' yet." He added, leaning his head back to look directly up at Harry

Harry laughed, taking his hands and putting them on Draco's shoulders. "Your back must be killing you. Did you fall asleep writing?" He asked, beginning to rub Draco's shoulders, who adjusted his position to allow Harry to massage him better.

Being an overly-expressive morning-Draco, he let out a loud moan of pleasure. "See? Y'only touch me in the mornings," he complained, but stopped talking when Harry's hand came into contact with a very tight knot. "Gnnnghhh..."

"Maybe," Harry whispered, stopping his massaging to lean over into Draco's ear, "it's because I have the upper hand when you're sleepy."

Draco made a sound of protest when Harry moved his hands away, and he stood up groggily. "I'll show you the upper hand..." He hummed, stumbling over to Harry to envelop him in a bear hug. He leaned most of his weight onto Harry, forcing Harry to lean up against the counter.

"You're also so *endearing* when you're like this," he smiled, holding Draco up with one hand and playing with the blond's bed head with the other.

Draco hoisted himself up, now more able to pull his own weight. "Why do you always say that?" He whined, his more-conscious self apparently taking over again. He didn't let go though, and instead planted a soft kiss to the place between Harry's cheek and ear. It felt nice, and Harry felt inclined to return the favor.

"Because it's true, you great, sleepy oaf," he teased, kissing the top of Draco's cheekbone. Draco perked up a little more, pulling away to look at Harry with alert eyes.

"Oh." He blinked, his cheeks turning pink. "I don't think you've done that before," he muttered, and Harry watched his grey eyes lower a bit.

Harry smiled. "No, I haven't." He agreed, and leaned in to plant a proper, firm kiss on Draco's lips.

It lasted for several long seconds, Draco fully awake now and actively kissing back, pulling Harry closer by the lips. Harry smiled into the kiss, and pulled away. Draco was flushed and grinning, and he reached up to brush some hair out of Harry's face. They were very close together, and Harry could feel the counter digging into his back, but he didn't want to move.

"What was that for?" Draco asked him, touching Harry's nose with his own.

"Didn't you like it?" Harry inquired, knowing fully well that he had.

"Well, yeah." Draco muttered, his hand now fully inside Harry's wild hair.

"Then, there's your reason."

Draco smiled so widely that Harry was concerned his face might break. He pulled Harry aggressively (though Harry doubted he would have complained if it had been another kiss).

"Can you make me coffee?" Draco asked him.

Harry smiled and felt like his day had just been made by that one request.

"Sure. Maybe if you try it with milk this time you'll like it."

Harry had kissed him yesterday.

Draco had enjoyed coffee.

It was a one for another sort of exchange, he supposed, but it felt fair. Was that how give and take worked? He wasn't sure, but it was easy enough.

For the rest of every day life he practiced give and take, too. What he gave were his articles and exemplary behavior. What he took was basic respect and tolerance.

The night after he visited the kids, he had stayed up until dawn writing. Harry had noticed how tired he was, and left early to let him sleep. He had slept until morning, and then he had spent an hour editing his newest article.

He had just gotten home from handing it over to *The Prophet*.

A Poor Education

By Adam Pennom

Wizarding society lacks a public education system. There is no Education Department at the Ministry, there are no regulations for what we children are taught. We regulate how they use their magic, what they know about magic, and little less is taught.

There it is again, wizard-centric thinking skewing our society. It once again boils down to Pureblood principal, doesn't it? Another outdated way of thinking, still governing the way our children are taught.

It should be acknowledged that wizards cannot live separately from muggles anymore. We do not live separately from muggles anymore. We live amongst them now, whether it be to visit muggle relatives, buy muggle products, or even to get a muggle job.

And yet, there are many basic muggle principals that we do not understand, and yet we would do well to take advantage of. No, these are not things you could have learned from a basic muggle studies course. These are entire academic fields that wizards do not explore.

Why is that, you ask? It's because "we have magic, so we don't need to learn these things." It's because "we live separately from the muggle world, so we don't need to see things their way." It's because "it's pointless to try and understand."

What kinds of things are these? Where can it be seen?

Ask your own yourselves and your children the following questions, and see how well you score up to a muggle:

In which cases is it appropriate to semicolon versus a colon?

Can you ask basic questions and supply answers in more than one language?

What is the quadratic formula, and how is it applied?

What are colors made of?

How do plants take in energy from the sun?

How do animals process energy from food?

Most wizards cannot answer the above questions, but they are part of the average muggle school curriculum. The answers to these questions are not taught at Hogwarts. Answering the above questions display an essential understanding of the world and our own place in it. So, why don't we bother learning it? Because it doesn't have anything to do with magic?

How silly it is of us, to think that we needn't teach our children why the Earth revolves around the sun unless it has to do with astrological positions.

How silly it is of us, to think that we needn't teach our children that water is made out of the same air we breathe.

How pathetic is it that we think we have no obligation to understand the world around us, just because we can cast a spell to make our lives easier.

Knowledge is power, and it would appear that it is something we are lacking.

Draco had a feeling that it would be one of his more controversial articles. Usually, he just pointed something out with vague accusations and called upon people for speculation. Usually, he only blamed prejudice and old ideas. This time, he vaguely alluded to old ideas and directly blamed the wizarding public at large.

He wondered what the reception would be. Which was why he had saved a copy to show to Hermione when Harry brought him over to his house for dinner.

After dropping the article off, he had started cooking dinner. It was nothing fancy; he had found a recipe for garlic herb sautéed vegetables and beef (which he had replaced with tofu, as he didn't feel like shopping or pushing any of his food rules), and prepared it and kept it warm with some charms. He had made some polenta with milk that he would serve under the sauté. He was quite proud of it.

Harry and Hermione arrived just before six o'clock. He heard them coming up the stairs, and laughed wryly to himself as he realized that Harry had recently begun simply apparating downstairs instead of out front. He wondered when the man would just start apparating straight into the kitchen.

They arrived at the top of the staircase.

"Don't mind his sitting room, 'Mione. It's dismal," Harry said, walking quickly into the kitchen.

"Hello to you, too, *dearest*," Draco greeted him with a sardonic tone.

"Don't mind his bitter tone, either. He's usually much softer with me in the morning," Harry told her, ignoring him.

Draco stood up and wrapped his arms around Harry's neck in a mock attempt to strangle him, though it was affectionate at heart. "I'm still here you know!" He growled.

Harry ducked out from underneath him, standing behind Hermione for protection. She was watching the two with raised eyebrows. "In front of company, Draco?" she asked him dryly.

"What were you expecting? I know you well enough, Hermione." Draco smiled at her, trying to come off as polite, but also not in order to annoy Harry.

"I don't know what I was expecting. Certainly fancier furniture," she commented, looking at the plain kitchen and its inexpensive chairs and table. Draco felt himself blushing.

"Well, it didn't seem right to fill the place with hand carved wood and velvet furniture. It's just a small flat." He tried to put venom into his voice, but it was hard with Hermione watching him guardedly and Harry making faces at him from behind her.

"It's not that I don't like it, it's just..."

"You were expecting something like the Manor?" He asked insouciantly. He didn't mind the assumption; there were much worse.

"Well, yes," she admitted, shuffling her feet.

Draco shrugged. "That's alright. Have a seat; I've left a copy of my newest article for you to read on the table. It should be published in a few days," he informed them. "I doubt it'll be breaking news."

Hermione nodded and practically flew to her chair, eager for a release from her earlier comment and for a chance to soak up new information. She had yet to comment on his recent article and how it interfered with her plan.

Harry drifted over to Draco by the stove. "Did you cook?" He asked, peering into the plan curiously.

"No, I'm afraid I didn't. I ordered take out and decided to dirty all my utensils with it anyway," Draco snarked, pointing to the sink full of knives, cutting boards, spatulas, and stirring spoons.

"Sorry," Harry murmured. "I wasn't sure with your... your...."

"Yeah," Draco replied. "I made it me-compliant. I hope you don't mind my bland tastes again," he teased. Hermione perked up from the spot at the table.

"I'm sure it'll be fine," she assured him, barely looking up. "It smells wonderful, at any rate."

Draco smiled sheepishly and served them all a bowl of polenta, topped with the sauté. "I hope you like vegetarian food," he told them, as he sat down at the table next to Harry. There were no placemats or expensive cutlery. Draco had always hated such etiquettes, and they had never become part of his "rules." He liked it simple, just like the food.

Hermione finished the article and began to eat. "It's good," she told him absently.

"Which? The food or the article?"

"Both," she shrugged. "Harry and I usually eat takeout when we're together, so it's nice to eat something homemade. Even if it is lacking in spices."

Draco did not ignore the backhanded compliment or the aversion of the article.

"And the article?" He demanded.

Hermione waited until she had finished chewing thoroughly before she responded, and paused long after she swallowed. Draco found himself literally on the edge of his seat, waiting for her approval.

"It might not be well received," she informed him. "And it's not what I had in mind when I asked you to write articles for Harry." She sniffed, taking another bite of polenta.

"I didn't write it for Harry. I wrote it for the kids," he told her, unable to hide the pout on his face.

"Well, meanwhile, Harry is receiving minimal media coverage, and *The Prophet* is still rolling around in... well, you." She told him.

"I don't mind!" Harry assured her, obviously trying to settle the mood.

"That's irrelevant," Hermione snapped. "The whole point of this was to promote gay rights, wasn't it? And here you are, publishing everything to do with orphans all of a sudden." She stared at him with that testy look again, and Draco knew his honest reply was important.

"What's first and foremost right now is what happens to those kids, Granger. We can't worry about how they'll be treated when they're old enough to start dating when there's something wrong with how we're treating them now." He pointedly took another bite of food, and focused on staring at the table.

When he looked up, she was smirking. She was still waiting for him to finish his point.

"I'm not completely blind to your agenda, Hermione," he told her, with less bite this time. "You want me to look good, and you want Harry to be in the papers. But, at the moment, I think it's more important that I *do* good, and Harry be in the papers for the right reasons. Right now, that's me addressing things like this and helping Harry advertise the fundraising gala." He knew his logic was sound, and he wondered what she would think of the direct insult to her plan.

She let out a relieved sigh, and smiled at both of them genuinely. "Thank god!" She cried. "I really *can* trust you, Draco. You're not blind or stubborn. And you have good resolve. And you can adapt the plan." She *giggled*, and dropped her hands onto the table with eagerness. "*Finally*, someone I can trust to function without my constant guidance!"

Harry stared at her in a stupor as she continued eating with a renewed gusto. "Hey!" He cried indignantly. The, he frowned. "Wait, that was all a *test*?" He asked her, gaping now.

"Apparently." Draco commented, watching Hermione with interest. "She's more Slytherin than I thought."

Harry crumpled like his world was falling apart before his eyes, and Hermione snickered. "Oh, come on Harry. It's not like you didn't know I was clever."

Last night with Draco and Hermione had been interesting for Harry. First, she kept her relationship with Terry Boot a secret from him for months. And then, there was her manipulative conversation with Draco, which he had told him was actually normal between them. Apparently, he didn't know her as well as he thought. And that was okay, he realized. He learned that he didn't have to know *everything* about a person to have a good relationship with them.

Which was a huge stepping stone for how he thought about his relationship with Draco. He didn't have to know and understand him perfectly to know that he enjoyed their relationship.

And he *had* gotten to know Draco very well in the past week. He learned little things, like his schedule and how far he could stretch his patience. He learned details like how he organized his kitchen and what kind of music he favored. He met his regular customers and took part in his day-to-day activities.

He was slowly the difference between a "good" day and a "bad" day for his anxiety, and what he could and could not handle. He was beginning to see the patterns in his rules and his reasoning.

He realized he liked what he saw. He might even be falling for him...

He smiled to himself as he shrugged on his favorite dark olive green coat. Today was the day Luna released the clothing. It had been a fairly quick process, as the designs had already been made, and magical copies had been transferred to fabric. All Luna had to do was adjust the size and fit, and *boom!* Instant charity a fashion.

He would apparate to her house, take a few pictures for the press, try on a few outfits, model them for more photos, and then leave. He planned on going straight to Draco, who had resigned to not going to the party. It was one of those limits that he had, and Harry didn't want to push him to do anything he couldn't do.

And when he got back, they would have coffee together. Draco would put too much milk in it, and Harry would have his black, and they'd look at the other was crazy as they held hands across the table, and by then it'd be evening, so they'd lay down on Draco's bed under his enchanted ceiling. And maybe this time, they'd fall asleep together on purpose, under the covers.

Harry focused on the daydream, willing it to pull him through the day spent with pressing reporters and a snarky Pansy.

Yes, maybe he was falling for Draco. He was okay with that, if he gave him *this* kind of feeling.

Chapter End Notes

I quite liked telling the story this way. It was a lot easier and faster moving than the past few chapters (I mean, really, there were like 8 chapters for 2 days), but there was still enough plot. Of course, that's only because it was appropriate for the situation here.

I just loved this. I didn't have to think about it or fret, it just sort of came out.

Past

Luna was waiting for Harry at the door to her house. She stood there in an exact replica of the flowy, silver-blue dress that Sylvia had drawn. He had assumed that's what it was, of course, and that she was wearing it for the photoshoot.

"Don't you look lovely?" He asked her as he climbed up the steps to her door.

"It's my Sunday best," she lilted. Pansy appeared behind her, wearing an orange and green tiger-striped suit (Harry thought Phillip had designed that one). She had a scowl on her face.

"Potter. You're late. The photographers are waiting," she snapped, pulling Luna into the house with a gentle tug of the waist. "As for *you*, darling," she cooed, "they want to get some shots of you in the tulip dress."

"The tulip dress?" Harry asked, trying not to wince at Pansy's gooey tone.

"You'll see it in a minute, Potter." She told him. "Now, I've got a selection of outfits to wear. And you won't complain about a single one of them, because this was all your idea." She had a malicious glint in her eyes, and he had a feeling she had some horrid things in store for him.

Harry nodded glumly. "Fine."

"Potter. If you love the children, you'll have to look a little more eager than that," she snapped, leading him down a pristine white hallway. They walked along a bright blue carpet, and Harry felt out of place in his old, faded jeans and dull green jacket. Luna's house was so *vibrant*.

Pansy shoved him into another white room, with a large mirror and a rack full of bright, colorful clothes. "Put on the outfits on the rack. No mixing or matching unless you're asked."

He stared at the clothes, half-mortified. "They're so colorful." He muttered.

"Yes, how observant of you. Or, as more eloquently put by Betty Braithwaite, 'quirky, vibrant, and original.' If you can pull them off well enough, Potter, you're looking at the future of wizarding fashion."

"You didn't like them two weeks ago," he pouted, pulling an outfit off the rack.

"That's before we got four reporters, eight interested vendors, and five modeling firms knocking on our door." She replied, shaking her head as if she didn't believe it. "Tell those kids they're pretty damn special," she added, closing the door quietly behind her.

Harry blinked and nearly dropped the outfit he was holding. He caught it and stared for a moment. It was the pants that the kids had originally drawn, creamy colored canvas splotted with neon orange and specked with all colors of the rainbow. He shook his head and smiled,

thinking it fitting that he start with this one. Luna had made them similar to muggle harem pants, loose, comfortable, and baggy with elastic holding down the waist and ankles.

The top was a strangely cut, loose tank top that had the same cream base as the pants, except there was a poorly-drawn orange-yellow sun in the center. He remembered, fondly, that Seth had drawn it.

Still feeling rather ridiculous, he walked into Luna's living room, which had been transformed into a photography set. The tall ceilings and high up, open windows made for beautiful lighting.

Harry looked around the room, spotting Luna in a bright fuchsia dress with a poofy skirt. It was shaped rather like an upside down tulip. Pansy was posing in front of a backdrop in the green tiger suit, her body posed to the side but facing the camera with a snarl. It became even more realistic when she saw Harry enter the room, and her lip curled in further distaste.

Meanwhile, a curly-haired blond man in a completely red suit with spikes sticking out like a dragon spine posed in front of a different camera. When he saw Harry, his eyebrows shot up and his posture straightened. "Brilliant!" The photographer trilled. Once she had gotten the shot, he stalked over to Harry.

"Harry Potter. They said you'd be coming." He said, giving Harry a once over with his eyes. "You turned out nicely," he added with a provocative wink.

"Thanks. Mr...?" He wasn't sure he recognized the man.

"Oh, don't play coy, Potter. Everyone knows who I am now!" He tilted his head exaggeratedly, but when he didn't get the reaction he expected, he shook his head. "It's me. Cormac McLaggen? Favored model of Witch Weekly?" He added with a suggestive tone.

"Oh. Draco mentioned you in his article, didn't he?" Harry asked absently. "Sorry, I don't see magazines much. But you pull off Ebele's suit nicely," he added.

"Mmmh. That's the kid who designed this?" He asked.

"Conceptually, yes." Harry replied, knowing that it was Luna who had designed the contours and handsome fit of the crimson suit.

"Yes, Harry. Stare all you like, I won't mind." McLaggen winked at him, turning to return to his photographer.

"Over here, Mr. Potter!" A familiar voice called. Harry swallowed his dread, looking over to find Rita Skeeter and Bozo waiting for him with a camera.

As he reluctantly joined them, Rita embraced him and gave him a wet smack of lips on the cheek. "It's been too long since I covered a story on you, Harry!"

Harry stepped back, grimacing and wiping the green lipstick off of his face. "Agree to disagree." He muttered, but she ignored him, and used her wand to apply some basic makeup to his face.

"Don't you look... Hmm, I don't know how to describe the look," she paused, shoving him in front of the camera. "What do you think, Bozo?" She asked her assistant.

"Boho." He replied, with complete coherence.

"Stop correcting me! That's the third time today. Your name has been Bozo for the past ten years, it's not changing now!" She snapped at him, and the poor assistant rolled his eyes.

"Pose, Mr. Potter!" Rita chirped excitedly. "I think for this outfit, we want something boyish. Innocent. With a hint of seduction," she added.

Harry knit his eyebrows in confusion. He had no idea how to portray any of those things.

"Ooh! Excellent, Mr. Potter. Hold that face, and thrust one leg forward." She instructed.

Harry obliged.

This process was repeated with over a dozen different outfits. There was a green sweater that looked like scales with a pair of wild black leopard print pants, which had been designed by Kara. Then, there was Sel's neon blue beanie with a winter coat printed like a blue sky dotted with "sheep clouds" with a matching pair of trousers and pants. He felt fairly decent in Tanner's "vampire" design, which was essentially a white suit that looked like it was dripping in blood (he only wondered what the inspiration had been). He felt like he was being mocked when he was "dressed" in nothing but a semblance of green vines that were supposed to be robes.

All the while, he just made distressed faces and contorted the body the way he was instructed. Everyone ate it up

"For someone who claimed to hate attention, he's sure a natural at this," Pansy scoffed, entering the room in cyan, draping shirt and pants that were supposed to glow in the dark.

McLaggen skulked in front the camera in a skin-tight silver suit with a shiny cone on top of his head. "What is this?" He demanded, gesturing towards his own body.

"Imagination!" One of the reporters suggested.

"No, that's supposed to be Tin Foil," Luna corrected her as McLaggen gave a suspicious scowl. "Like that!" She encouraged him. "It's a muggle reference, apparently," she added. She herself was in another flowy dress, this one scribbled with green and purple, and with a jagged, torn bottom.

Harry laughed at that, because Luna of all people would be the one to wear a tinfoil hat. Bozo snapped his picture, and Harry was in Melanie's suit, which was all dark blue and red plaid, which she claimed she took inspiration from "Harry's favorite shirt." He didn't like the suit as much, though.

"That's all, I think, Mr. Potter." Bozo informed him.

Harry was about to turn to change back into his normal clothes, when Luna interrupted him. "One more shot, I think." She announced. "Let's all do this one together, shall we?"

They all lined up against the wall, McLaggen in his tin foil, Pansy in flowing cyan, Luna covered in scribbles, and Harry in an atrocious plaid suit. It took them a while before all the reporters were satisfied with a shot. There was one taken with them all looking serious, another where they all pulled goofy faces, the next with them all smiling like idiots, and a few taken while they were arguing or chatting or complaining.

"That's good enough," Luna resolved, stepping away from the rest of them. "You may go now," she informed the reporters.

They didn't move, at first, but then Pansy snarled at them, and hissed, "*Now.*"

Harry took the opportunity to sneak away, but Pansy stopped him. "You, Potter," she called him out. "Sit down on the sofa. You're staying for tea."

He never thought he had been so rudely commanded to stay for *tea*, but he wasn't going to argue. He flinched as he watched her sharply (but not aggressively, he noted) instructed the reporters and their crews to clean up.

"And if you leave a *single* mark on anything, I will force you to submit your photos anonymously and you won't get paid a single *knut*. Do you understand?" She was authoritative and relentless, orchestrating their every move until their equipment had been shrunk, packed, and they had apparated away.

When it was all done, and it only took five minutes, Harry found himself trapped on a blue leather sofa next to Cormac McLaggen. Luna was serving them tea, and they were all still dressed in their insane children's clothes. McLaggen seemed surprisingly comfortable in the skintight silver suit, which only made Harry more uncomfortable.

"McLaggen!" Pansy had turned to face him, and she was the picture of rage. "Why are you still here?"

"I was hoping to catch up with Potter," he pouted at her, casting a mischievous glance at Harry that made him feel nauseated.

Luna stood up and put her hands on Pansy's shoulders. "Breathe. Relax. The shoot is over, and there's no need to be aggressive," Luna consoled her. "Both of you can stay for tea," Luna informed the two men.

Pansy let out a loud exhale from her nose, and closed her eyes, sitting down next to Luna. "Well, that was lovely," she smiled with saccharine sweetness, but there was obvious displeasure in her eyes.

Luna laughed with genuine happiness. "It was, wasn't it? I can't wait till everyone starts wearing them." She smiled at Harry with gratitude.

"Well, speaking of which, Luna," Harry mentioned, "Draco and I are planning on hosting a gala. Well, he's calling it a costume party..." Harry realized he was about to begin babbling about Draco and stopped himself. "Anyway. It's to raise money for the Orphanage, and we were considering other charities to donate to, and we wanted to make it the dress code that everyone wears one of your outfits," he explained.

Pansy raised her eyebrows. "How terribly corporate of you, Potter."

Luna smacked her hand playfully. "Now, Pans. Either way, it all goes to the orphanage!" She reminded her.

"Oh, right, I forgot," Pansy rolled her eyes. "We're doing this for *charity* and we're not making any profits." Her scowl and sarcastic tone indicated that she had *not* forgotten, and she was in no way pleased with this fact.

McLaggen bumped his silver-topped head into the conversation. "That's all well and good, Potter... But, Draco, you say? Draco *Malfoy*?" He inquired, leaning forward and staring at Harry with an incredulous gaze.

"Yes, Draco Malfoy."

"Ohh, that's an interesting pair," he averred. "I never would have seen it!" He exclaimed.

Harry clenched his teeth and took a polite sip of tea. "What ever do you mean, McLaggen?" Harry questioned him.

"You and *Malfoy* as a couple. I never saw the git as more than a cheap shag," he opined with a smug look on his face. He took a sip of his own tea and blinked as though he had just mentioned something as mundane as the weather.

Harry all at once wanted to rip his head off, and Pansy looked as though she were experiencing a similar desire.

"You take that *back!*" They both demanded at once.

McLaggen laughed. "Oh, his two lovers standing up for him. How sweet!" He shook his head, and smirked with new determination. "Draco Malfoy is a pathetic piece of sod, and he's wasting his time trying to redeem himself." He told them, daring them to challenge him.

"You don't know what you're talking about! He's changed!" Harry cried standing up and slamming his teacup on the floor. It shattered and the scalding liquid burned his foot, but he didn't care.

"Draco is a good person! And he tries harder than *you* at it!" Pansy screeched defensively.

McLaggen laughed, apparently soaking in the negative energy and growing stronger off of it. "Oh, please, he was a Death Eater. Now, all his pretty face is good for is giving a blow job." He smiled pleasantly at them.

"Shut up!" Harry growled. "He's twice the man you are."

"And at least he's *sorry* for being an asshole!" Pansy looked ready to spring on McLaggen and strangle him.

"Oh, you're one to talk, Parkinson." He retorted. "Filthy Slytherins," he added for good measure.

Pansy froze, looking stung. Harry was reaching for his wand, but Luna stood. McLaggen was now the only person left sitting down, and he seemed perfectly comfortable and casual.

"Cormac," Luna said calmly. "Not in my house. Get out before you say something else ignorant." Her voice didn't sound any different than he usual dreamy lilt, but perhaps that was what made it more terrifying.

"You have thirty seconds to get out. And if you breathe a word of this conversation to anyone, if you repeat a single one of those insults, I will destroy all of your modeling contacts." She sounded *happy*, for Merlin's sake, but there was a steel in her eyes that could turn men to stone.

As McLaggen sprinted for the door, Luna called after him, "Have a nice day!"

When he was gone, Harry slowly lowered his back to a sitting position on the couch, his mouth hanging open. Luna waved her wand, and the mess of the shattered tea cup was gone. Pansy crossed her arms, slowly lowering herself to sit next to Luna again.

"You used to argue with Draco like that," Pansy breathed, staring at Harry with distanced regard but newfound respect. "What changed? Why are you with him now?"

"I never said I was with him," Harry muttered, pouring himself a new cup of tea and trying to calm his now unnecessary rage. He could feel his magic swirling in the air around him, as it often did when he was upset.

"Potter," Pansy scoffed. "I saw the photo in the paper of you two at Hogwarts. I heard your voice when you spoke about him. You're in love," she shook her head and laughed softly. "I never thought I'd see the day."

Harry shrugged, taking another deep breath. He was almost shaking from anger, and it only seemed to keep on building even if McLaggen had left. Apparently, his body hadn't realized the threat was gone yet.

Luna picked up on the emotion. "Hold on, Harry. I've just the thing." She informed him, rising to dart away into another room.

"Well?" Pansy asked.

"He changed. We talked. I realized what I had felt all along, and it was easier when the Draco I had always hoped for had showed himself." Harry divulged.

"I think I fell in love with Pennom first," he confessed. "That first conversation was all consideration and logic and analyzing. But he was practical, and he was *nice*."

Pansy laughed. "But you know that's not all he is, don't you?" She inquired.

Harry laughed, too, and it spent up a little of the anger, like a huffed out release. "Of course. He's still an icy bastard, and he can be bitter, and sardonic and sarcastic and all the rest..." Harry sighed. "And it's amusing and *endearing*. But then, there's these moments where he's different all together, and he becomes all soft and sweet and reassurance and questions..." Harry felt his anger begin to melt away as he thought of all the sides of Draco, and it was replaced with a feeling of warmth.

"You've got it bad," Pansy sneered. "Look at you, all sappy." She was only teasing now, though.

"Did you know about his anxiety?" Harry asked her. He knew they had been close friends, but he didn't know if Draco had it back then.

She shook her head. "Not really. He didn't mention anything until he'd been Initiated with the Death Eaters. And we never spoke after the War," she added. "Was that why he closed off? The anxiety, I mean."

Harry shrugged. "I don't know. There's still a lot I don't know."

Luna entered the room, holding a bottle of calming draught. "For the both of you," she said softly, pouring a splash into each of their teacups. "The anger in the air has calmed, though. What'd I miss?" She asked, sidling in next to Pansy.

"Talked about Draco," Pansy said, filling her in.

"How long have you been together?" Luna asked, a happy smile on her face.

Harry twisted his face in thought. "How long's it been since I first dropped by?" He asked them.

"Two weeks?" Pansy looked at Luna for confirmation, and she nodded.

"So, two weeks." Harry said. "Gods, it feels like longer."

Luna laughed her tinkling laugh and looked at Harry closely. "It has been," she assured him mysteriously.

Pansy rolled her eyes. "She says stuff like that. You know her. I think it's time we send you back to Draco, anyway."

Harry nodded, amazed at how polite Pansy had become. "I'll see you two later?" He asked, heading for the door.

"In your dreams, Potter!" Pansy called after him. But she was only joking.

Harry apparated back to Draco's place.

It was Sunday, and Draco had received a letter on Saturday from Edwin Pellon. He had informed him he would be able to meet Draco at noon in The Three Broomsticks in Hogsmeade.

Draco knew Harry had that photo shoot with Pansy and Luna. He had opted not to go in case it triggered a panic attack. He didn't want to risk it with the reporters, and Luna and Pansy from his past. Despite the fact he'd changed, he was afraid to show his new self to old people.

He would have not gone out at all, but he wasn't going to leave Edwin waiting for him. He wanted to help the boy, and he would do so. He didn't know his situation precisely, but he would offer him consolation.

So, not too long before noon, he apparated into Hogsmeade. The Three Broomsticks sat familiar in the place it always had, and he wasn't sure if the familiarity helped or hindered the way he was feeling. He swallowed his emotions and entered the building.

He realized, with a bit of horror, that he had no idea what Edwin looked like. And he felt completely out of place, like he wasn't allowed here, that people were staring. His breath caught, and he stared at all the people in the room, frozen in the doorway.

He looked around the room, half searching for Edwin and half comparing himself to everyone else in the room. They all deserve to be here. I don't.

He tried to tell himself that this was a muggle pub, that no one here knew him, that he was invisible, that he was just someone to flirt with and buy drinks for. He wasn't anyone, he wasn't a person, he was invisible. He was safe.

But it didn't work. He felt magic humming around the air and he saw floating drinks and robes and a wizarding record that he had sold a few times before was being played and it wasn't muggle at all.

His thoughts were suddenly darting around his head, being chased by eagerly snapping wolves. His breath quickened, his vision spotted, and he almost turned and ran.

But then Madam Rosmerta was walking up to him, with a smile on her face and all the friendliness of a hostess that he didn't think he deserved. "Can I help you, love?" She asked him, and he was eternally grateful that she didn't mention his name or the fact that he looked like a terrified animal.

"I-I'm looking for an Edwin Pellon?" He asked quietly.

"Right over there," Rosmerta indicated a table in the corner of the room and winked at him kindly.

Draco, still not fully back to sorts, felt his limbs carry his half-aware body over towards the secluded table where a dark-haired boy in Slytherin robes waited for him.

"Edwin?" Draco asked, trying to summon his voice fully as he sat down at the table.

"Mr. Malfoy," the boy remarked. "You look like you need a drink," he added dryly.

"No, thanks. I'm a lightweight," Draco informed him. "And you won't be having anything other than butterbeer," he said absently, feeling the obligated adult that Pennom had made him speaking.

"Yessir." Edwin muttered. "How're we gonna do this? Do I just talk?"

"Spill." Draco bid him.

The young Pellon spoke for a good half hour non stop. He spoke of his mother and her refined grace and kindness, but also her rational sternness (which reminded Draco of his own mother). He spun tales of his father's distance, his bitterness at the wizarding world that he had been denied, that teased before him as everyone he knew used magic. Edwin said his father never seemed like the kind to go mad or become Dark, but he thought differently now.

The attack sprung out of nowhere for everyone. Now having nearly two weeks to bathe in the after effects of the attacks, Edwin had apparently distanced himself already from the event, his voice dry and bored as he spoke. But his eyes were pricked with tears and his hands shook as he recited his father's letter from memory.

The man was evil, he said. He may have been under the Imperius curse when he killed his wife, but he had not been afterwards. When he wrote to Edwin, telling him the power he had felt in his hands, telling him that death was the magic he had needed all his life, and it wouldn't be denied from him this time around.

His first letter had been mild, Edwin explained. He had just mentioned the power he had felt, the pleasure he had gotten under *Imperio*, which many other people had described as a blissful experience. But the words did not sound like his father.

The next few letters had grown more erratic, more terrifying. His father had begun to kill the animals they kept at home, and he was writing about meeting with the attackers. They were going to kill again. He wanted Edwin to join him--

"Edwin." Draco interrupted. "They're going to kill again? When did you find this out?" He demanded.

Edwin had been crying for the past few minutes, but now he broke down. "This morning," he wailed quietly. "The letter that came this morning." His voice was hoarse, and he was shaking. Draco put his arm around the boy, ignoring the looks from around the room that he imagined to be saying *What did you do now?*

"Shh." Draco whispered, rubbing the boy's back gently. "Shh. When are they going to kill? Have you spoken with any Aurors? Teachers?"

The boy sniffled and choked. "No! If father found out..." He sobbed again, and Draco tightened his hold around the boy.

"Hush. He won't. He won't find out," Draco promised him, remembering his own relationship with his father. The fear that he would disappoint him if he didn't serve the same master correctly. The terror he had felt, the disappointment when he was unable to kill Dumbledore.

"He can't hurt you," he assured Edwin. "I need you to do something for me, though."

"W-what?" Edwin asked, looking up.

"I need you to write your father. I can tell you're clever, you can do this." Draco murmured soothingly. "You need to write him and ask him about the attackers. Make it sound like you're interested."

"And?" Edwin's crying had subsided slightly, and his eyes were filled with earnest hope.

"Send me the letter, and I'll give it to the Aurors. And I'll keep you safe from them," he added, hugging the boy quickly. "Your father's actions won't do anything to you. You still have a chance."

I can save this boy from a fate like mine.

He let Edwin go. "I'll walk you back to the castle, and then you need to write your father. And I'll get help." He promised.

"Thank you." The boy choked.

His father won't be allowed to break his future for him. It's not too late.

It can't be too late...

Rough Day

Chapter Summary

In which we learn about Ron's thoughts on Draco and Harry. And we finally learn some more about Harry's PTSD and why exactly he isn't an auror.

If you don't like sadness or anger or anything angsty like that I apologize in advance because this chapter is a little sad. Harry has issues, too.
(rape mention)

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Draco wasn't home when Harry apparated into the shop. Which was odd, because he knew Draco didn't go out much.

He really doesn't, does he? Pansy said he "closed off." I wonder if he has any actual friends?

Harry knew, of course, that Draco spent time in the muggle world, running errands and such. He also knew he spent time in muggle pubs and clubs when he craved attention, but he hadn't been doing that since Harry came along.

I'll have to have a chat with him about his social life. Not that it's my job, but I don't want to be the only person in his life.

He realized that Hermione might have been the only other person to have visited Draco's flat besides himself.

Gods, why didn't I notice before?

And where is he?

In the past week, Draco had always been home when Harry showed up. The flat was sad without his warm energy and magic filling it up. The dismal living room taunted him and unnerved him, and the staircase down to the shop sat like a dark hole in the wall. He went to close it so it wouldn't be staring at him and painting images of basilisks slithering up the stairs.

He was tired after the day spent with Luna, and he was considering crashing on Draco's leather chair, but he didn't think he'd be able to handle it. And he would feel like an old man in that chair; the only thing that could make it worse is if Draco had mounted an animal head on the wall. He hoped he had better taste than that...

How does he stand being alone here all the time, anyway?

He went into Draco's bedroom, painted in tones of cream against the gray carpet that filled everywhere but the kitchen. The bed took up most of the room, it's forest green comforter bright and comforting. He took off the plaid suit from the photo shoot that he was still wearing, changing into an old-looking robe in Draco's closet, not caring that he would probably be upset.

He climbed onto the bed, pulling back the silk sheets that were the same ivory color as the walls.

He noticed there was a red wool blanket under the comforter, and for some reason it made him smile. He had never thought of Draco as the kind of man to own red, but perhaps that was just unfair House stereotypes.

He laid back against the pillow and closed his eyes.

Just a quick nap. Until Draco's home.

Ron Weasley hadn't been expecting any visitors to his office that afternoon. Especially not Draco Malfoy, of all people. He had no idea what the git wanted, or was even thinking, storming right into the office when he was busy filing cases.

Sure, it was a break from the mundane... But it was still *Malfoy*.

He had blown into the office, a storm of magic and stressful energy, and planted his palms on Ron's desk.

"Weasley," he panted. "We need to talk."

"Oh, hello, Ron, how are you, Ron? Do you have a minute? Of course I do, Malfoy, thanks for stopping by," Ron muttered sarcastically, rolling his eyes.

"Weasley," Malfoy glared icy daggers at him, but Ron didn't break. Being an Auror, he was used to angry behavior like this.

"Yes, Malfoy?" Ron raised an eyebrow.

"I need you to check up on a Hogwarts student. His name's Edwin Pellon." Malfoy ordered. "I just came back from a visit with him in Hogsmeade, though if you didn't have so many damn secretaries, I could have gotten to you sooner..."

"And why would I need to check up on him if you just left?" Ron demanded, crossing his arms. *Pellon. I know that name. Don't I?*

"His father killed his mother under *Imperio* two weeks ago." Malfoy informed him.

Ron frowned. "I don't think we investigated that case... It doesn't sound familiar. We were a bit busy with the attacks two weeks ago..."

"It was part of the attacks!" Malfoy snarled. "That's what I'm trying to *tell* you. I'm guessing it wasn't investigated as much because Mrs. Pellon was a pureblood, hm?" His face was drawn in an ugly scowl.

"What a hypocrite, Malfoy. You talk about respecting the muggleborns, and here you are only interested in the one pureblood case?" Ron shook his head. *Does Harry know about this? Now that they're friends and all...*

Malfoy took a step back, and his angry face fell, and there was a panicked look in his eye. He was frozen in place, and Ron didn't know what the bloody hell was wrong with him.

"I-I..." Malfoy shook his head. "That's not what this is about. Just because I'm advocating for muggleborns doesn't mean I have to ignore the other people facing discrimination." He sounded as if he were talking to himself, soft and quiet with a far away look in his eye.

"Malfoy?" Ron was slightly concerned now...

Something snapped in the man's expression, and he rounded on Ron again. "Mr. Pellon was part of the attacks. His son was deeply affected by this, even if it was his mother who was killed. A boy's mother was still killed, Weasley, and it was by the same twisted people who did the rest of this."

Ron blinked, not knowing what to say.

"So don't stoop so low as to bring our old spite into this, you hear? That boy just spent two hours bawling to me about how they broke his father, and now the man is trying to join them. He's corresponding with his son, and that boy may be the only way you can prevent the next attack." Malfoy's voice was ice, and his eyes had darkened.

"I-I'm sorry." Ron muttered, staring up at Malfoy in shock. He shook his head, and cleared his throat. "You say he's at Hogwarts? We'll send some people over immediately to watch the correspondence."

"There's the Auror." Malfoy muttered, but it wasn't sneered as it might've once been.

"The boy wrote to his father as soon as he got back to the castle. That was over an hour ago. He said he would forward his father's response to me," Malfoy explained. "It should be here within an hour or two, given the fact that the boy says their correspondence time is rather fast."

"Then I should probably wait with you for it," Ron speculated. "It would be easier. Then you wouldn't have to deal with all the security to get back to me." He didn't want to have to spend any more time with Malfoy than he needed to, but apparently... he needed to. The attacks were first and foremost on his mind, and he would suffer through spending time with the git in his probably too-fancy house...

Malfoy grimaced. "As much as I hate to admit it, you're right. I'll apparate you to my flat."

"Cheers." Ron replied dryly.

He led Malfoy out of his Ministry office, heading outside to the nearest apparition point. Grudgingly, he took Malfoy's arm.

"You don't live in the Manor, do you?" Ron asked all of a sudden, not wanting to go back there. He had been tortured there, and he wasn't quite in the mood to remember that.

Malfoy rolled his eyes, and with a *snap* they were disappearing.

When his body was back in place and his eyes were opened, he realized they were in a shop full of muggle items and wizarding records. The walls were painted royal blue, and all the furniture was a dark brown oak. It looked similar to the pieces Harry made, he thought, with the waving and winding of the wood.

"Is this your shop?" He asked Malfoy.

"Cobalt Records, yes. Don't you read the papers?" He scoffed. "I live upstairs," he added.

Ron grimaced as he followed the prick up the stairs.

Don't you read the papers? Me, me, me, me. Blegh. He thought, his inner dialogue gone to a mocking falsetto.

The stairs were boxy and unnerving (a fire hazard, too, he thought). At the top, the door was closed, and the thought that Malfoy had brought him up there to corner him and kill him briefly crossed his mind. He couldn't imagine Malfoy living in a place like *this*.

But then Malfoy opened the door, and a living room that he was sure Harry would call a "designing nightmare" appeared. He chuckled softly to himself, realizing how much Harry had changed. Ever since he had gotten into furniture making, the man had become obsessed with aesthetic and lighting and comfort (though mostly the latter).

He would have thought Malfoy to care even more, but it was the opposite.

The flat had cheap, gray shag carpet. The living room was little more than a chair and a plank over an inert fireplace, holding up an exalted record player. The kitchen table was round and flimsy-looking, with light wood and round metal chairs. The floor in the kitchen was the only place without the gray carpet, with an off-white linoleum floor the same color as the walls and cupboards. There was an oven, a sink, and a slate gray counter top.

"Not what I was expecting." Ron murmured, crossing his arms and looking around the tiny living space.

"Sorry." Malfoy scoffed, walking over to the window that was over the sink. He opened it, and let in a rush of frigid, early February air. The sun was just going down, but it was cloudy, and it was *cold*.

"So the owl can come," Draco informed him. "Toilet's down the hall and to the right if you need. I'm making tea," he added.

"Got any coffee?" Ron asked him, walking into the hallway.

"Yeah, it's for--" he broke off. "Yeah, I'll make coffee."

Ron was about to turn to enter the bathroom, but the bedroom door was open, and he saw a lump under the mussed up covers. "Er, Malfoy?" He called. Malfoy didn't *seem* to know there was someone in his bed....

Ron's auror instincts kicked in, and for some reason, he felt suspicious. He snuck though the door and towards the bed.

"What are you doing, Weasley?" Malfoy demanded.

Ron ignored him. He crept towards the figure in the bed, catching dark hair, glasses--

"Harry?!" Ron cried in shock. Harry barely stirred, instead pulling the covers over his head and grumbling.

"Draco..." Harry grumbled, and Ron felt sick from the way from the way he said the name.

"Shit!" Malfoy called from the kitchen, and Ron heard him storm into the room.

Why the hell is Harry in Malfoy's bed? He felt himself jumping to conclusions that he had a feeling weren't very far off... Harry had mentioned he was spending time with Draco, and Ron had even joked about them both being gay... But he hadn't thought.... No, it was too strange...

In a moment, Malfoy was sitting on the bed, and he watched as the man's hand drifted to Harry's face like it was second nature. He tried to force himself to calm down, that it wasn't a big deal... But it was too bloody *weird*...

"Harry," Malfoy whispered. "How long have you been here?" He was gingerly touching Harry's hair, and Ron hadn't ever imagined the man showing that kind of affection... He had to look away, but he couldn't. It was like watching a cat tear apart a mouse; it was horrifying but too fascinating to look away,

"Mmmph." Harry groaned, and rolled over to look at Malfoy, whose body on the bed was obstructing Harry's view of Ron. Ron stayed quiet... He wanted to see what this *really* was. He didn't want Harry to think he had to make up some sort of lie to defend himself...

Because he hoped that Harry would have some sort of defense, and he'd start yelling at Malfoy for drugging him or kidnapping him and not be making it up to appease Ron.

Unless he's under amortentia. Then how will I know? I'll know, won't I?

"What time is it?" Harry moaned, and Ron stared as his friend reached out to stroke Malfoy's arm. *What. The. Hell.*

"Almost six in the evening. When did you show up? I've been gone since noon." Malfoy replied fondly, and he seemed to have forgotten that Ron was sitting in on the entire encounter.

"A few hours ago. Was modeling the line with Luna and Pansy," Harry yawned and started to hoist himself up. "I dropped by and you weren't here, so I--" He broke off as he saw Ron standing there.

"Ron?" Harry sat up, straight as an arrow. "What are you doing standing there? How'd you get in?" he cried, throwing the blankets off of himself. Ron was grateful to see that he was fully clothed.

Malfoy buried his head in his hands. "Oh. Right."

"Right? What's right about this?" Ron demanded, and he felt his voice rising in pitch. "What are you doing in Malfoy's flat? In his *bed*?"

"Might as well be his bed..." Malfoy muttered.

"Stay out of this, Malfoy! Unless you want to explain what you're up to? And what you did to my best mate?" Ron was about to draw his wand, and he felt a swirl of angry magic fill the room. But it wasn't Malfoy's.... He recognized it as Harry's, and in a moment he swallowed his words and was terrified.

"Ron." Harry growled. "What are you going on about?" He demanded, linking his arm with Malfoy's defensively.

"Did you not tell him?" Malfoy grumbled quietly.

"I've barely told anyone, Draco," Harry hissed. "I'm not exactly out yet, am I?"

That hurt. *He doesn't think he can tell me?*

"Harry, you could have told me!" Ron protested. He felt another angry flare of magic from Harry, and he involuntarily stepped back.

"No, Ron, I couldn't. Because you'd react like this. I thought you might arrest him for abuse of love magic or something!" Harry accused him. He turned to face Malfoy. "Did you bring him over?"

"Yes..." Malfoy mumbled. Ron was surprised to see he wasn't trying to match Harry's anger. "It's for Edwin. He's sending a letter, and it would be best if there was an Auror to handle it immediately," he explained.

Harry frowned. "Why? What's wrong?"

"Nothing, yet." Malfoy sighed. He leaned over to kiss Harry's forehead, which made Harry scowl.

"Not telling me, then?"

"I made coffee. When you're less emotional and more awake, we can talk." Malfoy promised him, standing up.

Harry frowned. "I guess I'm grumpy when I wake up," he mumbled.

"I know." Both Ron and Malfoy said at the same time, which made Ron uneasy.

Draco had not expected Harry to be over. Of course, he had been coming over nearly every day... But he hadn't even thought of it today. He was used to being alone, anyway. And he certainly wasn't expecting Harry to be in his *bed*. Though he had enjoyed Weasley's shock....

But, still. It had been embarrassing. And rather disappointing that he had other things to do besides join Harry and just lie down...

His head was throbbing from the day. The exertion that it took to just be in public and fight off the anxiety amazed him... He felt as though he had climbed a mountain. And on top of worrying for himself, he was worried about Edwin.

He saw himself in Edwin. He saw the potential of the boy being called over to the wrong side, being forced to do things he didn't want to do... He couldn't let that happen, to see the boy be crushed by the weight of his own wrongdoings.

He poured a cup of coffee, and handed it to Harry.

"How do you take your coffee?" He asked Weasley, who had sat down at the table and looked as though he had just found out that one of Lovegood's imaginary creatures were real. His cheeks were puffed and were close to the shade of his ginger hair.

"Lots of sugar." Weasley grumbled, glaring at him subtly.

Draco sighed, pouring himself a mug of warm milk and adding a splash of coffee. Harry had teased him about it, but it was the only way he could tolerate it. Weasley raised an eyebrow, and Draco felt tempted to hex the freckles off of his face. He didn't want the man's judgement right now.

Harry just glared in defense of him, for which he was eternally grateful.

"So, is Edwin alright?" Harry asked. "I'm guessing you were off seeing him today," he added, giving Draco a questioning glance.

"Yes. After your chat with him, we've been writing. Apparently, he's been writing his father. He's sending us the next response." Draco explained.

"Wait," Harry paused, setting down his mug. "Why? What's special about this one?" He scratched the back of his head groggily, apparently still not awake from his nap.

"I asked him to feign interest in his father's letter. When he responds, he'll send me the letter. Then, depending on what it says, Auror Weasley here should choose to take the appropriate action." Draco explained, sipping at his coffee-milk.

Harry shifted his shoulders. "Can't we do something? Take action? Go and fight Edwin's father?" He looked like he was itching with Gryffindor bravery.

"Harry, love," Draco added the pet name just to annoy Weasley, but also to soothe Harry, "you can't. We don't know anything yet, and you can't just jump in and save the day like you used to. You might still be a Gryffindor, but that doesn't mean--"

"You're not an Auror, Harry," Weasley interrupted. "You'll have to leave it to us."

"Don't remind me," Harry snapped. "And what good you lot have done with it! You didn't even see the attack coming, and you've completely ignored Edwin and his father just because the victim in their family was Pureblooded. It's sick!" He cried, glaring at Weasley.

"You've been spending too much time with *Pennom*, Harry. It's not as simple as that," Weasley countered.

Draco was pissed at the remark, but Harry was worse. Draco felt that rush of potent magic that he felt that first day down in the shop. He knew it wasn't directed at him, so he sat back and watched as Weasley's face paled.

"I've heard enough people talk shit about Draco today, alright Ron?" He hissed, his knuckles white from clenching his fists. "The last thing I need is for you to blame my preexisting opinions on him. All Draco's said is what people are thinking, that's why he's so popular. Maybe you twats at the Ministry don't like him... But it's only because you're hiding!"

"Harry..."

"Shut up, Ron!" Harry howled. "Oh, look. The owl's here. Take the bloody letter and leave." He snapped, pointing at the barn owl that just flew through the open window.

Draco sighed, taking the letter. The letter was scrawled in poor handwriting. Even on parchment, the boy's father seemed mad.

Edwin:

So glad you have agreed. So proud of you. I can't give them what they want. But with your magic... They can do it. You have what they want.

I will come to see you soon. Hangyr and Kollop will be so pleased.

You will see the power soon. It will be beautiful. With your magic. So beautiful.

It was not signed, but it didn't have to be for Draco to know it was from the boy's father. It reminded him of his own father's scrawls sent to him from Azkaban in recent years...

He shuddered. The letters had followed him everywhere, but he had ignored them.

Weasley stood and snatched the letter, reading it with narrowed blue eyes that widened in fear as he saw the implications of the letter. "I'm taking this. We need aurors there, now. With the boy, and wherever the father lives."

Harry scoffed. "Glad you're finally looking into it. I suppose it's no use asking if I can help?" He added, watching as the aurora stuffed the letter into his pocket.

"You know why you can't, Harry," he said, softly but resignedly. He apparated away just as Harry looked like he was going to apologize.

"What did the letter say?" Harry asked Draco.

Draco sighed, walking over to Harry to place a hand on his shoulder. He placed the other hand on Harry's neck to feel his pulse, which Harry had taken to doing to him when he got anxious.

"I don't think that would help," he told Harry firmly. "You're upset. No more coffee," he added, taking the cup away. "You're jittering, and I don't want you making whatever this is any worse."

Harry frowned at the orders, but he put the cup down.

"Now, you're going to come with me to the bedroom, and we're going to lay down and work this out." Draco commanded.

Harry's eyes flashed with fear, but his magic swelled angrily again. "What are you saying? I thought you wouldn't talk to me like that! You're not like that!" He shouted, standing up and pulling away from Draco's touch.

"What...?" Draco took a step back. "Harry. I just want to talk. We don't have to go to the bedroom if you don't want," he added warily, wondering what he had done to lose Harry's trust all of the sudden.

"Sorry." Harry breathed, crossing his arms. "I just... You sounded like... And I thought..."

"Harry, I don't know what you're saying." Draco was growing more and more concerned. "What did I say?" He asked, deliberately not touching Harry because he knew it might trigger some other reaction.

"I... Give me a minute."

"Okay." Draco sighed. "It's been a rough day for both of us. You look a little worse for wear. Do you want to start with that? How did today go?"

Harry sighed, slumping against the kitchen wall and sliding to the floor. Draco carefully mirrored him, sitting on the floor against the sink cabinet.

"I met McLaggen at the photoshoot. He was an asshole. He... he said some things about you, and I got angry..." He muttered, pulling his knees into his chest.

"People say things all the time. McLaggen isn't someone to get worked up over."

"It wasn't just that! He said..." Harry choked bait, but continued. "He said all you were was an easy fuck, and that all you were good for was a blow job. And I wanted to kill him for saying

that."

"You didn't think that we...? Because we didn't. I didn't even interview him," Draco assured him, and he was telling the truth. Harry was the only Gryffindor he'd had interest for.

"No. I wasn't jealous or anything like that!" Harry protested. "It was just..." He let out a heaving sigh. "Don't try and dispute this... but I used to think those things about myself. That I was just something to fuck."

Draco frowned. "Harry... Why? You're a hero. A wonderful person." He added.

Harry closed his eyes. "My first boyfriend. Glen. The first person I had romantic feelings for." He announced, pursing his lips. Draco waited for him to continue.

"At first, it was fun. He treated me well. We met at a bar, made out, and he took me home. He treated me nicely, and convinced me I... owed him, you know? I owed him sex. And that's how it went." Harry explained. "I... I didn't like it. I hated it, actually. But I owed him."

Draco felt his throat tightening. Harry deserved more than that.... He was The Boy Who Lived, wasn't he? But that wasn't why he deserved it, and Harry would hate it if he said that... Harry deserved better because he was *Harry*.

"How long?" Draco asked.

"I don't even know. It wasn't long after the war, but it was before your trial... Or was it? I don't even remember. I was really depressed." He confessed.

"And then?"

"Then my Gryffindor kicked in and I left him. And I thought I should try women again."

"And how did that go?"

"I couldn't give them what they wanted... If you know what I mean? I didn't want to take them on romantic dates, the idea of having sex with them repulsed me... It just didn't work." Harry looked ashamed.

"That's understandable, Harry." He assured him. Then, "You've given me all that I wanted from you, if that means everything."

Harry let out a shuddering sob. "Really?" He asked. "Everyone else... they got so angry with me. I'd meet them in a club, and then I wouldn't let them fuck me when they took me home. Or we'd date for a few weeks, and I'd avoid it, and they'd give up."

"But you learned to say no?"

Harry laughed wryly. "It took a while..." He muttered. "And more often than not, I'd just explode at them. Get angry, make something blow up or break. Then, the Obliviators would come, because they were always muggles." His eyes pinched shut.

"That's why I can't be an Auror."

"Because you caused so many muggle incidents?"

"No. Because I get angry. They said I was too 'emotionally unstable.' I lied when I said that I made it out of the war alright." He admitted.

Draco smiled, but it was bittersweet. "So that's how you know how to calm me down so well. We're not unlike after all."

"But I don't worry like you do. I just hurt people, in the moment. I don't know which is worse."

"It's not a competition." Draco reminded him.

"I know." Harry sighed.

"I got angry with Ron because I thought he was being unjust. And at you after that because what you said was too close to what Glen would always tell me." He confessed.

"You don't have to come to my bedroom again if you don't want to. I'm sorry if I've forced you before." Draco murmured, hoping he had never done so.

"Draco." Harry scoffed. "If you had forced me to do anything, I would have hurt you. Left. Sleeping in your bed is very different from you raping me."

Draco paled, realizing that in those other relationships, Harry *had* been raped.

"Can I stay the night?" Harry asked. "I don't want to have nightmares tonight. No dreamless sleep, still."

"You don't ever have to ask, as I think you know. Considering the fact I found you in my bed earlier today," he added, trying to lighten the mood.

"I made the bed! I technically have the right." Harry laughed, and the twinkle in his eye had returned.

"You better not say that to all your customers!" Draco teased.

"Shut it. I'm using your shower, by the way."

"I'll probably be asleep by the time you're done. Can we talk more in the morning? We've the gala to plan."

"Ugh. The gala. What were we thinking?" Harry moaned, pulling himself to his feet.

"We'll deal with it tomorrow." Draco assured him as he wandered into the bathroom. "And, by the way, don't think I didn't notice you're wearing my casual robes!" He called after him, smiling as it earned a chuckle from Harry. But once he was down the hallway, his smile turned back to a frown.

Draco sighed, hurting at the thought of everything Harry had told him. But, his mind was also on Edwin and whoever the attackers were.

It had been a rough day.

Chapter End Notes

Harry is a very angry person sometimes, but that's normal in child abuse victims and war PTSD victims alike. His reaction to stress is different from Draco's. Harry's PTSD triggers a fight reaction, causing him to get angry and aggressive whenever he encounters an "unfair" situation or something that triggers an old memory. Draco, on the other hand, has social anxiety, rooting from fear of judgment from others and a general mistrust of other people, and eliciting a flight reaction.

I felt the need to clarify that.

Only Just Begun

Chapter Summary

This chapter starts off nice as per usual but CLIFFHANGER WARNING at the end because this is getting intense

Chapter Notes

Song is This Will Be Our Year by Zombies

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Harry was asleep in Draco's bed for the second night in the row, with the red wool blanket pulled up over his face and wearing one of Draco's silk "sleeping shirts." He hadn't had the chance to return home and get his own clothes.

They had spent the entire previous day (after the emotional strain of Ron and talking about his past) planning for the gala and listening to Draco's records. Draco had finally settled for calling it a "gala," even if the guests did wear "those ridiculous child garments."

Harry had persuaded him they were decent when Draco had found the plaid suit on the floor of his bedroom, and insisted Harry try it on. "Well, the fit isn't all that bad..." He had muttered.

They had also agreed that Draco would choose all the music, and an owled Hermione asking if she could find them some paid house elves they could use for catering. Draco wasn't too pleased with that, but he had agreed to it eventually, too.

As Harry's eyes fluttered open, he found that Draco wasn't there. He heard the water running, though, and Draco singing...

Is Draco singing?!

Harry shot out of bed, and saw he had left the bathroom door open. The smell of apples wafted out of the steam, and he leaned against the doorframe, listening to Draco's voice.

"The warmth of your love's like the warmth of the sun. And this will be our year, took a long time to come. Don't let go of my hand, now the darkness is gone..."

Harry grinned. They had listened to it yesterday, he remembered.

"And I won't forget the way you helped me up when I was down! And I won't forget the way you said: Darling, I love you, you gave me strength to go on! Now we're there, and we've only just begun--"

This time, he laughed fondly, interrupting Draco's singing. "I don't think I've said that yet!" He called into the bathroom.

Draco gave a startled yelp, and stopped singing. "Good morning to you, too!" He snapped, his dignity apparently damaged.

"Do you always sing in the shower?" Harry asked him cheerfully.

"Only when I'm in a particularly good mood," he replied, turning off the water and pulling a towel off the rack before stepping out of the shower. He was dripping wet, and the towel was wrapped around his waist and being held up by one hand.

Harry rolled his eyes. "You're terribly corny, aren't you?"

"It's still early morning, remember? I'm allowed to be."

Harry chuckled, and pulled another towel off the rack. He stood on his tip toes to dry off Draco's wet hair.

"I appreciate the sentiment, but are you trying to give me split ends? That's *terry cloth*." He scoffed, but did not do anything to stop him.

"Oh, pity child. Your fine hairs will have to deal with it, won't they? I'm trying to be affectionate." Harry retorted. "And you're no fun to cuddle when your hair is wet and cold," he added bitterly.

"There *are* drying charms, if you couldn't have waited for it to air dry," Draco informed him.

Harry removed the towel. "Oh, you're no fun!" He razzed, dropping the offending terry cloth and exiting the bathroom. "Dry off, you priss, and put some clothes on. I'm making coffee."

He heard Draco grumble something like "you don't have to be that way," and ignored it. In the kitchen, he saw that an owl had flown in through the open window and dropped off a copy of *The Prophet* and *Witch Weekly*. Harry was on the cover of both, modeling different outfits in each one.

He started the coffee and picked up the cover of him in the "vampire suit." The photo was replaying him crossing his arms and scowling at the camera.

"You'll like the papers this morning!" Harry called out to him, picking up *Witch Weekly*. The cover was him in the scale-sweater and the tight leopard pants. This pose was him pouting and running a hand through his hair.

"Was that sarcasm?" Draco asked as he trod apprehensively into the kitchen.

"See for yourself," Harry told him, pointing to the pictures sprawled out on the table. Draco picked up the one with the white vampire suit.

"Gods, Potter, *why?*" He moaned, staring at the picture with wide eyes. He picked up the *Witch Weekly* cover, his jaw slackening. "I don't know what's more unfair--the fact that you pull these ridiculous garments off, or the fact that every witch and wizard alike probably wants to pounce on you now."

"You think it's that good?" Harry asked, peering over his shoulder as he flipped the magazine open to see the rest of the outfits.

"Yes," Draco replied hastily. "Even if you look like a vagabond in this one, you're... you're..." He was staring at the picture of the orange pants and the sun shirt. The pants that started it all.

"I appreciate your physical appearance, too, Draco," Harry purred.

"Yes, I noticed you staring," Draco joked. "But... what *is* this?" He asked, pointing to the hideously orange pants.

"Bozo said it was boho." Harry shrugged.

"Not even asking..." Draco murmured. "Oh, there's the plaid again!" He grinned, pointing to the group shot. They looked like a dysfunctional group of friends. Luna and Harry stood on either side of Pansy, making rude faces at her, while McLaggen sulked to the side with a dramatic toss of his head in the silvery tight suit.

"Was it fun?" Draco asked him.

"Not really." Harry muttered.

"Pity." Draco sighed. "I would love to see you personally in some of these..."

"At the gala!" Harry sang, and Draco nodded earnestly.

"Very exciting. My vote is on the blood and white," he suggested.

"Only if you wear the red dragon suit McLaggen tried!"

"You don't know about mother's pet name for me, do you?" Draco murmured, but he trailed off. Harry looked towards what he was staring at. Another letter was sitting on the counter.

"Enough distracting, for the both of us." He said quietly. "Damn. I forgot about Edwin... with the gala, and you... and... Damn." He shook his head as he read the parchment.

"What does it say? You never told me about the last one, either." Harry tried to peer over at the letter, but Draco turned away. "Draco, you can't 'distract' me by not saying anything. And I won't worry like you!" He protested.

"But you might act rash." Draco protested. "Gods... I spent all day yesterday lazing around, and I didn't even think of Edwin!"

"Draco. You couldn't have done anything. Worrying wouldn't have helped." Harry objected. "Is he fine?"

Draco sighed, and he suddenly wrapped Harry in a hug. "He's fine," he assured him. "He said Weasley and a few other Aurors came to see him. He's not happy about that, and he can't have his father finding out."

"Did they find anything about the next attack?" Harry queried, placing his hands to feel Draco's pulse again. It wasn't racing, but it was erratic. "Something's wrong," he presumed, unable to think of a practical reason as to why Draco's pulse would be flipping and fluttering erratically.

"Yes." Draco responded with pinching his eyes closed and tightening his grip on Harry. "They don't know if there's going to be another attack. Mr. Pellon might just be stark mad," he explained, pulling away.

"I'm not following. What did you learn from the first one?" Harry narrowed his eyes, watching Draco's expression closely. He wasn't in the mood to be lied to. Not about this.

Draco filled a glass with water, not responding. He looked focused on the glass and downing it, avoiding meeting Harry's gaze or otherwise communicating with him. Once he had drank it, setting it down with a shaky *clink*, he answered.

"Mr. Pellon is a squib; I think you know that. He's expressed some desire to serve the men that made him kill his wife. But he's not enough, without having magic. They want Edwin... for something."

"Ron has the letter, doesn't he?" Harry asked. When Draco nodded, he felt stumped. "I just want to see it. What was it that they could have wanted?" He wondered aloud, catching Draco's eye.

"He mentioned them wanting what Edwin 'had'. It might not just have meant his magic." Draco suggested. "And he also said how beautiful it would be..."

"What would be beautiful?" Harry crossed his arms and concentrated. "It makes it sound like there's a larger goal at hand, don't you think?"

"Almost cult-like." Draco mused.

Harry sighed, slumping against the counter. He wished he had been able to become an Auror. Then, he would be able to get to the bottom of this. He'd be able to step into the middle of it and *do* something. Instead, he was sitting around and planning galas and getting photographed for magazines. This wasn't how he'd planned his life to pan out.

Draco must have seen the look in his eye, because he went to stand next to Harry and lean against the counter. "I know you're frustrated. But I think you're *worrying*, Harry. Is this about not being to do anything?"

"Yes," Harry sulked. "You feel the same way," he added, remembering Draco's jumpy pulse. He was *restless*. They both were.

"Well, yeah. I feel like I'm a part of this whole deal. Edwin's story is very close to home for me. So it just seems unfair that I can't jump in and fix it." He tossed his head to give Harry a pointed look. "Is this where you Gryffindors usually jump in and break some rules?"

"Yeah." Harry agreed wryly. "But that was in school. I'm an adult now, and I don't have *Voldemort* as an excuse anymore. The Boy Who Lived is just a memory now."

"So, what could the Boy Who Lived do now?"

Harry rolled his eyes. "Write invitations for the *party*. Follow 'Mione's plan of action and go out to fucking lunch without glammers and get photographed. Schedule interviews. But none of that helps Edwin, or gets us any closer to dealing with the attack." He grumbled. "I'm just a celebrity. Is there anything *you* can do? Penom? Malfoy? Draco?"

Draco frowned. "Why did you just talk like I was three different people?"

"Because sometimes I think you are. Malfoy was my enemy. Penom is a spokesperson, words on paper. Draco is... the person I'm always with." He didn't know what to call Draco. His boyfriend? No, they weren't public. His companion? No, they were much closer than that. His supporter? No, that was just rude...

"Should I be offended? I feel offended," Draco scowled, but his voice was light.

"*Malfoy* isn't an option; he's gone, and so are all his contacts. Penom doesn't have enough information yet to publish anything. And Draco? I can only console you, but I'm barely able to console myself." he explained, reaching out to hold Harry's hand.

"What would Hermione do?" Harry mumbled, rolling his head back to stare at the ceiling.

"She wrote out an entire bloody plan, remember? We don't have to ask that question..."

"No, I mean what would *she* do? Not what would she tell *us* to do, which she already has." Harry remembered the owl she had sent them yesterday. She had chastised them for ignoring her plan all this time, and even if Draco's own efforts were admirable, there were still crucial elements she expected them to implement. She wanted them to start appearing casually in public, so that Harry's coming out wouldn't seem like such a sudden personal coverage.

But at this point, he doubted it was about that anymore. She was just as worried about Draco's asocial habits as he was, and she accused Harry of having the same problem. Both of them avoided going out in public, and she tried to convince them it wasn't healthy.

Draco rolled his eyes. "She would still tell us what to do-- get our *pictures* taken together, relax, and to leave it to Ron."

"You don't know me well at all." A voice from the stairwell chuckled. Harry jumped, already having an absurd discomfort with the staircase. Hermione leaned in the doorway, her face

half covered in shadows and her hair and slim frame making up the majority of her silhouette.

"How did you even get *in*?" Draco demanded. "The wards only drop for me or Harry!"

Hermione laughed again, stepping into the dark sitting room and into the kitchen. "I apparated to the front and used a little trick from the Department of Magical Law Enforcement," she said, apparently not willing to divulge *which* trick.

"But you work at the Magical Creatures department...?" Harry asked, shaking his head in awe. Hermione never failed to surprise.

Hermione scowled. "Honestly, Harry, if you had even *listened* when I told you about my promotion, you'd know I'm switching departments."

Harry flushed. "I-I'm sorry. I'm a terrible friend," he added for consolation.

"No, I remember. You were daydreaming about Pennom. And you didn't even know he was Draco then," she continued wryly.

Draco gave Harry a side glance that he didn't particularly like, so he ignored it.

"Fine. Whatever," Harry muttered. "What are you doing here?"

"I came by to *tell you what to do*, as Pennom here so elegantly put it," she huffed sardonically. When they both just stared at her, she rolled her eyes. "I saw the photo shoot, Harry. I wanted to check in on you."

"And you immediately assumed I would be here?" He scoffed defensively.

Hermione raised an eyebrow. "I wasn't wrong, was I? I can't imagine what you do in here all day..."

"I bet you could," Draco smirked and giving her a suggestive wink. Harry was about to defend himself, but Draco cast him another sidelong glance that said *Come on. Just let her think we have a wild sex life*.

Harry supposed that would be better. Otherwise, Draco might look like a sap.

Hermione's eyes widened minutely, but she shook her head as if to clear her mind. "Right. The photo shoot. How did it go?" She asked them, though it should have just been Harry.

"Fine. We're going to see if we can use the photos to promote the gala," Harry informed her. "Would Terry cover that?"

"He'd love to."

"That's not what we're worried about right now, though." Draco reminded them.

Hermione frowned. "What's the issue?"

Draco handed her the letter that Edwin had sent him that morning. Harry wanted to protest that he hadn't gotten to read it, but that didn't matter. Hermione was reading it with a perturbed look on her face.

"You mean, they don't *know* where the father is? Why weren't they keeping tabs on him after the attacks?" She demanded, rage burning in her eyes. "Why haven't you told me about this?"

"I didn't think he was in danger until recently!" Draco protested, and proceeded to fill her in on the basics of Edwin's tale.

Harry interrupted him, though. "Since when was he in danger, Draco? What's in the letter?"

Draco sighed. "Pellon sent several letters to Edwin yesterday. He's threatening to take him away from school, and they can't find him anywhere. Edwin's still safe with the Aurors, though."

Hermione handed him the letter, and he soaked it up quickly. His blood froze at what he read, but then it boiled.

"You're joking." Harry hissed. All at once, he felt his magic swirl around him. He tried to control the rage he was feeling, as it was inexplicable to him, but he couldn't.

"Harry. There's nothing you can do." Hermione said, trying to soothe him. He wished it was working.

"I need to go get something." He whispered. He used his strengthened magic to apparate himself straight out of Draco's flat and into Grimmauld place. The house was waiting for him--grim, untouched, slightly neglected. His footsteps creaked as he ran through the house to the spot where he hid the Marauder's Map.

It was waiting for him, too. He pulled away the brick that concealed it and removed it from the hole in the wall. Pulling his wand out of his pocket (which he realized was on Draco's elegant black night clothes), he tapped the map and whispered, "I solemnly swear I'm up to no good."

Except he was. And a boy's life was possibly at stake.

The map blossomed to life, left untouched after so many years. He should have given it to someone else, but now he was glad he didn't.

He saw the familiar dot marked Ron Weasley, pacing around the Slytherin dorms (where he admittedly never thought he would see it). A dot belonging to an Edwin Pellon remained static nearby.

But that wasn't who he was looking for. He pored over the map, looking at every obscure spot he could imagine.

Then, he saw what he was looking for, moving swiftly away from the astronomy tower, of all places.

Charles Pellon. Edwin's father.

What are we going to do with you, Mr. Pellon?

"Where did he go?" Draco cried, grasping Hermione by the shoulders. "Where would he have gone?"

Hermione took a deep breath. "I don't know, Draco." She breathed. "But I need you to stay calm."

"How can I?" He shouted. "He went off to do something Gryffindor! He's going to hurt himself!"

The wolves snapped at him, springing all at once from the shadows. Only, for once, they weren't after him. He saw them springing on Harry. They demonstrated his death, ripping him apart and destroying every bit of light that came from him.

Draco's vision flickered, dark patches flashing in the corners of his eyes. He fell to his knees, suddenly feeling sick as the shadowy beasts dragged out images for him to see--images of his life without light, images of himself breaking, images of Edwin being tortured, images of an Imperio-ed Edwin torturing Harry.

"Draco!" He heard a voice shriek. He felt hands on his shoulders, and a voice screeching in his ears. "Breathe! Draco, you can breathe. Listen to me. You can breathe."

But he couldn't? How could he? The air was so thick...

A smack to his face startled him back to reality. Suddenly, air returned to his lungs, and he was scrawling away from the source of the hit. He looked around, panting and feeling like a scared animal.

"What the hell was that? Draco, you need to pull it together!" It was Hermione. She looked royally pissed, and he was still royally panicked.

"It was a fucking panic attack, Granger." He snapped. "It happens. A lot."

Her face hardly softened. "Well, are you okay?"

"No. It was fast but worse than I've had in over a month." He told her, slowly beginning to feel the rest of his body again. His hands were unable to stop shaking, and his head was throbbing. He must've hit it on the ground.

"Oh." She frowned. "I would give you a calming draught, but I don't have any. Can you stand?" She asked him.

"Not yet," he winced, feeling his legs like jelly. He thought of Harry, and how he might be in danger, and he felt sick again. "We have to find Harry."

"Harry's fine, I'm sure. He may be brash, but he's not stupid." She got down on her knees, taking Draco's wrist and feeling his pulse. "Breathe, Malfoy." She ordered him. "We'll look for him as soon as you're back to sorts."

Draco took a hitched breath, and closed his eyes. *Harry is fine. He's just going to get something. He said so.*

No. He abandoned you. He's gone. He left you as soon as the darkness came.

No! No, that's not what happened. That's nothing like what happened!

You're just being naive. He's--

"Draco!" Hermione snapped her fingers in front of his face. "Look at me. I need you to look at me, and ignore whatever's going on in your head."

Well, it was bound to happen again. How long was it, a week and a half? That's a new record. This one just came with a vengeance.

His mind was slowly clearing, and he pictured the patronus image again. He imagined Harry standing in the middle of it, and the wolves scampered away.

"Can you stand? I'm going to apparate us to Harry's house. He might be there," Hermione told him.

Draco nodded hazily, standing up. He felt a little dizzy, but he would be fine. Hermione wouldn't let him get splinched. She took his arm, and he leaned on her heavily. She apparated them to a street, which was assumedly Grimmauld Place. Number 12 would be nearby. He had never been, but it had once been in his mother's family. Sirius was her cousin, after all.

They made it to the door, and Hermione gave it a password. It opened for her with ease.

The air inside was gray, it seemed. The house was old-looking, and the air was thick with both dust and magic. Harry might have lived in it, but it wasn't a house that looked loved, despite the fact that it was filled with what looked like his own furniture pieces and scattered photographs. The house was too big to be fully lived in, though, and Draco could sense the emptiness behind different doors.

"Harry!" Hermione called. "Are you home?"

No one answered.

"I feel a lot of magic pooled in the room directly above us." Draco told her. "If he's anywhere, he's there. Or, he's apparated away."

"How can you feel that? I mean, Harry's magic is normally noticeable when he's upset, but I don't feel anything." She muttered.

"Sensory overload after the panic attack. I guess that's one thing I have to be grateful for," he said dryly. He channeled the adrenaline in his body and focused it on getting up the stairs. He

knew Harry wouldn't be there, he could just sense it...

Harry wasn't in the room when they got there.

"The Map." Hermione breathed, walking up to the wall. A brick laid on the floor, akimbo to the wall. "He took the Map."

"What map?" Draco demanded. He didn't think he liked the sound of this.

"The Marauder's Map. He hides it here. He must have seen something on it." She had a concerned look on her face, and she crossed her arms.

"What the hell is that supposed to mean, Granger?" Draco demanded.

"Harry's gone to Hogwarts. Someone must be there."

"Then why are we still standing here?" Draco demanded. All sense of panic was gone. His trademark Malfoy ice had taken over. It didn't matter if it was bound to shatter. It was all he had holding him together right now. Harry was at Hogwarts, and Edwin was probably in trouble.

Fucking Gryffindor. I knew he'd do something like this.

Chapter End Notes

It is not advisable to smack anyone if they are having a panic attack. Don't do it.

Dreams

Chapter Summary

I think this is what one might call a climax. Because Harry Potter is more than just a social justice warrior... This is, however, the most magical and mystical thing that happens in this story. Things will be back to normal, soon.

Harry was outside of Hogsmeade. He was too far away from the castle, and he was still in Draco's damned flawed night robes, but he still ran. He had managed to conjure some shoes to spare his feet before he disappeared from his house.

What I'd give to be an animagus right now.

He sprinted up the pebbly path, and his breath clouded in front of him, and the cold mid-morning air felt like it was freezing the inside of this throat and stabbing him with miniature icicles. But he kept on going, because he had Edwin's letter burned into his mind, and the image of Charles Pellon's name racing from the astronomy tower. And he had so much *rage*.

Why didn't they show me the letter before hand? Why couldn't they read through the lines?

The letter hadn't been Edwin. Or, it had been, but not entirely. It was the voice of a broken boy--no, he was more like a man--who had given up and accepted his fate. He knew his father was coming for him, and Harry had a feeling Edwin knew what was going to happen to him.

How long has he been like this, so defeated? Maybe after I met him? But why hadn't his teachers noticed? His friends?

He was terrified of what this could mean. Was Edwin's mother part of the attacks? Why had she been killed? Where did Charles fit in with all of this?

And what did Edwin have?

Hogwarts let him through the wards and opened the Great Hall up to him. He knew classes were probably in session, and he would probably encounter students wandering the halls.

If classes are in session, why is Edwin in his dorm?

He remembered Ron's pacing dot on the map. Perhaps he was interrogating the boy?

Then, he was in the hall, and the cold winter air was replaced with Hogwarts' familiar warmth. He didn't slow down, however, speeding as fast as he could towards the dungeons from memory. Years of potions lessons and stalking Draco had taught him where to go.

He wasn't sure how he would get into the common room without the password. How would Charles, for that matter? Perhaps he had acquired it from a student. He certainly didn't have the magic to pull off any tricks...

There were so many things that didn't make sense. Why was he in Hogwarts? Who were the attackers? Why was Edwin such a big deal to them? How did the Pellon families fit into the attacks? They weren't like any of the other victims.

Unless.... No. That couldn't have been it. It was so vindictive, so unnecessary, something only Voldemort would have done. If it were true, Pennom's words would have been for naught, and perhaps the unity in the community built after this would fall apart. This could be something more complicated than just simple pureblooded prejudice...

What if the attacks were just a mask to cover up something larger? Something involving the Pellons?

He didn't know anything about the woman, or anyone else in the family. She was a pureblood, and she had chosen to marry a squib. That alone, of course, would seem reason enough for some bigoted neo Death Eaters to choose to kill her. She had betrayed them, hadn't she? But, why was she the only pureblood that had been killed when so many others had chosen to marry muggleborns?

Edwin must have fit somewhere into this, too. And the use of his father to *Imperio* the woman... It all sounded so specific. Like a message. There was something *symbolic* in all of this, he had just to find out what it was.

Then, he was in a familiar corridor. A blank, stone wall stared back at him, but he had no way to get in. Frustrated, he slumped against the wall and opened up the Maurauder's Map.

Charles Pellon was nowhere to be found. Neither was Edwin, and Ron's dot had ceased to move. None of which were good things.

Damn it. I was too late. Edwin's gone, and Ron's unconscious, and I've been left with nothing to go on.

Then, something caught his eye. Slughorn was apparently in his office. Harry could go to him for help. He pulled himself fully upright, darting to the nearby office. Luckily, it was unlocked. He swung the door open, catching Slughorn in the middle of reading some papers.

"Harry?" He looked up slowly. "How fortunate you caught me in a free period. What's the matter? You look quite... Frazzled." He said the last word humorously but cautiously, giving Harry a curious eye. "And your attire is... appropriate considering recent events."

Harry scowled in confusion. He supposed he was referring to the recent photo shoot.

"Edwin Pellon. He's missing, and so is his father," Harry stated, staring at his old Potions professor, who was watching at him with amused indifference.

"Mr. Edwin is gone? How do you know?" Slughorn asked, his blythe expression turning shocked as he stood up abruptly.

"I've a magical artifact. Edwin is not in Hogwarts," Harry responded, practically on the tip of his toes from anxiety. "I need your help. Ron's still in the Slytherin dorms and I can't get in. I need to see him."

Slughorn frowned briefly. "Come with me, I'll let you in," he ordered, standing up and leading Harry out of the door.

"Fortnight prophecy," Slughorn told the wall, and the common room was revealed, dark and gloomy and green.

"Who comes up with the passwords?" Harry muttered, stepping into the dark, damp room.

"The prefects. This one was Edwin Pellon..." Slughorn told him, pausing to tilt his head. "What a coincidence," he added curiously.

"Yes." Harry muttered, following Slughorn to the boy's dorm. *Could that be another message? A prophecy.... Could that be what all this is about?*

They went up a staircase and into what Harry assumed to be the sixth year boys' dorm. Ron was knocked unconscious on the floor, and Edwin was nowhere to be found. "Get the headmistress..." Harry whispered, and Slughorn slid out of the room without another word.

"*Ennervate*," Harry whispered, his wand carrying out the spell to wake Ron. He blinked hazily, sitting up.

"Harry?" Ron asked, looking around the room. "Shit. Edwin." He groaned, holding his head. "Some gray haired man came in with two fully cloaked men," Ron reported, his auror instincts probably kicking in.

"And they took Edwin?" Harry inquired, looking at his friend, who all at once sprung to his feet.

"Must've. The kid didn't even protest. Like he knew what was coming," Ron whispered with a shudder. "How'd you know to come?"

"Marauder's map," Harry replied, giving Ron a hand and helping him to his feet. "They're not anywhere in the castle. But they couldn't have gotten far," he added.

Ron nodded. "Probably the Forbidden Forest, wouldn't you reckon?"

Harry felt a flutter of dread in his stomach. Last time he was in the Forbidden Forest... he had died. But, he had to go. Edwin could be in danger.

"That's our best guess, if he hasn't been apparated away from here entirely." Harry agreed, looking at Ron and sharing a look of steely determination.

"They wouldn't have." Ron told him, making for the door. "They mentioned something about a ritual," he added urgently.

The flutter of dread turned to a sinking stone, and old memories passed through Harry, causing rage and frustration to boil within him. *Not another person...*

"You don't think Edwin's a... a sacrifice, do you?" Harry asked Ron, as they broke out into a run to get out of the castle.

"Don't know, mate."

Ron's voice made Harry even more sure.

Draco and Hermione apparated to the edge of Hogsmeade. Harry could have already been to the castle by now, they knew. But, there, he could have gotten help. There was no danger they were certain that he would encounter, and Draco knew that his earlier panic attack had been irrational...

But, you never knew with Harry. And given Edwin's letter, and Harry's sudden disappearance, anyone would have been worried. The entire situation merited concern.

Draco was glad he had fully dressed himself before Harry had completely apparated. Harry was still in Draco's nightclothes, and he couldn't help worry that he would be freezing.

"We better run," Hermione told him, and Draco noticed she was in high heels. He gave her a concerned look--*How uncharacteristically impractical of you*--and she just glared daggers at him, breaking out into a sprint that startled him. He ran after her, not being one to be shown up.

Running, his anxiety melted away, but his thoughts repeated like a loop in his head. *Harry. Get to Harry. Harry.* His emotions were simultaneously enhanced and dulled, becoming less of a concern but more of a focused goal.

The pre-noon air was freezing, and thin gray clouds were beginning to settle. The rocks crunched under the soles of his shoes as he charged, and suddenly his thoughts began to click together. Why Harry had disappeared so quickly. What might have happened with Edwin.

He saw something in Edwin's words. Something that triggered a memory.

Edwin knew. Edwin had accepted his fate. Edwin wasn't just keeping me updated... He was leaving a goodbye note.

Another spurt of adrenaline gave Draco the advantage over Hermione, and he passed by her. He knew that Harry would be distraught. He saw something in Edwin that had been in himself, and that would leave him to more brash Gryffindor things.

Draco remembered a particular look on Harry's face. He had seen it enough times in his mother's Pensieve memory from his and her trial: the face Harry had made in the Forbidden Forest, as he revealed himself to Voldemort to be killed. He had been ready to die.

Was that the face that Edwin had right now? Is that what Harry had envisioned as he apparated away? Of course it was. Harry would not subject anyone else to what he had gone through. He had said so enough times himself.

Then, as if summoned by the thought, he saw in the dull winter daylight, a figure draped in too-large silk black night clothes. Charging behind him was a familiar shock of red hair, cloaked in brown Auror robes.

"Harry!" Draco screeched, but they were too far away to hear. He pulled out his wand and cast a quick *Sonorous* and called out again to him. He saw him flatter, look over and see him, but he kept on running.

"Catch up to me!"

He heard the equally amplified response, and his heart fluttered in fear and hope. *He's okay.*

Harry ran into the Forest, and Draco had a feeling that Edwin was there. His hypersensitivity after the panic attack must have faded, because he couldn't sense anything particular magic in the Forest. Besides, of course, the natural wild magical presence that resided in it.

He broke off from the path, sprinting into a diagonal line to reach Harry in the forest.

Edwin Pellon found himself bound by magical spells, cast by the two wicked men that called themselves Hangyr and Kollop. They were completely cloaked in black--*the garments of the night*--and he could not see their faces. He wouldn't have been surprised if their voices had been magically altered as well.

His pathetic, mad, and magicless father was carrying him over his shoulder. Edwin had always been slight, like his mother, and his father's brawn had always made up for his lack in brains... But Edwin felt weak like this, being carried along by a mentally unstable *follower* of two even more pathetic followers.

As his father clambered over the roots and vines in the Forbidden Forest, bumbling and stumbling, he was mumbling the lines of the prophecy that was the reason Edwin was here now.

"One dusk stark will strike the Dark

And those Lacking souls pay

By gilded hands opposite Day.

O'er a fortnight shall pass

After the public goes crass.

Once forgotten's the slight,

The garments of the night

Will harvest the haunted

Whose pow'r's not flaunted.

And so wakening the Beast

Upon fresh life will feast,

And that not given to

Will be so returned to."

Edwin had taken Divination, of course. This "prophecy" was too clear, too appropriate, for him to justly fathom to hold any credibility. These two cronies leading the march probably fed it to his father in order to convince him to help them capture Edwin...

What was so special about him, anyway? The half of him that was young and self-centered assured him that he just *was* special, and he was ideal for whatever they wanted. The other half had more self pity, and was bemoaning the unfairness of the situation. Why did *he* have to get kidnapped by evil murderers? And, more importantly....

What are they going to do to me?

Edwin had assumed from the blatant obviousness of the prophecy that his father had been assured that if they took Edwin's magic--or whatever else that was so extraordinary about him--he would be given his own. From the power-hungry blindness that had consumed him after killing his own wife, Charles was sure to jump upon anything that would jump-start the feeling again.

Who knows? he thought. *Maybe he just gets a kick out of killing people who trust him.*

But what was the Beast? Perhaps it was the beast that would get what it hadn't been given. Maybe this was some sort of sacrificial right, and his magic would be pooled into some secret weapon. Maybe this was the start of a war against Muggleborns... It would explain the attacks.

But not why they had killed his mother. The spiteful, pessimistically hopeful part of him believed that it was just a petty revenge ordeal. Someone had a grudge against his mother (or perhaps his father, too) and were now trying to receive penance.

Suddenly, they were in a clearing. He could see the stars, damn them, that had once given him so much hope. That he would once spend hours in the Astronomy Tower studying, and in his Divination courses begging for information as to how they foretold the future.

But now, they just flickered innocently, very far away. If they were the ones that had ordained this cruel predicament, so help him.

The bounds on him loosened as Kollop and Hangyr cast another spell, levitating him towards a stone. Wicked, they were, forcing his father to carry him all that way when they could have

just levitated him. Not, of course, because he had held any more sympathy for his father, but, rather, because this method was a lot less bumpy.

But then, he landed with a crack as they dropped him onto the rock, his skull meeting painfully with the stone. "Stars!" he cried, not only because he used it often as a curse, but because he realized, he shouldn't be *seeing* them. It was morning.

"That's right, brat," one of the cloaked men snapped. "You can see them here."

"How?" Edwin croaked.

His father started laughing quietly but maniacally off to the side, which was rather off putting. The other cloaked man answered him, saying, "This is for the Centuars, here. So they can always read the stars."

Had he not been tied to a rock, bleeding, and quite possibly about to lose his life, he would have been fascinated. Had he trusted the man, he would have asked for more information.

"What are you going to do to me?" he demanded instead, craning his neck to watch his captors. The magical bounds on him tightened, and his head snapped back into place, staring up at the unnatural night sky.

"Nothing you didn't agree to in correspondence," his father told him, in an unexpected moment of clarity. "You will give what you have. And it will be *beautiful*," he choked, and his eyes became glazed over once more.

In that moment, Edwin had wished he had told Draco Malfoy more about the letters, that the Aurors had asked him directly about his father's insane requests. Because, as of now, they probably knew nothing of his current predicament, just that he had falsely agreed to "help."

They're fools. They didn't look into my mother's case, and they didn't look into this one beyond my having an insane father.

He could not see anything than what was directly above him, but he felt a presence by his side and heard heavy breathing.

He felt something wet meet his skin, and suddenly, he felt as though he were burned. He bit back a screech, straining to hear the things his captor was muttering.

"I come wearing the night. I come in these robes, I come to dominate. Hear me, let me breathe your presence. I give you this child, that you may speak to me." The voice was changed, as if the charms disguising his voice had been lifted.

Then, there was a whispering on the wind.

They are wrong. It told him, its breath like soothing water over the burns.

Wrong? Who is wrong?

They come to my clearing, desecrate my stone. They misinterpret my words. You will be safe. He was sure that the others could not hear this trickling, wishing voice. Otherwise, it would have cleared their blindness and lifted the veil that impeded his father's sanity. This breath was life.

This time, the voice spoke aloud to all of them. Harsh and glaring, but the same voice.

"So, you found my words." The wind spoke blandly, unimpressed. "You followed the instructions as you could, you performed the rituals. You found the correct sacrifice."

"Yes, yes!" one of the cloaked men cried. He sounded disgustingly pleased, *erotically*, even.

Edwin shuddered.

"We followed all the rules," the other assured the voice. "We killed the mother, but we laid no hands on her. She was pure, and the father was not. The boy is close, but not close enough to save him. We can kill him!"

Edwin had no idea what rules they were referring to.

"And what else did you do?" the voice demanded, rising into a gust of sound and air and magic.

"Nothing! We laid no hand on anyone pure."

"Oh, yes, the hundred lives you maimed. They were not pure, so you could. Of course. I should thank you." The voice was reft with sarcasm, blowing over Edwin's ears like soothing kisses, reminding him he would be safe.

These fools... they had no idea.

"It has been a fortnight. The Night has settled into the father, into the heart of the boy, and no one remembers what we did. Will you not give us what we ask?" the voice at his feet demanded.

"You have summoned me with the rituals. What do you ask?"

"Wake the Beast. Give us the unending power it wields, that no mortal has been given."

The trees rustled, and Edwin saw the stars flicker. It was like a laugh, he thought.

"I *am* the Beast. I have been wakened, and the power you seek cannot be granted." The wind swirled in the air, hot and cold and soothing and biting all at once. "You come to my sacred clearing, and you think the voice you have summoned is not I?"

"I... We...The Prophecy..." Edwin's father broke in.

"Silence!" A screech pierced the air, and it was not dissimilar to the sound of wind whistling through a canyon. "You think that because you have found my home, because you raided my temple, that you *know*? This prophecy was not issued by me, but by these blind fools who

unleashed terror upon the innocents. So they might disguise their ploys from the public, so that they might summon me. I came not to speak to you, though."

"If not us, then who?" a cloaked man demanded

"In the trees, in the night clothes. The man who killed my last summoner." The voice sharpened, and suddenly, Edwin's bonds broke. He sat up, and saw his father and the two men had fallen unconscious.

Out of the trees, in black garments, garments of the night, emerged Harry Potter. Except it did not matter, because the prophecy was indeed fabricated by the fools who had kidnapped him. It was to manipulate his father, and it was only coincidence that Mr. Potter was in *night clothes*.

"Yes, you," the voice whispered, and now Edwin could finally see its source. A tall, humanoid shadow drifted in the center of the clearing. "You defeated the one who last called upon me. Who last killed those he considered impure. Who last confused the meaning of pure."

Mr. Potter froze. "You wish to speak to The Boy Who Lived? Why?" he demanded.

"No. I wish to speak to the man who came to save this boy, here," the figure replied. "I only recognize you from the last time you were here."

Mr. Potter visibly paled in the moonlight. "That was *here*?" he asked.

The voice chuckled. "I am not summoned often. You have been here for the last two times, and you have never summoned me. I think that means you deserve my gift."

"But it can't be granted. You said."

The voice laughed again, rustling the branches. "Your friends wait behind the trees as well. They may enter also."

Edwin saw Auror Weasley creep into the clearing, and then Draco Malfoy (or Penno), and a stunning young woman as well. They stood hesitant, regarding the shadowy voice, a creature of night and stars.

"It cannot. But I have other things." The shadow crept further into the clearing, and the stars pierced it like veins, flowing through it like power. "You all fought my last summoner. You have fought these two, though they are weak in comparison." It waved its hand towards the black clad figures slumped on the floor.

"You all have nightmares. I am the patron of the night, of dreams, of shadows. Let me relieve you of the beasts that haunt your memories." The voice had lowered to a breeze, swirling around them.

Malfoy looked up in surprise. "But... I... I didn't...." he shook his head. "I fought for Voldemort."

The shadow creature laughed. "And that is why your nightmares pass into the day. I cannot touch those," it added sadly. "But I will touch what I can, just as you have with your words to console the deaths of innocents."

It raised its voice to the power of a gale, and they were engulfed in a shadowy storm. Edwin feared for them and cried out as the storm subsided and they were no longer there. Not even his father or his captives. Edwin was alone in the clearing.

The shadow turned to face him. "You were the untrue sacrifice. I owe you penance as well."

"What could you offer me? I do not dream."

"You dream of the stars," it breathed, stepping close to him. He could feel himself being pulled into the darkness and the emptiness that was this voice, but he could not fall into it. He was not his sacrifice.

"I will give you the gift I give my people, the Centaurs. You may read and know the stars as I do, and you are free to come see me and this clearing as you wish."

"I... Thank you." Edwin gasped, as suddenly visions of stars and constellations and space and galaxies and colorful star souls filled his head. His head spun and revolved and he felt sick to his stomach and not all together human.

"It could be granted. To you." The voice was drifting away.

"You will be back soon. You are unlike them now." He could barely hear it, as knowledge and prophecies and visions filled his head. "But for now they await you. You are safe. The men who harmed you will be punished. Go."

Edwin realized he was suddenly no longer in the clearing, and it was daylight, and he was suddenly in front of the castle. And the stars, damn them, were gone.

Ice Cream

Chapter Summary

Oh, look, a silly chapter with hardly any emotional strain!

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

In the days following the visit to the Forest, Harry had spent as much time *away* from things as he could. He didn't see Edwin, or Ron, or Hermione, or even Draco. He played with the children at the orphanage and carved wood and wandered around under glamours, watching things from a distance. He even wrote letters to the caterers for the gala. He had been every productive.

The event in the Forest had not gone unnoticed, and there were articles popping up all over the place over the prosecution of Charles Pellon and the two attackers, who turned out to be the sons of some insignificant former Death Eaters. It was revealed that they had carried out the attacks almost entirely on their own, in a single night. They had done the entire thing half out of morbid curiosity and half to disguise the murder of Mrs. Pellon.

As it turned out, the Pellon family had a direct connection with the Beast they had met in the forest, the creature of shadows and stars and dreams. There had been a reason that Edwin was targeted, but it was not for his magic or to restore Charles. They had been wrong, and Edwin could never be sacrificed. He was precious to the night, to the stars, to dreams.

He had not been a sacrifice like Harry had been, though the boy had thought like one. Unwilling, however as he was.

In the outrage that followed, Draco had felt the need to submit another Pennom article covering the event. Harry had read it in the paper while eating breakfast at the orphanage. Draco's words were elegantly spun, speaking in gratitude that there was not more danger to come for the muggleborns, but also in resentment that there had been people so blind and indifferent to have gone out and made the attacks anyway. He used it as a reminder that they still could not forget, as there were still sick people out there who could kill.

The article was not without his trademark cynical criticism. He reminded everyone that Edwin and his mother had been ignored and forgotten, allowing the senior Pellon to go mad and the junior to be betrayed. He reminded them that all suffering was equal.

It was definitely not lacking a hidden Slytherin pride and defense, which he knew Slughorn would be proud of. Though, from what Draco had mentioned before, he wouldn't be giving Slughorn the time of day anytime soon.

Which, of course, reminded him of his original campaign. Before the attacks, before the clothes, before the orphans. Now that a blood war wasn't threatening to break out, he was still a closeted queer wizard in a wizarding world blind to queers.

So, of course, there would still be the gala for the children. But then, there would be Hermione's publicity interviews, courtesy of Terry Boot. There would be public appearances, and eventually his coming out. With the help of Draco.

Draco. He hadn't spoken with him in days... However long it had been since the Forest. He hadn't had a single nightmare since then, and his dreams were of stars and trees and whispering winds and freedom.

But the Forest had not changed anything else. He was still Harry Potter, and he still had campaigns to do, and he still cared about Draco. It was just that sometimes, he needed a break. After big things like this.

But he had waited long enough, and his mind was clear. He would owl Draco.

Draco,

I'm sorry to have disappeared in recent days. Could I see you again soon? I miss you.

Perhaps we could do that lunch that Hermione mentioned? Discreetly get our pictures taken while we pretend not to notice. A date, even?

--Harry

The note was perhaps too short, and perhaps it didn't address things clearly. But he hadn't the words to apologize, and he didn't know what Draco was thinking about his disappearance. He was sure it would be forgiven, though.

Draco would like the idea of a date, or so he thought.

Then again, he might only like it if it were out in the muggle world. He knew that even the shadow beast couldn't have cured Draco of his anxiety, just as Harry had not been cured of his anger.

He frowned as he picked up the paper again, spotting yet another article about the events in the Forest, only this one was centric on Harry. It was titled ***Potter Hasn't Lost His Touch*** and was based off an "exclusive" interview with Edwin and also Professor Slughorn. It mostly babbled on about him "charging in to save the day" and "running to defend Pellon with a fiery gleam in his eye."

It ended with a note questioning why he wasn't an Auror, and he felt sick to his stomach. So, he did what he always did, and went down to his workshop to do some carving. Maybe he would make something for Draco.

Draco was restless. It had been five days since he'd seen Harry. Five days since the nightmares ended.

What if he doesn't need me anymore? Now that he's not having the nightmares, he doesn't need me to hold him at night.

Worries like that circulated in his head over and over. He didn't want to owl Harry, but he didn't want to seem desperate. So, he kept his shop open for longer hours than usual every day, waiting for Harry to apparate into the shop and startle all the Warbeck fans away. And Harry would see him there working and he wouldn't suspect that Draco had missed him so much.

He was selling a Foul Ghoull album to a self-righteous looking teenage boy when the owl came in. It was from Harry, and it was brief, but he wanted to see Draco. Overjoyed, he shoed the annoying adolescent out of his shop so he could write back to Harry.

Of course, the lunch date would be troublesome... But fun, right? And after the past few days of media chaos after the Forest... It might be fun to stir them up over something else. Still, he didn't think he could manage an entire lunch, as far as how long it would take in public and appeasing his food rules. He would compromise.

H,

Meet me at Fortescue's in Diagon at 12:30. It's not lunch, but it's what I can handle. Plus, it's more casual. We can brush it off as an interview if anyone asks too many questions.

--D

He added the last bit as an afterthought. Part of him wanted to agree it was a date, and part of him didn't want to seem desperate and thought it should be more professional. This way, he was compromising. It was neither romantic or professional. After all, Harry hadn't spoken to him in five days. He wasn't sure what would be going through the other man's head.

He gave the letter back to the owl that Harry had sent, and watched it fly away. It usually took a decent owl twenty minutes to get to Harry's house, judging by his usual apparition arrival. It was just before noon, so Draco decided he would walk to Fortescue's.

He wasn't nearly as comfortable as he had been the last few times he'd been through Diagon. He seemed to draw more and more attention with every article he published out of as Malfoy/Pennom instead of just Pennom. People seemed to stare at him as if they couldn't believe that the "actual" Pennom hadn't stood up in outrage.

And they wouldn't, of course. Few people wanted the attention warranted by Pennom's "radical and outright" opinions, and no one else had the word of everyone he'd interviewed that he was indeed Pennom. Several of those people he'd interviewed had come out and made public announcements that they could confirm that Draco was Pennom, that he had written x article, as if the Prophet's magical confirmation hadn't been enough... No one could really oppose that.

Still, however, he passed many a skeptical and watchful eye as he walked through the magical streets. There were many others who looked at him with impressed regard,

fascination, and even admiration.

He tried to hold his head high.

I'm the most notorious freelance writer in all of the wizarding world, he reminded himself. *And, I'm going on a date with Harry Potter*.

He smirked more at the last bit than the first, glaring triumphantly at just about every pretty young witch he passed. Perhaps it was cruel, but he would be rather satisfied to be the one to disappoint them all by telling them that the Boy Who Lived was *gay*.

But not yet. Not until after the gala, at least, he decided. People were still getting over the fact that dozens of people had been killed over nothing but a few psychopaths looking to earn some Dark magic from a legendary beast. It was abhorrent, and they were still going to prioritize it over LGBT wizards, who were facing no apparent threat.

He felt a sudden chill as he stepped into the shadow of a building and pulled up the collar of his cloak. He was wearing muggle-styled clothes more than ever now. He had ever since his travels in the muggle world. But in the past year, they had become much more fashionable in wizarding communities, and spending more time with Harry made him even more comfortable with it.

And at least now, if anyone was staring at him, it wasn't because of his clothes.

A small part of him laughed at the irony that as a young boy, he would have killed for this kind of attention (and almost had). Now, he didn't want it, and he was getting it for completely different reasons than he once would have expected.

He shook the thought away as he approached Fortescue's, where sweet smells were magically being wafted in his direction. He decided he would wait out front or perhaps in another nearby shop for Harry to show up. He knew Flourish and Blott's was nearby, and he hadn't had any new reading material in a while. However, he saw the outside of the ice cream parlour was invitingly empty compared to anywhere else, so he took a seat in a chair by the front, warmer than the street from sunlight and protected from wind.

He sat in front of the shop, patiently waiting for Harry. He twiddled his thumbs and hummed tunes to himself. He didn't have to wait longer than twenty minutes for him to show up. He appeared with the per usual loud snapping noise, and his eyes immediately fell upon Draco. He strode forward, to the shop, and met Draco by the door.

"Fancy meeting you here, Potter." Draco snickered, louder than he should have. He didn't mean it to be rude, but rather to keep up appearances. And, admittedly... He was slightly bitter with Harry for not contacting him for days.

"Shove off, Malfoy," Harry retorted, with the same tone he had all those years in school.

All the same, they entered the shop brushing shoulders, and the customers inside (who had heard their greeting banter) stared at them with confusion. Draco chose to ignore them, instead listening to the familiar sound of Giants and Grindylows playing on the record player

by the counter. He ignored the faces staring and focused on remembering who he had last sold one of their records too... Probably Auror Micheals.

Mrs. Fortescue waited for them patiently with a warm smile on her face, though she was evidently perplexed, too. Draco didn't see what the big deal was, though. Everyone had seen the picture in the papers from three weeks ago of them walking up to Hogwarts arm in arm, and then heard that they were both at the Forbidden Forest affair. People should have picked up that they were friendly now.

He also still carried that first photo with him, in his pocket. He hoped Harry did, too.

"What can I get for you?" She spoke to neither of them in particular, instead staring at the space between them. She apparently couldn't tell if she should address them as a unit or not.

"Hmm." Harry tilted his head, looking at all the colors. He looked at them with excitement, whereas Draco looked at them in fear.

Must wizards have such colorful foods? Draco thought glumly.

"What's best in chocolate, Mrs. Fortescue?" Harry asked her, giving her that winning smile of his.

Draco liked the smile, but he preferred the more shy and sincere smiles they shared in quiet moments, or the genuine grin that fell on his face whenever they bantered. This charming smile was nice, but it wasn't for *Draco*.

The curly haired woman smiled back. "Oh, this time of year? We've a lovely cinnamon-cayenne-chocolate flavor, guaranteed to warm you up. We've got peppermint chocolate as well."

For some reason, Draco felt himself smile when she mentioned the peppermint.

He was surprised, though, when Harry went for the spicier one. He gave Draco a curious, adventurous wink as Mrs. Fortescue gave him two large scoops of dark chocolate ice cream swirled with bright red.

She was about to ring him up, but Harry interrupted her. "You're forgetting my friend." He smiled again, looking at Draco. "I'm paying."

It wasn't an offer, and Draco wasn't going to reject any free treatment--chivalry of his own be damned.

Mrs. Fortescue blushed. "Oh! I hadn't realized. What would you like this time? Peppermint again?" she asked, pointing to the green ice cream.

Draco shrugged. "It made my tongue turn green," he told her. Harry snickered and raised an eyebrow, and Draco shot him a glare. "And, no, Harry, I *didn't* cast anything on it to do that," he added under his breath.

Harry grinned at him. Draco felt like they shared an inside joke, a humorous secret between clandestine lovers.

Gods. Stop me from thinking. I sound like some soppy romance novelist... Just imagine... Clandestine Star-Crossed Lovers by Adam Pennom. He cringed at the thought, and both Harry and the woman noticed. He shrugged it off.

"What do you think I'd want, Potter?" he asked, trying to sound as bitter as he could. It almost worked.

Harry smirked this time, giving an innocent shrug. "Perhaps something with blueberries?" he suggested, pointing to a bright purple and yellow tub of ice cream.

"Citrus berry swirl," Madam Fortescue informed him, grabbing a sample spoon. "Lemons and blueberries."

Draco frowned. It sounded good, but the two bright colors unnerved him. He cast Harry a wary look, and he nudged him in return. "Just sample it, you great edgy ferret," he teased.

Draco felt the tips of his ears go red, his dignity slightly marred. He took the small spoon from the woman, and closed his eyes to ignore the colors. It tasted wonderful, and it wasn't as terrifying as he had expected it to be.

"I'll take this one," He told her. She nodded and gave him two generous scoops of the fruity sorbet. He saw Harry smile at him encouragingly, and he told himself it wouldn't be such a big deal.

"That'll be fifteen sickles and twelve knuts for you," she told Harry.

He tossed her a galleon and told her to keep the change. Then they turned to walk out of the shop, and Draco realized in horror that they had almost reached for each others' hands. *In public.*

No one noticed except a young witch in the corner with a few friends. She gave them an odd stare, and Harry just winked at her. Draco glared as viscously as he could.

The front of the shop was still empty, and the sun was still out and bright. It was a little chilly, still, and Draco felt a little silly for having ice cream. He remedied it by casting a warming charm on the both of them as they sat down at the quaint little table.

"I spent a summer here, when the Dursleys got upset with me. Fudge arranged me to stay at the Leaky and I stayed here and did my homework and got free ice cream," Harry babbled wistfully, taking a lick of ice cream.

Draco thought he could smell the cinnamon and red pepper from where he was sitting, and he ate a bit of his own.

"That sounds like it would have been nice." Draco remembered what he was doing that summer, and it wasn't quite so pleasant because he was with his father. He didn't want to tell

Harry that he knew which year he was talking about... Though he supposed that most people in his year would have remembered the articles about Harry in their third year.

"It was," Harry mumbled, taking another thoughtful slurp of his ice cream. He looked up at Draco with a concerned expression. "You're alright, aren't you? With the food and the place? And... the last few days? What's been happening with you?"

Draco scowled. "I'm fine. This isn't as bad as it could have been. It's a good day," he added, trying to put a lighter tone in his voice. He had been thinking about his father, and he shoved away the memory. "Anyway. The last *five* days have been uneventful. I just kept the shop open and ran errands in muggle London. What about you?"

Harry shrugged. "I was at the orphanage. Where else? And I'm working on a few new pieces," he explained. He took a moment to savor his dessert again (Draco couldn't possibly imagine how he coped with the strong spices) and sighed. "I'm sorry I didn't contact you. I didn't know it had been five days."

"It's alright," Draco assured him, nudging him with his foot from under the table. "You need that sometimes, don't you? Time away, I mean."

Harry nodded. "I'm not one for attention."

Draco chuckled. "Well, I am. Just not *bad* attention. You seem to despise it all. I really did miss you, though," he huffed, kicking Harry a little harder this time.

"Ow," Harry pouted.

They laughed for a few moments, and then someone approached them.

"Oh, hello boys! Fancy seeing you *both* here."

Draco looked over at whoever was infringing upon their happy moment. *Rita Skeeter. Abso-fucking-lutely perfect.*

"Hello, Rita," Harry growled, taking an aggressive bite at his ice cream.

Draco gingerly ate some of his own, suddenly feeling uncomfortable under the reporter's gaze. They did the same work, but she was a different kind of beast. Draco could slay with prose and strong opinions, but she could *murder* with just the right kind of gossip.

"I was just getting off work," she cooed, pulling out a notebook, "but as I'm sure Mr. Pe--I mean, Malfoy--knows, a writer's hours are *very* flexible." She winked at them slimily, and Draco gulped down his ice cream uncomfortably. "What are you two doing here?"

Harry glared at her testily, and Draco did too, leaving her to wait as he took another taste of ice cream. "Interviewing Harry Potter, of course," he spat.

Rita grinned. "Oh, lovely, Mr. Malfoy." She twirled her hair with her quill. "Perhaps I might join? It's not really fair that one writer should have the entire monopoly on a *gold mine* of news like Mr. Potter." She had a petulant look on her face.

"It's more of a private interview, Skeeter," Harry hissed. "In fact, we're not really interviewing. We're working on a project, and I doubt you'd be much help with it." He turned away from her, focusing on the chocolate and spiced ice he was working on.

Draco groaned. Skeeter would never leave them alone now.

"Oh, really? A project? Care to elaborate?" she inquired, arching a penciled eyebrow.

"No," Harry snapped, not bothering to look at her.

"Pity," she sighed. "I guess I'll just have to speculate then." She flared her quill dramatically. "Harry Potter and Draco Malfoy... scheming about what? Hmm."

Draco could see the cogs in her head turning, and he wasn't sure he liked what she was thinking.

"It's a gala," he informed her shortly, ignoring Harry's betrayed look. "We're raising money for the orphanage, along with another charity. We'll be incorporating the clothing line at Lovegood just released."

"Draco!" Harry cried. Skeeter perked at the use of his first name, her Quick Quotes Quill scribbling maniacally.

"Come on. It's not like keeping it secret will do any good," he reminded Harry, who just gave a defeated sigh.

"Lovely! Tell me more," Skeeter chirped.

Draco gave in and told her about the gala and his involvement with Harry's activism. Harry gave in too, explaining things to her most reluctantly. Draco had a feeling that he only tolerated it because he knew that it was what Hermione wanted.

Not that she would be pleased that it was Skeeter writing the article and not Boot.

Rita was practically purring with joy when she had finished the interview. The material she had gotten was *golden*. Harry and the Malfoy heir? Working together? People would be outraged, people would love it, people would *obsess* over it.

Not to mention the pictures she had gotten before she had approached them. Oh, how lucky she was that she always carried her camera with her! She had gotten such juicy shots of the two exchanging worried looks and cheesy grins. And the laughing! And the discreet under the table kicking... They were acting like old friends, or lovers even!

And of course, she had asked them about more than just the gala. They had practically opened up to her like a first year Charms book. It was so easy. *They* were so easy, around each other. Who would have thought?

The article had practically been written the moment the interview was done, thanks to her trusty quill. She would just stop back by The Prophet office, make a few quick edits, print the

pictures, and the article would be ready hot off the press tomorrow. She had no doubt that she could secure the front page. Charity, Harry Potter, and Pennom--everyone's favorite topics lately, all at once!

Oh, she was *good*.

She scampered into the office, snapping an insult at that awful Patil girl to wake her up. She was still moping about the loss of a lover or something. Or maybe her cat? Rita didn't know. She didn't care. She only cared about news.

She sat down at her desk, staring at her green inked article, and came up with a title. Yes, the thing was practically complete! Oh, she was *so* witty.

Potter and Pennom Propose Plans

Exclusive Interview by Rita Skeeter

It is cold and chilly as I walk down Diagon Alley, my camera in hand. A sight catches my eye, one that I have grown used to searching for: the short figure, the shock of brown hair, the glasses, the image of Harry Potter. The hero is stooped over a table in front of Fortescue's Ice Cream Parlour, enjoying a spicy chocolate ice cream and speaking in hushed tones to Draco Malfoy of all people.

The man that is behind the name Pennom is smiling at Potter assuringly, and soon, they are kicking each other playfully under the table and laughing like school boys. I can't help but wonder what is going on between these opposites and former rivals as I snap a few photos. I must go and investigate.

Potter is closed off, and Malfoy/Pennom is set on keeping Potter's attention for himself; they are in the middle of an interview, or as they later reveal, planning an event together. Malfoy informs me with a sly smile that they are planning a charity gala together, and that the money will go to the orphans and victims of late January's attacks on muggleborns (and of course the dear Pellon family). He mentions that there is another charity involved, but a quick glance from Potter cuts him off.

Eventually, however, Mr. Potter warms up. One can only imagine that he is still lost in the tragedy of the attacks, as he looks up at me with green eyes glowing with compassion and hope as he talks about the children at the orphanage. "They really need the money," he informs me. "They need better clothes and books and school supplies."

Pennom/Malfoy pipes in, though his voice has grave undertones. "They also need better teachers." I am reminded of his recent article regarding education, and I ask him about that. He informs me that he plans on directing a large amount of profits to educating the children, and Potter does not comment.

I am curious about the nature of this relationship, now. Potter is in agreement with almost everything Malfoy says, and Malfoy speaks coolly and politely with Potter. The

two are fairly good natured, which is unexpected considering their opposing histories. I ask them about this, and Potter glows while Malfoy glowers.

"We're quite alike," Potter informs me. "We've been through the same war, the same fights. He was just on the wrong side. He's changed a lot, and he's really a wonderful person now." He is shining with optimism and joy to be expected from such a beautiful soul, but you can see the pain behind his eyes as he remembers the war and the tragedies. He must have sympathy for Malfoy, who was apparently an unwilling Death Eater.

"He's not changed much," Malfoy commented. "We don't fight now, at least." He grumbles, taking a bite of his own very colorful ice cream, purple and yellow.

"Oh, we argue all the time, you git." Potter retorts good-naturedly.

"We do not, you prat! We get along just fine." Malfoy protests, sticking out an immature tongue, which has been colored by his food.

"Your tongue is purple again." Potter mumbles, and Malfoy yelps most ungracefully and attempts to cover his mouth.

This friendly banter suggests the two have been working together for a while, and that they work well together. I ask them about what they plan on doing next after the gala they're currently working on.

Potter smiles brightly, looking at Malfoy across from him. "Oh, what we meant to do from the beginning, before the attacks. We've got an article planned from him."

Malfoy cuts him off with a sharp glare, flicking some of his ice cream at the other man. "And it's not to be revealed yet, or I won't have anything to write about."

I do not press the issue, as I can relate to such woes of being a reporter. I am, however, curious as to how these two began working together in the first place.

"Oh, we met through a mutual contact." Malfoy replies dryly.

"It just worked. We made one idea, and more just kept coming. He really is a wonderful reporter. That's why I wanted to meet him." Potter is animated, and has finished his dessert. "I'm very lucky to have him willing to write for me."

These two's unlikely partnership works well, apparently. They have already planned out their gala, and have begun sending out invitations. They ask me to inform that anyone is welcome, however, provided they wear the new charity-based line of clothes designed by the orphans and promoted by Luna Lovegood.

With that promotional statement, Potter informs me the interview is done, leaving me to ponder what these two unlikely friends will come up with next.

Skeeter finished reading the article, and had it sent up to the chief editor. He was an odd man, but he adored anything to do with Pennom. She wasn't sure how he would react to something

written about him and not by him, though...

It didn't matter. Everyone else would adore the articles. She couldn't *wait* to hear the responses. Who would be angry? Who would adore it? Who would completely misinterpret it? What would Potter and Malfoy think?

Oh, she sighed to herself. Subjects like Potter are all I need to remind me why I love being a journalist.

Chapter End Notes

Does anyone appreciate my wizarding band names, or are they just overlooked? :(

Parents

Chapter Notes

This chapter was weird. I feel like it was written in some sort of haze, like a dreamland away from the rest of the story. Then again, a lot of chapters feel like that.

Harry and Draco had both gotten a lot of letters after Rita's article was published. And they couldn't redirect it to The Prophet this time, because it had been written about them instead of by one of them.

It was nearly a week later, and they were still getting belated responses. Questions about what Draco had done to Harry to get him to agree to working together; questions about what had happened to Draco to get *him* to work with Harry; questions about the gala; questions about the "other" article...

Harry thought it was ridiculous that people thought more about a meeting over *ice cream* than they did over the event in the Forbidden Forest. Or even any of Draco's other articles (besides the one where he had revealed his identity). It was absurd... But, it was the power of Rita Skeeter.

They hadn't gone into the public much after that, at least not together. Draco had plenty of panic attacks, and Harry was just about done with wizards in general. If all they cared about was his past and who he "allied" himself with, then maybe he *didn't* care what they had to think about him. Maybe he would just drop the gay bomb on them then and there, and then never show himself again.

He was being dramatic, of course, as Draco and Hermione constantly reminded him. He still had to wait until things had calmed down. And things were certainly not calm after Skeeter's article.

It was funny, really, the way she portrayed them. Harry as the emotional, hopeful, kind hero who was receptive and fervent in his answers. Draco as the closed off, bitter, snappy antagonist. It was no wonder people were shocked at their divide, when they had been painted as opposites.

But in actuality, Draco had been much more cheerful and respectful towards Skeeter than Harry had been. Draco had more tact and less reason to resent the woman; she'd never considered him worth her time to write about. But she had written a lot on Harry. Far too much, as far as he was concerned. He had been very closed off with her, and Draco had been very gracious.

That wasn't what she had wanted to see, though, and it wasn't what she had let others come to believe. She had had shown them what she wanted to think, and they thought it, so in swarmed the letters.

It was on the sixth day when the letters tapered out, and there was one that he had not expected to receive.

He was alone at Grimmauld place (which he had come to resent more than Draco's obscene living room) when the owl came, old and brown and frazzled like any other Post Office owl. But, the letter from this one was different, and it was in a handwriting he had never seen much of, but that he had come to recognize after a few months of legal documents and letters that started off kind but soon turned to arguments.

He wasn't going to read it now. He couldn't bring himself to do it. Instead, he stuffed it into his pocket apparated to Draco's shop. It was luckily empty, and he turned the sign to read closed as soon as he entered. Before Draco could even speak, he took his arm and apparated again to the orphanage.

Startled, Draco staggered towards the steps of the big house, surrounded by wintry golden fields overlooking the ever churning sea. "Is everything alright, Harry?" He asked him, turning to face him.

Harry shook his head. "Let's just forget everything for right now, yeah?" He asked, lifting the knocker on the door. "Let's forget about the articles, the gala invitations, the letters, the press. Let's just spend today with the kids here."

Draco nodded, and even though Harry knew that it was not Draco's preferred method of "forgetting," he would do it. The door swung open, and they were welcomed by Madam Humpop as usual. She was dressed in one of the dresses that had been designed by the children. It was sky blue and dotted with sheep clouds, just as one of Harry's suits had been.

"Hello!" she greeted them. "The kids are all at breakfast now, but feel free to join them." She opened the door fully, and Harry took Draco's hand unashamedly, even though he was shaking. His head spun a little, and he tried to block out what could possibly be in that letter. He tried his best to walk confidently through the door, but for once, it was *worry* that was causing him so much grief.

He felt Madam Humpop's gaze burning into his back, and he felt Draco's concerned glance towards him and his soft breathing near his neck, and all at once it was just too much.

He handled a few breaths, and they were in the kitchen. The children were fine, and he was the only one who was on the verge of crying, not any of them. He smiled as widely as he could as he asked them, "Who wants to go flying?"

Draco sighed as he watched Harry loop around on his broom in the cold February air. Some poor little polliwog was holding on for dear life, screaming in delight as Harry flew them around on his broom. He kept his broom at the orphanage, Madam Humpop had told him. Out here, he could fly it, and he kept him coming back to the kids.

Draco knew he would always come back for the kids, broom or no.

He just hoped that right now, Harry wasn't worrying about whatever had prompted him to drag him out of his shop so early in the morning. He had barely just flipped the sign on when Harry came in and shut the whole place down.

Draco was certainly distracted. Tanner and Kara were sprawled on the grass at his feet, poring over the short stories he had given them to read (he had briefly apparated back to his flat to collect them). He had written them over the course of the past few years, starting at his visit to Berlin. He hadn't touched them since he had written them, and he feared they were no good, but he had wanted to teach the two children about developing a writing style, that he hadn't been Pennom since he started.

In return, he was reading their stories. Riddled with grammatical errors and erratic plot lines, they also contained the imagination and emotion that only children could muster. He read about dragons and fairies and dreams of futures of adventures and families and belonging.

He choked on one line on a page that Kara had written.

And then she sat under the stars with her new family and she was safe. They were her family and only her family and she was safe and they would never leave her.

He knew, of course, that this dream might never happen for her. She was ten years old, and she was in an orphanage. Soon, she would be in Hogwarts, and there would be teachers and students but no family to come home to.

Is this how Harry felt? Is this what he dreamed for? A family to hold him sound, to make him safe?

He often forgot Harry was an orphan. He was the hero of the wizarding world, he was Harry Potter. But Lily and James Potter were dead, and Harry had never met them, and now he spent his free hours flying with children and eating their horrible concoctions and letting them drool all over him.

Harry still felt that way. He still dreamed of that family, that feeling of belonging. These kids provided it for them, and he ached for nothing more than to give it to every single one of them.

Draco could understand the feeling. His own father had never felt like family, never felt like home. But he had always had the warm and calming embrace of his mother, her soothing words and emotional comfort. And he had given that up in recent times. Since the war, he hardly saw her unless it was important, and he chased her off whenever she came to visit him. Hell, he never opened his floo because he didn't want her dropping by.

And now, he realized he was surrounded by orphans who would have done anything for what he had taken advantage of.

"How are you two doing?" he asked the two ten year olds. They barely heard him, just barely looking up from his handwritten parchments to grunt at him. He couldn't help but stare.

Now, when he looked at them, all he could see was the stories that Madam Humpop had told him. That Kara's parents had died in the war when she was the same age as Seth or Ebele, that she had seen them die, and she still had dreams about the black screams that came from their voices. That ever since they had died, she was frightened of abandonment. That she didn't like sharing, and that was why she and Tanner mostly kept to themselves.

Tanner had been the son of two men: one a wizard, the other a muggle. When Voldemort had come in and killed the wizard, the muggle swore himself against magic and sent the young child (old enough even then to understand that he was unwanted) to the orphanage. A parent had to be broken to do something like that, he thought.

But, here they were, sitting on the grass and enveloped in stories written by his more naive and selfish younger self. Looking at them, seeing them from here, or even from Harry's point of view, they were fine. They were apparently normal, and they had overcome their traumatic childhoods, with little more than a desire to belong.

Of course, that wasn't true. They must have been marred, deeply affected by that kind of rejection. But they coped, they survived, and they would be fine. He hoped, that is.

He watched as Harry landed, about to scoop up the next child. He stood up, catching Harry's eye as he strode over to him. Kara and Tanner didn't even notice his absence.

"What's up?" Harry asked him, his eyes bright from flying and apparently devoid of his earlier worries. His cheeks were flushed from the cold, and a smile as wide as the sky above him lit his entire face.

Draco couldn't help but smile. He wouldn't let his own solemnity taint Harry's obvious joy in the moment, but he did want to talk.

"Can you leave these little beasts for an hour or so? I'd like to talk," Draco told him, hoping that the happiness would not be drained from Harry's face. It wasn't, though some mild concern became apparent in his eyes.

"Sure. We can go sit by the cliffs," Harry replied, telling the oldest of the children there (Phillip, he thought) to herd the rest of them back to Madam Humpop.

Reluctantly, the tiny humans wandered away, and Harry took Draco's hand again and led him towards the roiling Atlantic. It never ceased to amaze him how the orphanage stayed such a happy place while incased in such eternally dismal weather.

"What's on your mind?" Harry asked him, obviously hoping he wouldn't be asked the same question.

Draco smiled wryly at the tactic, knowing he would give in. He pulled Harry forward a bit, his own coat sleeve riding up to reveal the scar of the Dark Mark. He didn't focus on it though, instead staring at the drab, dark green canvas of Harry's own coat, lined on the inside with soft, warm red flannel (he knew because he had borrowed it from Harry the one day he had agreed to visit Grimmauld place).

He realized he must have been very far away in his thoughts, because Harry cleared his throat. "You alright?" he asked.

Draco nodded. "Just in a bit of a dreamland. Can we wait till we're by the cliffs to talk? I'm enjoying the moment."

Harry squeezed his hand in silent agreement, and Draco stared out at the water-bound horizon. He saw misty swirls of gray that could have been rain or wind or magic or spirits, but the sky above him was only a thin gray barrier between him and blue sky. But the ocean was churning, aching with energy and rage and magic. The sky above it was wild and dark and possessed.

Around him, a gentle breeze rustled the golden grass around him, and every several hundred meters, a strong, tall, and bare tree would have risen up from the ground, reaching for the sky in protest.

And next to him was Harry Potter, all green eyes and compassion and forgiveness and hope and anger and despair and wishing.... And grief for all that he had lost but felt he had no right to mourn. In that moment, under the midday overcast sky, above the golden winter earth, he felt as though he truly understood Harry, and he felt all at once what he had considered all along: he loved Harry.

But of course he wouldn't say it. He wasn't that much of a sap or a fool or a Hufflepuff. Even if none of those things were bad.

They were not far from the cliffs, then, their footsteps beating down a path in the dry grass. Draco stopped and turned to face the man next to him, and he embraced him as tightly as he could.

"You know I'm yours, don't you? That you can belong with me," he whispered, not meaning to have said it at all. He was thinking of the line that Kara had written, and he didn't want Harry to ever have to feel that way. Or for anyone to feel that way. But right now, the only person he could help was Harry. "You can be safe with me," he promised him.

Harry made a small noise, and wrapped his arms around Draco's neck. "I didn't," he replied. "But thank you for telling me."

Draco pulled away slightly. "I know you're not thinking about you right now, though," he mumbled. "And you're an absolute idiot sometimes for that, but you care about those tadpoles back there, and it's *endearing*."

Harry laughed at the use of his own word, but not for long, because Draco was holding him in a terrifyingly intense gaze. Or Draco hoped that that was the reason. He still liked to think some part of him was intimidating, even when he was mush like this.

Draco didn't care for a split second, though, and he took advantage of that insouciance and kissed Harry. It had been too long (well, fine, two weeks) since they had shared that touch of lips, that insurgence of affection and sensation and peace. The wind ruffled their hair and

chilled the nape of his neck, but then Harry's hands were holding it, keeping it warm and pulling him closer.

Then, in a gust of cold wind and a pang of concern, Draco broke away. "But I wanted to talk."

"Yeah." Harry nodded solemnly, and the two of them continued towards the cliff, until they were at the very edge.

He felt the spark of wards beneath them, and he thought it must have protected the children from wandering over the edge. He didn't want to hear the story behind that.

They sat down by the edge, and Draco held Harry in his arms and let him lean against his chest.

"You make me so *schmaltzy*." Draco sighed, running a hand through Harry's hair.

"Oh, is that Pennom's vocabulary?" Harry teased, but his voice was far away, and his eyes were cast out to the sea.

"Shut up. I'm trying to talk," Draco snapped, not ceasing to play with Harry's hair. He didn't complain, either.

"Then talk."

Draco pressed a kiss to the top of Harry's head. "What do you plan to do with the children?" he asked slowly. "You can't adopt them all."

Harry sighed. "No. I can't. I have to find them all homes. Families. They need more than just me." He placed a hand on Draco's knee and kept it there, the gesture comforting.

"But you can't do that. More will keep coming. You can't just wait," Draco murmured.

"What do you mean, wait? Wait for what?" Harry queried quietly, suddenly stiffening.

"You want to adopt one. You want a child. I know you do," he told him, pulling him closer and forcing him to loosen up.

"I never can. I can't just choose one, when there's so many that need homes. It would be unfair."

"It wouldn't be choosing, and it's not like you'd be removing all of them from your life. You'd just be taking one or two, or gods forbid, three in," Draco reminded him gently. He felt as though this were a very tender subject for Harry. "You'd still come back to the orphanage, and the rest wouldn't be upset."

Harry didn't answer for a very long time.

"I got a letter today. From Andromeda. I haven't opened it," Harry confessed. His breathing quickened, and Draco placed a hand on his pulse. *So this was the source of his worry earlier.*

"Andromeda? Andromeda Black, my aunt? What could she want?" Draco asked, genuinely perplexed.

"She's Andromeda Tonks, actually. Teddy's guardian," Harry breathed. "My godson. Teddy Lupin."

Draco frowned. Harry had a godson? And he was... Professor Lupin's son? *And* he was being raised by Draco's aunt? It was very strange news.

Harry pulled out the letter. "Will you read it with me?"

"Of course."

He opened the envelope, breaking the plain wax seal covering it. The handwriting reminded Draco startlingly of his mother's, though it was less controlled and precise.

Dear Harry,

It's been too long since we have last spoken, and I am very sorry for that. But you must understand why now, don't you? I couldn't let you be Teddy's guardian. You were too unstable after the war, and the fact that you actually fought me and took me to court over his guardianship is proof of that.

But I am not writing to put salt on old wounds. Teddy is turning five years old soon (in a month and a half, he reminds me), and if you are well enough, I think that you should see him. I am not, of course, yet willing to pass on his guardianship to you. He barely knows you, but if you get along, the prospect can be considered.

I also see that you are devoting lots of time to working with children. How is that going? Perhaps you know some children that are Teddy's age.

Say hello to my nephew, Draco. I've seen you two in the papers.

Regards,

Andromeda Tonks

Draco frowned. "What was that all about?"

Harry was pale, and he stuffed the letter into his pocket. Draco pulled him in close, lifting a hand to his neck to feel his pulse beating. It was not elevated or erratic. It was calm and smooth, but his skin was cold. Draco cast a warming charm, hoping it was just the sea winds.

"We had a custody battle over Teddy after the war. She accused me of not being able to take care of myself, let alone a child." His breath shuddered, and took Draco's hands. "She knew about Glen, too, and how he didn't treat me well. She didn't want her grandson to be put into a situation like that."

"And so he wasn't even allowed to *see* you?" Draco demanded, incredulous.

Harry sighed. "It was partially my fault. I made a big deal out of it, and we fought, and she decided I was a threat to his well being. And now he doesn't know me, and I have no hope of ever adopting him."

Draco frowned, and he wondered if Harry would have ever worked at the orphanage if he'd of had Teddy. "Is that why you work with the kids here? Because you didn't get Teddy?"

"A little. I want to be able to give them the life I didn't get. A happy one."

"But you won't adopt any of them? Are you holding out for Teddy?" Draco questioned him, hoping Harry's logic wasn't so skewed.

"No!" he protested. "I meant what I said. I couldn't ever make myself choose. And I guess I am here because I couldn't have Teddy," he added quietly. "But, now I have a chance to be in Teddy's life, don't I?"

"You'd not give up these kids though."

"Of course not! I just want to see Teddy." Harry was shaking, and he began to cry. Draco didn't know if it was from fear, regret, or relief.

Draco paused, realizing the end of Andromeda's letter. "You think she trusts me? Or does she think I'm another Glen?"

"I don't know. But I have a feeling that she, if anyone, would see the truth." Harry muttered.

Draco kissed Harry's head again. "We'll be fine. We should go back to the kids, though. Madam Humpop might be getting suspicious," he teased.

"She already *is* suspicious," Harry scoffed. "Have you seen the way she stares at us? The woman *knows*."

Draco laughed. It didn't matter, he decided. Right now, his biggest concern was helping Harry deal with Andromeda. He also wanted to help with Kara and Tanner personally; he thought he might spend the gala trying to find possible parents to adopt them.

But, most importantly, he realized, he needed to write his mother.

Discrimination

Chapter Notes

This fic is getting absurdly long. And I only started writing it two, three weeks ago?? I have no life.

Also, I just realized I didn't update yesterday... Whoops!

Narcissa was naturally a very motherly person. She felt the need to take care of others, to keep them in line, and to be loving towards them.

Since the War, Draco had made this very hard for her, between giving up all worldly possessions to travel the muggle world, to moving himself completely into muggle London, and now this whole Pennom affair. He claimed he was either too busy for her (which was decidedly hippogriff shit), or he ignored her and kept his floo closed.

She hadn't spoken with him properly since he came out to her as gay (which hadn't exactly been surprising) before he published his article. His father would have been disgusted, which was why she tried to be as accepting as possible with him.

But after that, he hadn't given her any *opportunities* to be accepting of him. He kept himself away, and the only time she had seen him was when she apparated to his flat to try and help him with any possible panic attacks. Now, he had altered his wards to keep her out completely. It stung.

So, she had fulfilled that motherliness by coddling her house elves and adopting several kneazle kittens. It was pathetic, and she felt no more than a shadow of her former matronly self... But it kept her from being lonely as she read her son's articles and saw pictures of him with Potter in the papers.

His relationship with Potter was certainly interesting. There was definitely something *more* there--her son wouldn't show that kind of affection towards a business partner, and nor would he appear in public with them. Perhaps he was playing at something? Then again, he had always been a bit obsessed with the Potter child. It had been problematic for Lucius, so she had heard the blunt end of it.

She had sent several letters to Draco in the past four weeks (had it really been that long since she had just seen him?), inquiring kindly about his work and his social life. Of course, she hardly was interested in hearing about the record shop, and she knew Draco was hardly one to have a *social* life, but she wanted to hear from him. He never responded.

She was feeding her kneazles when the owl came. It was a post owl, and she knew Draco was the only one who would contact her who didn't have an owl of his own. She felt joyous, and

she didn't even care if the letter bore bad news. He was talking to her.

Dearest Mother,

I am so sorry for not writing you in the past few weeks. It was foolish of me. I thought perhaps if I avoided everyone from my past, it would help with my name. But it does not matter. Family matters, and no one can blame me for visiting with my mother, can they?

I'm so sorry if I've hurt you by ignoring you for so long. If you can forgive me, would you like me to stop by the Manor? We can chat and catch up. We might even talk about the gala I've been planning--I know how you love those things. You could even come, if you like. It's next weekend.

Your foolish son,

Draco

Narcissa wasn't sure when she had last felt so grateful. Her boy was coming to see her again.

Harry was at Hermione's house, draped over her sofa and moaning dramatically. She sat by him in a nearby chair, reading a book and humming quietly to himself.

"Life is so *frustrating*," Harry moaned, using his wand to draw golden sparks in the air. He made some more frustrated groaning sounds, but Hermione ignored him for a while longer.

"Maybe if you actually used her words and told me what was wrong, I could help you," she suggested at last, peering over the edge of her book.

"Unnnghh." Harry huffed, and green smoke puffed out of his wand.

"You are intolerable when you're like this." Hermione snapped at him, slamming her book shut and glaring at him.

"You sound like Draco," he sighed. "That's what he said before he told me to come see you." He rolled over onto his side to watch her better, and she did not look pleased.

"Oh, fantastic. Your reluctance to talk pushed him over the edge, so he sent you over to me." She rolled her eyes, dropping the book to the floor (a disrespect to literature that was uncharacteristic of her). "Mm, yes. I feel quite grateful."

"No!" Harry protested. "That wasn't it. He knows what's going on. He was just angry that I was ruining the 'mood' of his shop by playing too much depressing music. Like Accio Happiness and The Portkey Ponderers." He sighed again dramatically. "He says I 'ruined' them for him."

"Oh, gods." Hermione groaned, standing up to join him on the light rose sofa. "Since when did you cope like this?" She chuckled wryly. "What happened to you, Harry? What turned you into an angsty teenager?"

"Don't mock my suffering!" Harry snapped, deliberate quoting one of the songs Draco had almost put on the "banned" shelf (where he kept the Celestina Warbeck albums, which he had been forced to restock due to popular demand).

"I won't, if you tell me what's going on," Hermione said gently.

Harry sighed. "Andromeda wrote me," he admitted. "She wants me to meet Teddy."

"Harry!" Hermione cried. "That's brilliant! Why is that upsetting?" she demanded.

"Because!" Harry whined, sitting up abruptly. "I was never there for him, all that time! And I'm so upset with her for keeping me away from him!" He felt a rush of magic escape him, and he felt angry with Andromeda, and with himself. "It was completely unfair!"

"But Harry," Hermione objected, placing a hand on his shoulder. "You were completely unstable then. You couldn't even drag yourself out of the house after Glen, let alone raise a small toddler," she reminded him. "And besides, he's only five. It's not too late at all."

Harry closed his eyes. Hermione was right, really. He would have just hurt Teddy if he had tried to raise him before, and even now it wouldn't be a great idea. He would have just made it worse. And Teddy still had another six years until Hogwarts. That didn't mean he wasn't mad at Andromeda, however. He still felt that part of her reasoning for not letting him see Teddy was his "unconventional homosexuality." She had called him out on it before, and even mentioned it during the court battle (luckily, everyone in the room was sworn to not share the details of the charges with anyone).

She could have changed her mind, though, couldn't she?

"Fine," he consolidated. "So, maybe I'm making a big deal out of this... but it still hurts. And I don't know what to do. I feel like... Like I'd be betraying the other kids." He really felt as though it would be harder for him to keep the rest of them in his life if he finally had Teddy.

Hermione sighed. "Harry. You will probably never adopt Teddy. Get that through your head first," she told him pragmatically. "And you don't need to. He has a wonderful guardian, and you can be his godfather just fine. There are plenty of children you know that *do* need to be adopted! Teddy is no more special than them, is he?"

"No." Harry winced. Hermione was speaking the truth, of course... But it hurt a bit. In those first few months, he had imagined himself taking Teddy in. And then Glen came along (which Andromeda had somehow found out about and adamantly protested), then he was rejected from the Aurors (which she used as evidence for his incompetence and unreliability), next he became extremely depressed (such volatility didn't make for a good parent, she said), and, of course, there was the constant fits of anger (which she had claimed was his unsound judgment, which might put the child at risk).

And, so, he couldn't take Teddy away from Andromeda. However, she had been rational, while he had not been. She wasn't fighting against Harry, but fighting for the well being of her grandchild.

She had every right to be skeptical of Harry's parenting abilities. Suddenly, he felt grateful that she had invited him to meet Teddy at all. *Who knows? Maybe she's gotten over her homophobia. Maybe she just didn't like Glen. Would she like Draco?*

"You're right, 'Mione."

"As usual," she scoffed. "So, will you go and see him?"

"Yes. I will. I might even bring him to meet the other kids. I think he'd like Seth. I mean, not that I know Teddy... But any little boy ought to like Seth, right?" Harry's head was spinning with the idea of finally meeting his godson.

Hermione smiled fondly. "Of course," she agreed. She didn't say any more, and Harry was left for a few moments to contemplate when and where they'd meet... What they'd do... Would he invite Andromeda to the gala, to be polite? *Shit. I haven't even written her back, and she sent that two days ago...*

He didn't even notice Hermione was staring at him strangely, but when she addressed him, he noticed her curious gaze. "Harry?"

"What?" he mumbled, imagining Seth and Teddy flying together on small brooms, playing with mud....

"Why don't you adopt Seth already?" Hermione asked him, and he snapped to attention all at once.

"W-what?" He stammered, shaking his head. "What makes you think I want to adopt Seth?" he demanded.

Hermione sighed and shook her head. "He's clearly your favorite, and you relate to him the most. You talk about him nonstop, and he *adores* you. Not as if the others don't, but you two have a connection."

"I don't have a favorite!" Harry protested immediately. "I mean... do you think we do?" he added, more timidly. Then, he felt resolve swim in his chest, and he for some reason found himself blinking away tears. "No. I can't. Remember? I can't adopt one until the rest have homes!"

"You can't save them all, Harry! There will always be more. And they won't hate you for choosing one of them! They'd be happy for him!"

Harry stood up. This was sounding very familiar... Hadn't he just had this talk with Draco?

"I know that!" he snapped. "But, I can't... It's too soon. I'm just going to focus on the gala, and we'll talk to people about adopting then. And the others will find homes, too."

Hermione stood as well. "Why? So someone else will adopt him? If you wait too long, he'll grow too old, won't he? Weren't you just distraught over Teddy growing up?" she demanded.

It was annoying when she was so logical.

"Yes!" Harry growled, not sure what he was saying 'yes' to. "At least I've been around him... He knows me."

"Yes, he knows you well enough that you can become his guardian. You don't have that with Teddy. It's not like you'd be settling for less, Harry! You'd love to be a father, and Seth's just as good, if not better, as Teddy." Hermione obviously wasn't enjoying comparing and objectifying children, but she had a gleam in her eyes that said she needed to get the point across.

"I don't know!" Harry wailed. He crossed his arms. "I can't do this. I'm going back home."

He didn't realize until he was there that he had been thinking of Draco's flat.

It was amusing, really, that he thought of Draco's flat as *home* now. "Honey, I'm home!" he called out jokingly. Apparently Draco was downstairs, as his voice did not come from any of the upstairs rooms.

"Home, my arse! Not if you come bearing your entourage of sadness!" he called back up to Harry. He apparently didn't get the muggle joke.

"I don't have an entourage! Do you even know what that word means?" Harry protested, about to stomp downstairs to bug Draco.

"I damn well know what it means, H--" he broke off mid shout. "It's busy down here, alright? I'll come upstairs in a little while." His voice was no less loud (he did have to shout between floors), but it was softer and more concerned.

Harry realized that poor Draco might be barraged by questions now as to why a man was upstairs calling him "honey." He hoped to god that no one recognized his voice as Harry Potter's.

"Fine. I'll write that letter!" he replied, his voice carrying down the staircase. Draco didn't respond, apparently caught up with nosy customers now. He laughed wryly to himself and sat down at the kitchen table to write a reply to Andromeda.

I really need to get him a desk.

"Who's that?" Auror Micheals asked, once Draco had finished bantering with Harry through the ceiling. "He sounds familiar..."

Draco flushed immediately. No one, not even Auror Micheals, needed to know that Harry Potter was in his flat, calling it home, and using it to write a letter. "No one you know," he replied quickly. "He hasn't spent much time in the shop." It was a lie, of course, but he didn't think Micheals had met Harry yet.

He wasn't stupid, though, as eccentric as he was. He could probably use his Auror skills to figure it out if he ever met Harry or heard his voice... He might have to ask Harry to stop

helping him run the shop until he was out. In fact, it might be safer to just tell Harry not to visit at all during store hours...

Even after he realized that it was the wolves' sly growling suggesting those things, he didn't doubt that they were necessary precautions.

"Hmm," Auror Micheals hummed, picking up a Seething Lemons album. "Maybe I know him from work, then. Does he work at the Ministry?"

Draco blinked, letting his Malfoy ice (which sometimes *did* have its uses) freeze over the embarrassed heat filling him and drain the redness from his face. "No, sir. He hates politics."

Micheals frowned, hitting the record against his palm rhythmically. "Well, what's his name? I swear to Merlin I know that voice..."

Draco let out an uneasy laugh. "Auror Micheals," he said as lightly as he could, "I'm a famous, controversial writer. Don't you think it'd be a bit dangerous to reveal who my lover is? Especially when there are other customers in the shop?" he asked, glancing at the middle-aged woman pouting at the lack of variety in his Warbeck selection, the important-looking robed man, and the group of annoying teenagers.

"Oh! I never assumed he was your *lover*," Micheals smirked, and Draco realized he had been duped. As unassuming as this man seemed, he was still an Auror. Draco imagined he could easily play the "good cop" in the interrogation room...

"I hadn't meant for that to slip..." he mumbled, realizing that the shop had frozen and everyone was staring at him. "What? Can't a man have a personal life? I don't just sit behind this counter and write while I wait for you all to buy records the whole day," he sneered, and everyone looked away and went back to their mulling.

Micheals shrugged, dropping the five unpurchased records on the counter. "How much for these?" he inquired, still pulling out the usual 12 galleons for the buy-four-get-the-fifth-free sale that he always used.

"You know how much by now..." Draco muttered rudely, not in the mood for their usual pleasantries. He snatched the coins away, and felt a little sorry. "What do you do with all these records, anyway? One might worry you're in here to buy my entire shop and put me out of business..." He teased with an apologetic smile.

"I work at a desk in the Auror department. Something's got to lighten the mood, don't you think?" He smiled wryly, taking the records and tucking them under his arm.

"Oh." Draco frowned. "You don't work in the field? I thought..." He didn't know what he had thought, though the idea of this cheery man taking out Dark witches and wizards or stunning werewolves or killing vampires *did* seem a little strange. It was easier to imagine him being an Investigator, or perhaps a member of the Law Enforcement Patrol, but his title was Auror. And he didn't seem well suited to sitting at a desk all day, with his flitting about and positive personality.

Auror Micheals shrugged. "I did, but then I got hit with a couple of nasty Dark Arts spells, and they promoted me to something better." He smiled brightly as if Draco was supposed to know something, but he wasn't catching on.

"I'm sorry to hear that, sir," Draco mumbled, feeling a little confused.

Micheals grinned at him again. "Oh, no, marvelous Mr. Malfoy." He winked at him. "It's perfectly fine. I'm Head of the Auror Department now. Have been for two years."

Draco felt his jaw drop. He had the *Head of the Auror Department* coming into his shop every day? Chatting with him and complimenting him?

That's a good connection to have.

He closed his jaw as quickly as he could. "I had no idea, sir!" Draco laughed. "Congratulations, I suppose, though it's a bit late..."

Micheals turned to leave. "Don't worry about it, Mr. Malfoy. I'm still impressed by you. Stay magnificent!" he called, closing the door behind him.

Draco shook his head, slightly in awe by the strange little man who had turned out to be one of the most powerful wizards in the Ministry. And he was on Draco's side. That certainly helped with the wolves snapping at the back of his head. Perhaps he had told Draco his identity to makeup for the fact he had tricked him into admitting he had a... a boyfriend?

The witch with the Celestina Warbeck albums walked up to the counter with the same dull expression that they all had. All of her fans looked the same to him. *Call me a judgmental bastard. I still have to have some prejudice, don't I? At least this is over someone's deliberate music taste instead of their heritage.*

"Six galleons," Draco snapped.

"Didn't you just sell him five records for twelve, though?" she blinked, looking at him with a confused expression. "This is just one. It should be three galleons."

"Warbeck albums come with a special *tax* in my shop. And he bought enough for a discount," he added, scowling at her.

"Oh. Why is there a tax?" She asked innocently, giving him the six galleons he had asked for.

"It's a waste of shelf space," he replied curtly, snatching the money. "Will that be all for you?"

She shook her head slightly. "I was just wondering if it was true," she said timidly, "that you're gay? I mean, I know you're Pennom, and you wrote that article... But are you really? You seem so *normal*."

His scowl turned into a grimace, and he checked himself so he wouldn't hex her.

"It's *very* true," he snarled. "And it's harmful, *distasteful* assumptions that people with my

sexuality aren't *normal* that make me such an angry person!" he added for good measure, pointing to the door.

"Maybe you'll change your mind someday, though? I mean, what did girls do to you?" she asked, ignoring his conspicuous hints that she leave.

"My mind will not be changed. I'm quite happy. And, I can't blame women for it. Though, your own stupidity isn't making a very good case." He glowered at her, again gesturing for the door. He was not in a mood to deal with this. Harry was waiting upstairs, too.

She pouted. "That wasn't very nice." She shrugged. "See you in the papers, Pennom." And this time, she made no attempt at showing any innocent ignorance, shooting him a malicious smirk and heading out the door.

It wasn't until she was out the door and it was too late that he remembered seeing her face before, last time she came in to buy a Warbeck album. It was Calla Gallows, and no doubt she'd be writing another article soon.

He could have screamed. Warbeck fans were the worst.

Cassius Aterneus was reading over the article that Gallows had just sent to him. It hadn't come through Boot this time, even though it covered the "celebrity" category. He could see why. It was about Pennon (or Malfoy, he reminded himself), and Boot's girlfriend Granger would not have been too pleased with it.

Or maybe she would have. He didn't know her agenda. Maybe she didn't care what was published about Malfoy; after all, she hadn't said anything about Skeeter's article. But that hadn't been too vindictive, either. And neither was this, really.

Though, he didn't like it. It wouldn't really go with his own personal "gay agenda."

Gallows had taken another visit to Malfoy's record shop and overheard a conversation shouted between him and someone upstairs (whose voice she had described as "eerily familiar), who was apparently his lover. That last bit was revealed from an exchange between Malfoy and another customer, who was Head Auror Micheals.

It was curious, really. But not too seriously. He would have bet his identity that the familiar upstairs voice had been Harry Potter.

It hadn't been too hard to piece together. Between his discussion with Malfoy and the recent articles published about the two's strange partnership, it was obvious. Why else would Malfoy work with Potter, if he didn't have some other interest in him?

That did raise the question, however... Since when did Malfoy have feelings for Potter? He remembered seeing the two when they were younger in school, and how they were constantly fighting and exchanging petty insults. He supposed adulthood brought a lot of changes. And this one was most amusing.

He was torn between allowing the article to be published, or burning it and making Gallows swear to never speak of it again. On the one side, it would bring in some interesting speculation, and would be most interesting to watch. On the other... there were plenty of people whose speculations would be correct, and it might harm whatever Malfoy's plan was. He hoped that Malfoy would be working on pushing the LGBT rights agenda, now that the Attacks were resolved.

And if, suddenly, there was an article about Pennom's blatant aggressiveness over defending his sexuality, it might be a setback. If there was anything regarding Pennom's coming out (which he had assumed the rest of everyone had agreed was the queer visibility article), he wanted it to be something more positive. Gallows' trivial desire for revenge wouldn't be helping.

He sent a quick message to Gallows, thanking her for the information. He would tend to the article and edit it, using the information for his own good. Judging by the transcript of the encounter that Gallows had given him, she had acted like a right bitch, and Malfoy had reason to be upset with her. Instead of making it about Malfoy's anger, it would be about people's stupid assumptions.

He hadn't written anything besides advice columns and notes since becoming Editor in Chief. And Gallows couldn't blame him for stealing her story, unless she wanted to be fired. Or, suffer Patil's fate and become the letter-reader. That would be fun to see.

Within an hour, he had finished it. It was only a few paragraphs, and he figured it would just be a small clip on the Celebrity News page. Not enough to cause a stir, but enough to give it some attention. He wasn't like *some* of his writers, and he wouldn't go about it like a tabloid piece. Even Rita Skeeter knew better than that, and would vest every one of her articles with some agenda other than "LOOK! THE SCANDAL!" This was *The Prophet*, after all, not *Witch Weekly* or *The Quibbler*. He could manipulate the juicy gossip to *actually* get a message across.

Still Facing Discrimination

From Cassius Aterneus, Editor in Chief

Many remember the article by Adam Pennom (also known as Draco Malfoy) touching on the untouched topic of LGBT wizards' visibility. The article, which caused quite a stir here at The Prophet's office, brought many of us to speculate some interesting thoughts on the topic.

Sadly, productive speculations, such as "How can we deal with this problem?" and "How can I support the LGBT wizards in my life?" were limited, and most of the attention was drawn to questions like "Who else is gay?" and "Gods, have I been having associations a gay person?" and other trivial topics, which were covered by other media outlets in recent weeks.

Other common questions were "Who is Adam Pennom?" and "Is he gay?", which remained unanswered for the first week, as we only had as much to go off of on Pennom as he supplied us. A week after 'the article' was published, his piece "Look Now And

Remember" was published, in which Pennom's identity was revealed as Draco Malfoy (though that was the least important part of it). The first question answered, people turned to answer the second question, though it was widely assumed that the answer was 'yes.' Today, an undercover reporter confirmed that the Pennom/Malfoy is, indeed, gay, and in a relationship with an unidentified wizard.

Unsurprising surprises aside, that is not the issue we should be focusing on. Malfoy has had to deal with some unnecessary harassment in his shop from pestering customers lately. It's the same drabble that every other LGBT wizard or witch has had to deal with, and it's understandably frustrating.

We should be able to reach a point where we don't have to say "But you seem so normal!" to wizards and witches of any sexual orientation, because they are normal.

We shouldn't think it's a good idea to suggest that they will change one day, because this is the way they were made, and they won't change.

We shouldn't ask them what the opposite sex did to them, because this has nothing to do with past experiences, because this is who they've been all along.

Pennom/Malfoy's article was supposed to shed a light on this issue. Things were supposed to change. Perhaps we just need to be educated further on the subject. Who will step up and start teaching?

--CA

New Steps

Harry poured the coffee as he waited for Andromeda to reply to his letter. He had sent it off yesterday, and he hoped she would be replying soon. He had agreed that he had been unstable, but he was much better with children now. He had said that he was most excited to meet Teddy, and assured her she didn't have to worry about him taking her to court over his custody again. He also invited her to the gala, as "she of all people should understand the importance and joy of helping orphans."

He had also added that she should send the letter to Draco's flat in Diagon. He figured she could take the hint.

Just as he was sitting down, bearing his black coffee and Draco's coffee-stained milk, Draco let out a long, bearing sigh. "I hate everything," he muttered, burying his head into the copy of *The Prophet* he was reading.

Harry snickered. "Perhaps I should pull out the Phoenix Tears album of the same name?" he suggested.

"No. No more sad songs. I told you so. I will remove all of them from the shop if you dare play another," he added, turning his head to rest on his arm. "Besides, music won't fix this."

"What's the matter?" Harry asked, pulling Draco up off the paper so he could see it.

Draco Malfoy/Pennom's sexuality, page 4

"Can't I get a break?" Draco asked.

Harry shrugged. "Maybe you can. Let's read the article, and see if there's anything to fuss about." He wondered if this was how Draco felt when he had to deal with Harry's moping about the letter. He was in a good mood after sending the letter, and if he could feel fine after that, Draco would be fine with this. He flipped to page 4 and skimmed over the article.

"Draco! You've nothing to worry about. It's brilliant," he added, passing the article back to Draco. "Do you know the Editor? He seems to be on your side."

Draco's look of despair altered into a smirk as he read the article. "Good old Cassius," he laughed, sighing in relief when he put the paper down. "He is on my side, it appears. I was worried he'd find out about us, eventually, and spill it. Being a ratty journalist and all."

"You're a ratty journalist," Harry muttered, taking a sip of his tea.

"I am not ratty! That's why you're here, right?" he winked, and Harry remembered they still had the coming out article to write.

"Maybe we ought to step up to his call to action at the end," Harry suggested. "We've signed all the papers to start the charity. We could announce it at the gala this weekend!" He and

Draco had been, along with planning the gala, setting up a charity for LGBT awareness. They'd use the funds for it to carry out the awareness campaign and hire "educators."

They'd had to set up an account at Gringotts for it, along with signing several papers with the Ministry to prove they'd use the money only for the purposes highlighted in their contract. It had gone over well, though.

"Lovely idea," Draco replied, taking a gulp of his drink. "Though, I suggest the funds from the gala itself only go to the orphanage, as that's what people agreed to when they signed up. We can announce the charity at the gala, and then ask around for willing contributors at the party."

Harry sighed. "There's so much to do. We also have to find people willing to adopt," he added, rubbing his face with a tired hand. "Not that it should be too hard. Lots of people there will be interested, don't you think?"

"I hope so. I'm thinking we really ought to find homes for Kara and Tanner first, though, since they're older. They're priority."

"They're almost at Hogwarts, though. It'll be harder," Harry admitted. He wondered how much better his life would have been if someone had adopted him just before he left for Hogwarts. Or, while he was at Hogwarts. Any parental support would have been welcome.

He was interrupted when Andromeda's owl flew in through the ever-open window. She dropped the letter onto the table, and flew off immediately. Apparently, she was not waiting for a response.

Harry,

Would you like to meet Teddy this Thursday? We could meet at Fortescue's Ice Cream Parlour, if I am correct to assume from the papers that you enjoy it. Teddy has not been yet; we haven't spent much time around Diagon.

We might even take him to the orphanage afterwards (as chilling as that phrase is out of context). Will my nephew be joining you? I haven't spoken to him in... well, I don't think I've ever spoken to him.

And I would love to attend your gala! Teddy won't be attending; he wouldn't enjoy that sort of thing.

Yours in anticipation,

Andromeda Tonks

Harry smiled and tucked the letter into his pocket. "I think things will be fine with your aunt," he told Draco with a grin. "She wants to meet both of us for ice cream Thursday."

"Today's Tuesday?" Draco asked absently. "That should be fine. Hopefully Rita Skeeter won't interrupt this time."

Harry chuckled. "Maybe it will be this Cassius fellow! You never know. The press has eyes everywhere." He lifted his hands and waggled his fingers in an exaggeratedly ominous manner.

Draco snorted and rolled his eyes. "I hope not. As kind as he was, I fear he's figured us out."

"God forbid anyone knows you kiss me." Harry scoffed dramatically. "We have *boy cooties*!" He snickered childishly, half-wanting to lean over and kiss Draco just for good measure.

Draco frowned. "What in Merlin's name are cooties?" he inquired, taking another sip out of his mug.

"It's a muggle thing. Never mind," Harry grumbled, smiling into his mug. It was a good morning, he thought, and things were going very well. He hoped that this morning wouldn't be like so many others, and things would *stay* peaceful.

"Well, come over here and we can share the *cooties*." Draco smirked, standing up. Harry did, too, and they were pulled into a gentle, teasing kiss.

"Good morning!" Harry sighed happily when they broke apart, resting his head on Draco's chest.

"Oh. Now you're awake, then?" Draco teased him.

"Yes, I finally am. And you've a shop to open up, and I've a few deliveries to make," Harry responded, pulling away completely. "I'll go home and take a shower, yeah? I've started to smell like you."

"Is that a bad thing?" Draco pouted, crossing his arms.

"No. But I like my enchanted shower. You ought to come by and try it. Then I can see what you *actually* smell like." He winked, knowing he had already explained to Draco that he had judged his exes in part by whether or not their "natural" smell was pleasant or not.

"I've told you, I smell like apples!" he insisted.

"You *like* to smell like apples," Harry corrected him.

"And that's just fine!"

"Whatever, love." Harry sighed, standing on the tips of his toes to kiss Draco on the cheek bone. "I'll try not to drop by and rouse any more suspicions today, okay? I'll probably see you tomorrow."

"I'll be waiting here," Draco grumbled. "I've got an article to write."

"Can't wait to read it! Maybe if you visit Grimmauld I'll show you some pieces I'm working on." Harry apparated away before Draco could respond.

Draco was disappointed to see Harry go. He would have rathered they stay and kiss and do "cooties" and talk about Harry's magical shower. He might have even been willing to go and try it out. Maybe Harry would have been willing to share. He had no idea.

Whatever they would have done, he would have preferred it to what he was doing today. He was going to see his mother, and though he *rationaly* knew he had nothing to worry about (she was still his mother), he was fucking terrified. He had avoided her for a month, and now he was going to have to talk with her either as if it had never happened or they would reconcile. Not to mention the fact that he had yet to inform her personally that he had planned the gala to be in the Manor... After his "speculation" article about the event, the invitations that had been sent out, and probably the countless owls that had been sent from the caterers, she definitely knew.

She had even questioned him about it in the letters he never responded to, he knew. He felt like a terrible son.

The clock told him Harry had left just on time, and that he should probably apparate to see his mother within the hour. Sighing, he made his way to the bathroom to clean up and make himself presentable. For the first time in a while, he would even have to wear *robes*.

He took a quick shower (and he was most certainly *not* self-conscious of the fact that everything smelled like apples), just so he would seem extra clean to his nit-picking mother. Whom he loved, he reminded himself as he brushed his teeth.

In his bedroom, he realized just how full of muggle clothes his closet actually was. He only had a few robes, and he couldn't decide which ones were best fitted for a meeting with his parents.

The, he remembered his father wouldn't be there. He didn't have to worry as much about formalities and pureblood politics and other gibberish like that.

Fuck it, he thought, and decided he'd wear muggle clothes. *This is who I am now. Not the child that they made me, but the man that I have made myself become.*

He chose black dress-trousers and a green button up shirt, both of which he felt very confident in. Not long after putting those on, he was perfectly ready to visit his mother.

But despite the fact that he had gone much longer than just a month without talking to her, this time it felt worse. Perhaps because this time he had ended it on an argument, and he had completely shut her out. He had ignored her letters, planned an event in the house she was living in, and still hadn't spoken with her. He had even refused to repair his broken floor, which had even interfered with his communication with Harry.

Oh, and there was Harry. He was now in love with Harry Potter, dating Harry potter, sleeping with Harry Potter... And his mother knew nothing about it. Would she even approve? He had

no idea, and he was utterly terrified.

The wolves began snapping at the back of his neck, and for once they solidified his resolve. In a moment, he apparated to Malfoy Manor. The wards would let him in because of his blood, and nothing else. In every other sense, he was a traitor to the Malfoy name. He had even testified against his father after the war.

And then he was standing in the cold, bleak, stony foyer of Malfoy Manor. Memories of his father swirled around his head, and they were so unnatural and strange that he thought it must have been an enchantment built into the house by his father. It was very much like him, to torture him with some of the harsher memories, along with the better ones.

The wolves ate them up, growing bigger and then vomiting them back at them. He cringed.

"Mother!" he cried, feeling like a child. His father and the wolves told him so.

Child! Child! You fool, you traitor, you coward!

"Draco!" A warm, familiar voice called. All at once, his mother, Narcissa Malfoy, swept him into a graceful embrace. Her wanted touch immediately chased away the wolves, and he hugged her back, knowing that he was already forgiven.

"Mother," he breathed, feeling more at home than he had in a very long time. He felt completely absorbed in her embrace, invisible and unknown to all the world but her.

She broke away and held him at arms-length by the shoulders. "Are you alright, little dragon?" she asked him, and he didn't even wince at her pet name. "You look pale."

He shrugged her hands away. "Some wards Father must have left got to me," he explained. "The wolves reacted well to them..." He frowned drily.

Narcissa sighed, taking his hand and leading him into the sitting room. "The wolves..." she shook her head and sighed. "Is there no way to get rid of them? They have plagued you ever since you took the Dark Mark. It's faded now, but they remain?"

Draco frowned. "Mother, it's fine..."

"No, Draco! It's not fine. You can't lead a normal life because every time you go into public, these wolves start harming you. Can't you do anything? Block them with Occlumency? You're quite gifted in that," she added warmly, shoving him gently into a large, comfortable chair. She sat down gracefully across from him.

"Actually, Mother," Draco began, crossing his legs, "Harry and I were talking about it, and we think it could have been Aunt Bella's training that brought the wolves into existence."

Narcissa scowled. "The bitch!" she exclaimed, and Draco gasped at her sudden profanity. "That's just like her, to inflict that kind of torture on someone..." She trailed off, furrowing her eyebrows and looking deep in thought.

"I thought that at first, too," he admitted softly. "But I think it might have been my subconscious defending myself against her. They are strongest whenever I think about my past wrongs, or what people of the Light think of me, or when I think about doing something Dark." He paused, remembering the night at the Astronomy Tower. "They were the reason I didn't kill Dumbledore."

Narcissa frowned, and her elegant composure faltered for a moment. "So, they are a more violent form of your conscience." She sighed.

"Something like that."

"Oh, my little dragon..." She buried her face in her hands. "I would ask you to see Healers about it, but of course I can't force you. St. Mungo's would be able to help."

"Mother," Draco sighed in quiet objection.

"Fine." Narcissa cleared her throat. "Let us discuss something else. How is Harry Potter? I've seen you two in the papers a lot." She cast him an inquisitive look, and he felt himself blush.

"Yes, Harry..." He murmured, turning very red. Though he had no reason to, he supposed. He had never done anything shameful with Harry, though he felt as though his relationship with him was more intimate than most others he'd had.

"I'm in a relationship with Harry. A romantic one," he added, meeting his mother's eye and searching for disapproval. He had come out to her as gay just before he published the article, weeks before they had fought, before he met Harry again...

A smile cracked on her face. "I thought so. Are you happy with him?"

Draco faltered. He hadn't been expecting that. "I... Yes. I'm happy." He felt a goofy grin spread on his face. "I'm very, very happy."

Narcissa let out a little relieved laugh. "Then I am happy, dearest. He treats you well?"

Draco nodded, suddenly feeling very at ease. "Yes. Though, he sometimes needs a couple days away, and half the time all he's thinking about is the orphanage... And, mother, he knows nothing about galas! Here we are planning, and all he can talk about is the bloody children's costumes without a single thought to the guests themselves!"

He rambled on for a while to her, and she would laugh at him and agree with him and give him subtle advice. It was good to finally talk with her again, to have someone who knew him so well and cared for him so much. She already knew his nature; the only thing she had to learn about was the recent events in his life.

And, of course, they had to discuss the gala he had planned without discussing it with her.

She was the first to mention it, after a long moment's pause following a bout of wistful laughter.

"Were you going to mention the gala you'd planned? I asked you in the letters," she said softly, breaking the silence like a knife through curtains.

"Eventually." Draco sighed. "I was worried you'd be upset. You know that it's here, don't you? I'm sure some owls have been sent here." He avoided her gaze, staring down at his feet.

"Oh, I received *plenty* of owls. Didn't you read my letters, demanding an explanation? Of course I've been upset," she told him. "The only information I had about this 'gala' occurring in my own home was from an article you had published. I felt left out, not knowing any more than the next person." She seemed upset, but more remorseful than anything.

Draco wanted to hide himself for the next three years rather than face the shame he was feeling. "I'm sorry, Mother. I wasn't thinking. I was foolish and angry. It was a petty revenge."

"I know. You are forgiven. As long as you explain more about what's going on."

He gratefully began explaining to her the details of the event, as well as the major points. It was for the orphanage and for a second LGBT charity Harry and Draco were working on; any witch or wizard who could pay was invited; Draco would choose the music; the dress code included the Luna Lovegood Orphan line...

"That wasn't a joke?" Narcissa demanded. "When I saw that in the paper, I thought it was a joke." She added, shaking her head.

"Why would it be a joke?" he inquired. When he saw the look on her face, he added, "It was Harry's idea."

"It's so distasteful, Draco. This event is hardly a gala. A costume party? Yes. But not a gala!" She exclaimed.

Draco chuckled. "I had this discussion with Harry. He's of the opinion that it doesn't matter, as long as it's raising money for charity." Narcissa didn't argue, instead choosing to stare pensively at him.

"So, mother," he said at last, breaking the silence. "Would you attend the gala? In the children's designs?"

She smiled strangely. "It's in my own house, dragon. I would have gone even if you haven't invited me," she added, with a look that reminded him that Malfoys didn't miss out on charity events.

Especially not their sons' charity events.

"And I really would love to meet Harry," she said with a subtle wink. Draco felt himself blush, and he hoped she wouldn't interrogate him too much.

"Does the Editor hate you?" Hermione asked Terry casually. They were out to dinner at a very fancy muggle restaurant, which they didn't usually do. Hermione had a feeling Terry was trying to make up to her for the lack of articles he'd written.

Terry scowled, taking a sip of his red wine. "Probably," he admitted. "Malfoy accidentally let it slip I was writing for you, and Cassius thinks I have an unfair agenda now. I'm strictly forbidden from writing anything on the topic of Pennom, Malfoy, or Potter." He frowned as though he hadn't meant to say that. Hermione knew he hadn't.

"And why didn't you tell me before?" She pouted, twirling her pasta with a fork.

Terry turned red and tried to avoid her gaze. "Because I was worried you'd dump me," he confessed. "Sometimes I wonder if you only want to use me for my writing," he added.

Hermione frowned. The subtle variation on Veritaserum she had been using lately always made people admit things she didn't like. They were usually more emotional than usual Veritaserum confessions, but it was a small price to pay to be able to have a legal truth serum that was easy to use in public. She used it a lot, lately; she liked it when people were honest.

"Terry!" she cried, dropping her fork. "I'd never do that. I haven't dumped you yet, have I?" she added, gently pulling off one of her heels and running a foot flirtatiously along Terry's calf.

He blushed to the tips of his ears. "I know," he murmured. "I'm saying all these emotional things tonight. I don't really know why." He took a piece of bread from the basket and gnawed on it, as if to prevent him from saying anything else.

"Is there anything else on your mind?" Hermione asked him, making sincere eye contact.

"Yes," he told her. "But I'm not ready to talk about it yet." He must have noticed the concerned look on her face, and he raised a hand in the air in defense. "It's nothing bad, I swear!"

She laughed. "Alright, dear." She rolled her eyes, deciding to change the subject. "Did I tell you? Friday's my first day working fully with the DMLE. They've got me analyzing a new case already!"

"Oh! That's wonderful. I hope you're not spending too much time with Ron Weasley," he added, and winced, and she knew it was her Veritaserum again. She had brewed it herself, actually. She was quite pleased with its subtlety, and she was getting it approved with the DMLE to use in the field. It wouldn't have all the legal complications and obligations that full on Veritaserum had. It was one of the main reasons they hired her, that potion.

"Oh, come on," Hermione teased, "we're over that, completely. Harry talked us through it."

"That's what I'm worried about!" he blurted out, and shook his head. "Anyway, speaking of Harry, and this weekend... I need to get my hands on some Lovegood orphan clothes to get in to the gala. Did you pick anything out for yourself?" he asked through a mouthful of lamb.

"I got the purple and blue pinstripe pantsuit," she replied. "I was thinking of the silver skin tight that McLaggen sported for you. Very sexy," she smirked, taking another bite of her own food.

"Not in public!" Terry cried.

"But you'd wear it... somewhere else?" Hermione inquired with a wink.

"Oh, yeah," Terry replied, covering his mouth at the tone of his voice. Oh, she loved this emotional truth serum. It was *golden*.

"We'll have to pick that up, then," she replied nonchalantly. "But, if not that, perhaps the vine robes for the party? They're certainly your color," she added, smirking through a sip of wine.

"I think you're enjoying sexualizing the children's clothes..." Terry muttered, aggressively stabbing his meat. "But I wouldn't mind those ones. They're not as flashy as the silver thing."

Hermione nodded in agreement. "It's settled, then. I wear the pants in this relationship."

Terry burst out laughing. "I fell right into that, didn't I?" He wheezed once he had calmed down. "But, yeah. I suppose you do..." He trailed off with a wistful look in his eye, and stared at Hermione like she had turned into gold.

"What?" she asked, suddenly feeling very vulnerable. And in part wishing she hadn't put the veritaserum into his wine. He sounded like he was about to ask something very important, and the truth serum might've been rushing it...

"Well, because you're the pants here, I wanted to run something by you." He grinned at her. "I know we've only been together for five months, three weeks and two days, but..." He pulled something out of his pocket and winked at her.

"I thought you'd consider marrying me," he announced, and the restaurant fell quiet to stare at them.

She stopped breathing. She hadn't been expecting this... Not at this age... She still wasn't the Head of Department of anything yet... She had barely started living yet... She couldn't settle down yet!

But suddenly she felt as though the emotional Veritaserum had been put into her own drink, because all logical thoughts were overcome as she cried, "Yes! Gods, yes, Terry."

His grin broke out in a smile wide enough to reach his ears. He took Hermione's hand from across the table and put the ring on it, which was diamond and sapphire and felt enchanted with something... Or maybe it was just the experience that felt magic.

The room burst out in applause, and when it died down, Terry raised an eyebrow. "I also thought we might adopt some of those tykes Harry's always going on about," he suggested.

Hermione blinked. She hadn't expected on becoming a mother anytime soon... But she could do it. She wanted to do it. "Yes!" She agreed. "We can talk to Harry and Draco about it at the gala. They'll know who." She found herself smiling immensely, even if her life plans were being derailed before her eyes.

But between Harry and Draco's antics, and Terry's editor, she was used to her plans not going as expected. And they usually turned out fine.

Everything was going to be fine. She didn't have to control everything.

Terry slipped a vial out of his pocket, and handed it to her. "No more of this, though, alright?" He had a begging expression on his face. "I'm always uneasy when you use it on me, and I felt terrible giving it to you."

He had known about her truth serum. He had *used* her truth serum. "How...?"

He smirked. "We work well together because we're both smart, remember? You can't outsmart me *all* the time," he reminded her.

She blushed. "No more of that. Unless it's an emergency," she added, before he could hold her to anything.

"This is going to be a fun ride, Hermione." Terry winked at her, and held her hand from across the table.

She couldn't wait.

It was the last of Harry's deliveries of the day. He was dropping off a few things at a shop that was near the Ministry that had paid him a good price. It was muggle, but he had no doubt that plenty of wizards came into the shop leaving or entering the Ministry. So, he had decided to sell them some of his more quirky pieces.

There was a black wood table that had some colored opaque glass filling in the cracks (neon pinks, oranges, and blues). Another was a wood chair with wings carved out of the back. The third was another table with the legs carved into hooves.

The man behind the counter stared at them in shock. "Impressive, Mr. Potter." He breathed. "I've heard a lot about you from the last manager. May I... may I ask what your technique is? These are so... strange. Eclectic." He added.

Harry laughed. "Trade secret," he winked, taking the muggle cheque from the man.

"You'd think they're magic, wouldn't you?" a voice asked.

Harry turned around, realizing it was Auror Michaels. He was still in his robes. In a muggle shop.

"Hello, Mr. Micheals!" the man said. He glanced at Harry, and muttered, "One of our many eclectic customers. That building next door has interesting dress code."

Harry laughed, ignoring the comment. "Good to see you again, Mr. Michaels." He remembered the near half hour he had spent chatting with the man in Draco's shop a few weeks ago. He had practically interrogated him; he had a very high opinion of Draco.

The shop keeper raised his eyebrow, but Auror Michaels grinned. "Oh, yes! That's where I'd heard your voice before."

"Sir?" Harry asked, frowning. Why would Auror Michaels need to remember his voice? Had he done something wrong? He couldn't help but feel uneasy.

"Mr. Malfoy didn't tell you about my last visit to his shop?" he asked. Harry noted that he wasn't nearly as buzzy now as he normally was. He looked tired from a long day of work. Harry briefly wondered how *he'd* feel after a long day of auror work.

"No, sir..." Harry frowned.

"Let's just say I heard someone through his ceiling. And I've figured it all out now," he said quietly with a smirk and a wink.

Harry's eyes widened. "Oh." He blushed. "I think it's best if you don't mention that to anyone else...." he whispered cautiously. "We're sort of keeping it on the down low," he added, not sure he wanted to mention the article.

Michaels laughed his windy laugh. "Of course not. I admire Mr. Malfoy too much to spoil any plans he might have," he explained. "I've even put a few good words in for him at the Ministry."

Harry tilted his head. "You like his shop that much?"

"Well, not exactly." He shook his head. "Mr. Malfoy's a good writer and a good man. And I believe in second chances."

"Oh?" Harry inquired.

"Let's go for a walk, Mr. Potter," Michaels said, casting the shop keeper a glance. He led Harry out of the door and into the loud streets of London. The sun was just going down, and it was starting to get chilly out.

"You're much different than Draco usually describes you. And last time I saw you." Harry added, not sure why he felt the need to mention such a pointless thing like that to him.

Michaels shrugged. "I'm usually not feeling professional when I'm in Cobalt Records. And I try to be cheery for Mr. Malfoy, gods know he needs it." He sighed, scratching his graying curls.

"How well do you know Draco?" Harry asked him.

Michaels grimaced. "I was on his case after the War. He was young and scared, and there was a dark haunted look behind his eyes. Everyone else wanted to apprehend him." He explained. "I know what it's like to have people on your back like that, and he didn't deserve it."

"How would you know?" Harry didn't care that it might have been rude.

Michaels scoffed. "Well, besides being a mostly-muggleborn put into Slytherin..." He sighed. "I'm a werewolf, Mr. Potter."

Harry was surprised. Though, he hadn't expected Remus, either. "And you're an Auror, sir?"

"Head of the Auror Department, actually," Michaels corrected him. He kept his composure and said it like it was no big deal.

"H-how?" Harry demanded, staring at him in shock. Harry couldn't be an Auror because of his "anger management issues," but a werewolf could be the head of the department?

"It happened in service. And wolfsbane is a life saver," he added wryly. "But for the most part, it was kept quiet. The injury got me out of duty for a while, and when I came back I was promoted."

"That's remarkable," Harry commented. "And I have trouble believing it." He laughed as lightly as he could. "But what's this got to do with Draco?"

They had reached the apparition point, and Michaels had stopped walking. "Mr. Malfoy has faced some terrible discrimination, for things that mostly people in his family have done. I understand that. I'm also moved by his writing. Isn't that enough?" He inquired, and Harry noted he was sounding more like his usual chipper self.

"I suppose, sir."

"Also, Mrs. Malfoy spoke with me during the trial. Fine woman, she is," he added wistfully.

Harry smiled; he didn't really know Mrs. Malfoy well, but he bet she had all of Draco's charm.

"Will you be coming to the fundraiser this weekend, sir?" Harry asked him.

"Wouldn't miss it." Head Auror Michaels winked at him, and apparated away in a snap.

Before he himself apparated back to Grimmauld, he was visited by the unappealing vision of Auror Micheals in the skin tight silver suit. He hoped to god no one would be wearing that one.

Harry Godfather

Chapter Summary

Harry is affectionate, but also very awkward and we introduce Andromeda's point of view.

Chapter Notes

I consulted Google and asked how long the average novel is. Google informed me that at 100k words, this is now officially a novel. I buried my face in my hands and asked myself how I had done this to myself. In three weeks.

This is who I am now. School will be a drag when I have to pull myself back into reality.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

It was Thursday morning, and Draco had come to Grimmauld place.

He had shown up at Harry's door before four in the morning, apparently having apparated to the nearby point and walking to his door. He was fully dressed in his muggle clothes, except he wasn't wearing a coat. The tips of his fingers were practically blue, there were dark circles under his eyes. His hair was windblown, his cheeks red, and his face drawn tight in an emotion Harry's half-asleep self couldn't figure out.

"What're you doing here so early?" Harry mumbled, leaning against the doorframe. He rubbed his eyes and yawned. The sun wasn't even up yet. What could Draco want at this early hour?

"Freezing my arse off," Draco snapped. "Warming charms can only do so much." Evidently, he'd been up for a while. He wasn't acting like his usual sleepy self.

"Come in, then," Harry muttered, pushing the door open with a foot and closing it behind Draco. "What's going on? You never come see me." He led Draco into the sitting room and cast a spell to get the coffee going.

Draco shrugged. "Couldn't sleep." He sat down in the chair closest to the fire and warmed his hands. He was staring into the flames absently.

"And you waited until now to come?" Harry asked, slowly waking up and noticing more. Draco's voice was hoarse, and his skin looked very dry. Harry wondered if he'd been out all night.

"Was a bit drunk before, actually." Draco sighed. "And I know that's usually more incentive to stop by, but I was sober enough that I knew I couldn't apparate. And I didn't want to cast a sobering charm."

"You hate alcohol, though," Harry remarked, pulling a chair close to Draco's and sitting in it. "What happened? And what did you do?" He reached over to take Draco's hand. It was cold and dry and he didn't move it from its spot on the black leather chair arm.

"I was just feeling anxious. Restless." He made a distressed sound in the back of his throat. "I apparated into muggle London. Drank some frilly alcoholic drinks I could tolerate. I hadn't done it since being with you," he added. "It didn't work like it usually did." He frowned, obviously confused by this fact.

"Oh. And?"

"Didn't make out with any strangers, or anyone else, if that's what you're wondering," he grumbled, and ran a hand through his slightly-tangled hair. "That wouldn't be fair."

"I didn't mean it like that, though I'm glad you didn't," Harry said with a sigh. "If it didn't work, what did it do?"

Draco looked away from the fire and into Harry's eyes. "It numbed me. Which was why I didn't cast a sobering charm. But I still couldn't *forget*, you know?" His grey eyes were shining with either grief or hope--Harry couldn't tell which.

"I kept on thinking about my stupid, stupid fears. About what people think about me. And I realized I really don't have anything to worry about anymore, do I? People don't care about what I did anymore," he continued, laughing wryly. "None of the letters accused me of anything other than being a Malfoy or an annoying journalist, right? That part of my life is over. I'm Pennom, now. In fact, I was thinking of changing my last name to that."

Harry smiled and rubbed his eyes again. "I'm so glad for you, Draco." He tried to hold back another yawn. He wanted to listen to what Draco had to say, even if it was four in the morning and he was half asleep.

"Yeah," Draco mumbled. "And I was thinking... I have you now, right? I've got you on my side, and you know I'm good. As far as I'm concerned, that's all I ever really had to worry about." He laughed again. "I always cared about what you thought of me. When you testified for me at the trial... that meant the world to me."

Harry yawned very loudly, no longer able to hold it in. "How long have you been awake? You're acting weird."

"I haven't slept all night! And I'm allowed to be sentimental," Draco pouted, crossing his arms.

Harry noticed how dark the circles under his eyes were, and how tired he looked, and how chapped his lips were. Still hazy and sleepy and addle-brained, Harry felt himself fixating on the latter bit.

"Your lips..." he murmured, not making any sense, and leaned over the space between their chairs to kiss Draco's cold, dry lips. The other man started, but happily obliged in kissing back. He lifted a hand to cup Harry's face, and it was freezing. Harry pulled away abruptly, and Draco made a sad sound.

"Cold!" Harry cried accusingly.

Draco just chuckled, getting up from his chair to stand in front of Harry's seated form and hold his face. He kissed him again, deeper and more passionately this time. Harry gave in, even if Draco felt as if he had just woken from the dead.

Finally, he shoved him away. "As great of a kisser you are, love," he muttered, "you're still freezing, and you haven't slept. It's still early. We can go to bed." He planted his feet back on the ground and stood in front of Draco, taking his hand and leading him upstairs to the bedroom.

"But I'm not tired!" Draco protested, only half heartedly.

"I still am," Harry groaned. "Just come to bed with me, okay?"

He thought he heard Draco snigger from behind him. He ignored it, and walked into the bedroom. His bed was still mussed up from being called to the door not long ago. It wasn't as comfortable as Draco's bed, but he didn't care, and he wouldn't hear Draco complaining.

He closed the door and turned to face Draco, and began unbuttoning his shirt for him slowly.

"What are you doing...?" Draco murmured, watching him with nearly crossed eyes and a lazy smirk.

"You're going to sleep. And this is a nice shirt. Can't have it ruined, can we?" Harry asked, pulling it off of his shoulder.

"Oh." Draco shrugged, not taken aback at all as he unbuttoned his jeans and pulled them off. "Guess I'll warm up faster without these cold things on, anyway," he muttered, watching Harry as he flopped ungracefully back into bed.

He followed Harry over and carefully deposited himself in the bed. "I don't think this is how I'm used to doing it," he snickered. "Usually both people are undressed? And it's much more passionate than this."

Harry rolled onto his side, his back to Draco. "Stop making sex jokes," he groaned. "I just want to go back to sleep. We have lunch with Andromeda and Teddy today."

"Fine," Draco sighed, lining himself up with Harry's body, wrapping his arms around him to spoon. He was still an evil bastard, though, because he slid one icy hand up Harry's shirt. Harry yelped from the cold, glad he was at least wearing a shirt over his boxer pants.

"That was cruel," Harry grumbled, and Draco snickered again, planting a frigid chin on his shoulder.

"I'll have stolen your body heat soon enough. Just go to sleep."

"No problem." It was always easier to sleep when Draco was there, even if he had the touch of an iceberg. Harry closed his eyes and fell asleep, ready to wake in the morning to meet Andromeda and his godson.

Draco fell in and out of sleep and fleeting dreams. He dreamt of children flying on brooms and colorful costumes and Hogwarts. Once the sun was up, around seven or eight, he thought, he had trouble falling back asleep.

He watched Harry's face as he slept. He had ended up on his back, and his eyes were half-open like a sleeping cat's. He looked peaceful, and Draco rested in the assurance that the Beast in the forest had cleared them both of their nightmares.

He smiled wryly as he remembered Harry expressing his desire to read what he had written the other day. Instead of writing like he'd said he would, he went to see his mother. He didn't know why he'd felt the need to lie, but he was glad he had started on the article last night before he'd gone out drunk-wandering.

After last night, he knew it would be better if he just closed his eyes and went back to sleep. He had spent all night wandering around, and thinking, and even crying a bit. He had sobered up after several hours of buzzing around muggle London, and randomly decided to apparate to Harry's house.

Then Harry had been there, probably too asleep to understand what he was even saying. But he let him in, and listened to him anyway, and with a dazed expression, he had kissed him more intensely than they'd ever had before.

Harry was very strange, he decided.

The aforementioned werido had begun mumbling incomprehensibly in his sleep. Draco thought he might be dreaming about the gala, because he heard something muttered about "damned elves" and "sponsors."

It was probably the worst kind of dream he had now, and Draco saw no harm in releasing him from the 'nightmare.' He propped himself up on an arm so he was looking over at Harry's unconscious face. He found himself smiling as he leaned down to brush his lips against Harry's.

His eyes snapped open, and he yelped and practically flew away from Draco. "Gods!" he exclaimed, looking terrified.

"What?" Draco asked, feeling terrified. Had he triggered a memory? "Are you okay?"

Harry heaved a sigh and burst out laughing. "It's you!" he laughed. "I was dreaming I was talking to a house elf. I wasn't expecting that." He shuddered visibly and collapsed back onto the bed.

Draco laughed in relief, too. "I like to think I'm much more handsome than a house elf." He was also very grateful that it had just been a strange dream and nothing more.

"You are," Harry agreed, rolling over closer to him. "Let me apologize for that," he added, pecking Draco on the cheek.

"That's all you got?" Draco whined.

Harry rolled his eyes, and began to press quick kisses on Draco's neck and shoulders, moving down to his exposed chest. It felt heavenly, and Draco didn't really know what to do. Harry just kept kissing his upper body, and Draco wasn't going to protest.

"Oh." He sighed when Harry focused a bit longer on a certain spot. "I wasn't expecting that," he breathed. Harry really *was* strange. Draco never knew when he was in the mood to be affectionate.

Harry propped himself up and smirked. "We should get up, yeah? We've got our visit with Andromeda at noon."

"That's not for *hours*!" Draco protested. "At least let me return the favor." He added, almost adding another one of his 'this isn't the way it usually goes' comments. His interactions with Harry weren't anything like sex, he thought, but they were intimate, and he enjoyed them just as much (albeit in a different way).

Rolling out of bed and stretching, Harry laughed and yawned at once. "Nope," he replied, rather cruelly. "Go take a shower," he suggested, "and I'll make breakfast." He started walking towards the door.

"You're a bloody tease, Potter!" Draco called after him, grabbing a pillow and wrapping his arms around it, giving himself a moment to pout. He shook it off, however, deciding there were plenty of future occasions to get to know Harry's body. In perfectly non-sexual ways, too, he compromised.

He hauled himself out of the creaky bed. The floor was cold, but at least he wasn't anymore. He had been warm under the covers. He thought Harry's suggestion to take a shower would be nice.

Oh. Right. Harry's enchanted shower.

He shook his head and mumbled to himself about stupid Gryffindors. Harry had mentioned how he judged people based off of the scent the shower assigned him. He grimaced. With his luck, he'd smell like wet dog.

Though, on the inside, he knew he smelled like apples. He *had* to. He hadn't been *lying* to himself all these years.

The bathroom was right next to the bedroom, he found. It didn't take long to get into the shower (he was only in his underwear, after all). Soon, the water was running, and he stepped under the hot, steaming water.

He didn't smell anything. He thought it might come later. He took the bar of soap and began cleaning himself. He was a bit grimy from wandering around last night, he thought, and wondered why Harry hadn't commented on it. Then again, he was Harry, and his hair was always a rats nest anyway.

He noticed all the products in the shower were unscented. Harry must have given up on trying to smell like anything else. He always carried the fragrance of strong peppermint on him, anyway.

He had washed his hair and everywhere else, and he still didn't smell anything. Frustrated, he cast a wandless *sonorous* charm. "Potter!" he called out, annoyed. Harry took his sweet time, and he kept the water running.

"Yes?" Harry asked, and Draco assumed he'd opened the door.

"Can you smell anything, Harry? Does this magic shower of yours work?" he demanded, and heard the click of the door closing behind Harry.

"Hmm," Harry muttered. "Not apples, sorry, Draco." He sniggered.

"What?" Draco cried. "No! What is it, then?"

Harry didn't answer at first. "It's spicy," he added at last. "Maybe cinnamon? Cloves, too. And it's citrusy."

"So, apple spices, then?" Draco asked hopefully.

"Nope. Orange and spice, maybe?" Harry suggested. "It's nice, actually. Complex. Piquant. Not sickly sweet like the stuff you use at your place," he added.

"You don't like how I normally smell?"

"I like this better," Harry replied diplomatically. "Now, finish up, alright? Breakfast is waiting, and you better eat it!"

Draco sighed. He liked the apple smell because it was simple, like how he preferred his food. But Harry liked more pungent, less simple things; hell, he even liked his ice cream spicy! Not that spices were unpleasant... He liked them, actually, he thought as he could finally smell the water of the shower, just as he switched it off.

Just keeping it simple made it easier to control, the little voice in the back of his head told him.

But he liked it when things weren't always simple, didn't he? He liked the complex relationship with Harry, he liked switching it up for once and staying here. He liked oranges and spice, and he like lemon blueberry ice cream, and he might even like other things. He didn't just want to eat porridge and tofu and other bland foods, did he?

He remembered his mother's words, and thought he might do well to try something new. He would eat whatever Harry had for breakfast for him.

He wrapped a towel around himself and hurried into the bedroom. He hadn't brought any clothes with him, besides the dirty ones from last night, which were crumpled on the floor. Sighing, he shifted through Harry's closet for something acceptable. He could try and transfigure it to fit him better.

Gods, does he own nothing decent? Tee shirts, jeans, plaid flannels... Merlin, he's casual...

But he did like that about Harry, he thought as he chose a blue and grey plaid shirt he'd never seen Harry wear. He cast an elongation charm on it, along with some jeans. They fit a bit funny, but he wasn't going to risk altering them further and ruining them. He left the bedroom and managed to find his way to the kitchen, where Harry was waiting for him.

"Toast and eggs?" Harry asked rhetorically, setting two plates at the table. "Easy enough for both of us," he added.

"Wonderful." Draco nodded, smiling at Harry gratefully.

"Wait." Harry paused, setting down his fork to stare at Draco, who was mid bite. "Are you wearing my clothes?" he asked.

"Oh, like you've never borrowed mine," Draco snapped.

"I'm not upset," Harry replied gently. "You look relaxed. It's nice. Hopefully no one notices, though," he added with a wink.

Teddy tugged at Andromeda's robes. "Who are we seeing again?" he asked her. She had told him a few times, but he was a very absent minded child. He was easily distracted, but he stayed happy, and that was what mattered to Andromeda.

"Your godfather. And my nephew," she explained to him, taking his hand to prevent him from further tugging. They were walking down Diagon alley together. Poor Teddy was overwhelmed by all the sights and sounds, and would falter every few minutes to stare with wide eyes at some store they passed.

"Oh. What's a godfather? Is it the same as a nephew?" he asked, absently staring away at something.

"No. Your godfather is Harry; he's supposed to be a big friend. Draco is my nephew, and Harry's friend," she explained. She hoped they were just *friends*. She didn't like the idea of Harry's lifestyle *influencing* Teddy. His last relationship had not been pretty (that Glen man was a pig). If that's what the gay lifestyle denoted, her grandchild would have nothing to do with it or its practitioners.

"Andy!" Teddy cried, distracted again. "Look, Andy! What's in there?" he asked, pointing towards Flourish and Blotts.

"Books!" she told him, pulling him gently along. "When you're bigger, we can go there, and you can read some," she promised him. Fortescue's was nearby, and she knew he would soon

be captivated by it's color and aroma.

"I can't wait," he told her eagerly. Then, he spotted Fortescue's. "Oh! What's that?"

"That's where we're going to meet Harry," she said, and he beamed a smile up at her, pulling her along faster.

"Let's go, then!" he cried.

She could not spy the two young men yet, but she supposed they were a few minutes early. It didn't seem to matter yet, anyway. Teddy was enamored with the ice cream parlor. He stared up at the bright colors inside, and she imagined his mouth would be watering at the fragrances. Hers was, and she usually didn't like to indulge in such treats.

Madam Fortescue smiled down at Teddy; she was probably used to seeing small boys like him in the shop. "Hello, there!" She smiled at Andromeda. "Can I get you two anything?" She asked warmly.

"What would you like, Teddy?" Andromeda asked him.

"Butterscotch!" he responded immediately.

"Do you have that?" Andromeda asked, wondering why he had chosen that. She hadn't remembered giving him any before; perhaps he'd had it when visiting a friend.

Then she remembered with a wince that it was always Nymphadora's favorite. How could Teddy have known? He was always surprising her like this. She had felt the same way when she discovered he was a metamorphagus.

Madam Fortescue nodded. "Of course. In a bowl for the little one?"

Andromeda didn't order anything, and paid the woman, taking Teddy's surprisingly large bowl of ice cream. She supposed she would finish it for him if he couldn't... Though, she didn't doubt his appetite. He took after his mother in that way, too.

She sat down with the boy at an outside table, where he kicked his legs and scooped at his ice cream slowly. The air was warmer than it had been, and the sun was out and shining. She kept her eyes out for Harry and Draco, though she hadn't seen Harry in years, and she had never seen Draco. She had seen pictures, though, and she knew they both took after their fathers.

Though she hoped Draco was more like Narcissa in mannerism.

It wasn't long before she spotted two young men sticking out like a sore thumb in muggle clothes. They were brushing shoulders and smiling like fools, and she'd be damned if the look they were sharing wasn't something of deep set affection.

When they were closer, she noticed Harry look over them at first, but then his eyes fell on Andromeda's face and she knew he recognized her, even if he didn't know Teddy.

"Hullo," he said, moving away from Draco and towards her and Teddy. "Hullo, Teddy. You've gotten big." He was staring and smiling wistfully, and had crouched down to be eye level with the seated child. His eyes glistened and his face was cheerful.

He'd gotten much better with children, she thought.

"Who're you?" Teddy asked, and she saw Harry wince.

"I'm your Harry, godfather," he said, and paused over the stumble. "I mean, I'm your godfather, Harry," he corrected himself.

The damage had already been done, however. Teddy was already giggling, his hair changing to match Harry's. "I've a hairy godfather!" He dropped his spoon into the bowl and continued his giggle fit, and Harry grinned, standing up and winking at Andromeda.

She realized he had done it on purpose, and silently applauded evident appeal to children.

"Hello, Andromeda," Harry said, more calmly.

"Hello, Harry. You look well. Not nearly as disheveled," she couldn't help but add. Harry winced at that, but Draco slinked up to his side, and she did not miss the intentional brush of their hands.

"He doesn't have the nightmares anymore," Draco informed her, and she grimaced at the sad excuse for an introduction.

"You're Narcissa's son?" she asked him, playing off of his own curtness and apparent lack of manners.

"Draco Malfoy, yes. Not that I plan to keep that particular surname," he added dryly, meeting her eye as if to say, *I'm not my father*. She hoped to the gods he wasn't.

"Oh, which one, then? Black?" She asked. *Potter*? She asked herself silently, warily. There was *definitely* something there.

"Pennom, actually," he corrected her. "Haven't you read my writing?" He inquired, rather cheekily, she thought.

She had, and she found herself remembering the front page after the muggleborn attacks. And one on gay rights. She held back a grimace.

"I have, actually," she replied coolly. "You're quite talented, I see. Is that why you're with Harry? Are you writing for him?" She wondered if they'd pick up on the question between the lines.

"Something like that," Harry interjected, subtly elbowing Draco in the ribs. Andromeda narrowed her eyes at them.

"I still don't approve of g-a-y-s, Harry," Andromeda hissed, spelling out the word so Teddy wouldn't hear and ask questions. She didn't know how she could possibly explain it to him.

Draco opened his mouth to say something, but Harry grasped his wrist.

"Well then, Andromeda, it's a good thing that I'm *a-s-e-x-u-a-l*, and Draco and I don't have s-e-x," he snapped at her, even going so far as to glare. "Let's grab something from inside, shall we, Draco?" he asked, pulling him into the parlour.

"Andy," Teddy chirped, "why did you get mad at hairy godfather?"

"*What is her problem?*" Draco hissed under his breath as soon as the shop door swung closed. It was even colder inside than outside, which meant that it was finally warming up.

Harry didn't have a chance to answer Draco, because the curly-haired Mrs. Fortescue had already greeted them. "You two back for more, are you?" she asked with a wink, looking down at their joined hands.

Harry blushed as he remembered they were in public, pulling away.

He would have told her he'd pay extra if she didn't mention it to anyone, but he supposed that would have made it worse, so he settled for giving her a meaningful look. "Got anything new?" he asked her. "With chocolate," he clarified.

"Hmm. Orange chocolate?" she suggested.

Harry's eyes widened and he smirked at Draco. "I love oranges," he said meaningfully, and Draco rolled his eyes. "I'll take a scoop of that one. And a scoop of the chocolate spice one I had last time."

Draco scowled. "You're terrible, Potter," he mumbled. "I'll take whatever you've got with *apples*, Madam Fortescue." He glared challengingly at Harry.

"Hmm. I'm afraid it's not apple season, dear," she informed him. "But we have some left of that peppermint you usually get," she added with a wink.

Draco blushed.

"You *usually* get peppermint?" Harry asked with a smirk. He was glad to know he liked peppermint.

"Shut it, Potter, I live nearby." Draco grumbled. "I'll pay this time. Might as well let you know I've a bloody discount card." His cheeks were flushed red.

Mrs. Fortescue chortled softly as she handed them their desserts, and Harry laughed at Draco's sensitivity. But it faded when he caught Andromeda's eye through the window. Before going outside to join them, he paused by the door.

"Don't lecture her or get upset, okay? We want to make a good impression for Teddy," Harry whispered.

"She's a homophobic, Harry!" Draco hissed. "She can't even say the word 'gay' aloud. I bet you she doesn't even know what asexual means..."

Harry sighed. "We're going to the orphanage later. If you *must* educate her, do it there when Teddy's not there to listen and be frightened. Kids hate social tension."

Draco rolled his eyes and opened the door. Harry couldn't care less about the tension in that moment, because Teddy was sitting there and grinning up at him as brightly as the kids at the orphanage.

"Andy says you knew Mum and Dad?" Teddy asked.

Harry sat down next to him. "Oh, yes, I did! Your dad was wonderful. He was my teacher. He also gave me chocolate. I think of him when I eat this!" he explained, taking a big bite of ice cream and swallowing dramatically.

Teddy giggled.

"And your mum? I bet your Andy's told you about her, right?" Harry asked, meeting Andromeda's eye when he used the nickname. "She was a very good fighter in the war. And her hair changed colors."

Teddy nodded. "I know. Was Dad a meaty-mafagus too?" he asked, tilting his head and butchering the word.

Harry laughed. "No, he wasn't a metamorphagus." He caught a look from Andromeda, and something told him not to mention the werewolf thing until later.

After ice cream, Draco's tongue was green as usual, and they had apparated to the orphanage by the sea. The air was less electric this time, and the clouds were bright and puffy and swirling in the sky. For once, it was sunny.

Harry had made off with Teddy and Seth and a few others to ride brooms and play tag on the ground. Draco hung back with Andromeda. He wanted to have a conversation with her. He put on his best Pennom-like expression and sat down next to her on the back porch of the orphanage. For a moment of silence, they watched Harry be chased by four small children. He collapsed onto the ground and let himself be tackled.

"He's quite good with them, isn't he?" Andromeda remarked.

"They're his life," Draco replied. Harry was sitting up now, and the red-haired Seth was hanging off of his neck. Teddy was watching them with some look like awe.

"Teddy isn't used to roughhousing," she told Draco tightly. "Harry certainly doesn't hold back."

Draco chuckled. "You'd be surprised. He's very gentle."

As if to confirm his words, Harry sat cross-legged and picked a flower next to him, passing it around for all the kids to see. He probably made some story up about it having magical properties, because they all started to fight over it at once.

"I'm sure you'd know," Andromeda scoffed.

Draco stiffened, ignoring the implication. Instead of taking her bait, he took it a different route. "Mum said her parents really didn't like you," he said casually.

He had gone from watching Harry to watching the puffy clouds roll overhead. He remembered days of his early childhood, where he and his mother laid on the grass in the Manor gardens, watching the clouds fly by. He drew on that memory for strength and clarity.

"Yes. I'm sure she didn't mention they were pureblooded bigots, considering she married one." Andromeda scowled, casting Draco a look that said, *I don't believe that you're any different.*

Draco heaved a pained sigh. "It's a shame when people judge you for who you love, isn't it?" he asked placidly, as a particularly large cloud floated overhead, temporarily casting them in shadow. He cast a sidelong glance at Andromeda. She looked rather flustered.

"This is different," she muttered, adding something unintelligible after that.

"What was that?" he asked her, raising an eyebrow.

"You heard me." She crossed her arms, instead focusing her gaze on Teddy as he ran up to Harry with an identical flower from before.

"Afraid not, Auntie," Draco said jovially, watching as Harry ruffled Teddy's light brown hair (which looked similar to Andromeda's).

"I said it's unnatural and disgusting," she said quietly. "What you do. Two men." She spoke a little louder, but her face was red.

Draco laughed bitterly. "I can assure you, men and women together have done much kinkier things than I have." He said it humorously, but he felt anger building inside of him. Who was she to judge him based off of something that has nothing to do with her?

"Well..." She frowned. "That still doesn't make whatever you and Harry have okay."

"I think you're getting the wrong picture," Draco told her. "Harry is asexual. We don't have sex. I haven't even seen him completely naked. I don't have sex with anyone else, either," he clarified. "Whatever image you've in your mind, it's not us. And even if it were, what business is it to you? You don't have to see."

Andromeda shook her head. "I don't want to think about it! I don't want Teddy to think it's okay."

Draco rolled his eyes. "Then don't think about it. Would you want to if Harry was with a woman?" he added, holding back a snicker as she paled a bit. "And Teddy is hardly five. I

don't think he should be thinking of *any* sex, do you? But it's perfectly normal and healthy for him to see two people in a relationship."

"But if men together is all he sees..."

"That's ridiculous, Andromeda." Draco interrupted her. "*I never* saw men together. And yet I started fancying them when I was fourteen. And it's not like we'll be the only adults near Teddy."

Andromeda sighed. "But... it's still repulsive!"

"And I think the idea of a man and a woman pretty repulsive, but I'm not telling you to be any different." He felt the need to cast a hex, to be sarcastic, to call her names... But he was Pennom right now. Pennom remained cool.

"At least it resulted in childbirth! What's the point of being together if there's no children?" she demanded.

"Oh, is that why you haven't sought out another partner? Because you're too old? Do you tell infertile people the same thing, that they don't deserve to love?" he demanded, glaring holes into the side of her head.

She winced. "No..." She shook her head. "I--"

"Enough, Andromeda. Just because you squirm at the idea of love different than yours doesn't change the fact that Harry is a wonderful person, and he's wonderful with kids. If Teddy ends up wanting to spend more time with Harry, how would you explain that you don't want him to see him?" Draco's voice was firm and unwavering, and he was rather proud of himself for staying so phlegmatic.

"I would tell him that Harry has done bad things. That he is a bad influence," she sniffed, apparently ignoring his past statement.

"Oh, yes, he's volunteered at an orphanage and destroyed a Dark Lord and happens to kiss me occasionally. The *worst* influence." He got up to leave. He was done talking to her; she wouldn't be convinced, and he didn't want to end up blowing up at her.

"Draco," she called out to him.

"What? Forgot to mention that you *can* keep *me* from seeing Teddy?" he snapped.

"No," she breathed. "I just wanted to tell you that you're different. From what I expected."

Draco didn't even acknowledge her, and he huffed and stormed away from her, towards Harry. He was "racing" back and forth with each of the kids, letting them win each time. When he saw Draco, he stopped and bent over to breathe heavily.

"Who wants to see me race Draco?" he panted, standing up to look Draco in the eye. All the children cheered.

"Fine." Draco laughed. "One, two, three, go!" he shouted, and began to run for the cliffs. Harry cursed behind him, already off to a slow start. Draco's legs were longer, and so he was easily faster.

"I didn't realize ferrets were so fast!" Harry called from behind him.

"Wasting your breath, Potter!" He called back. He didn't want to stop running. He felt relieved from it. His foot striking the earth helped relieve him of the frustration Andromeda had caused him. His foot pounded into the earth, stride after stride--

And then Harry cast a tripping hex, and his entire body pounded into the ground, and he felt very much frustrated. Harry didn't slow down, and ended up stumbling, too, and landing on top of Draco in the dry, golden grass.

"Smooth," Draco grunted, as Harry planted himself directly over Draco.

"You know I'm such a flirt," Harry teased, pressing his nose to Draco's.

"Yes. But children. And my aunt. Get up." Draco commanded, shoving the other man off of him, who just laughed.

"You're pretty done, aren't you? We can say goodbye to the kids and get out of here."

Draco wanted nothing more than to be alone with Harry so he could just fucking *rant*. So he quietly agreed, waiting to be free of the presence of the homophobic relative of his that was supposed to be less bigoted than the rest of his family.

He supposed "bigoted" was a relative term in the wizarding community.

Chapter End Notes

Is this story too fluff heavy, I ask myself? Why do most of the chapters start in the morning, I wonder? And what's with Fortescue's all of a sudden? Do I use this story to vent my frustration with society too often? Is anyone even in character?

I do not know. I am naught but a measly Drarry writer.

Also, the Gala is coming soon.....

The Gala

Chapter Notes

I made a mistake and forgot to clarify in Chapter 23 (during Draco's visit with Narcissa) that she had been aware of the gala, despite the fact that he had been avoiding her. She had gotten several third-party owls, and even more RSVPs to the invitations, so she knew beforehand. I went back and fixed it, whoops.

I was really tired when I wrote Ch. 23. I kept on thinking "there's something I'm missing!" This is why you need to write your plot out beforehand!!

Also, am I the only one who hates the way Narcissa was portrayed in the films? In my head, she's much more graceful and young, I suppose. And more blond.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Draco looked... *interesting*.

It was the day before the gala, and the two were doing last-minute planning in Grimmauld place. Harry had an entire closet full of the children's designs, and they had been sorting through them to find the outfits they wanted to wear.

Draco had chosen to try the Foil suit. It was like spandex, and he shone, and Harry had to admit it was better than when McLaggen had sported it. Still, it was strange.

"You're not wearing that in public," Harry told him, staring with wide eyes. "You look like a space man."

Draco laughed. "You don't need to give me fashion advice, Harry." He winked. "Just wanted to see your face if I wore this." He turned to go back into the bedroom to put on for what he *actually* wanted to wear. "What kid designed this, anyway?"

Harry frowned. "Melanie, I think. But the drawing was just of a silver man. Luna took it from there," Harry explained. "You can't expect a six year old to draw up anything more than the concept." He went into the closet to find the white "vampire" suit Draco had suggested he wear.

He smiled when he looked at everything there and remembered the kids' drawings. Most of them were far different in actuality than in the original drawings... But that was marketing, he supposed. He began sifting through the racks, looking for the white suit.

"Gods, it's like bloody rainbow in here!" he called out to Draco. "Maybe it's just internalized," he added with a snicker.

"What did you say?" Draco yelled from the other room. "Internalized rainbows?"

"It was a joke!" Harry called back to him.

"What the hell are you going on about?"

Apparently Draco didn't understand the gay muggle "closet" reference.

"Never mind!" Harry shouted back at him.

"What?" Draco sounded frustrated. "Dammit, Harry! Just come out of the bloody closet!"

At that, Harry burst out in a fit of laughter. "I can't! Not yet, remember?"

He heard Draco stumble about in the other room, and soon he was standing in the closet door in front of him. He was in another of the items McLaggen had modeled: the red tux with the dragon spine on the back. It only looked *slightly* ridiculous.

"What, do you need help finding the suit?" Draco asked, looking slightly peeved. "And what are you *laughing* about?" he demanded.

"You're supposed to help me *come out of the closet*," Harry said, looking at him expectantly.

"Okay, then. Let's find the suit."

"No, Draco!" Harry laughed. "It's a metaphor. For telling everyone I'm gay."

Draco frowned. "The suit or the closet? I'm confused now."

Harry sighed, and patted Draco on the shoulder. "It's okay, love. And red really isn't your color."

Draco had ended up choosing the white suit, and switching Harry out for the red dragon one. He had finally conceded that there was no way he could find something for either of them that didn't look ridiculous, and had essentially given up.

After that frustrating realization, he had used Harry's floo to visit his mother. He felt that he owed it to her, after not telling her about all this until last minute. She had felt quite left in the dark beforehand.

Now? She was obviously frazzled and overwhelmed. The catering house elves were disagreeing with the "enslaved" Malfoy house elves on almost everything. Narcissa was trying to tell some of hers to hold back and leave the others alone, but they were insisting that it was their duty to stop the other ones. They weren't listening to her because she wasn't their official master.

Draco was. He found her close to the edge of her limits and on the verge of tears.

"Henny! Goppy!" he snapped. "Leave these elves alone. You can only care for the bedrooms until they leave."

His mother looked up at him with half-gratitude, and half-rage. "Three days, Draco! I've been dealing with this for three days. You could have done something sooner." She let out a sigh, and wrapped him in hug, leaning most of her weight on him. "I've no idea how you expect this to be ready in twenty four hours."

Draco rubbed her back. "It'll be fine, mother," he assured her.

Narcissa didn't appear to believe him. "I got one of the dresses." She informed him, once she had steadied herself and broken away. "It wasn't as much of a joke as I had expected," she added with a smile.

"Well, wait till you see mine," Draco murmured. Young girls had the brains to design decent dresses, he supposed. But neither them or the boys could come up with a normal suit.

"I'm supposing it will be as muggle as what you normally wear?" she inquired, staring curiously at his clothes.

He realized, with a blush, that he had borrowed Harry's clothes again. *Terribly casual. Ridiculously comfortable. It's absurd.*

"I'm afraid I wasn't interested in the robes, no," he confessed. He wondered what his father would have thought of him hardly wearing robes anymore. He probably would have blamed it on Harry, he realized.

Narcissa sighed. "I'm sure you'll look handsome, regardless." She sighed. "Though whatever you're in now is certainly questionable."

Hermione and Terry were among the first people to arrive. They had apparated to the gates of the Malfoy Manor, where several other people were waiting outside the house's door.

The Manor was different than she remembered, at least from the outside. While it was certainly not neglected (the grounds still had beautifully manicured gardens), it seemed much more empty. There was no Dark magic buzzing in the air, and she felt very little fear this time.

She wondered how many people had questioned attending because it was in the Manor. She had mentioned this with Draco, but he insisted it was the only suitable location. She had a feeling, however, that he just wanted it to be there so the Malfoy name could be connected with the charity work.

Not that Draco wasn't already. He had written a piece announcing the article, stating the importance that people attend to show support for the orphaned children that he had been spending so much time writing about. He pulled heartstrings by telling a few of their sob stories, and suggested that interested parents come and speak with him or Harry, or Madam Humpop (the matron of the orphanage whom had left the children with a trusted sitter for the evening) at the party.

It was also rumored that he and Harry had begun signing off papers for a second charity. Working in the Ministry, and being a friend of theirs, Hermione knew that it was for their LGBT awareness project, and that both men had invested a considerable sum of galleons from their accounts at Gringotts. They would be announcing it tonight, she knew, and she wondered how Harry would play it off. The public was for now ignoring the nature of his relationship with Draco, but it would get harder as they drew more and more attention to themselves.

Which she didn't mind; she wanted people to guess, to speculate, to be aware of. It would be less of an issue, then, when Harry finally came out. But Harry and Draco wanted more of a "big bang" effect, apparently not caring that the sudden announcement would put them in an even brighter spotlight.

She smiled, and squeezed Terry's hand. It was out of her power, anyway; Terry was forbidden by the editor to publish anything on them.

"I really wish I could cover the story on this party," he sighed, as they approached the front door to the Manor. "But alas, Skeeter got it. As with all things having to do with Potter... And they think I have an agenda?" He laughed wryly.

Hermione chuckled. "Skeeter's been at it longer than you have. At least you're her superior in the office, right?" She suggested encouragingly.

"Not really," he groaned. "Whatever she writes gets covered as news. My stories are lucky to make it into the first few pages. We're not *Witch Weekly*, you know."

"Speaking of *which*," she joked, "I see our famous designer. Luna!" she called.

Luna turned to face them, in an ethereal, glowing dress. "Hermione!" she greeted them, beckoning them over. "And Terry. What a surprise!" She smiled at Terry, her former Housemate. Terry waved half-heartedly at her.

"Is he your date, Hermione?" she asked warmly.

Terry cleared his throat, and gave her a look that said, *Can I say it? Please let me say it.*

She rolled her eyes, and he took her indifference as approval.

"Hermione is my fiancée." Terry announced with a grin.

Hermione held out her ring hand for Luna to see. "As of this week," she clarified, as Luna lifted her hand to inspect the ring.

"It's lovely," she commented. "Where did you get it? I might want something similar to give to Pansy--"

Luna broke off as none other than Pansy Parkinson stalked up from behind, wearing an almost identical pantsuit to Hermione.

"Granger. Boot." She nodded to them curtly, taking a moment to glare at Hermione's outfit. She placed a hand on Luna's shoulder. "Luna, love, you can talk to these peons later, okay? The doors are just opening up, and we need to get in early so I can talk to Draco without him avoiding me."

Luna sighed, but nodded. "Of course, dear." She waved at Hermione and Terry as she was dragged away. "Congratulations, by the way!" she called.

Hermione giggled, but Terry just shook his head. "She's as weird as ever," he remarked. "You wouldn't know," he added, "because you didn't live with her." He took her hand again and guided her towards the house.

Hermione didn't object, knowing they didn't want to argue before the evening had even begun. "Fine," she sighed. "Let's go. Hopefully Draco won't avoid *us*, hmm?"

"Harry won't, if he does. Someone's got to be willing to talk about adoption," he replied. They stepped through the doors into the massive foyer.

"Well," Hermione said. "This brings back memories."

Harry was hovering by Draco in the back of the room, where he was quietly talking with the musicians he'd hired. When Harry asked him to choose the music, he'd actually just thought Draco would choose some lively records to play. Instead, he'd written several of his favorite musicians and asked them to perform live. Harry wondered why he hadn't realized that Draco would insist on live music.

Draco was whispering to Farhedge Manzyne, an accomplished musician of 45 years, like he was some sort of saint. Harry caught the words "mother" and "a huge fan," and "last minute." He had a feeling this old geezer wasn't there because Draco enjoyed him, but because he thought it might help make up to his mother.

Harry tentatively joined them, apparently towards the end of the conversation.

"Of course, I'll speak with her. How can I find her?" Manzyne asked. He was a handsome middle-aged wizard, most likely around the same age as Mrs. Malfoy. His head was shaved, but he was dressed in immaculate dress robes and had a rather sophisticated aura to him.

"You'll know her when you see her." Draco grinned at him, and Manzyne nodded and walked away to his violin.

"What was that about?" Harry asked Draco, tapping on his shoulder. He jumped slightly and turned to face him, a smirk on his face.

"I hired mother's favorite musician. I recall her swooning at a particular record of his when I was younger. She'll be thrilled to meet him." His eyes glittered with excitement.

"Your mother *swoons*?" asked Harry, having trouble imagining the Malfoy matron showing much emotion other than controlled distaste.

Draco frowned. "Perhaps not in your own understanding of the word. She sighed contentedly with her eyes shut," he added. "I hope that's a good thing..."

Harry laughed. "I'm sure it will be. Now, can we go greet our guests? Or would you prefer to continue mingling with Hammered Harpies and the Jeweled Junipers?"

"Well, I've yet to talk to Japon Hearthscross... He's a very talented guitarist, you know..." He sighed and glanced back towards where the musicians were setting up. There were five bands and artists, a mix of wizarding rock and classical and folk. They would be taking turns playing throughout the night, and had volunteered to perform for free.

"Later!" Harry urged him. "The doors have already opened, and people are probably wondering what to do."

"We hired a hostess so we wouldn't have to do this..." Draco groaned. "But you're right. We must make a good impression." He gave Harry a pained look that spelled out something along the lines of, *I'm going to hate every minute of this.*

Harry would, too--and he didn't even have the same reasons as Draco, whom had come to hope that he would never have to deal with this high society bullshit ever again after growing so tired of it. Harry just wasn't used to it.

He resisted the temptation to take Draco's hand or show any other kind of affection. He deliberately took a step away so their shoulders wouldn't brush, and kept his eyes forward. "You look great in the white," he told Draco, in spite of himself.

"And Gryffindor red suits you," Draco replied. "Now, act spiteful towards me. We have an act to maintain."

Harry rolled his eyes. "I'm sure most people have seen through it, Malfoy." He only just managed to hide his contempt.

"Shut it, Potter." Draco took a few steps forward, apparently spotting someone familiar. "Zabini!" he shouted. "You came! What the hell are you doing here?" His voice was light, and Harry was glad he encountered a friend.

Harry searched around for a familiar face. He was a little surprised when he immediately considered Pansy Parkinson a familiar face, and approached her and Luna as they stepped through the door.

"Hello, ladies." He grinned at them, and they paused at the door.

"Potter," Pansy said plainly, a smile lighting her face. "Is Draco here?" she inquired.

"He's with Zabi--er, Blaise," he informed her, and a malicious grin appeared on her face as she scampered away to find them. Harry was left staring at Luna, who was literally glowing.

"She's been meaning to talk to Draco for some time," Luna remarked. "How are you, Harry?"

"Stressed, actually. This whole charity thing is harder than it looks. Though you certainly helped!" he added, giving her a look of gratitude. "I mean, this would be much more stressful for me if we weren't all dressed strangely. It's a bit like standing in front of a crowd and imagining them in their underwear."

Luna smiled and tilted her head. "You are very odd, Harry," she murmured, and wandered away.

Harry wasn't sure what that meant, coming from her. As she wandered away, he spotted Hermione with a dark haired man. He realized that must have been Terry Boot, and approached them.

"Harry!" Hermione beamed, and he saw her squeeze Terry's hand as she let go to approach him and hug him.

"Hullo, Hermione," he chuckled as he hugged her back. Terry came over to join them, and Harry broke away. "Terry Boot?" he asked, and without realizing gave the man a once-over. He hadn't changed much from school, really.

"Hello, Harry," he said. "Hermione's talked about you a lot," he said wryly. "Too bad I can't report on you."

"Hm?" Harry asked, looking between the two of them.

Hermione rolled her eyes. "The Chief Editor isn't Terry's biggest fan right now. But that's irrelevant. How are you feeling this whole thing will go?" she asked him.

Harry shrugged. "Fine, I suppose. It's hardly begun. We've got nice food from the house elves and good music that Draco's hired. You should be able to hear it any minute..." He trailed off, casting a glance over his shoulder.

"Excellent," Terry commented. "What about the orphan part? Do you think you'll be able to scout out some parents for some of the children?" he asked pointedly, sharing a look with Hermione.

"I don't know, actually. I hope so," he muttered, imagining both the strangeness of having one of the children leave but also the security of them having a family. "Why? Do you know someone?"

Hermione set her jaw. "Actually, Harry..." She said quietly, looking at Terry again, "We were considering adoption. Sooner or later," she added hastily.

Harry tilted his head. His first thought was that he couldn't imagine Hermione settling down any time soon, and the second was the oddity of her use of "we." He looked closely, and he noticed a ring he hadn't seen before...

"Merlin!" he exclaimed. "Since when were you engaged, Hermione Granger?" he demanded, picking up her hand to inspect the ring. It was a very beautiful piece of jewelry, he noticed, and applauded Terry silently.

"Just this week. If it were earlier, I would have told you beforehand," she explained.

Terry was grinning like a fool. "It's brilliant," he said, staring at Hermione. Harry didn't know what exactly he was referring to, but he nodded in agreement. His attention, however, was taken by a couple hovering nearby, waiting to talk to him.

"I'll see you later, 'Mione. Terry," he added, moving towards the new couple. He didn't recognize them, but he stayed and chatted for a few minutes with them about the party, the charity, the children.

"Oh, we'd love to adopt, wouldn't we, Jerry?" the woman asked,

"Oh, we would, Mr. Potter. But we already plan on having kids of our own, so it's really out of the question." He was looking at his wife pointedly.

Harry frowned. He didn't understand why that was a problem. "Well, there are several infants in the orphanage, as well, if you're looking for a younger child."

The wife grimaced. "Oh, no. It's not that--I've heard young ones are terrible anyway, and I'm not looking forward to it," she said. "Blood is very important to us. But we still support the cause!" she exclaimed.

Harry realized they were pureblooded, then, and that they were just here for the publicity. "Oh, that's understandable," he lied. "Have a wonderful evening, you two."

They wandered off, and Harry found himself watching Draco. He was engaging with both Blaise and Pansy now, and... *Merlin. Is that Neville?*

Draco was by the drinks table with his two old friends, Pansy and Blaise. Talking with them had been easy, and he realized how much he missed having friends from his old life back. People who knew him well.

Maybe I don't need to run from my past.

He and Blaise were chatting aimlessly about the weather in Germany, where Draco had once lived and where Blaise currently resided. Pansy was nodding along, occasionally chiming in how lovely it sounded.

Then, Neville Longbottom strolled up (wearing a copy of the plaid suit Harry had sported in the magazines). Pansy cast him a disheveling look, but this was not the boy from school who would cower away. He lifted his chin and smiled widely at them.

"Pansy, hullo. Blaise, good to see you!" he added, and Blaise smiled shamelessly and waved. Neville turned to Draco. "And Draco. How are you?" he asked.

Draco frowned, not feeling entirely sure as to why Neville Longbottom of all people would be asking him how he was. "Fine, *Neville*. Quite happy with how many people have already arrived," he added, hoping to stay neutral.

Neville nodded. "Fantastic, isn't it?" he asked, looking around. He turned back to Draco. "Anyway, just wanted to meet you again, I suppose. The Head Auror talks about you a lot, says you turned out nice. I had to see it to believe it."

Draco frowned at the hidden insult. "I'm quite nice, thank you very much," he said through gritted teeth. Then, "You know Auror Michaels?"

"Yeah, of course. He's my boss. I'm an Auror, didn't you hear?" he asked, and something like pride glinted in his face.

"Wouldn't have expected that, Longbottom," Pansy remarked casually. "Congrats."

"Congrats indeed. You work with Weas--Ronald?" Draco inquired.

"Oh, yeah. We used to be partners on the job, but now I spend most of my time helping with Michaels. He plays a lot of your music--you've got nice tastes, I think," he commented. As he said that, the music began to play.

"I do indeed," Draco smirked, as a newer, but slow, rock song began to play.

Neville smiled. "Care to dance, Pansy?" he asked. "If Luna won't mind. I don't think she would; I was just chatting with her."

Pansy raised her eyebrow. "Whatever, Longbottom. A dance is a dance." She grabbed his elbow and pulled him onto the dance floor, and she began leading the dance.

Blaise chuckled. "Neville's great," he commented.

"You know him well?" Draco responded, picking up a glass of soda water. He had sworn to no alcohol so he wouldn't be caught being sappy around Harry in public. Or start spewing out his bottled up anxiety to some possible sponsor.

"Well, I had to make new friends, didn't I?" Blaise asked. "Not all of us chose to repair our reputations by hiding. I put myself out there. Neville and I go out drinking together. He's surprisingly helpful in reeling in the gals," he added with a wink.

Draco winced. "I'm trying, Blaise," he muttered. "And I can see that. Pansy couldn't resist him, and she doesn't even *like* men!" He laughed, trying to shake off the regret that he let Neville replace him as Blaise's friend.

"Bet you felt his charm too, didn't you, Draco?" Blaise snickered.

Draco huffed a laugh, and found himself watching Harry across the room. "No, not really," he confessed.

"Got your eye on someone, then?" Blaise asked, trying to follow Draco's gaze. But Harry had disappeared into a crowd of guests. He certainly was surprisingly better at this than Draco.

"Mmmph," Draco grunted, glaring at Blaise. "Perhaps. What about you?"

Blaise didn't respond for a moment. "Is that *Ginny Weasley*?" he demanded, pointing across the room. Harry had emerged from the crowd with that Weasel girl, and Draco suddenly felt a pang of contempt and jealousy.

"Yes," Draco hissed through gritted teeth.

"Gods, she turned out fine. I hear she's a Quidditch star now. You know if she's still with Potter?"

Draco scowled. "She's *definitely* not with Potter," he confirmed. He couldn't place a finger on where this sudden jealousy was coming from--Harry was explicitly his, and he had told him he didn't like women. He took a deep breath, reminding himself he had nothing to worry about. He pictured himself being kissed all over by Harry in his bed Thursday morning, and at once his feelings of insecurity vanished.

"Hmm. I might have a go at her then. Whaddya think?" Blaise asked, licking his lips in a rather unsavoury manner.

"I think Harry mentioned she likes women," Draco commented, "but she might be bisexual. I wouldn't know."

Blaise grinned. "I think I'll have a go, then."

"Just leave her alone if she says no, yeah? Otherwise I might have to pull a Pennom on you."

Blaise rolled his eyes. "You've gone bloody mental, between the writing, and Potter's orphan work, and the records and the charity," he remarked. "Now, excuse me, but I have a Weasley to seduce."

Draco found that last phrase particularly repulsive.

Harry was in the middle of a group of rich, old women. They were fawning all over him and applauding him for his work and his 'gorgeous, gorgeous eyes.'

Then, out of the crowd, Ginny appeared and pulled him away by the arm. "Excuse me, ma'ams," she had said, "but I've got to chat with this one."

She gave him a little of a shove once they were out of the group, and he bumped into a table. "What's with not writing me anymore, huh? I thought that after I sent you that article, we might have something to talk about again," she pouted.

"Gin!" Harry cried. "I'm sorry, I've been terribly busy... And 'Mione and I just made up with Ron..."

"So that's an excuse to ignore me, too?" she demanded. "You're a twat, Potter!"

Harry blushed. "I'm sorry, Gin..."

She rolled her eyes. "You're also bloody gullible. You think I give a shit? I've been practicing nonstop for the World Cup. I wouldn't have time to write to you." She shoved him lightly on the shoulder again.

He laughed. "Right. I forgot you're just as mischievous as George sometimes."

She grinned. "Oh, yes I am. Now, he's here, and if you don't tell me what's been happening in your life lately, he's agreed to feed you his latest invention." She lifted a hand into the air and beckoned, and George appeared from the fray, in the orange splotched pants and a pink top with spikes all over it that he hadn't remembered being one of the original designs.

"Harry, old boy!" he said mockingly, in a false, creaky old voice. "Why, it's been fifty years, I think. My grandchildren are dying to meet you!" Hh croaked, conjuring a cane to lean on.

"Bollocks, George," Harry snapped. "It's hardly been six months!"

George stood up straight. "Bloody right, it has." He sniffed. "You missed Christmas! And you haven't even stopped by the shop. Is there no fun in your life?" he questioned, waving a hand dramatically in the air.

Ginny cleared her throat. "Right, Harry. What do you do for fun these days? Ron's been tight lipped lately. Or he just doesn't know anything more than I do," she added with a wink.

"Erm, I've been planning this. And visiting the kids. I carve furniture, too," he added, hoping they wouldn't press him further. He knew, of course, that they would... But one could hope.

"Boring!" Ginny and George both sighed.

"Any ladies in your life?" George asked, wiggling his eyebrows.

Ginny cast a smirk towards Harry, and Harry realized that Ron and Ginny were the only Weasleys who knew about his sexuality. And Ron was the only one who knew about Draco.

"Actually," Harry said cautiously, "I'm seeing Malfoy."

Ginny's eyebrows shot up and she crossed her arms, while George staggered backwards, conjuring the cane again to catch himself. When he pulled himself back together, he leaned into Harry's face and whispered, "Malfoy has a *sister*?"

Ginny burst out laughing and Harry shrunk a bit. "No, George. I'm seeing Draco Malfoy," he clarified, speaking slowly and hoping his gaze told them to keep it quiet. He could trust them he knew, even *if* George was unpredictable.

George cackled as well. "Good one, Harry." He wiped a fake tear away. "Let me guess. You're shagging Charlie, too?" He began laughing again, but Ginny elbowed him in the ribs and he stopped.

"Wait." George's eyes cleared as he stared at Harry scrutinizingly. "You're being serious. Merlin, Harry! You're bent!"

Harry blushed. "Yes, I am," he confirmed. He decided he didn't need to go into detail about the asexuality thing; that would just be more confusing.

George's face turned concerned. "Does Ron know? Not to be discouraging, but he threw a bit of a fit when he found out about Charlie..." He glanced at Ginny with concern. "Wasn't too Happy when Gin brought home that first girlfriend, either."

Ginny rolled her eyes. "He's over it."

"We've worked it out, I think," Harry added. "Is he here tonight?" he asked, looking around the room for another orange head.

"Yes, actually. He escorted me," Ginny replied. "Poor bloke doesn't know how to be single. I ought to find him someone to dance with." She shook her head and laughed wryly.

"Ginerva Weasley!" A voice called, and Harry spotted Blaise Zabini approaching them. "Care to dance?" he asked, presenting an arm with a flourish.

Ginny grinned. "Sure thing, Zabini," she replied, and she was pulled onto the dance floor. Harry saw that it was the Jeweled Junipers playing now, and it was some sort of folksy tune.

Most of the room was dancing--Mrs. Malfoy (whom he had yet to properly meet) was dancing with Manzyne. His dark skin and robes contrasted nicely with her own pale skin and light blue dress, and their were stars in both of their eyes. Draco would be most pleased.

"Well, Harry," George smirked. "I'm *most likely* straight as an arrow, but I'd *love* to be your first dance partner of the evening," he proclaimed, taking Harry by the arm.

"As long as we can convince everyone else that that's how this party goes. I'm not out yet, you know," he informed George, though he couldn't help but grin.

George simpered. "Well, I'll be sure to keep our little affair hush-hush, then."

Draco had not expected *George* Weasley to be his competition tonight, but there he was, dancing with Draco's boyfriend. He watched from the sidelines with a scowl, certain he noticed some chemistry there, but decided that brooding was unbecoming of him.

He took the arm of the nearest elderly lady and took her onto the dance floor. She squeaked with delight, and once they were dancing, she chuckled and exclaimed, "It's been a long time since a handsome fellow like you has done something like that to me!"

Draco found himself dancing with multiple partners, both men and women. Harry did as well, he noted, and he kept track of each of them. All three of the visiting Weasleys (Ronald protested most adamantly); a few young witches, and then the men that seemed to be their husbands or dates; Neville Longbottom; and too many old women to count. He did it casually, cheerfully, as he always did everything. Everyone loved him.

Draco danced with Longbottom, too (it turned out he *couldn't* resist his charm), as well as Blaise, Pansy, and an old man who repeatedly mentioned Draco's writing. There were several

unfamiliar faces, made even more hard to remember because each and every one of them was in some child's garish idea of clothing. Colors of all sorts whirled around him, and his senses were too overwhelmed for him to even notice if he were having a panic attack.

Towards the end of the dancing, Manzyne had broken away from dancing with Draco's mother (and *oh* had Draco noticed the looks they gave each other) to play the last several slow songs.

The energy was dying down, and Draco found himself and his partner (a young French man) bump into someone else. He looked up and saw Harry with an old woman Draco had recognized from his trial.

"Excuse me," Harry said, pulling away gently from her. He tapped Draco's partner on the shoulder. "May I borrow him?" he inquired.

The man was not about to deny his host, so he reluctantly joined with the old woman (though not without a scowl), and Harry approached Draco.

"Care to have the last dance, Malfoy?"

"I'm surprised you bothered to ask," Draco replied, and though Harry took the initiative, Draco led the dance. As casual and happy Harry looked, he was still a shit dancer. "Why did people bother with you?" he asked teasingly. "You're all over my toes."

Harry smirked. "So they could say they danced with Harry Potter, of course," he replied. "And, of course, for my conversational skills."

Draco rolled his eyes. "Oh, naturally, with your awkward... charm?"

"It won you over, didn't it? I am a natural flirt, you know," Harry whispered, all of a sudden trying to take the lead, but he ended up stumbling. "Anyway," he corrected his feet and his hand placement, "lots of people have offered to adopt."

"Let's see how many of them actually visit the orphanage, though," Draco muttered, and yelped as Harry stepped on his toe.

"At least a half a dozen will," Harry assured him. "And after dinner, we'll have more opportunities to talk. Have you spoken with anyone?"

Draco grimaced. "Not really," he confessed. "Trying to keep my head together, yeah? It's a little rough."

"It's fine. Let me know if you need a break, okay? You're sitting next to me at the table," he reminded him.

Draco nodded. "I'll keep that in mind."

The dancing ended, and dinner began. Harry gave a quick speech about the orphans, the purpose of the gala, and how while the money everyone there had contributed was fantastic,

the best solution would be adoption. There was a short amount of applause, and Draco stood continued for him.

"A cause that does need money, however, is something that Harry Potter and I have put together. If you agree with the cause, we have slips of paper above your plates. You can check the option for part of what you've already paid to go towards this charity, or all of it, or none of it.

"We've refrained from mentioning this before because of the priority on the children's situation, along with the fact we just finished getting the charity authorized last night." He smiled, and a gentle chuckle resonated throughout the room.

"We've yet to settle on a name yet--Potter here's considered the Rainbow View, whereas I think that's too soppy, and have elected to simply call it the Magically Talented LGBTQ Foundation." A silence settled.

"Call it what you like," Draco continued. "Harry Potter and I both think that there's a lack of information out there on what it means to love someone of the same sex here in the wizarding community."

Harry had to keep himself from looking up at Draco when he said that, and let him continue.

"The funds, if you choose to donate them, will go towards funding a mixed media campaign spreading the awareness of the LGBT presence among us. Hopefully, we'll scrap together some journalists other than myself to cover the topic.

"More importantly, we want the money to go towards finding help and therapy for gay, lesbian, trans, or anyone else struggling with gender or sexuality. We think it would help to have resources for adolescents at Hogwarts, especially."

There was a murmur of dissent at this, but Draco didn't falter, which impressed Harry. He stood strong despite his insecurities.

"As wizards, we tend to take interest in strange, odd, abnormal--*queer* things. I'd like to ask that we all consider valuing our queer people, too." He finished his speech with a sound nod, and Harry took initiative with the applause.

When it died out, Harry stood up and placed a gentle, reassuring hand on Draco's shoulder. "Are there anymore questions?" he asked.

An old, tall man stood up. "Yes," he said firmly. "My wife and I were wondering... what's *lesbian*?"

Oh gods. Harry thought. *This could take a while.*

He encouraged everyone to begin eating as he answered questions.

Narcissa watched her son deliver his speech calmly and coolly, the picture of everything she and Lucius could have hoped for him. There was another person, however, that her eyes kept

on returning to. And, sadly, it wasn't Manzyne.

She had thought she'd spotted Andromeda from the dance floor, but was so caught up with her dance partner that she ignored it. Now, however, sitting naught but a few seats across from her, Narcissa knew that her sister was at the gala.

She wasn't sure when the last time she had seen her was, though she wasn't expecting to meet her here. She probably thought she was oh-so-progressive, spending her money on poor little orphans like her grandchild. And she probably knew about Harry and Draco, and supported their unconventional--

No, she didn't. Narcissa watched her sister's face as Draco rose to speak, and it was not out of contempt for Draco's bloodline. Her face tightened and a scowl formed when she saw Draco's passion (which Narcissa hadn't even realized he'd had) for the gay rights cause. When it came time to check the box, she noted her sister chose not to donate any to the new charity.

Draco and Harry began asking questions, and Andromeda was staring vehemently at them. Harry, too, she noted, which was strange as he was her grandchild's godfather.

When chatter had resumed, and Harry and Draco were busy answering private questions, Narcissa found a way to sneak into a seat next to Andromeda, which was a distasteful move that Lucius would have detested. But Lucius was not there, and Narcissa followed her own rules.

"I hadn't known you were so bigoted, sister," she whispered as she took a seat next to her.

Andromeda stared up at her with anger, as if she had been expecting her to visit with her and had been dreading it.

"You're one to talk!" she hissed in response.

"I married Lucius because I knew what our parents would do if I didn't. And, at the time, I loved him. But that does not mean I necessarily share their close-mindedness," she replied coolly, staring at her sister with a level gaze.

"So, you're fine with your son doing *that*?" she whispered, making a vague gesture with her hands.

Narcissa rolled her eyes. "My son cannot help the way he was born, Andromeda. Just like you can't control if you're a muggle or a wizard, Draco didn't choose to want men. I accept that this is how he is, and I want him to be happy."

"You don't actually believe that hogwash, do you, Cissy? I thought you were smarter than that." Andromeda was scowling, and her attitude was not pleasant in the slightest.

"Draco never showed interest in girls. That's proof enough for me. And if it still matters so much to you whom my son pursues... I would say you have an unhealthy problem." Narcissa sniffed, watching as Draco spoke in reserved tones to a pensive looking young couple. Beside him, Harry watched in admiration.

"It's disgusting, Narcissa," Andromeda protested.

"You sound like our parents," Narcissa snapped. "It sounds as though you're still resentful with them for their prejudice, and this is your way of getting revenge. This is your holding power over other people."

Andromeda did not respond. She kept still and silent.

"I would ask you to consider forgiveness and acceptance. It weighs much lighter on the soul." Narcissa stood, and left her sister to brood in her own, close minded thoughts. Narcissa was going to meet her son's boyfriend.

After a long bearing conversation with two parents asking for advice on what to do if any of their children turned out to be gay, Draco truly hoped the dinner was almost over. He and Harry had answered some of the most basic questions to the most obscure. It appeared their audience was, for the most part, completely clueless.

He thought he might have a quiet break from it all, but then his mother appeared. He supposed she wanted to meet Harry, and he wouldn't object to that. Though, a public introduction would have been very different from the private one, he found himself almost grateful, because she would be less likely to question them on the "nature" of their relationship together.

"Mother." He smiled warmly at her when she arrived, and Harry dipped his head in greeting.

"Hello, Draco. This is the infamous Harry Potter?" she asked, not doubting that he of course was.

"In the flesh, Mrs. Malfoy." Harry smiled cheekily at her, and he kissed the hand that she offered.

"I am married to Lucius no longer, Mr. Potter," Narcissa informed him. "Ms. Malfoy will do. I've yet to return to my maiden name."

Draco thought he saw her cast an unpleasant glance at Andromeda, but he wasn't sure.

"Well, Ms. Malfoy," Harry repeated, "are you enjoying your evening?"

She smiled. "Very much so. Your preparations are impressive, and I feel inclined to say that Draco's choice in music for the evening was *perfect*."

Draco couldn't help but smirk. He wondered what would become of his mother and Mr. Manzyne.

"And the house elf conflict was resolved?" Harry inquired. "I'm so very sorry for the inconvenience that must have caused. And I admit we should have informed you sooner." His voice was laced with charm, and Draco couldn't help but wonder if he had rehearsed.

"That has all been remedied, young man," Narcissa smiled sweetly. "After all, it means I got to meet you, no? I'm sure you've been treating my son well," she added with a very subtle wink.

"He's wonderful, mother," Draco replied quietly, and shared a joyous glance with Harry that for more reasons than one he hoped no one else had noticed.

"I should hope so. He *is* the Boy Who Lived, after all."

Harry grimaced. "I prefer not to be remembered by that," he confessed, and Draco found himself smirking at the memory of all the times he and Harry had used it ironically. "I'm trying to become known for my other endeavors. Such as this one."

"And I'm sure you will, Harry," Narcissa assured him. "However, it seems like there are others waiting to be in your company. I plan on meeting you again later, Mr. Potter." Narcissa excused herself and returned to her seat, and Draco found himself faced by Cassius Aterneus.

"Draco!" He grinned. "And Mr. Potter," he intoned, reaching out an eager hand to shake. "A lovely event you've thrown here. As a trans wizard, I appreciate your efforts with the charity, whatever you're calling it."

"Thank you, Mr...?" Harry trailed off.

"Oh! My apologies. Cassius Aterneus, Editor in Chief of *The Daily Prophet*." He winked at Draco. "I just wanted to let you know that I'll do whatever I can to promote this charity of yours," he added.

"Thank you," Draco smiled. "And I'm sure you won't face any conflict over that," he chuckled.

Cassius frowned. "Actually, I'm here to warn you about that. As editor, I hold a lot of power. But the publisher and the owner have more leeway to do what they want, and their agenda is unclear. But they might be against you two. So watch out."

"Oh," Draco and Harry both muttered, turning to face each other.

"That's most unfortunate," Draco murmured. He could see how some bad press could seriously hurt their campaign...

"I'll talk to Skeeter, though. She'll be on your side, no matter what the big shots say. We can get a counter article published, along with some celebrity endorsement--if Harry Potter himself hosting it wasn't enough." Cassius snickered.

"That means a lot to us, sir," Harry replied.

"I know." Cassius answered. Before leaving, he bent in between both of them, and whispered, "You two lovebirds be careful, okay? People are starting to wonder." Then, he got up and marched away, leaving the two of them dumbfounded.

"Well," Draco breathed. "That was unexpected."

All in all, Harry decided, the night had ended well. He had caught up with a lot of old friends (Ron included, who had approached him towards the end of things). Draco even tied some old friendships back up, with Blaise and Pansy.

Things were looking up, he decided, as he bid his guests farewell. The house elves were cleaning up the mess, and Draco was getting autographs from all the musicians--which Harry knew he would just sell, Draco not being one for memorabilia.

Hermione and Terry were among the last to leave, with promises of wedding invitations and visits to the orphanage. The musicians followed, and soon it was just him and the two Malfoys.

Narcissa made no approach to speak with them, electing to go to bed after a wistful goodbye with her new musician friend. Harry had the feeling it would not be the last time they saw each other, either.

Draco was waiting for him with an arm full of signed records. "Where are we staying tonight? Mine or yours?" he asked through a yawn.

"Who said we were sleeping together?" Harry asked, stepping to plant an awkward kiss on Draco's cheek.

"Oh, I just assumed." Draco smirked, taking Harry's chin and planting a full kiss on his lips. "It's generally what we do, isn't it?"

Harry nodded absently, ghosting his fingers along Draco's neck. "We really do have to publish my coming out article soon, though," he sighed, pulling him into an embrace. "It's becoming very frustrating to have to keep a reign on everything I say and do around you. I feel guilty just looking at you."

"So, like school, then?" Draco snickered, kissing Harry's forehead, and then his cheek, and then his neck. "Come on, I'm tired. We can think about your publicity later; I daresay we've had enough of that for one night."

"Fine," Harry agreed, slinking an arm around Draco's waist. "My place?" he suggested. "Oranges and spice might be nice," he added with a wink.

"Oranges and bloody spice," Draco groaned good-naturedly, and he led Harry away to the floo.

Rita Skeeter was torn.

She had been hiding behind a curtain under a disillusionment charm, watching the incredibly intimate encounter between Malfoy and Potter. She had brought her more discreet camera and taken several shots, her Quick Quotes Quill recording their conversation.

Now she didn't know what to do with the information. By some grace of the gods, she had made it off the grounds without setting off any wards. She was now back in the comfort of her own home, mulling over the options.

On one hand, there was the *right* thing to do. Her editor--whose power she did not resent, despite his young age; she wanted to be a reporter, not an editor--had a conversation with her about promoting the gala and the (now apparent) couple's new charity. She happened to agree with the cause, and she didn't want to mess with it at all.

On the other hand, there was the *reporter* thing to do. She had this information, and the people would eat it up! In the cliché words of so many of her comrades: "The people deserve to know!"

But there was a quiet voice whispering in the back of her head, a voice she rarely heard much of. It reminded her that there was only *so much* the people deserved to know. After all, it wasn't like this was some secret, Death Eater, foul-hearted planning she had stumbled upon. Hell, it wasn't even an infidelity scandal! It was a quiet, intimate moment between lovers in their own home.

And of course, there was the consequence of what would happen to her if she published it. Potter and Malfoy had allies--she knew that after observing the gala, even if they didn't know them. She had seen the silent support of them, the sound belief in her cause. If people found out she had been *spying* on them? Merlin, it might be the end of her career.

But, then again, there were also people who resented them. Or resented one and not the other. And the kind of stir they would cause would be interesting, good for news. It would be the kind of drama she *loved*.

Another quiet morality voiced in the back of her head, the voice of her "true love," Lorette. Would she betray her if she published this? If publishing this set back the gay rights cause (which it might), she would never forgive herself. Lorette might never forgive her, six feet under she may have been.

Life is so difficult.

Chapter End Notes

Fun backstory: Cassius Aterneus is the name he chose after he was kicked out of his parents house for being trans. On the way out, his father told him his decision to change his gender was simply vanity, and he'd grow out of it one day.

The name Cassius means "vain." Aterneus is a variant of the Latin word for "eternal."

Cassius chose his name to spite his father, his choice remaining to be forever vain.

I wanted to share that earlier, but there was no way I could find to incorporate it into the story. So, here you go :)

Propaganda

Chapter Notes

Completely unrelated: I was browsing Spotify and I found a bunch of Harry Potter inspired music. I'm actually dying--it's brilliantly terrible. I can't stop smiling and laughing. Draco and the Malfoys, Harry and the Potters, The Whomping Willows (they're musical fanfic), Ministry of Magic... How is this a thing and why does it make me so happy?

Still, considering this is a partially music-centric fic I think this is very important. XD

Harry woke to skin pressed against his own and hot breaths on his neck. The odor of oranges and spice mingled curiously with peppermint, and old cotton sheets crinkled against his bare flesh.

He rolled over to see the still-asleep face of Draco, whom had gone home with him, showered, and went to sleep with hardly more than a second thought. He relished in the ease he now had with Draco, no longer laced with hesitation or fear.

Draco's gray eyes flickered open. "Is it morning already?" he mumbled, burying his face into Harry's shoulder.

"Yes, it's morning," Harry replied, turning his head to stare at the ceiling. "And we've things to do today, don't we?" he asked with a groan.

"Noooo," Draco whispered. "It's Sunday. I don't have to open shop today. We can relax."

Harry chuckled. "We've other things, though," he reminded him. "The charity, the papers..." He trailed off with a sigh.

"Stop it. I'm not awake yet. Hold me."

"Fine," Harry murmured, rolling onto his side to properly wrap himself around Draco. "I don't want to think about the papers yet either." He exhaled.

Draco's breathing slowed, and Harry thought he had fallen asleep again, but then he spoke. "We did the gala. That's enough for now, isn't it?" He closed his eyes and pressed closer to Harry.

"But, Cassius' warning..." Harry muttered.

"Shhhh. You're so awful when you first wake up," Draco complained, nipping Harry's shoulder with a quick bite-kiss.

"I am not. I'm just not delirious with sleep. I've been awake longer than you, anyway," he grumbled.

"I am not delirious!" Draco protested with a whine. "Well, maybe a little," he confessed with a grin. "It's like I get charged with all this wonderful energy after being with you all night, and--"

"Watch it, Malfoy," Harry teased him, "or you might say something your coherent self regrets. You don't want to be a Hufflepuff, do you?" He gave Draco a kiss on the mouth to silence him further, which he responded to with a tiny moan.

When he broke away, Draco insisted brushing his lips all over Harry's torso as he spoke. "I'm still worried about what Cassius said, though," he confessed, as Draco gave up trying to get him to change the subject and just rested his head on his chest.

"What, about the publisher?" he inquired, letting out a long breath.

"Yes. What if there's something terribly negative?" Harry speculated. "What will that do for us? For all this?"

"Just get the fucking paper," Draco resigned. "You're obviously too busy being the one *worrying* for once, and you're not going to stop." He cast Harry an annoyed glance, and added, "Much as I would love to stay here and *cuddle*."

"Glad you're awake," Harry chirped, sliding out from underneath Draco. "Want any coffee?" he asked, standing up and heading for the doorway. He was a bit chilled, seeing that he was in nothing but his underwear.

Draco sat up and stretched with a groan, following after him in a similarly bare state. "No," he grumbled. "Maybe tea?" he suggested, and Harry looked behind him to catch him mid yawn and about to stumble down the stairs.

He cast a wandless stabilizing charm. "Watch it, sleepy head," he muttered, making his way down the stairs with deliberate care.

"Yes, mother." Draco yawned again, wrapping his arm around Harry's bare waist once they were both at the bottom. "Eggs and toast again?" he requested.

"Sure," Harry replied. "I'll start on that and you can read me the news, yeah?"

Draco grimaced. "Ugh, you make it sound so *domestic*." He rolled his eyes and went to get the paper off of the table, which the owls had probably dropped by that morning. With a chuckle, Harry began making the tea and prepping the eggs and toast.

"Er, Harry?" Draco interrupted. "You might want to take a look at this."

Hermione was at Terry's house when she found the article. They were helping each other cook breakfast, and then the owl swooped in with the paper in it's talon. Terry tossed it a treat. "Thanks, old boy."

She wasn't paying attention to the bird. She caught Harry's name on the rolled up edge of the paper. She snatched it up immediately to read it.

Potter's Orphanage Fundraiser Turns Into Malfoy's Gay Propaganda Speech

Exclusive By Calla Gallows

Last night, Harry Potter put on a fundraising gala for the child victims of the muggleborn attacks. The event itself was innocent, and it's intents were good. The party was excellent, with good music and dancing.

When it came time for dinner, Mr. Potter gave an impressive speech placing value on the orphans. He requested that each one of the people in the room consider adoption, and that their donations were greatly appreciated.

Malfoy, whose Manor hosted the gala, stood to give his own speech. He droned on about gay representation, and then suggested that we place gay envoys into our schools, like Hogwarts. Malfoy announced that it was his goal to spread the gay agenda. And he is targeting our children.

Aleksander Selwyn and his wife Olivia Selwyn (nee. Travers) spoke with this reporter on their thoughts on the scandal.

"We are going to have our own children one day," Mrs. Selwyn explained. "And to think that they could be encouraged to start thinking this way, and to adopt that kind of lifestyle." Her face was grave--as would any parent should be when discussing this topic.

"The fact that Mr. Malfoy could display such open resentment to blood and heritage is disturbing," he added. "What kind of relationship is he encouraging?"

Mrs. Selwyn broke in. "A relationship devoid of morals and honor, based purely off of pleasure! It's disgusting. He will never have children."

This reporter--

Hermione had to force herself to stop reading. It was disgusting.

"What the hell is this?" she demanded. "How could your editor let this slide? It's hypocritical trash!" she cried, shoving the paper into Terry's face. He dropped his spatula and took it from her hand.

"Fucking Gallows," he breathed. "Cassius wouldn't have approved of this. She must have brought it to the publisher." He shook his head and dropped the paper onto the counter.

"But I thought that---"

Terry frowned. "Cassius may act and seem like he has all sorts of power, but he's far from the final say in *The Prophet*. He's young, and he doesn't own anything. He just gives things approval to give to the publisher."

"So, how could Gallows have gotten it to him?"

"He was at the gala, I saw him. Might've put her up to it." He took a deep breath. "He's a wretched old man. Acts like he's some sort of entitled pureblood, but he's really not. He looked visibly uncomfortable during Malfoy's speech."

Hermione fought back the rage and despair swimming in her gut. "This is going to be hard to fix."

Terry nodded in agreement. "If only we had someone bigger than Gallows. Shouldn't be too hard, right? The bitch is probably rejoicing over her first front-pager." He scowled.

"Someone bigger..." Hermione frowned. "Pennom?" she inquired.

Terry raised an eyebrow at her. "C'mon, love. You're brighter than that. Pennom is Malfoy. Wouldn't work at all." He reminded her.

Of course she knew that. She'd said so herself... But her mind was addled, and she was flustered, and she felt all short circuited. She had no idea what to do. Terry couldn't write for her, Cassius' name wasn't big enough... And they couldn't publish it through *The Prophet*, anyway, if the publisher was against her.

"We need someone who's name is big enough to publish on it's own," she decided, meeting Terry and sharing a determined expression. They both reached the same conclusion at once.

"Rita Skeeter."

Rita saw Gallows' article hot off the press. She wanted to burn everything in the building when she saw it. There was nothing she could do. The publisher, Faron Waspatter, was a bastard and was probably too pleased with this to let it go anyway.

She knew there were people (like dearest Harry Potter) who would accuse her of this same kind of journalism. And she wouldn't deny it--she had been pretty sneaky in her younger years. But she wasn't *stupid*.

She wasn't a politician, and she didn't write about politics. She wrote about the people, the scandals. And unlike in politics, you didn't make shit up in that kind of reporting. You didn't choose your most radical option to interview. You didn't try to conjure an image for your cause by being a hypocrite.

For fuck's sake. They're going on about the value of having blood children at an event calling for adoption.

Gallows was stupid. She'd made a fool of herself, giddy to please Waspatter when he asked for her help. The article was a sloppy attempt at mudslinging. She even tried to act as though Potter was a separate piece of the gala from Malfoy.

Sure, Rita liked to paint Potter as the loving, brilliant, Boy Who Lived, and Malfoy as the bitter antagonist. But at least when she wrote about them, she admitted they were a unit (and

more now than ever). But Gallowes had been stupid enough to act as if Malfoy had acted indecently of Potter, that Potter didn't support the same cause.

Her facts were all *wrong*, and she didn't even try to be sneaky about it. She was just an idiot, and a shame to journalists everywhere.

Rita was now sure she had done the right thing when she sent that letter.

"What is it?" Harry asked. "Was I right to be worried? What's in the paper?" He demanded.

Draco frowned. He hadn't looked at the paper yet--what was in his hands was a creamy envelope with flowing green script. "It's a letter, actually," he told Harry. "From Skeeter."

"Open it," Harry hissed, dropping the egg he was holding. Draco winced as it smashed onto the floor. Harry ignored him, though.

"Okay," Draco replied, ripping open the envelope and pulling out its contents. He was disturbed by the first thing he saw. It was a picture of him and Harry last night, after the rest of the guests and filed out. They were kissing and staring at each other sopily.

Gods, I look that ridiculous when I look at him, and he hasn't even told me?

The thought was sickly, but even more sickly was the idea that Skeeter had that photo. What did she want? To blackmail them?

"Is there a letter?" Harry asked, peering over his shoulder.

With a shuddering breath, he pulled out more pictures of them, and finally a letter.

Potter + Malfoy

Why does no one know about this yet? Looks like you two have it bad...

If you don't want anyone finding out about this, just let me know. I wouldn't want to interfere with your agenda--believe it or not, I actually support your cause. I don't know if you think these pictures would help or hinder that.

Don't think I'll start pulling any favors for you, though. I'll only hold back this information if it would do anything to harm the gay rights movement right now, which is in a pretty delicate spot.

And, if it helps, I'll write something.

--Rita Skeeter

"What the hell?" Harry whispered, placing a hand on Draco's shoulder from behind him. "That was weird. What does she even want?"

"No idea. To help?" Draco suggested, leaning back slightly into Harry and turning his head. "Do you think she--"

Draco was interrupted by a stumbling sound and a *Gah!* from the sitting room. Snapping his head over to look, he was greeted by an awkward shock of red hair belonging to none other than Ronald Weasley.

And this is why I keep my floo shut, he thought.

"Bloody hell!" Weasley cried, staring at Draco and Harry in shock. Draco realized, with a slight smirk and a blush, that he and Harry were in nothing but their underwear.

"You're the one who dropped by without warning!" Harry retorted, stepping away from Draco. He was probably embarrassed. "What are you even doing here?"

Draco, not one to miss out on an opportunity to embarrass the Weasel, moved from being front of Harry to beside him and slunk his arms around him. "We were busy," he pouted with extra dramatic effect. He saw Harry's cheeks turn red, and the Weasel averted his eyes.

"I, er--"

"Busy with what?" another voice piped in.

Harry groaned, and Draco realized it was the Weaselette as she popped into the kitchen. He narrowed his eyes, suddenly not approving of this whole flaunting-naked-bodies thing.

"Oh, gods..." Harry groaned. "What do you want?" he demanded.

"Don't sound so unhappy to see us again!" yet *another* voice trilled, and the Weasley twin Harry had danced with last night was there. "Oh, my. Now isn't this a treat."

Draco groaned, too, finally breaking away from Harry. "How many of you *are* there?"

The twin grinned. "Oh, here? Just us three." Then he lowered his voice. "But up in the woodworks? *Dozens.*"

He cackled when Draco's eyes widened in shock, and then when he scowled in anger.

Both Harry and Draco were standing, vulnerable and without their wands, in the kitchen with their arms crossed. Draco tried to give them his best death glare, and even Harry looked fairly malicious.

"Well, what do you want?" he snapped.

The girl Weasley--Ginerva, there were just *too many* to call them by their surname--smiled innocently. "We were here to check in on you after this morning's *Prophet*, Harry." She told them. "We weren't expecting this."

Ronald made a miserable groan and covered his face in his hands.

"And *all* of you had to come?" Draco demanded, still glaring at Ginerva. He didn't like the way she was staring at Harry, even if it wasn't flirtatious or sexual. It was mischievous. Much like the look on the twin's--George's--face.

"What, and miss out on this?" he purred, taking a step into the kitchen and licking his lips. "No way! Ron, I'm starting to think you might be the only straight one in here."

Ronald groaned again, and so did Harry, and Draco was ready to stab something.

"Just kidding!" George assured them. "Just kidding." He didn't look like he was kidding, though.

"What article?" Harry demanded at long last.

"You didn't read the paper yet?" Ginerva asked, walking up to the square table and picking up the rolled up newspaper. Now with her proximity bothering him, and his mind settled, Draco attempted a wandless summoning charm to get a blanket. He wrapped it around himself and Harry, who was still blushing like a virgin.

"No, we were a bit busy, like I said," Draco snapped, picking up the envelope and waving it in the air. "Skeeter's got dirt on us."

"And you had to be in your underwear?" Ron cried, finally allowing himself to look now that they were partially covered.

"We weren't expecting visitors!" Harry protested, snatching *The Prophet* from Ginerva. Draco was going to tell him to keep his floo shut, but then he saw the article, and his face stoned over.

"Yeah," Ginerva said.

"We felt like we had to stop by, since we were there last night, and all," George added.

Ronald cleared his throat. "Probably should have warned you first."

Harry shook his head, huddling closer to Draco under the gray and black comforter they were 'wearing.' "Doesn't matter," he sighed. "Looks like we're pretty fucked over."

Draco was about to agree, but he could hear more stumbling. *Another Weasley? Please don't let it be so....*

"Harry!" A familiar voice cried, and Granger was in the kitchen. Following her was Terry Boot.

"Looks like it's a party in here," he commented, crossing his arms.

"Worst after party ever," George stated, gesturing with his head towards Harry and Draco. "Did you to get the news, too?" he asked Hermione.

"Yes." She sighed, looking around the room. "And after last night went over so well..." She shook her head wistfully. "We thought we could offer our heads for some brainstorming."

"Gallows is a fool," Terry added for good measure. "She's not a proper journalist. She has no idea what she's doing." He tried to look consoling, but Draco knew it was hard. She was on the front page; people would take it as credit enough.

"She's a Warbeck fan; of course she doesn't," Draco grumbled in spite of himself, earning him an incredulous look from the Weasleys that just made him like them less.

Harry nudged him and rolled his eyes. "Anyway," he announced, "Skeeter just sent us a letter; she enclosed a bunch of pictures of Draco and I from, er, later last night."

Ronald's eyes widened. "Oh, gods, I think I'm going to be sick..."

"Not like that, you prat!" Draco snapped at him. He held up a picture. "We're perfectly innocent."

Ronald appeared to relax, and Harry nodded in gratitude. "And Skeeter thinks so, too," he added. "Or, maybe she does. The letter seemed like blackmail, but she was offering to help us."

Hermione and Terry shared a look. "That's brilliant!" they both exclaimed.

Ronald gave an uneasy look, as if he just realized that the connection between them for the first time. *Looks like Ronald didn't hear about the engagement....*

"What's so brilliant about it?" Harry scowled. "She took pictures of us when we were all do-eyed," he grumbled.

George and Ginerva began to snicker, and Draco shot them a glare, pulling the blanket tighter around him and Harry.

"But she can write for you outside of *The Prophet*!" Terry exclaimed. "She can fix this if anyone can."

Harry's eyes widened. "No!" he cried. "Fuck no. Not Skeeter. She'll think we owe her, between this and the pictures... No, we can't let her be the one to write *anything*."

Draco pulled Harry closer, granted a little privacy under the blanket-robe-thing. "She's sympathetic with our cause," he whispered to Harry. "And I can't write it. She's our best chance."

Harry was quiet, but Draco (and everyone else, he was sure) could feel his magic swirling around him in silent rage. "Fine. But I'm not the one asking her." He snapped. "And get out of my kitchen!"

Everyone stared at each other in shock.

"You heard him," Draco said. "Go back whence you came." He pointed towards the sitting room and the floor.

There was some grumbling, especially on Ronald's fault. But they all stumbled back into the floor, with a few hasty goodbyes as they tried to get away from Harry and his anger.

Once they were gone, Harry dropped the blanket on the floor.

"I'll write Skeeter," Draco muttered. "You do whatever it is that will calm you down, alright?" He looked down at Harry, who had an expression on his face Draco didn't think he had seen before.

He reached up at Draco's face, pulling him down for a kiss. It was rougher, deeper, and with more teeth than what Draco was used to, but he didn't necessarily complain. For once, Harry wasn't on his toes, and was instead pulling down on Draco's neck.

"You're not worried?" Harry asked him quietly.

"I think I'm getting used to this, actually," Draco whispered, the wolves alarmingly far away. "I can't worry as much, now, can I? Not when I've got your article to finish."

Harry's eyes widened, and he took a deep breath. "Then I should calm down, too," he conceded. "I'm putting some clothes on and I'll hack at some wood, yeah?" he asked.

"Go make something pretty, Potter. I'll go home and work on the record player."

Rowan Michaels was a generally tolerant man. He could forgive and forget. He knew the value of mercy, of acceptance, and a little bit of positivity.

He was consumed by all of that and it's opposite when Auror Longbottom came in and dropped the morning paper on his desk.

"That gala I went to?" he asked. "Yeah. This was published. It's bullshit."

Michaels looked up at Longbottom and forced a smile. "The author," he said, glancing down at the name. "Gallows. Anything you can get on her?" he asked.

Longbottom just left to go look. He was a brave young man, but he also was good company. He also knew his way around paperwork, and did an especially excellent job in the interrogation room.

He placed a Reddened Ravens record on the player, and focused on reading the article.

Gallows obviously had something against Mr. Malfoy. She had acted on it by writing this spiteful, misinformed, terribly *biased* article. Then again, maybe it wasn't her. The editor?

No, he knew Cassius; he also knew the meaning of mercy. He wouldn't have been to blame.

Oh. The publisher.

He knew Faron Waspatter. He wasn't a pleasant character, and he was the embodiment of every pureblooded prejudice. He usually didn't get his opines published, though. He must have hated Mr. Malfoy. This might be his revenge.

Gay propaganda? He gave a charity speech in his own house at his own party. This is propaganda.

He didn't want to think about the amount of people that may have possibly turned against Mr. Malfoy after this article. How could they possibly believe he was "targeting their children" after all the work he'd done to help them?

It wasn't fair. It was sickening. He felt his compassion for Malfoy swelling and his hatred for Waspatter mimic it. He would do whatever he could to fix this, even if it was just the spittle of a newbie reporter. He had his Ministry connections, he would talk to people. In the end, this would bring Malfoy more benefit in the end.

Longbottom came back, and said he couldn't find anything on Gallowes.

"Check Waspatter for me. If you find anything, get a warrant to search his house. The rat will pay." He found the wolf inside of him growing angrier, and he had to channel his energy.

"You alright, sir?" Longbottom asked, recognizing the expression.

"Fine. Just a little too close to the full moon. I'll get some wolfsbane," he muttered, rubbing his temples. "In the meantime, just figure out what we can do to help Malfoy. We won't have gone through the effort to fix things for him just to have his reputation ruined for the opposite reason it was in the first place," he sighed.

"Got it, boss." Longbottom winked at him and ran out the door.

Merlin. Michaels sighed. I shouldn't care so much.

Cassius waited in his office for Skeeter. She said she had news for him, and he guessed it had something to do with Potter and Malfoy. He wasn't at all pleased with Gallowes's article, and he rather wanted to strangle Waspatter. But, he couldn't, because then he would be fired. And he sort of prided himself on being the most powerful trans wizard in England, even if he was 'stealth.'

So, getting fired was out of the option. He hoped Skeeter had a solution, much as he disliked the woman.

She came in last minute, holding a file full of papers. She dumped them on his desk, and several pictures of Malfoy and Potter together showed up. They looked very much like a couple--not that he hadn't already guessed.

But he recognized the setting. And their situation. And he was not pleased.

"I'm not publishing this, Skeeter," he hissed, before she could get a word in edgewise. "We've already got people turning against Malfoy. This might make things bad for Potter, too."

Skeeter's eyes widened. "Oh, no! That's not what I wanted. Though, it might help them, on another hand..." she murmured, and looked like she was about to snatch the papers up again, but thought better of it. "No. I need you to hold on to those, so I don't get tempted. I promised to help them, actually."

Cassius raised an eyebrow. "Did they blackmail you?" he inquired.

She smirked, Slytherin to Slytherin. "Actually, I blackmailed them," she confessed. "But I won't be reaping from that, now that you have these. Don't let me touch them," she added determinedly, like an addict resolving to quit.

"Why are you helping them, then?"

"I believe in their cause, Mr. Aterneus." She grinned. "And I think you might, too. Am I wrong?" She inquired with a wink, a glimmer in her eye that said something along the lines of *ask and tell*.

She was *such* a fucking reporter.

"Yes, Skeeter," he hissed. "So, old woman. We're on the same page. What do you need me for?"

She grimaced at the phrase 'old woman,' and didn't choose to ignore it. "I'm only in my forties," she purred at him, her eyes narrowed into slits. "But regardless. I need you to hold on to those; that's it. I can't trust anyone else."

He frowned. "How about the subjects?" he asked, staring at the men in the picture with slight nausea. They were so... *schmaltzy*. He hadn't expected it from either of them, actually. Especially since he remembered them from school.

"No! I need to keep it in the *media*. In case we could use them to help!" she added, like an insincere addict.

"Well, then," he sighed. "What are you going to do?"

She pursed her lips in a smug expression. "Talk to my friends at *Witch Weekly* and *The Quibbler*; of course. Write an article for them paging all their young, queer little readers that, let's face it, don't touch *The Prophet*."

"Target the children, you're saying?" he inquired.

She let out a sly laugh. "Exactly. It's what Malfoy wanted, didn't he?"

Cassius nodded.

"When all else fails, the youth are our strongest hope."

Hung in the Gallows

Harry had gone to the Orphanage for the day, to drop off the money they'd made from the gala. It was something to distract him from Gallow's article of a few days ago.

Madam Humpop greeted him at the door. "Good morning, Harry." She tilted her head at him, as if surprised to see him so early. The sun wasn't even up yet.

"Morning." Harry sighed. He passed her the bag of Galleons he had just picked up from Gringotts. "Here's everything we made. Seven hundred eighty-five galleons, five sickles, and seventeen knuts."

Her eyes widened. "Thank you," she breathed, pulling him into the doorway. "I'm sorry about that awful article, by the way. I didn't think Mr. Malfoy was taking away anything from us when he spoke."

Harry had forgotten she was at the gala. "No, he didn't," he agreed. "Considering I'm running for the same cause," he added, giving Madam Humpop a meaningful look.

"Of course." She knitted her eyebrows. "Harry, I don't mean to intrude, but--"

Harry smiled and cut her off. "Yes, Draco and I are together," he informed her.

She nodded. "I thought so. You do well together, I think. You'd make lovely parents, you know," she added, with a gleam in her eye.

"Not yet, Madam." He sighed. "I have to find them all homes first, before I can adopt." He made his way into the art room, where he was sure the kids would be waiting. Or, at least Seth would be.

"That's a little backwards, don't you think?" she asked him. "Considering that adopting them would be finding them a home..." She trailed off, pausing at the doorway as he entered the art room.

"Seth's still asleep," she told him, when he turned around and frowned. He was alone in the center of the tall-ceilinged empty room, with the lighting charms that felt and looked like sunlight.

"How did you know I was looking for Seth?" Harry asked her, eying her suspiciously. How did everyone know Seth was his favorite?

"Harry," Madam Humpop sighed. "It wouldn't be picking favorites if you adopted him, you know. All the kids know you get on best with him. They'd be *happy* for him," she added, looking at him with a matronly ferocity that told him she thought he was being stupid.

"I can't," he protested quietly. "I'm not a family yet. He needs a family. They *all* do."

"You have Draco," she reminded him. "I wouldn't say you're not a family. And even if you weren't, Harry, Seth would love to live with you. He's said so himself."

Harry felt himself wince at that. He felt like a horrible person, but he would feel that way *anyway*. "I don't know. Draco... He's, well, you know..."

"A man?" Madam Humpop inquired with a raised eyebrow.

"No!" Harry cried. "I mean, yes, he is... But that's not what I meant. I just don't know if he'd want to start a family with me. We've not been together that long, you know."

She stepped into the room and placed a hand on his shoulder. "It doesn't matter. What matters is Seth. And he would want to be your family," she said softly.

"I--I can't. I'm not ready. I can't take him now." He didn't even want to mention Teddy, even if he did know there was no chance of adopting him. Teddy seemed easier; he had a *right* to Teddy, even if he didn't know him. What tied him to Seth was--

"Seth loves you, Harry. He might as well already think of you as his father. Isn't that enough?"

Harry didn't respond for a while. He didn't know what to say about that. He didn't have to, either, because a minute later, a small little boy with a shock of red hair appeared in the doorframe. He was still in pajamas and was rubbing his eyes from sleep. It was still early in the morning; he must have been the first one up.

"Harry?" he asked, smiling, still sleepy. "I thought you were here. I just knew." He eagerly stumbled over to give Harry a hug, who lifted him up.

"Good morning, little guy. You just knew, huh?" he questioned. Seth nodded and buried his head into Harry's shoulder.

"I had a dream," he mumbled. "This isn't a dream, right?"

Harry laughed. "No, we're both awake."

"Good," Seth mumbled. "I like it when I don't have to share you." He let out a little sigh went slightly limp in Harry's arms, apparently drifting off to sleep.

Madam Humpop looked at him pointedly, and Harry felt terribly guilty.

Hermione and Terry arrived at the orphanage at noon to meet the children.

The orphanage was a large house painted in light yellows and off-white colors, and a dark gray roof. It reflected the land around it, with rippling golden hills meeting a gray sky, dropping off to meet a crashing, roiling sea.

It was dramatic, but cheerful.

Harry greeted them at the door. A red headed child sat atop his shoulders, clutching his hair like reigns. A white-haired little girl hid behind his legs, and an olive skinned boy (who looked older than the rest) stood behind them with reserve.

"Hullo, Harry," Terry said, letting go of Hermione's hand to greet him with a wave. He didn't shake Harry's hand, as he looked busy clutching the ankles of the boy who balanced precariously atop him.

"Who're these?" Hermione asked, smiling down at the white haired little girl.

"Come inside, won't you?" Harry asked them. He shut the door behind him and lifted the little boy off of his shoulders to set him on the ground. Hermione had a feeling that this was Seth, the little boy who had shown up less than six months ago after he showed signs of being a wizard and his muggle parents kicked him out. Harry talked about him non stop.

"This is Seth," he confirmed. "And this is Sylvia." He pointed to the white haired girl. "And that's Tanner," he added, pointing to the boy who was watching them carefully.

"Hi," Hermione and Terry said.

Hermione felt uneasy. Children made her uncomfortable, and she was terrified of doing something wrong. She didn't know how Harry did so well with them, considering how awkward he could be.

"This is Hermione and Terry," Harry told the children. "Hermione is my best friend, and Terry works where Draco does," he explained to them.

"You're a writer?" Tanner asked Terry.

"I am. Head of the celebrity section," he added with a cheeky grin.

"Awesome!" Tanner exclaimed. "Mr. Draco tells me a lot about writing, but he's a freelance. Could you tell me about what it's like to be on the inside?" he asked, his eyes aglitter.

Terry raised his eyebrows. "Sure."

Hermione smiled as Terry was led away by Tanner into some other room of the enormous house. She smiled at Seth and Sylvia. "What do you two like to do?" she asked them.

Sylvia blushed. "I like to play with Melanie," she whispered. "She makes up stories for us."

Seth nodded. "And I like to draw. And Harry says I'm a good cook!" he exclaimed.

"Come on," Harry grinned. "Let's go meet the rest."

Skeeter sure was taking her sweet time in "fixing" things.

It had been four days since Gallows' article, and Cassius was growing restless. The only thing that gave him solace was that his publisher, Waspatter, was under investigation for

fraudulence and for buying illegal Dark objects out of Knockturn Alley.

He always knew the man was a cheat, but he was Dark, too? It was icing on the cake.

Speaking of the investigation, there were Aurors at his door.

"Mr. Aterneus? Open up. It's Aurors Longbottom and Weasley."

"Come in," Cassius sighed, and flicked his wand so the doors were opened. He recognized both of the Aurors' names--Light pureblooded families. When he saw their faces, he thought he recognized Weasley, but Longbottom he didn't. Perhaps the Neville that was in Potter and Malfoy's year had a brother?

"We're here to see if you know anything about Waspatter. Does he have anything against anyone? Any... motives?" Longbottom asked, casually walking up to the desk and taking a seat.

Cassius raised an eyebrow. "You mean, a motive against Malfoy?" he inquired.

Weasley turned red and made a choking sound, and Longbottom laughed. "What would make you think that?"

"Listen, Aurors," Cassius said. "I'm a nosy reporter. I'm also pretty damned clever. The timing is just right, and you wouldn't be the first person in this office trying to make a stand for Malfoy."

"Oh?" Longbottom raised an eyebrow.

"We're here to help Harry, if anything," Weasley muttered, and Longbottom shrugged in amicable agreement.

"Can you help?" he asked.

Cassius chuckled. "Not with Waspatter. But I've got Skeeter over at *Witch Weekly* trying to help out. And I'm doing my best to get Gallows fired," he replied.

"And why are *you* helping?" Weasley asked.

"I support Malfoy's agenda," he answered coolly. "And in lieu of that, Potter's. Come one, come another, no?"

Weasley's eyes widened, whereas Longbottom looked at him in confusion. "Never thought that something like that could be said about those two," Longbottom mumbled.

Cassius looked Weasley in the eye. "We're on the same page. I just don't see how legal it is for the DMLE to be intervening with something like this. This is media work."

"Then don't breathe a word of it," Weasley told him.

The pair got up and left, the big doors slamming shut behind them.

There's more power backing this than I had originally thought.

"What do you want, Skeeter?" Draco asked. The old witch was in his record shop, and she had her quill with her. *At least she's not trying to go undercover*, he thought wryly.

"I'm here with *Witch Weekly*, dear," she purred, flicking her quill in the air. "Thought you might want to respond to Gallows' terrible piece on you. You never responded to my letter, so I thought I might just stop by."

"Harry doesn't trust you," he told her, tucking the parchment he was busy writing on under his desk. He had begun writing an outline for Harry's 'coming out' article, and he didn't need Skeeter seeing it.

"He doesn't trust many people, does he? It comes from his troubled past," she sighed, fluttering her eyelashes. Draco could see her act, though, and he wasn't liking it that much.

"Irrelevant, Skeeter. If this is an interview, don't think you can milk any extra from me." He gave her a look that would have chilled bones. Only, lately, he hadn't been so great at pulling off the Ice Prince act anymore.

"Fine," she sighed. "Let's chat about the gala, then. Do you have anywhere I can sit?"

He shook his head. He wouldn't let her upstairs, in case she found anything of Harry's up there. *Not that it matters. She already knows...*

"First question," he ordered.

She rolled her eyes. "Haste, haste," she mumbled, then cleared her throat. The Quick Quotes Quill zipped to attention on its piece of paper. "How accurate was Gallows' portrayal of your agenda?" she asked.

"Not at all accurate." He scoffed. "I'm not trying to 'recruit' anyone. You don't *become* gay or lesbian or trans or bi or anything else, just like you don't *become* straight. You already are. My goal is to find help for adolescents and adults to come to terms with that part of themselves."

Skeeter made a small noise of approval. "And what do you think of the comments on your 'lifestyle?'" she asked him, an eyebrow quirking behind her glasses.

"It's just the same as anyone else's," he muttered. "I work. I eat, I sleep, I go out."

"More in detail, dearie? I meant regarding your sexuality."

He glowered at her. "I don't have a dozen boyfriends and lurk about trying to snare up young boys, if that's what you're asking," he snarled. "I have a boyfriend, or a partner, whichever you prefer to call him. We visit each other often and do things together. Just like anyone else."

"In public?" she inquired casually, even if she very well knew the answer. "I don't think we've heard of you having a lover, Mr. Malfoy." She smirked.

"He's not out yet," Draco murmured. He shot her a glare. This could very well give him and Harry away, if people started piecing it together.

"Pity," Skeeter pouted. "And what do your parents think of this? Are they concerned about bloodline, as the couple from the gala article are?" she inquired.

"They said that at a gala raising money for an orphanage. I place little value on blood heirs," he replied curtly.

"Not the question, dear. Your parents?"

"My father is in Azkaban," he reminded Skeeter through clenched teeth, "and I do not value his values. My mother is fine with it, as any good mother should."

"Lovely," Skeeter hummed. "What do you think of the 'propaganda' title? Do you regret giving the speech at the gala?"

Draco rolled his eyes. "Not at all. It was in my own home, and Harry and I planned it together. It wasn't just me; he's on board with this, too. We started the charity and had every right to do so."

Skeeter smirked and looked at him like a cat on a mouse. "And Mr. Potter," she sneered, "why is he supporting the gay rights agenda? Is he gay, too?"

If looks could kill, Draco would have been charged with murder. "You'll have to ask him that. I'm afraid I don't know the answer," he seethed through clenched teeth. He took a breath, and added, "I think he's on board with it because he's a good person. With a hero complex. He wants to help people, like any decent person should."

"Mmmm." Skeeter nodded in approval. "And is there anything you'd like to say to the young people who will be reading this?"

Draco nodded. "It should be nobody else's business to judge who you love, no matter what sex they are or what their lineage is. You are entitled to your own feelings, and don't let anyone convince you there's anything wrong with that."

Skeeter grinned. "Excellent, Mr. Malfoy. I'll publish the transcription of this article for next week's issue." The quill froze, and she tucked it into the bag hanging at her side.

"And, this is off the record... But nice work. You're good at keeping your secrets."

Draco glared at her. "No one will find out until we say so."

She looked content with that.

Pansy Parkinson had yet to exact her revenge on Gallows for her article.

She knew, of course, that Gallows was a nothing, and she would easily be erased in a week or two. People would forget about her words, and Draco's name and cause would be redeemed.

That didn't mean Gallows could be forgiven, of course. Being that stupid *and* that malicious was inexcusable. She must have been a Gryffindor--no Slytherin would talk like that. Not counting the Selwyns, of course. Their words in the article were *ridiculous*.

The older she got, the more she resented pureblooded ideology. She was ready to just go and drop her heritage altogether. It's not like her family would have cared--they were done with her the minute she had begun dating Luna.

Forget her success, forget their love for her, forget the fact that she was their *blood*. Because she was lesbian, she was nothing to them. In their opinion, she and Luna were a "waste." They were both "perfectly decent pureblooded ladies," and they were the end of their family lines.

Pansy didn't give a fuck.

But she *did* give several fucks over this article. It was harmful, it was spiteful, it was stupid. It would set back whatever Draco and Harry were planning, and it encouraged the already existent homophobia. It was also the first *visible* homophobia she had ever seen in the media, just as Draco's article was the first gay rights piece in the media.

Wizards were stuck in a world of "don't ask, don't tell." No one spoke up against it until someone mentioned it.

She wondered how many people *actually* objected to homosexuality compared to how many people just were ignorant to it. She figured they were at an advantage to the muggles, since there was very little misinformation currently being spread about being queer. There were no blatant misconceptions being spread, so they didn't have to fight against that.

Draco was right. They just had to get the word out about what was *true* about being gay, and beat the homophobes to the catch.

And, of course, she would hang Gallows where she stood. She would use her connections to make sure Gallows could never write again, and would set a path ensuring that anyone else who wanted to spread lies would be doomed as well.

She had some fire calls to make. And she wouldn't like all of them.

Hermione and Terry weren't the only prospective parents who visited the orphanage that day. There had been a pair of young witches who came in and adopted one of the babies in the nursery. They would have the paperwork and approval process (along with getting the muggle paperwork) done in a month, and she wouldn't go home with them until then.

Harry had been surprised at their rapid decision, but Hermione thought he was being silly. He was the one who had known the child he wanted to adopt for nearly two years and not done

anything. And there was a big difference between adopting a baby and a small child. Your personality had to work well with the child's, whereas the baby you would largely influence.

Hermione discussed this with Terry as soon as they arrived at Hermione's house. She couldn't see herself raising a baby... Not when she was rising in influence in the Ministry. And a small child? That seemed even more terrifying.

"Melanie seemed to like you," said Terry, sprawling himself on her couch.

"But I wouldn't want to separate her from Sylvia," Hermione resisted. "And she seems like a handful. She needs a lot of mental stimulation and interaction." She poured each of them a glass of wine and carried it over to him.

"So we can adopt both," Terry told her. "No matter what kid you choose, 'Mione, they'll need a lot of attention. And someone to take care of them."

He sighed and took a sip of her wine. "I know. Maybe I'm not the right person for this... I can't raise a *child*. What was I thinking?" She shook her head. Could she even handle the stress of getting married?

"Of course you can. You survived all those classes at Hogwarts. You're the queen of time management!" he exclaimed, reaching out to touch her shoulder.

"And I had a *time turner*. I can't do that with a child." She sighed.

"What, do you plan on entirely devoting yourself to work?" Terry asked, looking slightly hurt.

"No!" she exclaimed. "I mean, I expect to work a lot... And how can I work and raise a child?"

"Lots of people do, love," Terry told her softly. "What if we take in Tanner? Or Kara? They're both turning eleven soon, and they'll be off to Hogwarts next year. Then, you wouldn't have to take care of them as intensely."

Hermione thought about it. It was a good idea....

"Granger!" a voice snapped.

Hermione turned her head, and saw the scowling head of Pansy Parkinson in her fireplace.

"What, Parkinson?" she demanded. She might be on good terms with Harry, but Hermione didn't like her. She was a corporate woman and often tried to meddle with the Ministry or bend the law.

"I need your help, obviously."

"With what?" Terry demanded, defensively slinking an arm around Hermione.

"I need to get some sort of law passed. Against misinformation," she told her.

Hermione rolled her eyes. "There's already one of those, Parkinson. The Ministry isn't stupid," she snapped.

"Really? Then can people publish anti gay propaganda like the muggles do? Are we in danger of that, too? Or has your Ministry already got it covered?"

Hermione frowned. "Okay." She sighed. "Maybe not. I'll have to look into it. But there are a few against slander," she added. She realized Pansy had a point, though. If the misinformation laws were so sound, Rita Skeeter wouldn't be able to make a living.

"And is there anything illegal in what Gallows wrote?"

"Probably not," Hermione admitted. "Even if it is total shite. But I'll ask Ronald."

"Get on it, Granger. I've already filed a complaint against the publisher. I've heard he's being dealt with." She snickered wickedly, and her face disappeared from the floo.

As soon as she was gone, Terry shut the floo. "No interrupting anymore. We don't want to find ourselves in a similar situation to Draco and Harry," he whispered.

"Weren't we talking about adopting children?" Hermione demanded.

"Later," Terry told her.

The day felt like it lasted forever, but in a good way. Harry had been worn out after a long day of painting and running around with Seth, whom had insisted on spending a day 'not sharing' Harry.

It was fun. It wasn't as tiring as usual, and he found that he didn't even mind laying on a hard wooden floor in the art room while Seth splattered paint all over and talked about insects.

"And the other day I found a big green one," he mumbled, using his hands to smear a great blue streak across the paper. "Madam said it was a mantis. I hadn't seen no mantises before."

Harry smiled and picked up his own paint brush, making little purple marks in the blue that looked like butterflies.

"Thanks, Harry. Pretty," Seth said. "Ya know, Harry, there's lotsa stuff I haven't seen," he speculated quietly, dropping his brush.

"I believe it," Harry laughed. "You're less than half a decade old. You have a lot of time."

Seth ignored him, probably because he didn't know the word *decade*. "I seen all the stuff around here. I betcha that mantis was the last new thing I'll see here, 'less some new kids come," he muttered, splotching some orange into the corner of his painting.

"Don't think like that, buddy. It's a big world. You'll see lots of stuff," Harry assured him. He picked up another brush. "Here, let's put a tree here."

"It'sna Christmas, tree Harry!" Seth protested. "It's not Christmas!"

"Christmas trees don't only grow at Christmas," Harry chuckled.

Seth sighed. "Yeah." He stared at the picture for a few more moments, suddenly looking very tired.

"What's the matter, little man?" Harry asked him, lowering himself to rest his hands on his palms.

"Why can't I go home with you, Harry? Why'd I gotta stay here?" he asked, pouting a little. "I heard you talking a little with Madam, but I didn't know whatcha were saying."

Harry felt something inside of him snap, and he blinked to keep himself from crying. *Shit.*

"All your friends are here, Sethers," he reminded him softly. "I can't take you away from your friends."

"I can be friends with *your* friends, Harry," Seth protested. "Don't your friends like me? I heard you talking to Madam that Draco might not like me."

"No, no, buddy. Draco likes you. My friends like you. But don't you want to be around other little kids?" he asked. He and Ebele were practically inseparable, and Seth loved to lead the other kids in adventures.

"I do, Harry. But I like being round you better." He sighed with a little huff and laid his head on the painting, realizing too late it wasn't dry. A bunch of paint splotted onto his face. He scrunched his face as he reached up a hand to touch it, sitting up.

Harry sat up, too. "But if you went home with me, you wouldn't get to see your friends as much."

Seth's eyes welled up with tears. "But I could come back!" he cried. "If I stay here, Harry, someone like that Mione lady will come and take me. I figured it out yesterday. And I don't wanna go home with anyone else." He let out a little sob.

"What makes you think that?" Harry asked. How did Seth know all about this?

"Cause that's why I'm here, Harry. I just learned that we're"--he let out a hiccough--"*or-funs*. Kara told me. We're here cause someone is gonna take us away to a family. And I don't want to go home with any of those people." He wasn't full out crying yet, and Harry didn't want that to happen.

He'd never seen Seth cry before.

He lifted Seth up and held him. "Shh, buddy. Those are nice people. You don't know 'til you meet them." He didn't know what he was saying. He didn't want Seth to be taken home by any of them, either.

Seth let out a loud wail, and clung tightly to Harry's neck. "No! I don't want anybody else, Harry! They might leave me like Mum and Dad!" he screeched. "It's not fair!" He shoved away from Harry, landing on the floor with a thump.

"D-don't you want me?"

Harry didn't know what to say. He didn't know when everyone had decided that he would adopt Seth, or when exactly he did, or when Seth figured it out. He wanted to tell Seth that people didn't always get what they wanted, that Harry had a lot of big things happening, that he couldn't deal with a child right now, that he had a godson that needed him...

But they weren't good excuses. They were pointless. There was a child that he loved crumpled on the floor, and he could make him stop crying. Just because he hadn't known his parents didn't mean he didn't have an obligation to him. It didn't mean that he wasn't allowed to take care of him.

Harry then remembered that Seth's original parents hadn't wanted him because of his magic. Harry didn't want to be like them.

He got up and picked Seth up, rubbing his back, remembering how Madam Humpop had taught him how to soothe young ones when he first started volunteering at the orphanage three years ago.

"Hey, hush," he whispered. "You wanna spend the night at my house? You wanna come home and have a sleepover?"

The sobbing stopped, and Seth let out a choked little, "Yes!"

"Let's talk to Madam."

He went to speak with the orphanage matron, fighting off feelings of guilt that the other children might be jealous. He couldn't care about that now, though.

After he spoke with Madam Humpop, he used his patronus to send a message to Draco. He hadn't usually used it because of the magical effort and the fact that he didn't think Draco could cast his own. It would do for now, though.

He apparated back to Grimmauld Place.

Family

Chapter Summary

Warning: this chapter might be too cute and have too many feels for you to handle!

Draco and Harry tell their story to Seth.

Draco was reading a muggle book on coming out, waiting for Harry to come over. It was probably pointless, but after Gallows' article, he was feeling more wary. He wanted to do this *right*.

But then a white, glimmering stag had appeared right in front of him as he sat in his dismal leather chair. It lit up the sad, dark living room, and he realized it was Harry's patronus when it spoke in his voice.

"Come to Grimmauld. Need some help."

Panic rising in his chest, Draco dropped the book and stood up. He pictured Harry's sitting room in his mind, and apparated to it.

"Harry!" He cried. "Harry, are you alright?" He had no idea what could have happened that Harry felt the need to summon him via patronus, but it couldn't have been good. He turned helplessly in a circle, looking around for him.

"Where are you?" he called.

"Up here," a voice responded, and there were footsteps. Harry appeared at the bottom of the staircase, looking perfectly fine.

Draco rushed at him and pulled him into an embrace, pressing a hard kiss to his lips. Harry let out a surprised grunt and tried to pull away, so Draco let him go and held him at arms length. "What the hell made you--"

He cut himself off, because at the top of the staircase was a small, redheaded boy.

"Hi, Draco," he said casually. "What were you doing to Harry?" He tilted his tiny head, watching with bright eyes.

"Seth!" Draco cried, pulling away from Harry. "What a surprise." He tried to smile as brightly as he could, but he was simultaneously terrified and confused.

What has Harry done?

"Seth's spending the night," Harry announced loudly.

"And tomorrow!" the boy cried with a bit of a whine to his voice.

"Lovely," Draco deadpanned.

At least he didn't adopt the child without warning me beforehand. That would be terrifying.

And then he wondered if it would be terrifying *with* warning.

And what would Draco's position in the relationship be, then?

He had a wary feeling that the child would become Harry's priority, and he fought back a twinge of jealousy.

"We were just choosing a room for Seth," Harry informed him. "We only just arrived."

Draco followed him up to the top of the staircase, where Seth stood waiting. His face was puffy, and he looked like he had been crying. "Oh, look," Draco pointed out. "You have a little day pack and everything."

Seth beamed at him. "Got's my pajamas and my tollet-tees!" he proclaimed, hoisting it up higher on his shoulders.

"Toiletries?" Draco suggested, raising an eyebrow.

"Yup. That." The boy grinned. "But I gotta go pee, actually," he announced, still grinning.

Draco glanced at Harry warily, who answered the boy. "There's one at the end of the hall. You might like the bedroom next to it," he added, smiling warmly.

Seth nodded. "And I don't need help," he informed them proudly, before scampering away.

Harry turned to Draco once the boy was gone and smiled gratefully at him, pressing a soft and lingering kiss to his cheekbone. "Thanks for coming to help," he mumbled against the skin, quietly moving to place another soft kiss on his lips.

Bastard. Draco thought. *He knows I can't protest if he's doing that.*

He was going to speak up, but he just moaned as Harry lightly trailed a hand up and down under his shirt. He let it continue for another moment, but he wanted to speak before Seth was back, and he didn't want any more questions from the boy about what he was 'doing' with Harry.

"Stop playing me, Potter," he hissed, breaking away. "You know I'm bollocks with children. This is bloody terrifying," he whispered in a panic.

Harry sighed and looked at him with big eyes. "And I'm very happy with you for helping," he breathed, moving in to kiss Draco again, aiming for a spot near his ear that Draco

would *not* let him go near. Not if he wanted to maintain any sense of resolve or dignity before melting into a puddle.

"You are acting like a Slytherin, and it needs to stop. You can't butter me up," he muttered, shoving Harry lightly away. "You're being manipulative. And it's only worse that in another situation, I would have no affect on *you* if I did this."

Harry pouted. "I'm only trying to make you happy."

"Come on, Harry. You know you just had to ask nicely, and I would have helped," he whispered. "This isn't a game of *services*. I would have helped you just to make *you* happy."

Harry blushed. "I know. I was just thanking you in advance," he said, without a trace of saccharine sweetness. "I know what it's like to be manipulated. And believe it or not, I'm not as much of a Slytherin as you like to believe."

"What's a Slytherin?" A high pitched voice asked from behind a door. Draco heard the toilet flush, and he moved a few steps away from Harry.

"What Draco is!" Harry called, giving Draco a look that said *And thus the raven calls the crow black*.

The sink ran, and Seth was back in the hallway, his shirt half tucked into his tiny trousers.

"What's that s'posed to mean?" He asked the two men, once he was back in the hallway.

Draco did what he always saw Harry do, and crouched down to be at eye level with the boy. "It's a House at Hogwarts. The best House in Hogwarts, to be specific." He grinned as widely as he could. "It's under the lake, and all the cleverest people live there." Draco glanced up at Harry with a smirk.

You want me to play nice? I'll do it my way.

"They also always have that look on their face," Harry muttered.

Seth peered up at Draco and imitated his smirk perfectly.

"See, Harry?" Draco asked innocently, standing up. "He'll fit in perfectly."

"I'm a Slytherin!" Seth cried, smirking again. Harry had a very unsettled look on his face, and he was staring at the child with a rude expression.

"I think we ought to put you to bed," he murmured, taking Seth's hand and leading him into the guest bedroom closest to theirs. Harry's, technically, but Draco thought of it as theirs.

He followed them into the bedroom, and Harry took Seth's little pack and put it on the bed. "Let's get your pajamas on, alright?" He asked. "And then we can tell you stories so you fall asleep."

"Okay," Seth replied, letting Harry take out his pajamas for him. "Do I have to go brush my teeth? Madam always makes me brush my teeth."

Harry shrugged. "One night won't hurt," he muttered, helping the boy out of his shirt.

"No." Draco frowned. "He should brush his teeth. You must instill hygiene habits in them at an early age."

Harry raised an eyebrow, standing up as Seth finished changing into his sleep clothes all on his own. "Look at you, playing the responsible parent," he teased, giving Draco an approving look.

"I'm not his parent," Draco replied, hoping the child wouldn't mind. (He didn't.) "I just don't want to return him to Madam Humpop with him telling her he doesn't need to take care of himself."

Harry sighed, but he was smiling. "Go brush your teeth, little guy. We'll get your bed ready, and come up with a story for you."

"Okay, but I pick the story!" Seth piped as he darted out the door, his bag of 'tollet-tees'.

Harry grinned and took a step closer to Draco, still having that smug look of approval on his face.

"I think it's terribly perverted that you've never seemed more interested in me than when there's a child in the house," Draco muttered, feeling defenseless as Harry slipped his arms around his waist and pressed a kiss to his jaw.

"Just proud of you," Harry murmured. "You're better with kids than you think."

Draco tried a grimace, but just ended up melting a little on the inside. "I think you just have a domestic kink," Draco scoffed.

"Don't have kinks." Harry broke away as tiny footsteps sounded down the hall.

"You're a wicked man," Draco grumbled, though he realized that Harry probably *wasn't* trying to torture him. He just thought it was terribly unfair that he had to wait until there was a child to interrupt them after a few minutes.

The little boy popped back into the room without his bag. "I can count to a hundred," he told them matter-of-factly. "That's how long I brush my teeth for."

Draco realized with a flush that they hadn't touched the bed, so he cast a quick cleaning spell on the bed to rid it of any dust. He pulled back the covers, not forgetting to shoot Harry a glare as he did so. He patted the front of the bed.

"Come on," Draco told him. He almost called him *little dragon*, because that was all he knew from his mother's own pet names.

Seth flashed him a just-brushed-teeth smile, and Draco saw that they were all small, straight baby teeth. The little boy climbed onto the bed, with a little assistance from Draco, and pulled the covers all the way up to his neck.

"Come on, Harry." Draco said, pulling himself onto the bed and leaning against the wall it was against. Seth hardly took up any room in it, so there was space for Harry to sit at the end.

When they were all in place, Harry flicked his wand and extinguished the light. Draco thought it was too dark, though, so he cast a slight variation on the *lumos* charm so a purple light fluttered in the air.

Seth sat up at once and stared at it. "It's a *fae*," he breathed. "I remembered Mum and Dad told me about *faes* once."

Draco smiled softly, but wondered how much the boy remembered of his parents. He remembered that the boy's parents had left him at the orphanage once he'd shown signs of accidental magic, and they'd thought he was possessed or something bollocks like that. He didn't know how exactly, but the little boy had ended up in the magical world where he belonged less than a year ago. And, from what he could tell, Harry had grown to adore the boy since then.

"It's not a fairy," Harry laughed. "It's a light. A spell."

"Madam's told us bout spells," Seth said, watching it carefully. "Says we've magic. Mum and Dad said it was bad, and they got rid of me." He said it bitterly, but in a way that he didn't seem to care.

He was too young not to care, Draco thought.

"It's not bad!" Draco assured him. "Magic can be very good. Harry, cast your patronus."

Harry closed his eyes, and a smile lit his face. The patronus appeared quickly and brightly, and Draco had the feeling that Harry didn't need to draw on a memory to cast it this time. He was thinking about the here and now.

Seth squealed as a stag trotted around a circle in the room, and then jumped into the air and disappeared into a cloud of mist.

"Can I do that?" he asked.

Draco laughed. "One day, if you're in Slytherin and you're as strong as Harry."

"Or if he's in Gryffindor," Harry protested. "Or any other House," he added. "As long as you go to Hogwarts."

Seth frowned. "When do I go t' Hogwarts? I thought I was goin' back to Madam," he mumbled, pulling the blankets closer to himself. "Or I'd stay here."

Harry sighed. "You're here for tonight, Sethers," he said quietly. "Why don't we tell you a story?" He crossed his hands in his lap and grinned.

"Yeah," Seth mumbled. "Can you tell me about magic? Madam doesn't talk about magic much."

"I bet Draco knows more magic stories than I do," Harry said, nudging Draco.

Seth smiled and nodded enthusiastically, propping up his pillow so he could sit up to listen.

Draco rolled his eyes, thinking that he should be lying down so he'd fall asleep. "Get over here, tyke," he ordered, patting the spot beside him. Seth's eyes widened, and he sat next to Draco cautiously.

"You don't have to sit next to me if you don't want to," Draco told him.

"Oh." Seth instead crawled onto Draco's lap. "Tell me the story," he commanded, making himself comfortable and leaning into Draco, who gave Harry a panicked look. Harry just smiled encouragingly at him, and wrapped an arm around his back.

Sitting there, with a child he barely knew on his lap and his childhood enemy wrapped around him, he felt more at home than he had since he was very, very young.

He began to tell his story.

"Once upon a time," he said pompously, "there was a boy with a lightning bolt scar." He felt Harry stiffen around him, so Draco eased his head onto Harry's shoulder.

"This boy defeated a very bad man when he was still a baby, but his parents died because of it. He grew up without really knowing his parents," Draco explained, and Seth made a sympathetic noise.

"But even if he didn't meet his parents, this little boy was loved by all the wizarding world, because he was The Boy Who Lived. Wizards and witches everywhere told his story and knew his name, and would throw celebrations for him." Draco felt Harry stiffen even more, which was disconcerting.

"You're forgetting a very important part," Harry whispered, pulling away slightly.

"This is how it's told, Harry. I should know," Draco retorted quietly, wondering what it was that had set Harry off. He was only telling the story his mother had told him his entire life.

"Well, I think I should know better," Harry countered, pulling away to look at Seth.

He began to tell his side of the story.

"The boy with the lightning bolt scar was sent to live with his mother's sister Petunia, her husband Vernon and her son Dudley. Petunia was bitter and made him do all the chores. Vernon was fat and turned red when he was angry, and he was angry a lot. Dudley was also

very fat, and he was mean, and he always got what he wanted." Harry's face was taut with emotion, as though it was hard for him.

"They were muggles, but they were a bad kind of muggle. They hated magic, and they never told Harry about his parents. They made him live in a closet under the stairs. The boy didn't like being in the closet."

"No one deserves to live in a closet," Seth muttered quietly.

"No, they don't," Harry agreed, giving Draco a look and a smile. "The boy with the lightning bolt scar wasn't happy at all. Petunia and Vernon and Dudley treated him very badly, and called him names and hurt him. They were a terrible family." He muttered quietly. Draco winced, and kissed the side of Harry's face.

"I didn't know that part of the story," Draco whispered.

"But it got better!" Harry exclaimed, reaching over to ruffle Seth's hair. The boy was looking sad, as if he didn't really like the story so far.

"The boy with the lightning bolt scar had a bunch of accidental magic, like you, Seth! And one day, when he was eleven years old, he got a bunch of letters from Hogwarts. It scared his relatives, though, and they didn't want him to know he was magical. So they drove him far, far away, to an rock in the middle of the ocean. They were going to hide until the letters were gone."

"Would the letters let him go to Hogwarts and let him become a Slytherin?" Seth inquired.

Draco snickered, even if he knew the boy was only asking because it was the only House he knew.

"I'm getting there, I'm getting there!" Harry exclaimed. "A giant man named Hagrid came to the rock. He had a pink umbrella and he drove a flying motorcycle, and he gave evil Dudley a pig's tail." Harry chuckled, and Draco wondered if that part was true. "He also had a birthday cake for the boy, who had never had his own birthday cake before. He took the boy away from his evil family, and they went to a magical place called Diagon Alley, where the boy learned about magic and got his first birthday present."

Draco interrupted. "And when he was getting his robes, he met a dashing young Slytherin that he was never going to forget."

Harry rolled his eyes and gave him a quick kiss on the cheek. Seth just looked at them with a funny expression.

"And the Slytherin didn't know how to be nice, then, and the boy thought that they wouldn't make very good friends," Harry continued, now leaning comfortably into Draco.

"They met again on the train to Hogwarts," Draco countered, "and the Slytherin offered the boy his friendship. The boy very rudely refused, and the Slytherin was crushed, and he

wouldn't forgive him for a very long time. He would try and prove he was worthy to be his friend--"

"But he was just mean about it." Harry cut him off. "The boy made other friends--a boy with red hair named Ron, and a girl with puffy hair named Hermione. They were all Gryffindors, and *not* Slytherins."

Seth made a disappointed sound. "But didn't Draco say that Slytherins are the best?"

"Draco says a lot of things, Seth," Harry muttered, earning an elbow to the ribs from Draco. The little boy shifted in Draco's lap and looked up at him.

"I like the things Draco says. Can he tell the story now?"

Draco chuckled, and Harry frowned, but let him have his turn.

"The boy with the lightning bolt scar learned a lot about magic, and he learned how to play Quidditch, which made the Slytherin very jealous. But the Slytherin was not jealous that the lightning boy had to fight the man who killed his parents--and he fought him every year!"

"Why did he fight him?"

"Because the man was evil, and he wanted revenge. So, the boy fought against him every year, and learned more and more about magic. The Slytherin was still sad that the boy was not his friend, and wasn't always nice to him."

Harry scoffed. "He was *never* nice to him."

"But he secretly liked the boy, even if he was very jealous of him. He was smart, and handsome, and clever, and powerful. But the Slytherin's father didn't like the boy, and when the evil man returned, the Slytherin's father began to work for him. The Slytherin was very sad, and he didn't want the lightning boy to get hurt."

Seth whimpered. "Did the Slytherin help his father or the lightning boy?"

"The Slytherin wanted to help the boy, but he couldn't. So, he helped his father for a very long time."

"And the lightning boy hated the Slytherin for it. He thought he could have been better." Harry rested his head on Draco's shoulder. "He *knew*."

"But the lightning boy was very stupid. He didn't know that the Slytherin didn't want to help his father, and that he didn't want to kill anyone or do bad things. The Slytherin boy was very sad, so he went into a bathroom one night and cried." Draco moved a hand to fiddle with Harry's hair.

Harry froze. "And the lightning boy came in and hurt him very badly. He didn't know what he was doing... He was *very* stupid. He hated himself for hurting the Slytherin boy."

Draco kissed Harry's cheek again, not caring what Seth thought, because he wanted Harry to know he forgave him. He had never been happy about it, but he had forgiven him completely the minute that Harry had spent the morning carelessly kissing his torso, where the scars had long but faded.

"You guys are weird," Seth muttered, covering his face with his hands. "Finish the story."

Draco grinned and took over. "It was alright, though, because the Slytherin still admired the lightning boy for always doing the right thing and for helping other people. But the Slytherin still had to do something very bad, and thought he was going to be hurt if he didn't do it. He was still very afraid."

"The lightning boy was there when he was about to do it," Harry whispered, and this time it was Draco who stiffened. He hadn't known that. "He had an Invisibility Cloak, and he was there when the Slytherin didn't do it. He knew the Slytherin had good in him."

Seth yawned. "Because Slytherins are the best."

Draco smirked. "That's right, Seth. But the two boys still went very different ways, and they didn't see each other for a long time. The Slytherin boy thought about the lightning boy a lot, but he knew the lightning boy was busy finding ways to defeat the evil man."

"He *was* very busy," Harry confirmed. "And one day the Slytherin's father caught the lightning boy and his friends. But the Slytherin saved his life."

"Indirectly," Draco murmured.

"And the lightning boy made it out, and he eventually would kill the evil man. And the Slytherin's mother would *really* save his life, if only because she loved her son. And the lightning boy defeated the evil man using the Slytherin's wand. And everyone lived happily ever after," Harry concluded.

Seth frowned. "But, what about the Slytherin boy?"

"What about him?" Draco frowned, remembering the horrible years after the war, and the trial, and the wolves...

"Did he and the lightning boy ever become friends?"

Draco laughed. "Yes. The lightning boy protected the Slytherin after people wanted to arrest him, and he gave him his wand back. And then, years later, they worked together to help more orphans. And they became friends."

"And then did they live happily ever after?"

"I think so," Harry whispered. "Nobody knows yet."

Seth yawned. "I think they do."

Draco laughed. "We hope so," he murmured. "But you need to go to bed, little dragon." He lifted Seth off of his lap and placed him on the pillow. He and Harry got up, and Draco tucked Seth in.

"Good night, Draco. Good night, Harry," Seth murmured, his eyes already flickering shut. "Thank you."

"Good night, Seth." Harry smiled. "We'll tell you more of that story next time."

"Next time?" Seth visibly perked up. "I get to come back?"

Both Harry and Draco laughed, and shared a look. Draco wouldn't have thought earlier this evening that he would have wanted the little boy to come back... But he did.

"Any time you want to," Draco told him, and Harry smiled brightly. "Good night, little dragon." Draco whispered, and took Harry's hand and led him out of the room. He left the purple light floating there, and shut the door behind him.

"I didn't know. About your family," Draco said quietly as they went to Harry's room. "I'm so sorry."

"I didn't know how you felt about me," Harry replied. "I'm sorry, too. Maybe I should have given you a chance."

"It's fine. We have one now." He smiled, leaving their door open in case Seth needed them in the middle of the night. He had never thought of himself as being good with kids, but he had so many memories of what his mother had done for him. Those told him what to do.

Harry began taking his own clothes off to get ready to sleep, and Draco followed suit.

"Should I adopt him?" Harry asked quietly, climbing into the bed.

"Is that even a question?" Draco demanded, joining him.

"So, yes?"

"Obviously," Draco snapped good-naturedly, snuggling himself close to Harry's skin.

"Do you think you would help?" Harry asked, speaking fast like he was nervous. "I mean--"

"Yes, Harry. That's not even a question either."

Harry laughed softly. "Thank you, Draco."

Draco didn't reply. He just closed his eyes, and tried to drift off to sleep. He wasn't sure if he was dreaming or awake when he heard Harry say, "I hope this is what family feels like."

He did know he was awake, though, when he snickered into his ear and added, "You didn't brush your teeth."

Resolutions (or, the Other Article)

Chapter Notes

This is the second to last chapter, guys. I hope you loved reading this as much as I loved writing this.

Seth did not wake them during the night, but the little bugger sure was an early riser. And he had a way of materializing into doorways.

"Good morning!" He cried, startling Harry out of his wits, who was performing his morning ritual of staring at Draco and waiting for him to awaken. Said beast rose from his sleep in an instant, sitting up and gasping.

"Who? What? Where?" he mumbled, or something along those lines, as it was mostly incomprehensible.

"Why're you in the same bed?" Seth asked them, still leaning in the doorframe and staring at them curiously. The top of his head probably didn't even reach the top of the mattress, Harry thought.

"Oh. Hi, kiddo," Draco groaned, slumping back into his spot against Harry. "We're sleeping," he added.

"You're awake now!" Seth cried, jaunting over to Harry's side of the bed.

"Good morning, Seth," Harry grumbled, rolling away from Draco. "We're not really morning people. Could you give us a minute?" He asked.

"I can count to a hundred," Seth informed him, plopping himself onto the ground. "One, two, three, four..."

"Why is he so loud?" Draco moaned, stuffing a pillow over his head.

"Eight, nine, ten, eleven...."

"He's a child, Draco. This is what they're like. Wonderful, aren't they?" Harry replied, smiling in spite of himself, staring at the small redheaded, bed-headed child sitting cross-legged on his floor.

"Fourteen, fifteen, sixteen, seventeen..."

"I wasn't...." Draco muttered.

"Twenty-two, twenty-three, twenty-four, twenty-five..."

"Like you would remember," Harry chortled, rolling back over to Draco. He rubbed his back lightly from under the covers, hoping the touch would motivate him like it did last night.

"Oh. What's after twenty-nine? It starts with a *t* again."

"Thirty!" Draco cried. "It's thirty. Thirty in the morning," he groaned. "Thirty is too early to be awake, let's just go back to sleep!" His voice sounded like he was singing, and Harry found himself laughing again.

"I'm always up at thirty!" Seth chirped, trying to find a way to crawl up onto the bed.

"No," Draco snapped. "No one is up at thirty. *Ever*."

Harry kept on laughing, hysterical from the joy of having his two favorite people in the room at once being so ridiculous. He wasn't used to Draco being so un-soppy in the morning, and he had no idea Seth was this chipper when he first woke up.

"I am," Seth insisted, gripping Harry's arm and hoisting himself up onto the bed. "And I want breakfast."

Draco groaned again, sitting up completely. "This is worse than Los Angeles," he sighed. "No, scratch that. I haven't had this much noise this early since the hostel in *Delhi*."

Seth blinked at them. "You don't got shirts on," he commented, staring at them curiously. "You're really weird."

"So are you," Draco countered, but Harry saw that he was smiling, so it was okay.

"Are you two like Mum and Dad?" Seth asked, tilting his head. Harry sat up, and his eyes widened in alarm.

"What do you mean, buddy?" he asked. He hoped the boy wasn't thinking they would drop him off at the orphanage and never come back...

"Do you love each other?" inquired Seth. "You kiss and hold hands, and you were all wrapped together. So, do you love each other?" He was watching them completely innocently.

Draco smiled at Seth again. "Why, yes, we do," he replied. "See?" he asked, grabbing Harry's head and placing three loud, smacking kisses on his face.

Seth giggled and fell over. Only looking up at him with his eyes, he hummed, "Are you a family?"

Harry froze, and looked over at Draco. "No, Seth, we're not. We don't have any kids, you see." He cast a meaningful glance at Draco, hoping he still meant what he'd said last night.

"Oh." Seth rolled onto his back. He didn't say anything else, and he had that sad look on his face. Harry nudged Draco, who grunted.

"But Harry was thinking we might want one someday," he added. "And we like you an awful lot."

Seth sat up immediately. "You do?"

"We do," Harry assured him.

"You didn't want me to stay yesterday," Seth mumbled, but a smile was spread wide on his face.

Draco took a cautious glance at Harry. "We were still thinking yesterday," he replied. "And Harry can't keep you just yet. We still have to work things out with Madam."

"So..." Seth's face scrunched up in thought. "We *will* be a family?"

Harry burst out laughing again. "Yes," he promised. "We will be."

Seth beamed. "So.... *Now* can we have breakfast?"

Draco and Harry had thrown on some clothes and met Seth downstairs in the kitchen. Draco was extremely grateful he was so short, otherwise he thought the little pollywog might have started one of his 'cooking experiments' that Draco knew he was prone to try. Instead, he had waited for them on the floor.

"You make something, I'll read the paper," Draco told him. Yes, he liked to cook, too... But it was Harry's kitchen, and as far as he was concerned, Harry's kid.

"It's going to be kid food," Harry warned him.

Draco raised an eyebrow.

"Pancakes," Harry clarified, picking Seth up off the floor and hoisting him onto his shoulders. It was such a natural movement, and Draco knew Harry had been doing it for longer than he had dated him...

He frowned, realizing that Seth, as young as he was, could be considered a more permanent fixture in Harry's life than Draco. He could be here now, but in a few months, who knew? But Seth would still be there.

"Do you like pancakes?" Seth asked, peering from behind Harry's hair, his hands all tangled in its mess.

Draco's eyes widened, realizing the boy must have seen him frown. "Yes, I like pancakes," he replied. "Carry on. I was lost in thought." He stared down at the table, wondering if Harry and him were really as tied together as he thought.

He's my lightning boy. I'm his Slytherin. We learned that last night. I've nothing to worry about.

He wasn't sure he believed it, but he had to if he wanted to keep the wolves at bay. He didn't want to collapse in front of Seth, and he didn't want to ruin a perfectly good day.

Just then, there was a rustling from the sitting room. Draco snapped to attention, slightly worried that there would be another Weasley surprise attack. There wasn't though--it was just an owl. Seth had woken them early enough that they beat the morning post.

It unceremoniously dumped *The Prophet* and *Witch Weekly* on the table, and then made its way back to fly out of the chimney. Draco picked up the latter news venue. He never thought he would be reading a gossip magazine over an actual newspaper, but there he was.

A picture of him in his shop was the front cover. He was leaning over his piece of parchment--Harry's coming out article--before he looked up and raised an eyebrow at Skeeter and her camera. He knew the words forming on his lips were *What do you want, Skeeter?* But somehow they'd managed to make it look more dramatic, friendly, and... *flirtatious*.

He turned a little green at the idea.

The cover read: **Words With Draco Malfoy: Love Who You Love**

He looked up at Harry, who had conjured a step stool for Seth and was helping him measure the flour for the pancakes.

"Harry." Draco held up the magazine. "I'm on the cover of *Witch Weekly*. I'm a celebrity now!" he exclaimed, feeling genuinely excited. And silly.

Harry smirked at him from over his shoulder, cracking an egg into a bowl separate of the flour that Seth was aimlessly stirring. "Congrats. I think my first time was when I was twelve." He turned back to the cooking.

"Oh, congratulations, Draco. That's an excellent picture of you, Draco. You're so inspiring, Draco." Draco muttered in an exaggerated, deep voice that made Seth giggle. "Oh, Harry, no need to compliment me. We all know I'm amazing."

Harry chuckled. "Glad you don't need me to remind you."

Draco huffed. "Don't you even want to read it? Skeeter just fixed our Gallows problem."

Harry dropped his whisk and stopped beating the eggs. "I'd forgot about Gallows," he confessed. "Thanks, Sethers," he added, pouring the egg mixture into the flour.

Draco thought he was thanking him both for the stirring and for helping distract him.

"She interviewed me, and she added some comments about me being 'every man's secret dream' and threw in some gibberish about my philanthropy efforts with the orphans and with the charity we're doing," he explained, looking over the inside article. The page was purple and with gray text, and Draco wondered if she was onto something.

"Oh, congratulations, Draco. You're so inspiring, Draco." Harry mimicked Draco's mimicking, which really wasn't fair at all. He cast a spell on the skillet that was on the stove so it was the right temperature, and poured the batter on.

"Thanks, love," Draco purred, acting as if it didn't get to him.

"That's an egg-sellent picture of you, Draco!" Seth pitched, and Draco found himself chuckling.

"What do you think, Harry? Is he a Ravenclaw or a Slytherin?" Draco asked.

"Gryffindor," Harry snapped, at the same time that Seth cried, "Slytherin!"

They brought Seth back to the orphanage before noon, and he hardly protested, though he made them promise to come back for him soon. Harry went in to talk with Madam Humpop about adoption. She could only legally make Harry his guardian, unless they got married, which they both vehemently protested against, and couldn't technically legally do in wizarding society.

Harry saw a slight insecurity in Draco's eyes all the same. When they were leaving the orphanage, Harry took his arm to side-apparate him away. They walked for a few minutes before they did apparate though, and they walked like they did that first morning on the way to Hogwarts.

"You'll still be part of his life, Draco." Harry smiled. "We have plenty of time to make things official."

Draco looked at him with raised eyebrows. "You think so?" he whispered. There was some kind of shock and concern in his eyes.

Harry just winked at him, and apparated them back to Cobalt Records.

When they were solidly back on his feet, Harry broke away and flipped the sign open. "I think you'll have plenty of extra visitors today." He grinned. "With your cover-photo and all."

Draco smirked. "I suppose I will." He sauntered over to his spot behind his counter. "And I've an article to write," he added.

Harry took his spot sitting on the staircase. "Oh?" he inquired. "What about?"

"You. If you agree that it's time, of course," Draco added hastily, picking up the parchment all the same.

The door rang open, so Harry couldn't answer as deeply as he would have liked to. Instead, he just muttered, "Go for it, Malfoy."

Draco waved a greeting at the customer, and began humming to himself as he wrote. Harry stood up to sift through the records and find something to play that would annoy Draco.

It took him a while, choosing a new record ever few minutes and placing it on the player, to find something in the shop that Draco didn't like that *wasn't* Celestina Warbeck.

He crumpled up the paper he was writing. "Dammit, Harry," he muttered. "That's on the 'banned shelf' for a reason." He threw the paper ball into the air and Vanished it.

"Considering I made these shelves," Harry retorted, "I wouldn't call that shelf 'banned'. And I didn't, because I don't name my pieces." He smirked. "And it's not anywhere near the Warbeck."

Draco rolled his eyes. "It's where I put all the records I hate. They're cheaper than the others."

"So, the sale shelf?"

"No. The banned shelf." Draco sighed, and pulled out another piece of parchment. "Just... chat with customers or something. I really want to get this right."

Harry grinned, because Auror Michaels just walked in. "Fair enough," he smiled, standing up to greet the man, who was looking cheerful to be in Draco's shop.

"Hullo," he said, looking out of the corner of his eye to see that Draco had stopped writing and was pretending not to pay attention.

"Hullo, Mr. Potter, Mr. Malfoy," Micheals returned, and waved excitedly at Draco.

"Just wanted you to know that the publisher who called for that recent Prophet article on your gala got arrested. For other reasons, of course, but he's been arrested." Michaels was grinning like a fool.

Harry also had a feeling that the publisher wouldn't have been arrested if he hadn't called for that article.

"That's good for us, then," Harry replied, glancing at Draco, who was smirking down at his parchment as if his like got way easier.

"And Mr. Aterneus wanted me to inform you that Calla Gallows has been fired. Additonally, a certain Pansy Parkinson is planning on making sure she never gets employed again." His grin had turned slightly wicked, and Harry found himself gaping.

Draco had given up on pretending not to eavesdrop. "Can she even *do* that?" he questioned, gaping as well. He shook his head and regained his composure, snapping his mouth shut. "I mean... As Head Auror... would you consider that legal?"

Michaels winked at them. "There's nothing wrong with Ms. Parkinson speaking with corporate directors," he said innocently.

Harry blinked. "Well, that's good for us, too, then."

"I'm not done," Michaels twinkled. "Ms. Granger and Ms. Parkinson have asked me for help on passing a something by the Wizangamot that would legally protect us all from *anti* gay propaganda."

"That sounds too good to be true..." Harry whispered. "Thank you, Auror Michaels."

The man simply shrugged. "I expect I can call a favor from you when werewolf rights get brought back onto the table," he said solemnly.

Draco's head popped back up from his article. "What about marriage?" he asked. "Could you... bring that up?"

Michaels raised an eyebrow. "Any plans, Mr. Malfoy?" he inquired.

Draco just blushed. "Just in case. For Seth," he added, giving Harry a meaningful look that made his heart swell. He could have gone and snogged him then and there, but there were other customers in the room besides Michaels.

Michaels looked like he didn't completely understand, but he shrugged. "That's a long way away, Mr. Malfoy. Give it a decade." He sighed, and looked remiss to say it.

"It's more than I could have asked for a a year ago," Draco replied. "Thank you, Auror Michaels. Is there anything I can do for you?" he asked, looking courteous and grateful.

Michaels smiled brightly. "Is the record you've got playing for sale?"

Draco's pleasant expression dropped to his Malfoy death glare. "Take it. For free. And don't give it back."

Auror Michaels laughed, taking the record and putting it back into its sleeve. "Generous and noble as always, Mr. Malfoy." He turned to leave the shop.

Draco scowled. "I can testify for werewolves, too, you know!" he called after him as the door slammed shut. "I'm a famous reporter! I'm more than just a shopkeeper!" he cried, to no avail.

Harry chuckled. "He likes you, Draco. Be grateful." He realized Draco might not even know that Michaels was a werewolf.

Draco just slumped back to his parchment. "I need to write this article," he muttered. "And as soon as it's written, I'll stand in front of the entire staff of *Witch Weekly* and *The Prophet* and kiss you madly for all the world to see and let Skeeter write an exposé article on our secret gay affair."

Harry's eyebrows shot up. "What did you just say?"

Draco smiled coolly at him, and in that moment, Harry saw a man without any wolves, without anxiety. A picture of the future. "If you've taught me anything, Potter, it's that I don't need to worry so much."

And that time, Harry really did cross over the counter to kiss him, much to the surprise of the middle-aged witch dawdling by the Celestina Warbeck corner of shame. She let out a squawk.

Draco made a surprised noise, but gave in for a few moments before breaking away, ignoring the woman. "And that I'm secretly an attention whore. If it weren't for you, Malfoy and Pennom would still be separate entities," he added with a grin.

Harry kissed him again. "You're brilliant."

"Mmhmm. Keep preening my feathers, Potter." He looked over the Harry's shoulder to the woman who was clutching a copy of *A Cauldron Full of Hot, Strong Love* to her chest, looking scandalized.

"Are you going to buy that, ma'am?"

Draco was tired of rewriting the article. He wanted to storm upstairs and shove that copy of *Is It A Choice? Coming Out to Misinformed People* into the rubbish bin. It was just making things more complicated.

And then he realized it didn't have to be complicated. He was *Adam Pennom*. Or, more realistically, *Draco Malfoy*. There was nothing in his way to writing this article. He had nothing to be afraid of.

There had once been a time when, somewhere, in the back of his mind, he had worried that Harry would be done with him the moment he finished the article. There had been an even longer time where he thought Hermione might murder him if he made a single mistake. There was yet the longest period where he had just simply believed that the world might stop spinning if he wrote it and he and Harry would never live normal lives again.

But this would pass, too. It would even help push his agenda along, now with Skeeter's *Witch Weekly* article's positive spin on him and all. Hell, Hermione was right--they'd reached a point in the press that no one would even be that surprised. They'd caused enough chaos already.

Huh. He thought with a wry smile. *Hermione's plan seemed like it was falling apart, but her ultimatum ended up winning out.*

He didn't think he'd tell her that, though. She'd probably figured it out on her own.

He took a deep breath, and a twinge of anxiety snapped at the back of his brain regardless. He told himself that along with all those ridiculous things he'd promised Harry he'd do after he published this article, he might go to therapy at St. Mungo's. It would be more effective than his old plan of going there to learn how to be a Healer.

He chuckled quietly to himself, and from his spot on the stairs, Harry shot him a curious look. How silly he'd been back then, thinking he had to cure the world to make himself whole again. That's why he'd jumped on this article, hadn't he?

Harry Potter is gay. Will anyone even be surprised, after all we've done since this started?

He picked up his quill and began writing, occasionally glancing up to ask Harry questions for the content.

Harry Potter Likes Men and He's Tired of Your Ignorance

By Draco Malfoy

In late January, not long before the Muggleborn Attacks, Harry Potter and I sat down at the kitchen table above my record shop. He presented me with a proposition to write an article for him. He said he was ready to come out as gay, and he thought it would do good for the 'gay rights agenda' I had just begun pushing the week before.

Despite the fact it would be anything unlike my then-anonymous persona would write, I agreed to it. Now, as Draco Malfoy, I see no problem with writing this article, with Harry Potter sitting just a meter away from me.

Not long after that initial conversation, we determined that Harry is not gay, but asexual. He is attracted to men, but not sexually.

"And I just like women as friends." He pipes up from his spot on my staircase. He is relaxed there; several visitors to my shop might recognize him sitting there, as we often do.

I ask him to comment on any thoughts he might think people have on his (a)sexuality.

"Sod off. It's none of their business. And to everyone else who's dealing with the same problem... Tell them the Boy Who Lived thinks they're terrible."

When we first sat down to discuss this article, we decided that I, as Pennom, would write it as a political statement. To rile the crowds, to inspire people. We expected this article to be the news of the year.

Different events humbled us. Our orphanage work, for example. We also grew used to making headlines.

To some clever readers, it may come as no surprise that Harry Potter and I, Draco Malfoy, former and unwilling Death Eater, are in a romantic relationship. And we've come to think that it shouldn't be a political statement. It's normal. It shouldn't be revolutionary.

And to anyone who has a problem with it, I give you this inspiring, political quote from Harry Potter:

"Sod off."

And if you still have a problem with it, just remember that the Boy Who Lived thinks you're terrible.

--DM

Draco couldn't help but permit himself a smirk when he was done. It was childish, and not Pennom material, but he was tired of thinking of this article as some grandeur means to an end. It was just a coming out article. He passed it to Harry like it was any ordinary piece of parchment. Because that was all it was, in the end.

He wouldn't even march into the Prophet's office to give it to Cassius. He would owl it. With a post owl.

Harry looked it over with a smug expression. "We'll leave the political shit to the Ministry," Harry muttered. "We'll just work with the kids and raise the money."

Draco nodded. "And I'll continue writing, of course. And other people will start to take initiative, too."

Harry set the parchment on the staircase, and he used his wand to lock the shop door and flip the sign closed. "I feel like it needs a finishing touch...."

"Skeeter's pictures. We'll release those, too, in case they don't believe us." Draco smirked. He was envisioning the image of the two of them kissing softly, looking ridiculous, Harry in his bright red suit with the dragon spine, and Draco in the white and red 'vampire' suit. It would be perfect to remind everyone that they were nothing more than two fools in love.

Two gorgeous, famous fools in love. He allowed himself the compliment.

Harry looked surprised. "Are you sure? Isn't that risky?"

Draco laughed. "Didn't you tell me that you liked taking risks?"

Harry chuckled at that, too, probably remembering his awkward flirting in the furniture store. "I do," he assured him. "Just... you aren't worried about coming across as too forward with this? Just this morning you were acting like you didn't know if we'd even stay together."

"I had hours of thinking time staring at that parchment, Potter," Draco growled. "And along with realizing I need to quit worrying, and that I love attention, I realized that I practically signed myself a binding contract to you the minute I agreed to write you this article. There's no going back."

"Risky," Harry replied with the quirk of an eyebrow.

"Like you care. You're the one *coming out of the closet*."

Harry sighed dramatically. "I suppose I am. Now, go mail that bloody article so we can get on with our lives."

Draco agreed wholeheartedly with that statement.

And Harry will never have to live in a closet ever again.

And hopefully, eventually, no one else would have to either.

Epilogue

Chapter Summary

This is it. I've finished my first fic.
Thank you all for sticking with me and reading it. :)

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

It had been over three years since Harry had come out of the closet.

Three years with Draco; three years raising an adopted Seth; three years running a charity; three years of records and relentless Celestina Warbeck fans; three years of ignorant bigots asking him questions about his sex life.

Two years since Hermione and Terry were married; two years since Kara and Tanner were adopted by said couple and started going to Hogwarts; two years since Sylvia was adopted by Pansy and Luna; two years since Pansy and Hermione's anti-discrimination law was passed; two years since Draco was able to found his own wizarding primary school (not that he taught at it; other people were paid to do that).

One year after Draco finished therapy at St. Mungo's; one year after Harry had been permitted to start working part-time as an Auror; one year after Farhedge Manzyme proposed to Mrs. Malfoy; one year after the Ministry began going through the process of setting up legal procedures for same-sex marriage.

After all that, it was Seth's seventh birthday, and they were celebrating at home. They had bought a good-sized house out in the country not long after adopting Seth, because it was closer to the orphanage. They also decided that Draco's flat was too small, and both the Malfoy and Black estates were too depressing for raising a child.

Along with most of Seth's friends from both school and the orphanage, Harry and Draco had invited their own friends over to celebrate.

The children were all trying to fly their own brooms above the small crowd of adults mingling below.

Hermione was chatting with Luna about their respective daughters and keeping up with work while relaxing under the shade of a tree, while Pansy was arguing with Cassius and Terry over the projected value of stock in journalism. Andromeda was eagerly discussing the positive progress of the same sex-marriage bill with a smug-looking Narcissa and a confused Manzyme. Ginny and Blaise were busy competing against George to see who could transfigure the most articles of clothing without anyone noticing. Ron was the oblivious

victim, the back of his shirt turned maroon and lacey by George, and calmly reading a copy of *The Prophet* and occasionally looking up to share commentary with Michaels. Rita Skeeter was not in the bushes, but rather in the open with complete permission to photograph Draco and Harry as they attempted to wrangle the children to pose for *proper* photographs.

Everything was as it should have been, and it was nothing like Draco and Harry would have expected over three years before.

Ron looked up from his paper and cast a *sonorous* charm on himself. "Celestina Warbeck's finally jumped on the bandwagon!" He called. "She hung a rainbow flag at her last concert and dedicated her last song to the Malfoy/Potter couple." He added the last bit with a snicker, and everyone wondered if Warbeck realized how much Draco would *not* appreciate the gesture.

There was a divided cheer and boo from the group, Draco doing his best to lead the *boo*. Rita was probably only booing because she was disappointed she hadn't been the one to write that article.

Cassius paused his debate with Pansy. "While we're announcing things," he shouted, "*Witch Weekly* dubbed me the top most influential man--*not* just trans man!--in Wizarding Britain!"

There was a collective cheer, and Terry did not hesitate to remind him that Cassius now *owned Witch Weekly*, so it wasn't really fair judgment. That led Pansy to continue ranting to him about capitalism and stock values.

Meanwhile, Harry finally caught Seth after five minutes of chasing him down on the ground, despite his new speed and strength from helping with the aurors. Draco laughed freely, and watched them with the contentment of a recovered man. He hadn't had a panic attack in eight months, and he could finally easily eat more colored, textured things. But he still hated coffee.

Teddy rushed over last minute to be in the picture, changing his hair color three times before the photo was done, just to be a show-off. Andromeda saw him and called him over. She was long since over her unfair dislike towards Harry and Draco, and had even begun working for their charity, which they had finally dubbed the Foundation for LGBT Witches, Wizards, and Everything In Between. Harry still called it the Rainbow View, though.

Once the picture was taken, Seth re-mussed his hair in a most Harry-like fashion and ran off to chase down Ebele and have a go at flying on the broom.

"He's taking after you, Potter," Draco snapped. "He thinks it's perfectly fine to run about with the hair of a neanderthal." He scoffed.

Harry rolled his eyes. "Oh, and who's to blame for that smirk of his? Who taught him how to trick people into losing their own arguments? And the fact that he's already started asking for Slytherin colored sweaters?" Harry demanded accusingly, knowing with almost complete certainty that his son--*their* son--would be in Slytherin.

"They're nice colors," Draco pouted. Harry snickered as someone cast a spell that turned his trousers gold and his shirt crimson the second he said it, however.

"Weasley!" Draco cried, spinning around pointing his wand to hex the offender.

"That was me, mate!" Blaise yapped, as his own robes clothes were turned to Hufflepuff colors by Ginny.

"Maybe yours should be Hufflepuff, too," Harry speculated.

Draco shot him a glare, and then turned red as his mother's gaze fell upon him with an inquisitive eye. She rolled her eyes and flicked her wand at him, turning him back to normal.

"I think it's time we start dismissing our guests," Draco grumbled.

"What? Why?" Harry demanded. "We've just finished everything on your schedule. Can't we let everyone have a moment to relax?"

"I scheduled it for a reason, Harry," Draco sighed. "Like fish, guests begin to stink after five hours." He huffed.

"It's three *days*, Draco," Harry corrected him.

Draco's eyes widened. "*Gods, no.* Harry, we have to get them out *now*, before they decide to stay forever!" He exclaimed, gripping Harry's shoulder and staring at him like a madman.

"Stop being so dramatic," Harry muttered, leaning in to give him a quick kiss that Rita's camera did not miss. "You haven't even talked to Hermione or Michaels about the newest Ministry drama."

"Spare me, dearest," Draco muttered dryly. "I could care less about what Elder Rosaline has to say about 'radical liberals and their buzz topics' again." He groaned loudly and took a long bearing glance back at the crowd.

Harry raised an eyebrow, slinking an arm around his waist and leading him back to the group and the white tables. "But isn't that what you asked for when you chose to be a reporter?" He inquired with a slight smirk.

"Shut it, Potter. Pennom's taking a month *long* break after the disaster of the werewolf article," Draco grumbled, pulling his partner closer.

"There was a reason Michaels asked for me and not you," Harry said in a singsong voice.

Draco rolled his eyes. "Wait. Before you make me go back." He stopped abruptly and began dragging Harry in the opposite direction, towards another tree at the far end. "I thought we might have a private moment."

Harry went along with it, sitting next to him on the grass under the shade of the tree. The sun was half hidden behind a billowing cloud that was sure to promise rain in the next hour, and

he almost commented on it until he realized that Draco had more serious things in mind than just the weather.

Draco waited a few minutes in silence, simply holding Harry's hand and breathing in the moist air as they watched their adopted son play with his friends. When he spoke, he drew a deep breath and looked as though he planned on savoring the moment forever.

"If you would have told me where I'd be right now before I ran into you at that furniture shop, I probably would have hexed you blind," he confessed with a wry chuckle.

"I would have, too," Harry agreed with him, resting his head on his shoulder.

"But, this is what I've always wanted," Draco admitted quietly, drawing circles on Harry's hand with a thumb.

"A family and a claim to fame?" Harry teased him.

"You know me too well," Draco chuckled, apparently no longer in the mood to protest any joshing around. He pulled a piece of paper out of his shirt pocket. It was discolored now, and the folds in it wore deep, but Harry would have recognized it anywhere. It was the first picture of them together, walking arm and arm to Hogwarts.

"That's what I've always wanted, Harry," Draco told him. "Someone to share my life with. Someone to pull me through when I'm on the verge of collapse. And you've more than done that for me."

Harry smiled warmly at him, taking his own copy of the picture out of his pocket. "Me, too, Draco." He sighed. "And, you make *me* feel like I'm normal. You bring the best out of me."

Draco pressed a kiss to his cheek. "And you, I. At least for the latter part. *I* think I'm quite extraordinary," he teased, and Harry sat up to take a kiss on the lips this time. It was soft and sweet, and not unlike the first one they had ever shared, only they knew each other much better now.

Draco continued to say, "And, I know--"

"Has he asked yet?" Blaise interrupted him with a shout, probably use a Sonorous.

Draco gave Harry a painstaking look and cast his own Sonorous. "Shut up, Zabini," he shouted. "I'm getting there!"

Harry watched him curiously, honestly not knowing what he was going to ask. Was there some question they hadn't gone over? Some doubt still in Draco's mind over their relationship?

"Sorry if that spoiled it," Draco grumbled, taking a moment to apologize with another kiss. "Anyway," he continued, "I know it's not technically legal yet, but I got us these--"

"How about now?" George asked, waving his wand in the air.

"*Fuck off, Weasley!*" Draco growled, without a single scrap of consideration for the delicate ears of the children.

"What?" Harry asked, still confused.

Draco grinned, probably at his obliviousness, and pulled out a platinum and a gold band. "I thought I might ask you to marry me. Or, wait to marry me." He smiled hesitantly and watched Harry with an expectant gaze.

"Are you done yet?" Ginny cried out, interrupting once more.

"This isn't even any of your business!" Draco screeched at them, then composing himself to look at Harry. "Er, so.... What do you say?" He inquired more calmly.

Harry grinned widely, and pulled his partner into another kiss, deeper this time. "Is that even a question?" He snickered after pulling away. Draco smirked and slid the gold ring onto his finger for him, while he did the same with the platinum for Draco.

"Did he say yes?" Seth called. The group must have put him under a Sonorous and under the hope they wouldn't get mad at their own son.

"Yes!" Both of them responded at once, only slightly annoyed.

There was a loud cheer, and George, Ginny, and Blaise all released firecrackers into the air in celebration.

Draco moaned in despair. "This is why I wanted them all to leave."

The fireworks spelled out ***Look Now and Remember!***

And Harry couldn't even fathom a good reason why, besides the fact that Draco had grown sick of the term over the years.

Then, the next bout of fireworks gave off a pretty realistic image of the many-times-folded newspaper clipping of them together they were both holding, and so they decided that maybe it wasn't all that bad.

~fin~

I want you all to know I pulled an all nighter so I could finish this story before school started back up. I haven't slept in 30 some hours.

End Notes

Edit: I wrote this just four months ago, and my writing has evolved so much. I actually cringed trying to edit this. I got six chapters in and gave up.

If you've read all the way through, thanks. I didn't deserve it. Gah. If anyone wants to edit this, I WOULD LOVE YOU FOREVER.

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