

the hulking Scor is Kieran."

"Right!" Mabel clapped her hands together. "Now that introductions are over, who's hungry?"

Draco's stomach chose that moment to give an involuntary grumble and she chuckled as she peered into a large rucksack in the corner of the room.

"Tonight's dinner menu consists of...drumroll please...beans!" She laughed as the rest of the group groaned.

"I'm sick of beans!" The young girl whined.

"Well, that's all we got until we find more supplies tomorrow, Rubes."

Mabel pulled out several metal tubes and began tossing them one by one to her companions before tossing one at Draco.

"Thanks." He muttered as he stared at the silvery object. He assumed the beans were inside the tube, but how was he supposed to get them out?

He decided to observe the muggles to see how they would get into the container and watched in fascination as Mabel pulled a small metal object from the front pocket of the rucksack and dragged the pointy bit through the top of the metal lid. She pressed the end of the object into the lid and it popped open before she handed the metal contraption to Ruby, who deftly opened hers. Once the opener thingy got to Draco, he placed his wand on the desk. He was confident he would be able to open his tube, he was second in his class after all, but the metal was much more unforgiving than the others made it look. He could feel the eyes of the muggles on him as the tube slipped out of his hand and clattered on the desk before he righted it and continued to saw into the tin. The metal of his tube looked jagged and as he tried to pry the lid off, it sliced his finger, blood dripping from the cut as he hissed.

"Oh, he is a ponce!" Sonny exclaimed cheerfully.

"Give it here." Mabel grabbed the tool and began cutting into the metal with ease. "You never used a tin-opener?"

Draco shook his head and scowled as the others chuckled.

"Yet a rich bastard, ain't ye?" Said the hulking snorter.

"Something like that." Draco sniffed.

"Bet you had chefs and nannies to do all your cooking and washing." Ruby scoffed as she reached out to grab Draco's wand. "What's this?"

He snatched it from the desk before her fingers grazed the wand and clutched it to his chest, "It's—it's a family heirloom."

"Jesus, alright weirdo. I just wanted to see it." Ruby looked at him like he had two heads as Mabel handed him the open tube of beans.

He sat stiff-backed on a chair with wheels and watched the muggles tip the tubes up to their lips as they slurped the beans into their mouths. He couldn't help the look of disgust that overwhelmed his features.

"Is there no silverware?" He asked incredulously.

All five of the muggles turned to him with narrowed eyes.

Sonny piped up, "No, now eat."

Draco looked back down at the tomato-y beans as his stomach gave another growl. If his ancestors could see him now, seconds away from guzzling cold, tinned beans down his throat,

they'd surely be rolling in their graves.

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After the barbaric dinner, which, surprisingly, hadn't tasted as badly as he had expected, they all tossed their empty cans into the corner of the room.

Draco cleared his throat. "So, can someone tell me what the fuck is going on?"

They all cast flitting glances at each other before Sonny took a fortifying breath and spoke, "About four weeks ago, reports started coming in from small towns and villages about a virus that was spreading. It began as an infection that attacked the nervous system. The beginning stages of the infection caused high fevers, lethargy, vomiting. Then death. No one knew what caused it or how to cure it. Mortality rate was one hundred percent. But the dead didn't stay dead. They... reanimated. Went mental. Started attacking people. Eating them. Drinking their blood. Then those who got bit would become infected." She paused and took a deep breath before continuing. "At first, the news downplayed things. Told people that the situation was being contained, but the virus hit London within two weeks and threw the city into chaos. Cities were quarantined, airports and roads were shut down, parliament declared a national emergency. Urged people to lock themselves in their homes and wait it out."

"Sittin' fuckin' ducks," Kieran scoffed.

"It wasn't until the military became overrun that things really seemed to go to shit. We all lived in the same block of flats, so we barricaded our building and hunkered down, but by week three we were running out of food. The streets finally seemed quiet enough so we ventured out last week. Trying to make our way to Scotland since we heard there was a safe zone somewhere, but it's slow going and we've lost a few of us along the way." At Sonny's last statement, Ruby sniffed as Mabel placed a comforting hand on her back.

Sonny continued, "The Rotters—that's what we call the infected—are less active during the day and roam in hordes mostly and tend to congregate in dark buildings until nightfall. The city is full of pockets of them and they'll still venture out during the day if there is decent cloud coverage. You were lucky today."

Draco's mind whirled. He didn't understand a lot of what she told him, but the gist was unsettling and he had so many questions that he knew they wouldn't be able to answer. Where was the Ministry? The Aurors? Surely they had safeguarded magical London? But then he remembered the state of St. Mungo's and his stomach dropped.

"What about the rest of Europe?" He asked. Maybe he could get to his family's chateau in France, or Zabini's Estate in Italy.

Sonny shook her head slowly.

"I need to go to my manor in Wiltshire. My—my family home is there and it's safe. My parents will be there."

Sonny shot him a pained look. "Wiltshire's been overrun. It was one of the first towns to...I'm sorry."

Draco shook his head, "No. My family home is impenetrable, it's one of the safest places there is besides Hogwarts."

"Hogwarts? Is that some kind of military base?"

He stiffened as he realized his slip. "Yes. A highly secretive one. My father—erm—trained

there."

Kieran looked unconvinced. "A secret military base in Scotland? Called Hogwarts?"

"Maybe that's where the safe zone is," Archie chimed in.

"Right, well tomorrow we'll get supplies and food." Sonny looked to Draco, "We'll get you some clothes and make our way to Wilshire with you."

Draco's eyes widened, "You—you'll come with me?"

"It's better to stick together. Strength in numbers," Mabel added. "Then you can take us to that Hogwarts base."

"That's three days walk at least ta the West. We need ta go North." Muscles said gruffly.

"If his father is military, he could have intel about the safe zone. If his rich boy mansion is indeed impenetrable, then at the very least we can go there and figure out a plan." Sonny's voice softened, "I know you want to find your family, Kieran, and we will, but we're tired and worn out and we need to rest. Somewhere safe."

Muscles huffed and nodded his head once as Sonny turned back to Draco, "There's an extra sleeping bag and some blankets in the corner there, pretty boy. Get some sleep."

As Draco folded his body into the corner of the room, he mentally berated himself for somehow allowing the group to invite themselves along to the Manor. Muggles at Malfoy Manor. His father would well and truly kill him. Not to mention the statue of secrecy that he would no doubt break after they saw his house elves or the charmed portraits or any of the other magical objects that made up his home. He was fucked, but a large part of him felt relief at not having to make the journey alone.

He would have to tell them he was a wizard at some point. Sooner rather than later. He supposed in the grand scheme of things, the statute of secrecy was the least of his worries.

Don't panic. This would be fine. He could just obfuscate them when the time came, if need be. His breaths were coming in little short bursts as he clutched his wand to his chest and curled on his side to face the wall.

He had seen a lot of death during the Dark Lord's regime, but he thought it was over. Thought that he'd never have to endure it again. Now in the span of a few hours, he had seen a witch with her chest ripped open, been attacked by a feral muggle and learned that a disease had infected the bloody world, his friends were probably all dead or fled the country, his parents had left him to rot in St. Mungo's which meant they were probably dead too. He had no luxuries, no fucking idea how to survive without Mipsy.

*Fuck!* He was going to die.

He curled in on himself and didn't even bother to try to stop the potion bottles from smashing to the ground. His lips wobbled and tears filled his vision as he softly cried himself into oblivion.

fell to his shoulders while the other half was pulled up into a small and ridiculous bun of sorts. Draco noticed they both wore heavy coats and boots with thick soles and held long swords at their sides.

"Did you find anything?" The plump woman asked.

"Didn't have time to look while I was saving this one's life." The dark-skinned woman jabbed an accusatory thumb in Draco's direction. He stood to his full height and lifted his chin haughtily at the indignant glances the muggles threw his way. "You?"

The redhead nodded. "Enough to eat tonight."

The male looked at Draco and snorted. "What's wi' the dress?"

"Came from the hospital." The woman answered. "Must've been sedated this whole time or something, because he has no idea what's going on. He's like a deer in headlights."

Draco didn't understand how he was a deer or what headlights were, but it was clearly a jab and he scowled in her direction.

"Well, come on then, in ya pop." The redhead stepped aside as they entered and the man began closing the metal grate with a loud clank.

Draco's gaze roved around the space and locked on a mannequin that was holding a long stick with a small basket at its end. His face must have shown his confusion because the man sidled up next to him, "Nor o' fan of Lacrosse then, lad?"

Draco cleared his throat. "Not really a big—er—sports fan."

The man snorted again (what was it with the snorting?) and looked Draco up and down, "Aye, ye don't seem the type ta ge' yer hands dirty."

Draco sneered. He officially hated the man.

"Come on, everyone's in the back." The man walked to the door at the back of the store as the other two women opened it and stepped in. As Draco stepped through the threshold, he noticed a small lantern in the corner that did a decent job of lighting the room and an older man sitting behind a desk, his boot-clad feet propped on the cheap wood as he balanced a weathered-looking axe on one thigh. A long sausage-like object hung between his moustached lips as smoke billowed from his mouth.

A young, blonde girl, no more than thirteen, sat cross-legged on the edge of the desk. She wore rainbow-colored fingerless gloves as she twirled a small pocket knife that seemed to fold into itself through her fingers with practiced ease. It reminded him of how Blaise would twirl his wand during Divination.

"Who's this poufier?" The young girl asked blandly, looking at Draco with disdain.

"Oi, that's fucking rude, Ruby." The older man admonished. The young girl, Ruby, rolled her eyes and continued folding and twirling her knife. Draco also didn't like her.

"Right, I'm Sonissa. Sonny for short. What do they call you, pretty boy?" The machete woman said as she extended her hand to Draco.

"I'm—um—Draco." He said as he tentatively reached out and shook it.

Her eyebrows shot up. "Draco. That's a strange name. Bit poncy."

His mouth popped open, but before he could respond to the insult she pointed to the young girl. "You met Ruby. The one constantly sucking on a cigar is Archie. The redhead is Mabel, and

She wiped the sticky blade off on the man's jacket and sheathed it into a leather strap on her back before approaching Draco with her palms up. "I'll tell you everything you want to know, but the sun is setting and we don't want to get caught exposed at night. I'm not going to hurt you. Me and my people can help you."

He let out an ungentlemanly snort and began to laugh a bit maniacally. "You—you're not going to hurt me? That's—" he giggled. "Your people? Muggles are going to help me." He muttered and chuckled softly. "This is an awful dream. No, a nightmare."

"Okay, I don't know what a muggle is, but it sounds derogatory, so if you're some bigoted prick, I'll just leave you here to die and turn into Rottter dinner!"

"What the fuck is a Rottter?"

She rolled her eyes and began sauntering away before she tossed over her shoulder, "Either come with me or don't but I'm going."

He glanced around the disheveled street, the sun setting behind the tall buildings casting an eerie glow over the street as he watched bits of paper and trash being carried on the breeze. He looked back to see that the woman was already halfway down the block.

*Fuck.*

He sprinted after her and caught up as she was rounding the same building he had stumbled out of earlier.

"Where are we going?" He asked quietly.

"Me and my companions are staying in the mall for the night. The shops have good security and we think there's probably still food and supplies to be pilfered there."

Draco gulped. He did not want to go back in that 'mall' but he desperately wanted to change out of the scratchy, mint green hospital gown.

As their feet crunched over bits of refuse, Draco winced as little pieces of wood and glass poked the sensitive pads of his feet. The woman pulled a small black square box from her jacket pocket and held it to her mouth.

"Kilo, go for Sigma. Do you copy? Over."

The little box gave a crackle as a man's disembodied voice rang out, causing Draco to jump.

"Kilo for Sigma, I copy you. What's your 20? Over."

The woman looked around before clicking the side of the box with her thumb, "Coming up on the food court. Over."

"Third floor. Sporting Goods. Over." The strange voice box crackled again.

"Copy. On my way. I have a guest. Over and out." The woman pocked the black box and nodded her head in the direction of some medieval looking metal stairs.

Finally, after climbing three flights of scary iron stairs, they came to a stop at a shop front which had a large metal grate over the front. The woman knocked her fist three times rapidly on the metal, and after a moment, the grate began to creak and rattle as it lifted from the bottom, revealing a woman and a man standing inside the shop.

The woman was curvaceous and short-statured with coppery red hair that came just above her collarbones. She reminded him of a Weasley. The man had a thick beard and was nearly as tall as Draco. He was built like he was made up entirely of muscle, with dark brown hair, half of which

# IT'S CHAPTER 3 NOT A STICK

Draco awoke to something poking his arm and he groaned, batting it away.

"Mmph, too early, Misy." He grumbled.

"Come on pretty boy, rise and shine. Time to go shopping."

Draco's eyes shot open, locking onto the face of Sonny as tears immediately filled his vision. Her brows furrowed and she let out a long-suffering sigh, "Oh, Christ, don't cry again."

Draco sat up from his nest of blankets in the corner of the small room. "No, no, no, NO! I thought that was all a bad dream!" This can't really be happening! He yelled, scrubbing furiously at his moist eyes before he began to toss the blankets around in search of his wand.

"Well, sorry to burst your bubble, but it's happening and all fucked. Now hurry up your little stick and meet our in the shop. We need to get moving if we want to on the road before nightfall."

a backwards glance. Sonny spun leaving a sniffing Draco clutching his wand.

He cast a quick scourge on his body and his teeth before begrudgingly pulling himself onto



his feet, stumbling slightly as he crossed the threshold.

"Get enough beauty sleep, boy-o?" Archie clapped Draco on the back hard enough to propel him forward a few steps, the 'cigaret' hanging from his lips bouncing as he chuckled heartily.

Draco didn't respond, he just continued to stare blankly at his new travel companions milling about the small shop as Sonny sidled up next to him.

"You can probably find some decent trackies here, but I think there's a men's shop on the first floor that my dad used to shop at. Had loads of good quality clothing and shoes that'll hold up to wear and tear better."

"Yeah, alright." Draco replied glumly. A fresh suit should boost his spirits slightly, he thought. "Oh, and we need to get you a weapon."

He instinctively looked down at his wand and took a fortifying breath. *Right, now or never.*

"I already have a weapon." He held the hawthorn wood between them.

Sonny arched an eyebrow. "That's a stick."

He rolled his eyes. "No, it's a weapon. And, dare I say, a better one than any of you lot have."

Kieran scoffed, of course. "Aye, maybe we can poke the Rotters ta death wi' yer wee tree branch."

Draco took a deep breath in through his nose and released it slowly. "I have something to tell you all, and I don't want you to panic." They all tensed as he pushed his shoulders back and lifted his chin. "But it's not a stick, it's a wand... And I'm a wizard."

The room was silent with tension for several moments as the muggles stared at him expressionless before flicking their eyes to one another.

Ruby snorted loudly, "You a nutter, pretty boy?"

One by one Archie, Kieran and Mabel began sniggering behind their hands while Sonny just continued to stare at Draco through narrowed brown eyes.

"No, I am not a nutter. I am a *wizard!*" He drew the last word out slowly.

Sonny placed a tentative hand on Draco's shoulder and caught his gaze. "You're a wizard? As in, you can do magic and you wear a pointy hat?"

He nodded. "Yes—well except for the pointy hat. I wouldn't be caught dead covering my hair with one of those monstrosities. I mean, other wizards and witches do, but I guess it's more of a personal preference."

She nodded her head slowly and her eyes widened slightly. "Wow. Okay, you're really a wizard."

Draco let out a relieved sigh. "Yes, so—"

"And I'm the Queen of England."

They all doubled over and erupted into raucous laughter. There was the slapping of knees and the wiping of tears from cheeks as Draco crossed his arms over his chest rather petulantly and waited for them to compose themselves.

Sonny wiped the last tear from the corner of her eye and straightened, still sporting a grin. "Oh, I haven't laughed like that since before the outbreak. Thank you, pretty boy."

Draco huffed. "Would you all stop calling me 'pretty boy'? While I'm very flattered, my name is Draco Malfoy and I am the heir to one of, if not the most powerful wizarding families in Great Britain. This isn't a joke and I'm not mad."

"Well done, Sonny. Ya saddled us wi' a bloke who's aff's head!"

## CHAPTER 2 TRICKED BY WISPS

"You—you just cut that man's *head* off!" He screamed. "OFF!"

"Shhh! They're not as active during the day especially with no cloud cover, but they will be if you don't shut the fuck up!" The woman said quietly and, in Draco's

opinion, menacingly.

"Who the fuck is 'they'?" He whispered back furiously.

The woman seemed to really look at him now, and he felt himself growing rather insecure over his current state of appearance under her appraising stare.

"Which hospital are you coming from?"

"St. M—ern—the—the one down—" he pointed ambiguously to the direction he had come, hoping to Salazar

that there was a muggle hospital that way.

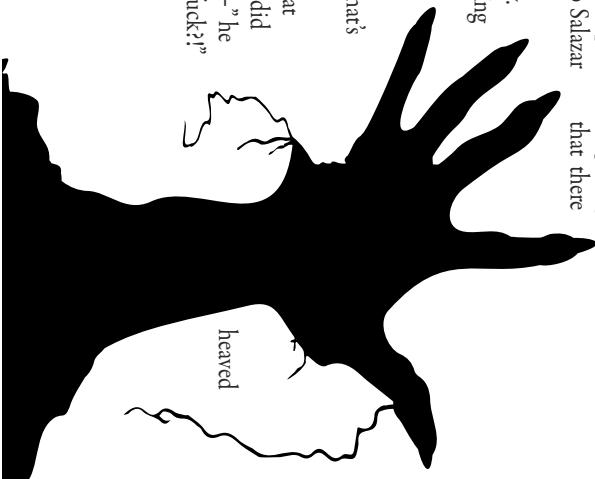
"St. Thomas?" She asked suspiciously.

He nodded vigorously, still trying to catch his breath. "Yeah, yep. St. Thomas. Just woke up and everyone was gone."

"So you...don't have any idea what's happened? The outbreak?"

He shook his head and whispered, "What outbreak? What—why was there—why did he—why did you—your knife—blood—" he out a sob and gagged again. "What the fuck?"

heaved



Draco sneered at the Scot and clenched his jaw. "Till—I can show you—just hold on—let me think."

He mentally ran through all of the spells he could use to make them choke on their teasing. *Aqua Errato* was too wet and far too boring. He would love to hit Muscles with a *Densageo* and watch him panic as his teeth grew to his knees, but he didn't think that would go over well. He could transfigure something. Or conjure something? Or—His eyes lit up as he settled on the spell, casting a quick glance to his unenthusiastic audience.

Draco pointed his wand at a mannequin wearing a ghastly red jumper with the letters MAN U on the front and shouted, "*Dragonfire!*"

The mannequin began to shake and ripple, its legs shifting and growing, its arms stretching and widening as red scales began to form on its exterior. Finally, the head transformed from human-shaped to gargantuan and snouted as the transfiguration took hold.

After roughly ten seconds, what was once a mannequin was now a towering Chinese Fireball Dragon. It huffed and its head prodded the flimsy ceiling as it stretched its leathery wings.

Draco turned back to the muggles with a haughty 'I told you so' eyebrow arched and a snug grin, but immediately furrowed his brow at the look of unadulterated fear on the faces of his companions.

"WHAT THE FUCK!!" Ruby screamed as Archie's cigar tumbled limply from his mouth and rolled onto the floor. Kieran was wide-eyed, his sword aloft and aimed at the transfigured beast, while Mabel stumbled back several steps, her hands cupping her mouth.

Draco rolled his eyes and pointed his wand over his shoulder without looking, ending the spell. He looked at Sonny who was standing stock still, eyes wide as gallons and mouth agape. "My mum always told me magic was real." She whispered, still staring at the space the dragon had occupied. She turned her head slowly to Draco. "You—you're a fucking wizard?"

Draco placed a hand on his hip and cocked his head to the side. "Yes. Not crazy. Magic is real and I'm afraid you'll be seeing a lot more of it if you accompany me to my family home. Oh, and Hogwarts."

"What the fuck?" Ruby muttered, her hands bracketing her temples. "He's actually a wizard."

Archie was bent at the waist, his hands braced on his knees. "He's a wizard."

Sonny closed her eyes and inhaled deeply before opening them slowly. "Okay. Tell us everything."

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Unsurprisingly, the muggles peppered him with countless questions about magic. Draco told them about Wizarding London, Hogwarts and a very simple and watered down version of wandlore and the statute of secrecy.

"Are unicorns real?" Yes.

"Mermaids?" Yes, but it's more appropriate to call them merpeople.

"Can you fly?" On brooms, yes. Or apparition if you count it.

"What's apparition?" Something I'm not able to do at the moment for some Merlin-forsoaken reason.

"What is your favorite spell?" Hair charms.

"How many wizards are there?" I don't know, a lot. Witches too.

"Are there wizards and witches outside of England?" Yes. Loads.

"What do they teach at Hogwarts?" *Herbology, Defense Against the Dark Arts, Transfiguration, Potions, Arithmancy. Tons more.*

"What was your favorite?" *Potions.*

"Can you teach us magic?" *No.*

He responded patiently to each question, as if he were explaining magic to a toddler and actually found it quite endearing seeing their enthusiastic faces light up when he said something that sparked their interest. Ruby seemed particularly fixated on learning more about unicorns and merpeople than she seemed with learning about anything else magical.

Once the thrill had worn off enough for everyone to remember they needed to get moving, they made their way out of the sports shop. A contemplative silence fell over the group as they stopped at several stores and small stands to pilfer through the mess left behind for supplies and food.

As they reached another store front, Kieran, who hadn't asked a single question, and had yet to look Draco in the eye since his revelation, cleared his throat.

"Sonny, why dinnae you help pretty boy ge' wha' he needs while we go find more supplies. Keep yer walkie on channel two."

She nodded as she pushed open the glass door to the shop and walked through the threshold. Draco, who had expected to see an establishment filled with crisp Oxfords and trousers and luxury suits and handmade dress shoes, was met with the appalling sight of *regular, bland muggle clothes.*

He scowled as his head whipped to Sonny. "What is this?"

She looked around the shop, confusion marring her brow. "It's a clothing shop?"

He shook his head rapidly. "No. This is—this is *unacceptable*. Where are the three-piece suits? Merlin, I'll even settle for two-piece suits." His lip curled as he held the fabric of a pair of trousers—if you could call them that—in between two fingers and felt his patience thinning.

"This feels like troll hair! I can't wear anything in here!"

"Fuckin' hell," she growled, "You can't wear a bloody suit in the middle of the zombie apocalypse, pretty boy! Your clothing needs to be practical and durable, not fashionable!"

His hand came to his chest, affronted. "Not—Not *fashionable*?! Never say that to me again."

She rolled her eyes so hard that he only glimpsed the whites of them for several seconds before she snatched a pair of horrendous trousers off of a rack. They were patterned with blobs of different shades of green and brown on them. They were worse than Voldemort's decrepit and tattered robes. An affront to the name of trousers. An abomination.

She continued on through the shop, grabbing a plain black shirt, socks, a black jumper that reminded him of a strange cloak as it seemed to have a hood attached to it, and a pair of shiny black boots with chunky rubber soles, before coming to a stop at a small dressing room at the back.

She thrust the "clothing" into his arms and shoved him into the small cloth-covered room. "Put those on and I don't want to hear another poncey word out of you." She slid the piece of fabric over, effectively slamming the cloth door in his face.

"This is mortifying, Sonny. I can't wear this, I look ridiculous! What are these trousers? Why

You almost became Rotter food, pretty boy."

Draco panted and whimpered as he pointed his wand at the face of a beautiful woman. Her skin was a rich chocolate brown color and her black hair was sectioned into small plaits that ran down her back. She held a blade in her hand that was as long as Draco's arm and he watched as it dripped thick dark red blood onto the pavement. He watched in horror as she lifted the blade and plunged it into the man's decapitated head before pulling it out with a squelch and staring at Draco with what he could only describe as a bored expression.

"Your little stick isn't going to do much good against my machete."

He gulped in heaving breaths and promptly threw up the water he had drunk earlier as she sighed.

"Come on, it's getting dark. Let's get somewhere safe."

Perhaps his magic was drained. He closed his eyes again and channeled all his magic, all his focus and...nothing. Fuck!

His knees buckled as he fell to the dirty street and he held his head in his hands as the potion bottles began to rattle on their shelves. *Don't panic. Just breathe.*

He just needed to get to the Manor. If apparition wasn't an option, he either had to find a broom or walk the 150 kilometers or so to his home. Pushing himself up, he cast a compass charm which showed the direction of West as he began ambling up the street.

He stopped at a newsstand and pulled a water-soaked muggle newspaper toward him. The headline screamed at him as he tried to process the words,

**Prime Minister Declares State of Emergency Amid Outbreak**

As he began to frantically read the rest of the article, that's when he heard it. A groan.

His head whipped to the side and his eyes went wide as he saw a figure walking up the street toward him. His heartbeat sped up and he let out a little puff of air before raising his hand in a small wave.

"Hello!" Draco yelled, "Thank Merlin! I—Ineed help—you're the first person I've seen—"

His words died on his tongue as the figure snapped his head toward Draco and bared his teeth at him and began growling.

"Oh, um, apologies! I don't—nevermind—sorry to trouble you!"

Draco began to back away slowly, the hairs on the back of his neck standing on end as the man started running toward him at full speed. The closer the man got, the more Draco saw that something was deeply wrong with him. His eyes were black and bottomless, his maw was covered in red liquid so dark it looked almost black and accompanying black veins peppered his translucent skin. The man, he looked crazed.

Draco spun on his heel and began barreling through the street, the man still giving chase. Draco tossed a stunner behind him, and judging by the growling and snarling, he was pretty sure he missed. He could hear the footfall of his assailant gaining ground. Draco was fit, but his injury and lack of strength made each step agony. He dared a glance over his shoulder and watched as the man's outstretched hand curled into the back of Draco's hospital gown.

Draco yelped as he was yanked to the ground, losing his grip on his wand as it clattered to the street. The man scurried and yanked at his back as Draco fought to get to his feet. He swung an elbow at the man's face and heard the crunch of the man's nose, but he didn't even flinch, just kept growling and clawing at Draco's shoulders and gown. Rolling over onto his back, Draco's arms strained at holding the man off of him, pushing at the wild man's chest with all his strength. The man's jaw clicked as he gnashed his bloody teeth, scratching frantically at Draco's arms and neck. The Occlumency shield had completely disintegrated now, potions bottles exploding and shattering as panic gripped the edges of Draco's mind.

*This is it. I'm going to die at the hands of a rabid muggle psychopath. Fucking he thought.*

He closed his eyes, mentally preparing for his demise, when he heard a terrible squelching sound and the rabid man's grip loosened. Draco squinted an eye open and, instead of seeing the visage of the crazed man, he was met with the sight of the man's gaping neck where his head had been. Black blood spouted rhythmically from the wound as Draco screamed and pushed the man's lifeless body off of him and scrambled to his feet, snatching his wand up.

do they have so many pockets?" He whined as he swung open the curtain.

Sonny, who was lounging on an overturned piece of furniture, looked up and gave him a low whistle. "You look like you're ready to kick some Rotter arse, pretty boy! And they're called cargo pants. Specifically, those are camouflage cargo pants. Very 'in' right now."

"In the garbage." He muttered, looking down at himself with revulsion. Honestly, why do muggles need this many pockets on one pair of trousers? They should be burned with fire, but the boots were surprisingly comfortable and warm, as was the shirt and jumper.

"Right, well, now that you're geared up, I think it's important to give you a rundown on things you'll need to know when we get on the streets."

He nodded as she held up a finger.

"One: Rotters want to eat your flesh and drink you dry," Draco grimaced, "so avoid their gnashers and DON'T GET BIT. Two," she held up a second finger, "encountering one or two of them is nothing, but a horde of them is when you should run and run fast. Three," she held up a third finger, "and three is the most important, in order to kill them you have to decapitate them or smash their heads in."

Draco felt his stomach roil with nausea, but he swallowed it down and nodded.

"Your stick—erm—wand? It—it can..." Her voice trailed off.

"I can probably use a severing charm to remove their heads, yes. Or a bombarda—it's like an exploding charm."

"Okay, fuck, that's—that's good." She stood, blowing out a deep breath, and began walking to the entrance. "We should meet up with the others and head out."

"I was thinking that perhaps we should stop by Diagon Alley—er—Wizarding London. I mean, to get some magical supplies, like healing potions, brooms, and extendable tents."

"Fuck yes." She nodded her head vigorously, and he smiled widely at her enthusiasm. She shot him a grin back. "You ready to fuck shit up?"

team died on his tongue as he took in the devastation before him.

Papers and parchments were strewn about the corridor, beds had been overturned and, his eyes widened, what looked eerily like blood was splattered all over the walls, the floors, even the ceiling.

His heart began to beat heavily against his chest and he had to grip the doorway of his room as his breaths began to leave him in heaving gulps.

*Okay. Okay, this is fine. I'm sure there is a perfectly reasonable explanation for all of this.*

"Hello?" His voice cracked on the word and echoed through the empty ward.

Silence.

He made his way through the hallway on shaky legs and bare feet, carefully avoiding shards of glass, bits of broken furniture and *ah yes, definitely blood.*

He swallowed thickly and took in a long slow breath. He had to stay calm and find a healer, or an Auror or someone, anyone to tell him what the fuck was going on.

Though, in his gut, he knew that it was nothing good.

He rounded the corner as he came to the end of the hallway and stopped dead in his tracks as his eyes fell on a figure lying in the middle of the corridor. It was a witch, judging by the long hair and fuchsia-colored robes, but the robes were torn apart - as was the center of her chest.

Her torso was drenched in blood which also pooled around her on the tile. Her chest cavity had been completely ripped open, her rib cage jutting out at all angles, bits of her flesh hanging from the ends of the jagged bones. Her skull looked like it had been caved in and the contents scooped out.

Draco felt bile bubble up his esophagus and gagged. He placed his hands on his knees, and tried to control his breathing, which had, once again, begun to quicken into panic. He could not fucking panic. He didn't like using Occlumency. He hadn't had to use Occlumency for over four years, since the war, but desperate calls and all that.

He closed his eyes and focused his magic on bottling up his feelings, this current mind-fuck of a situation, and that dead witch, and poured them gently into a potion bottle. He placed the potion bottle on the top shelf of his mind's potion room and when he opened his eyes, he felt clearer. Less panicky. More focused.

He hugged the wall to support his weight as he hobbled to the stairwell and made it to the first floor atrium completely out of breath. How long had he been bedridden? His legs felt like jelly and his lungs burned from the effort of keeping himself upright.

The atrium lobby, usually packed with witches, wizards, and healers bustling about, was also deserted save for more overturned and shattered furniture, debris and *oh wonderful, more blood.*

With his Occlumency shields up, he walked on, passing through the smashed-in glass doors of the magical hospital and stared unfeeling at the trash and debris that littered the muggle department store. He had never had to use the hidden entrance to St. Mungo's before and noted small rows of muggle shops, their windows smashed and items strewn about. He made it to the apparition point at the corner of the building's facade and closed his eyes, holding his wand tightly as he attempted to apparate to the Manor.

His magic hummed and he felt the familiar pull of apparition. He opened his eyes and, instead of being met with the sight of the gate to his ancestral home, he stared at the same London street.

## J PRETTY D

on the wall read 'St. Mungo's Critical Ward.'

His brain was still foggy and it took a moment for the memories of how he got there to flood back. He remembered that he had been in the final game of the Quidditch playoffs against Ireland and had spotted the snitch across the pitch. He dove his broom at full speed toward the golden ball and just as his fingers wrapped around it, a bludger had smashed into his side. He remembered it knocked all the air from his lungs and the last thing he remembered was falling from his broom in slow motion.

"Fuck." He wheezed, "Healer!"

His plea was once again met with silence.

*What the fuck!*

He waited for someone, *anyone* to come check on him as he stared up at the white tiled ceiling for what felt like hours. His mouth was so dry, it felt like he was dying of thirst.

Surely a healer should have come to check on him by now. He'd had his fair share of quidditch accidents since he began his contract with the Wiltshire Wyverns and he usually had a gaggle of healer witches at his bedside, fluffing his pillows and feeding him pudding.

"Right, guess I've got to do everything my-bloody-self around here." He huffed and pushed himself into a sitting position, his tender ribs protesting at the movement.

He gingerly swung his legs over the side of the bed and slowly pushed himself to stand. His knees buckled immediately and he fell to the floor with a loud thud and a groan.

After several minutes of struggling to right himself, he finally wobbled to the small lavatory in the corner of the room. He turned on the tap at the sink and lapped greedily at the ice cold water, nearly choking with the urgency in which he guzzled it down. He looked up and into the mirror hanging above the sink and grimaced at his reflection. His hair was greasy and limp, and his eyes widened as he stared at the right side of his head where someone had *shaved* his beautiful locks off down to his skin and a jagged pink scar bisected from his hairline all the way behind his ear. *I'm going to hex whoever touched my fucking hair*, he thought. Then suddenly, with a soft groan, he realized that the Essence of Moondew balm he ordered bi-monthly on special import from Egypt was likely not brought to him, nor administered consistently during his time recovering. His hair would surely never recover from this.

With his thirst finally quelled, he hobbled to the door of the room and tried to push it open, but it didn't budge.

Hefrantically patted the pockets of his suit. No, his... hospital gown. Hesitated at the offending mint green material. Honestly, for a wizarding institution, one would think St Mungo's ordered the gowns from a muggle distributor. He'd never felt a fabric so horrid. He could practically feel his skin blistering under the coarse material. He rolled his eyes before turning around to search the room for his wand.

He found it nestled in the top drawer of a small nightstand next to the bed and let out a sigh of relief as soon as his fingers gripped the dark wood. He looked around the room in search of his clothes and realized quickly that his efforts were fruitless as there were none to be found.

He cast a simple *abohamza*, and the lock clicked as he pushed the door open forcefully. "Wait until my father hears about th—" The expletives he intended to deliver to his lazy healer

## CHAPTER 4 PRIORITIES POTIONS

**T**was well past midday by the time they exited the shopping center.

"Lead the way, magic man!" Archie declared with a dramatic bow and a flourish of his arm.

Draco realized belatedly that he had no idea how to get to Diagon Alley from here, but he knew that King's Cross was about three blocks from the Leaky Cauldron. "Erin I don't usually walk there. We have different forms of travel. Do you know King's Cross is from here?"

"About an hour's walk north, I'd say."

Draco nodded and cast a Point Me spell and began to head up the street as he heard Ruby mutter, "So cool."

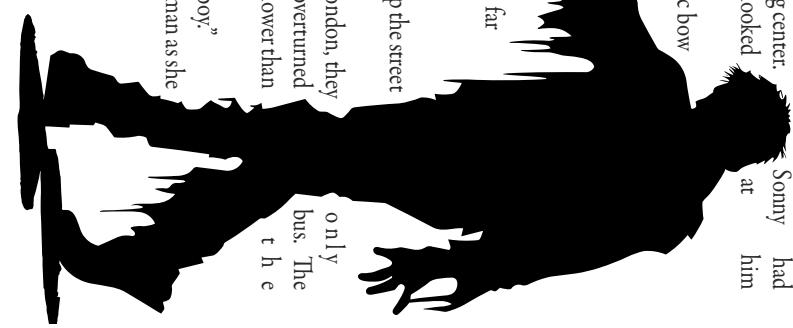
As they wound through the dishevelled streets of muggle London, they made it about ten minutes before a Rottweiler jumped out of an overturned bus. The woman's leg was bent at an unnatural angle and she was much slower than one he had first encountered.

Sonny nudged Draco with her shoulder. "You're up, pretty boy."

"It's Draco." He whimpered and pointed his wand at the woman as she

Sonny had him at

only t h e



snarled and limped toward him. He watched in disgust as thick blood oozed from her mouth and noted the spiderweb-like veins crawling from her black eyes. One of her cheeks appeared to have been half-eaten. *Lovey*, he thought.

Draco slashed his wand and shouted, “*Diffendo!*”

The woman’s arm was separated from her body as it fell to the pavement with a heavy smack. As more dark blood spouted from her bicep, she continued to advance, her remaining arm outstretched towards Draco.

He hadn’t had to duel since the Battle of Hogwarts and he realized he was well and truly out of practice. His heartbeat thumped in his ears as images of his professors and classmates lying motionless and unseeing flashed in his mind.

He took a deep breath and siphoned those memories into potion bottles, placing them in a small drawer of his potions cabinet.

His wand arm was more steady this time as he aimed and shouted, “*Diffendo!*”

This time, the spell sliced cleanly through the woman’s neck as her head rolled back off her shoulders and thumped as it bounced to the ground. Her body took a moment to crumble, hitting the ground heavily as her limbs twitched and convulsed before falling still.

Draco promptly vomited up the dregs of his undigested beans from the night before as Ruby whooped and walked up to his side, slapping him on the back.

“Wicked!”

He tried to smile but it came out more like a grimace and gratefully accepted the bottle of water Archie handed him.

“You okay?” Sonny asked quietly as they carried on down the road. Kieran and Mabel occasionally rifling through automobiles for supplies.

He swallowed thickly and nodded. “Weak stomach is all.”

“It’ll get easier.” She said softly. “Well, not easier, just less jarring I suppose.”

They encountered thirty-four Rotters, eight of which were dispatched by Draco as he practised the accuracy of his severing charms (he only threw up four more times) before they reached the large plaza of King’s Cross Square. Draco led them two blocks west and one block north, as they finally stopped at the entrance to *The Leaky Cauldron*.

Draco rounded his shoulders as he addressed the group. “Right. I don’t really know what to expect in there. It could have been magically protected from the outbreak. And if that’s the case and I walk in there with muggles in tow, they’ll probably lock me up. Or the virus has spread there too, in which case, everyone I know is likely dead.” The last word came out a bit squeaky so he cleared his throat.

“Well, let’s find out?” Archie asked tentatively, peering at the unassuming facade of the building as he blew a cloud of smoke from his mouth.

Draco nodded and squeezed his wand, gently pushing open the wooden door.

The stench that permeated the pub was purrid and thick and had them all covering their noses and mouths with their shirts. Draco gagged and quickly cast a bubblehead charm, taking in a gulping lungful of clean air.

“Do me!” Ruby whispered, tugging on Draco’s sleeve.

Draco cast the charm on Ruby and turned to Mabel who had tears forming on her lash line

# CHAPTER 1 DON'T PANIC

**A**

s Draco slowly rose to consciousness, the first thing he noticed was that his mouth felt like he had swallowed flour powder and he couldn’t peel his eyes open no matter how hard he tried.

He also noted an immense pain coming from his ribs and issued a groan which made him cough, causing the pain in his ribs to heighten and radiate through his side.

He hissed and peeled his tongue from the roof of his mouth with great difficulty. “Water,” He croaked.

There was no response.

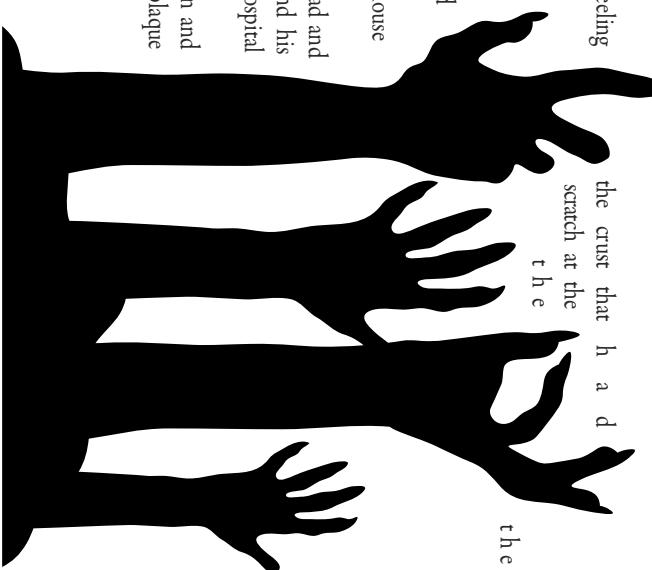
He forced his eyes open, feeling the crust that had formed in them crack and corners as he squinted at sunlight shining through windows to his room.

“Mippy, watet.” He rasped again.

No response. No pop as his house elf appeared. Just silence.

He cautiously tilted his head and his eyes moved slowly around his room. No, not his room. A hospital room.

The walls were a sage green and the bed was crisp white, the plaque



from the acrid scent as she nodded vigorously. Draco cast the charm on Archie and Sonny before turning to Kieran who had wrapped a scarf around his face.

“Don’t” It was the first word Muscles had spoken to Draco since learning he was a wizard and the cold shoulder did not go unnoticed but Draco decided not to press it. If the man wanted to suck in decaying air that was fine with him.

Draco shrugged and turned back to the cavernous room. The space was dark without the usual glow of the roaring hearth and flickering torches, but thanks to the sparse windows, he could just make out the devastation. He walked further in, carefully stepping over broken bottles, overturned wooden tables, and large trunks. The sounds of the old structure creaking, rats scurrying beneath the rubble and owls hooting ominously from the beams above them made Draco shiver as they moved through the large room.

He peered cautiously around the corner of the hall which he knew led to the alley’s entrance and saw the distinguishable outline of the establishment’s owner, Tom, crouching at the end of the long corridor. His hunched back was half-turned to Draco and he was clutching something as soft crunching and slurping sounds echoed in the small hall.

Draco’s eyes narrowed, trying to get a better look, and as Tom lifted the object to his mouth and ripped into it with his teeth, Draco saw it. A small severed leg. A child’s leg. Draco let out a choked gasp and Tom’s head whipped up at the sound, his black-eyed gaze landing on Draco before he snarled and dropped the gnawed limb. With unnatural speed, Tom—or what used to be Tom—sprinted down the corridor towards the group. Draco lifted his wand and shot a severing charm, but Rotter-Tom only stumbled back slightly, his neck seemingly absorbing the spell as he continued to sprint towards them.

Draco let out a shocked squeak as Tom barreled into him, knocking him to the floor. Panic seized Draco as he strained to keep Tom’s flesh-riddled teeth away from his face.

“Draco, push him up and away from you on three!” Sonny shouted. “One, two—three!”

Draco shoved at Tom’s chest hard, pushing his thrashing body as far away as he could muster, just as the end of Malel’s sword sliced through Tom’s neck. Black blood poured from the gaping wound and splashed thickly onto Draco’s neck and chest as Tom’s headless body continued to thrash. Sonny kicked dead-Tom in the chest, causing his convulsing body to topple off of Draco and hit the wooden floor. Dead-Tom’s bloody maw was still growling and snarling when Sonny plunged her machete into his head with a sickening crunch.

Draco involuntarily relieved his stomach of its last remaining beans and water and once he stopped gagging, he waved a vanishing charm—a strong one—at his blood-soaked torso. It still felt stiff and sticky as if the spell could only do so much.

“Ugh! Fucking disgusting. Tom!” Draco yelled. “And why the fuck didn’t he die? That spell was perfect! It should have sliced clean through his head!”

“We have encountered a few that were harder to kill and much faster. Remember the ones near the museum?” Archie interjected and looked to his companions who all nodded. “Perhaps they were wizards and it affects magical people differently?”

“Well, fuck. So Diagon will be swarming with superhuman zombie wizards and I have no way to kill them!” *Don’t panic, don’t panic.*



## SELLING FANFICTION IS ILLEGAL. DON'T DO IT. IF YOU BOUGHT THIS, SHAME ON YOU. IF YOU BOUND THIS YOURSELF. IM SO PROUD OF YOU!

did you call it? Muggle?" He nodded weakly, "Right, you'll have to kill them the muggle way I'm afraid. Make sure to get a good initial swing and since the hatchet is on the smaller side, you may need to hack at their neck a bit—no don't throw up—"

Draco was focusing so hard on not retching that he took the hatchet with no resistance. "Fuck, let's just go. Fuck!"

As they all filed into the small alley behind the Leaky, Draco stood in front of the brick wall that led to one of the entrances to Diagon. He closed his eyes and took a deep breath as he poured the images of Tom's dinner and the feeling of being showered with the wizards' thick blood into a cauldron and placed its heavy lid on top. When he opened his eyes, he tapped the three bricks with his wand in succession as they all began to shift and grind and fold away.

"Holy fuck," Archie breathed out as the bricks revealed the smoking and disheveled street of Diagon.

The group was silent as they moved swiftly through the street, avoiding the charred remains of unlucky goblins, witches and wizards in their path. Once they came upon the storefront of 'Pendope's Potions & Potlaces', they could see where the shop had been hit with an explosion charm as a chunk of the facade was caved in, bricks littering the walkway below. Draco wandlessly cleared their path as they filed into the crumbling store.

Inside, the shop was littered with broken potion bottles and cracked cauldrons, the scent of dried herbs permeated the space and magical plant stems and leaves peppered the surface of the floor.

"Don't touch anything" Draco warned his companions. "I'm going to check the storage room for anything salvageable."

"I'll come with you," Sonny said as she walked up next to him. "Haven't you ever seen a horror film? Never go anywhere alone."

Draco shook his head, "I've heard of them, but I've never seen a muggle film. And I certainly don't want to see a horror one."

Ruby giggled, "God he's like an alien."

As Sonny and Draco moved to the back of the shop, they had to duck beneath shelves that had been knocked over, tipping precariously onto one another. They stopped at a large wooden door adorned with a small golden plaque which read 'Storage' and Draco groaned when he attempted to turn the brass knob and it didn't budge.

"Likely warded," Draco muttered as he scanned his N.E.W.T.- level memories about removing warding spells. He tried some fairly basic spells at first, which of course did nothing, before he began reciting more complex incantations and wandwork. A bead of sweat trickled from his temple as he worked through them until the door gave a small shutter as it shimmered and creaked open.

The storage room was small but it seemed to have been untouched by any damage. It had at least four levels, all accessible by a thin wooden ladder which was on a moveable track. Shelves upon shelves of potions and magical ingredients lined the walls as Draco's eyes bounced from item to item before finally landing on a section containing crimson bottles of blood replenishing potions, Essence of Dirtany, Murtagh, and Pepper-Up. He hastily snatched up as many tiny bottles as he could fit in the small rucksack Sonny had forced him to wear and shoved the remaining in

her bag along with a variety of potions ingredients, bruise pastes, healing balms and some of the more rare herbs he spotted.

As they made their way out of the storeroom and squeezed through the toppled shelves, Draco heard the unmistakable sound of squeals of laughter.

"Oh thank God, we think she drank something!" Archie explained breathlessly.

Ruby just continued to shriek with peels of laughter, clutching her side as Draco rolled his eyes. "Which bottle did you drink, Ruby? Was it yellow and sparkly?"

Ruby roared with another bout of laughs as Mabel tried to cover her mouth, but nodded her head in the affirmative as Draco rifled through Sonny's rucksack for dried shriveledgs which he promptly ripped off a small piece and instructed the teen to place underneath her tongue. They all stared as the young girls' giggles began to subside and she took a heaving breath.

Draco crossed his arms and narrowed his eyes. "What part of 'don't touch anything' was lost on you? You could have ingested something far more sinister than a bloody Laugh-A-Lot Elixir young lady!"

She rolled her eyes and waved a small hand. "It said it was safe for teen and up consumption on the bottle. *Dad!*"

Draco huffed and pursed his lips, "The next stop is a street down and tucked into an alley. This time, do as I say, you little brat."

Ruby threw him a two-fingered gesture as Draco stuck his tongue out at her.

On the way to their next stop they encountered three WizardRotters which took them over ten minutes to dispatch. The group were heaving and sweaty by the time they reached '*Thornbury & Sons Quidditch Emporium*' and pushed through the heavy and shattered glass double doors.

The shop was large, the size of half of a Quidditch pitch and had a domed ceiling which let in enough daylight to see that the store had been utterly ransacked. The wall at the back of the shop, which once held a pristine display of every broom imaginable, now sat bare save for a handful of children's brooms.

Draco growled and stomped over to the magical outdoor supplies section and after digging through piles of discarded quidditch robes, magical camping chairs that would turn into recliners, and what he could only guess was cooking equipment. He found two magi-tents, shrinking them quickly and placing them into his rucksack.

"I suppose that's as good as we're going to find here I think," Draco rubbed the back of his neck, "just one last stop."

\*\*\*

"You brought us to a bloody clothing shop, pretty boy? Your priorities are so fucked." Mabel scoffed as she sheathed her sword.

"It's not just a clothing shop." He sniffed. "It's the best clothing shop. High-quality acromantula silk fibres, dragon-leather accessories, weather-imperious luxury materials." Draco sighed wistfully, "I really needed this."

He chose an all-black outfit (of course) reminiscent of an Auror uniform; the trousers magically tailored to fit his body were lined with Himalayan Yeti fur (ethically sourced and imported), the shirt was a black Oxford (anti-wrinkle and tear-resistant with a built-in dragon leather wand holster), and the pièce-de-resistance was the sleek black Gricentaur-wool peacoat with double-

## PRETTY BOX

First published in 2025. Completed in 2025

Based on Harry Potter J. K. Rowling  
Relationship is Hermione Granger/Draco Malfoy

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Words: 100,833  
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Kudos: 185

Typeset by SENNA STEIN 2005

As a mysterious virus plagues the world, Draco Malfoy wakes up from a magically-induced coma in hospital after a freak Quidditch accident with no clue as to the horrors that have ravaged the country. Helpless, pathetic and alone, he meets an unlikely group that helps him survive.



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breasted front closure buttons and a weather-resistant outer charm. Lastly, donning black wyvern-leather boots, he looked into the cracked shop mirror and finally felt like himself again.

The other members of his group grabbed some new clothing items with enthusiasm as Draco explained the magical benefits of each piece, with the exception of Muscles who stationed himself at the door, sword in hand, staring vigilantly up and down the alley.

Just as Archie was sporting a dashing bowler hat that complimented the wearer, Muscles held up a fist and the group went silent.

"What is it, Kieran?" Ruby whispered.

"I think I heard something, just up the street." He whispered back, eyes still glued on the narrow road beyond the alley.

A tense silence continued for several seconds, all of them straining their ears, until they heard it. The unmistakable sound of snarling and growling. As the sounds grew closer, it became apparent that they weren't dealing with three or four Rotters.

"A horde. We have to go!" Mabel whispered frantically, panic lacing her voice.

"Aye, sounds like way more than we can handle. Especially if they're...like you." Kieran's gaze flicked to Draco before turning once more to the street.

Draco rolled his eyes and positioned himself in front Ruby as they all filed out into the alley, weapons gripped tightly in their hands.

They crept swiftly to the corner where the alley split with the street and could hear the snapping and snarling of the horde growing closer still as the hairs on Draco's neck prickled. Muscles slowly peaked his head around the corner before whipping it back and briefly shutting his eyes, turning back to the group with a hard expression.

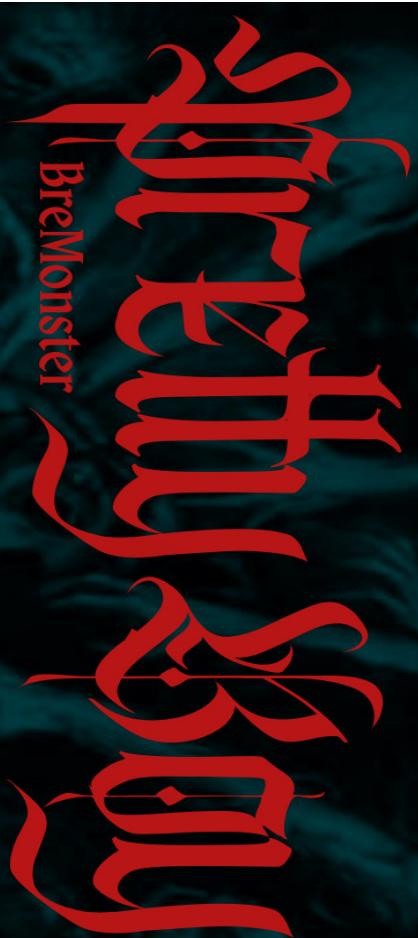
He shook his head slowly and whispered. "Cannae get out that way. Horde's coming from both directions. Is there a back way down this alley, pretty boy?"

Draco glanced behind them at the deserted narrow alley that he knew led to a more unsavory part of Knocturn Alley and took a fortifying breath before nodding. He hadn't been to Knocturn since the unfortunate Vanishing Cabinet incident of 1997 when his life went to shite. He certainly didn't want to take a stroll down memory lane now, but judging by the rabid growling and shuffling of bodies that now sounded only meters from them, he would have to, whether he wanted to or not.

Draco turned to lead the way and as he took a step his foot kicked a glass bottle he hadn't seen and sent it clattering across the cobbled alley. The group froze as the bottle clanked and rolled and finally smashed as it hit the opposite wall.

The silence was deafening. Even the snarling had ceased for a moment as Kieran peered tentatively around the corner once more. The moment his large head breached the corner, a rotted hand shot out and snatched Kieran's hair before he sliced his sword up and through the limb. He whipped around, eyes wide and screamed. "RUN!!!!"

Draco grabbed hold of Ruby's hand as they barreled down the alley, Sonny sprinting at his other side. Draco dared a glance behind them and screamed out some colorful expletives as he watched in horror as at least forty Wizard-Rotters poured into the alley after them. As they wound through the narrow back alleys, skidding around each corner, the Rotters were right behind them. They passed Borgin & Burkes and Draco was positive there was an entrance to another part of



Dragon through the small passageway to the left of the large block of buildings, but as they slid into the narrow passage, they were met with brick walls and no exit.

“*FUCK!*” Draco yelled. He shoved Ruby behind him as the others took a fortifying stance, weapons aloft as the hoard barrelled into the small corridor.

Sonny swung her machete into the neck of the first Rotter as it attempted to grab her. The blow was hard enough to chop through half of the Rotter-Witches neck, but it continued to advance as Sonny pulled her machete out of the wound and took another swing. This time the head was severed as she moved onto the next advancing Rotter. Mabel, Kieran and Archie were hacking and slicing away, dark red blood splattering on the brick walls. As the bodies of the undead began to pile up, three more Rotters took its place.

“We’re gunna die, we’re gunna die.” Draco muttered. There wasn’t enough Occlumency in the world to quell his utter terror, but he jumped into action when a Rotter slipped through the group and headed for Draco and Ruby.

He gripped his hatchet and with a wild swing, plunged it into the head of a decaying witch. He attempted to pull the hatchet free, but it wouldn’t budge from her skull. He used the leverage to keep her out of arms reach as she scratched and clawed at his arms. He was so preoccupied with not being eaten that he didn’t notice that Ruby had let go of his hand until she swung an old rusty pipe into the Rotter’s head, effectively freeing his hatchet from the skull as the head of the Rotter smashed open like a pumpkin at the impact.

“Fight ‘til we die.” Ruby said with conviction, the rusty pipe held tightly in her grip. He nodded, panting heavily and he had the fleeting thought that she would have made an excellent Beater in another life.

They hacked and sliced as the horde continued to swarm the passage until they heard small popping noises accompanied by bright lights, like a spell, and one by one Rotters began to fall lifeless to the ground. After what seemed to be hours but was likely only minutes, the horde was down to ten Rotters before a group of soldiers were visible at the other end of the alley. They wore long black robes and their hoods were pulled far over their heads, covering their faces in shadow. They held black metal objects in their hands, all aimed at the Rotters and with brutal efficiency the objects seemed to fire out spells that somehow killed the undead on impact.

Finally, when Sonny had hacked off the last head and the soldiers had popped off their last spell from their strange wands and there were no more Rotters to fight, the soldier that had been at the front of the skirmish stepped forward, pulling the opening of her robes aside to tuck her bulky metal wand into a holster attached to her thigh. She tilted her head to the side as she stared at Draco before removing her hood revealing a wild tangle of honey brown curls.

“Well, well, well, the ferret lives.” Said Hermione Fucking Granger with a smirk.

PRETTY BOX

# CHAPTER 5

# SILVER SPOONS

“Well, well, well, the ferret lives.”

Draco's eyes bulged and he choked on his own spit as he attempted to speak.

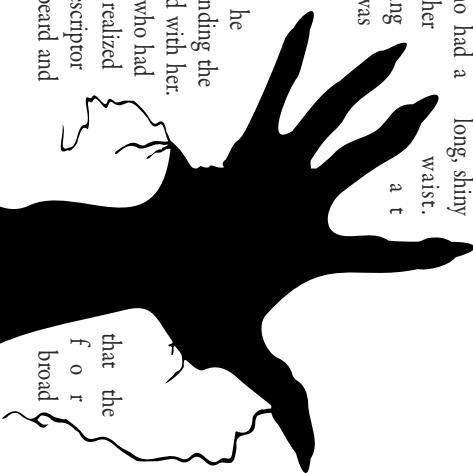
“Granger?” He croaked. “What the fuck?”

She looked...good. Her plump lips were pursed and cheeks flushed as she arched a thick eyebrow. Her hair was still as unruly as he remembered it. Sure, Draco had seen photos of her over the years, but their social circles never clashed so it was strange to notice how much she'd -

Granger snorted, “Where are your pureblood manners, Malfoy? I think you meant to say ‘thank you for saving my life,’ no?”

He scowled as three of Grangers' companions removed their hoods. There was the she-Weasel who had a long, shiny sheet of fiery red hair that swayed at her waist. Draco had seen her occasionally in passing Quidditch galas and fundraisers as she was the assistant coach to the Harpies, but they certainly never spoke. She exuded an air of confidence that someone...

of her ilk usually didn't possess and he was horrified to find himself understanding the obsession all the boys at Hogwarts had with her. Next to her was the Longbottom boy, who had filled out quite a bit since school. Draco realized word ‘boy’ was no longer a good descriptor the wizard who now sported a scruff beard and



shoulders as he leaned nonchalantly against the brick wall of the alley. And lastly, the ginger Weasel himself, who was sneering at Draco, still looked as pathetic as ever with his gangly limbs and that mop of red hair that looked like it hadn't ever seen a brush.

Sonny nudged Draco in the ribs as she spoke, "Thank you, all of you."

Granger's head snapped to hers as she looked Sonny over before nodding once. She then seemed to take in the rest of Draco's companions and turned to him with wide eyes.

"Are they—are they *muggles*!?" She asked incredulously.

Draco crossed his arms over his chest and lifted his chin. "Yes. They—they've helped me."

"Oh this is too good!" Weasel slapped his knee and barked out a sharp laugh.

"How do you guys know each other?" Ruby asked, eyes bouncing between Draco and Granger.

Ruby's head tilted as she studied Granger. "Did you guys date or something?"

Draco spluttered and Grangers' lip curled as the Weasel choked loudly.

"Absolutely not!" Draco shouted at same time Granger yelled, "Fuck no!"

They both stared the other down, chests heaving and mirroring looks of disgust.

"Right, well, we would say it was nice seeing you, Malfoy, but we must not tell lies." The last hooded figure sidled up to Granger's side and pulled his cloak back, revealing the mop of black hair and unmistakable scarred head of The Chosen Git. "Best of luck, but we really must be off. Come on, Mione."

As they began to turn around, Draco blurted, "Wait!"

Granger looked at him over her shoulder, her face nearly swallowed by her mane, and arched an eyebrow.

"We—well, erm, my mum—do you know—is she...?" He swallowed thickly as he trailed off.

Grangers' shoulders fell slightly as she sighed, "I don't know, I'm sorry. Last we heard, she had travelled to France to speak with someone about your head injury. Don't know if she made it back before the Ministry blanketed the country in anti-apparition wards last week."

"They what?!"

Granger nodded, "Apparition, portkeys, floo, broom travel. They were able to create a kind of atmospheric enchantment over the whole country with the hope of stopping the spread of the virus. Didn't do much good, I'm afraid."

*Well, fuck.*

"Why doesn't magic work on the Rotters?" Draco asked.

"Rotters?"

"That's what we call them. The virus was named ROT-456 and well, they're rotting, so it kinda stuck." Sonny chimed in with a shrug of her shoulder.

"What kind of guns are those?" Sonny asked tentatively.

Granger glanced down at her thigh before answering in that insufferable snotty voice he had rather hoped to never hear again. "Magically enhanced to target the infected using high beam UV-rays which are shot at a higher velocity than a normal gun would allow. A mix of magic and muggle technology."

"Lazers!" Ron shouted.

Granger rolled her eyes and corrected, "Lasers. Of sorts."

"She created the enchantment herself!" She-Weasel interjected, her feminine voice laced with

pride as Granger's lips quirked.

"UV? Why UV?" Sonny asked.

"We noticed that the infected have an extreme sensitivity to sunlight and the theory was confirmed after some...testing," Granger replied vaguely.

"Hmm." Sonny nodded. "And where are you all headed?"

Granger and company exchanged glances, seemingly having a silent conversation before Granger spoke.

"We're headed to Scotland. There's a magical school there and we've heard it's safe for now."

Ruby bounced on her heels. "That's where we're headed!" She jutted her thumb at Draco.

"After we check on pretty boys' mum."

Granger and company exchanged another tense moment of silent eye conversations. Grangers' eyes glanced at Draco's group then back to Potter. Potter pursed his lips and his eyes narrowed slightly. Potter looked at Weasley who looked as if he smelled something foul, then looked to the Weasel's sister and Longbottom who both shrugged noncommittally.

Granger looked back to Potter then cut a sharp glance to Ruby then back to Potter whose eyes softened. Potter huffed and then rolled his eyes before Granger's lip twitched.

Potter turned to Draco's group with a lopsided grin. "Suppose we'll travel together then."

The Weasel let out a disbelieving laugh. "You're joking, Harry. We can't take them."

"You're not taking us anywhere, Weasel!" Draco sneered. "And we don't need you."

"Pretty boy," Sonny placed a firm hand on his shoulder, "we would have been Rotter-dinner if it weren't for them. They saved our asses. Safety in numbers, remember? Plus, they're going to Hogwarts too. It only makes sense to travel together."

"Absolutely not. We're going to Wiltshire anyway and they're certainly not coming to the manor."

Granger's eyes widened as she mumbled, "Of course, the manor." She looked thoughtful before she spoke directly to Draco, "We are actually. That'll be our next stop too."

Potter's head whipped to look at her, "It—It will?" At the same time Draco spluttered, "Beg your pardon?"

"The Malfoy Library, Harry! I can't believe I didn't think of it before. Hogwarts' Library may have some collections, but nothing like his pureblood hoarding and that means I can start researching right away! This actually works out well!"

Draco scoffed indelicately. "Seil a tireless little swot. Of course you're thinking about books at the end of the bloody world."

"Those *books* could hold the answers to saving the world from certain collapse, Malfoy." She growled through clenched teeth as she took a step toward him, her hair slightly spiking at the ends. "And I know that your library has one of the more extensive collections of rare books than anywhere else in Britain, so we're going."

"Oh, what? You think you'll create the cure for this, Granger?" Draco sneered as he took a step toward her.

"Yes, that's exactly what I think."

He scoffed. "And if I don't let you through the wards?"

He didn't realize they had been practically chest to chest until Granger whipped out her wand

## 30 PRETTY DAY

and pointed it beneath his chin, the tip jabbing into his throat.

"Woah, okay, everyone calm down," Sonny said as she and Archie took a step up to Draco's side. A small pang of appreciation for the muggles ran through him at their display of solidarity.

"Pretty boy, we need them and they need us. None of us want to die, right?" Sonny said as she looked up at Draco imploringly. "If she thinks that she can—" She looked at Granger, "You think you can create a cure?"

Granger chewed on her bottom lip before replying, "Well, maybe not a cure, but a vaccine or...I—I don't know. I think I could. I want to try."

Sonny nodded her head before turning back to Draco, "Don't you want to save the world?"

Draco scoffed, "No."

Ruby rolled her eyes, "Yes, you do. Quit being a baby."

Draco narrowed his eyes at the teen and sniffed, "Fine."

A wide grin stretched across Ruby's face and Draco had to control his facial muscles from returning the gesture. Instead choosing to roll his eyes and swipe his tongue across the inside of his cheek.

Granger lowered her wand as he heard She-Weasel muttered, "As if you had a choice."

"The sun's going to set soon." Potter cut in. "We should hunker down for the night at Fred & George's shop."

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The large group filed into the colorful building just as the sun had finally set. Granger's group began setting wards at the perimeter and entrance of the shop while Draco's group shuffled awkwardly in the center of the space. Although it looked like it had been mostly cleared out, large product displays still pock-marked the store and shelves were still lined sparsely with the odd Weasley product here and there.

The Weasel cast a darkening charm on the large bay windows that faced the once-bustling street, causing the shop to fall into darkness before clicking a small silver object. Soft golden light sprang from the trinket and lit the magically-powered bulbs throughout the space.

"Wicked! What's that?!" Ruby exclaimed brightly.

"Oh, it's called a Deluminator, it sucks light sources into it and can spit them out whenever you need." The ginger replied enthusiastically. "It was a gift from Dumbledore!"

"Who's Dumbledore?" The teen asked.

"Oh right, he's—" Ron started.

"—Please, I've already had a terrible two days, can we not take a trip down memory lane?"

Draco rolled his eyes and drawled.

She-Weasel snorted and flicked her hair over her shoulder, "Aw, what's the matter ferret? Don't want to reminisce about the time you tried to kill our dear Headmaster but ended up cursing a classmate instead?"

His eyes bulged as he sputtered, his muggle companions turning to him with equally wide eyes.

"I—I—that was—I was—" He stuttered.

"He was a child whose loyalties were misplaced and who was groomed into something that he clearly was not." Granger finished as she sniffed and looked everywhere but at him. "And what the fuck is that supposed to mean?" Draco snapped as he crowded into her.

was forced to go on long trips with the Dursley's during the summers."

"Cheers," He said weakly as he stuffed the strip of gum into his mouth.

Another several minutes went by and he was grateful the nausea had subsided slightly as he tried to tune out the low-timber of Kieran's voice and the light chuckles coming from Granger. He couldn't explain why the sound of their chatter made his blood boil.

"Why are we slowing down?" Potter inquired as the truck seemed to sputter, starting and stopping irregularly.

"Shite, we're out of petrol." Sonny replied as the truck rolled to a complete stop in what looked to be the middle of the barren English countryside.

"It'll be dusk soon, we should find a place to camp." Ginny said as she swung open the vehicle's door and hopped out onto the pavement.

The rest of the group made their way out of the truck and Draco peered around the empty landscape and noted no buildings or houses. Nothing but rolling green hills.

"We're going to camp here? There's no protection anywhere." Draco said with a flap of his hand.

"We can set up protection spells. They don't work for long against several Rotters but a few well placed wards will stop one or two and will give us enough time to dispatch them. We'll need a few people to keep watch throughout the night though in case a horde comes through." Granger replied.

"Nose goes." Ginny replied as she touched her finger to her nose again. The others each repeated the gesture quickly until the only people not touching their noses were Kieran, Draco and the Weasel who was too busy rifling through one of his cargo pockets and pulling out what looked to be a packet of crisps.

He'd need to ask Ruby what 'nose goes' meant.

"Wha' happened?" The Weasel asked as he shoveled a handful of crisps into his mouth, crunching loudly as little crumbles rained from his lips.

Draco's own lips curled into a sneer.

Ginny snorted, "Oh, this ought to be good."

**D**raco scowled as he sat on a transfigured tin can, staring petulantly at a small, flickering fire that the Scot had adamantly refused to let anyone start with magic earlier. The smoke was unbearable and Draco cast a wordless shield charm, nor wanting to smell like burnt wood chips and ash the next day. They had been given "nightwatch slots" which overlapped by one hour, so Draco was currently counting the seconds in his head where the Weasel would join him and disrupt his brooding. The movement of a tent flap had his ears perking and his muscles tensing as the ginger oat stomped his way over own chair from a small wood chip, uncomfortable and unstable, plopping down and running a hand down his face.

"Any trouble?" The Weasel asked.

"Only if you count the smoke from this gods-awful fire." Draco replied flatly.

"Merlin, you would think having a bit of magic to make his life easier would be welcome, but he's wingeing more than you did over a hippogriff scratch."

## CHAPTER EIGHT AND OVER SICKS



Draco snorted before schooled his features once more.

"She's only got about one-thirds tank of petrol, but the others were even less, so it'll have to do."

Weasel smirked, "You can laugh when I'm funny, Malfoy. No need to pretend I'm not hilarious."

"Hilarious in the 'so bloody thick, you have to laugh' kind of way." Draco shot back.

"Hah!" The Weasel barked, "You know, you're kinda funny too, Malfoy. In the 'so pathetic, you

have to laugh' kind of way."

Draco sneered as they fell into an awkward silence.

"You know, I was at your match. The one where you got that." Weasley pointed lazily, presumably to Draco's scar. "Won't lie and tell you a small part of me didn't enjoy watching that bludger smash into you, but the fall...everyone was sure that you were dead. I still don't know how you survived that."

"Yeah, well, I suppose I'm resilient."

"And then waking up in St. Mungo's alone with no idea about the outbreak. I probably would've shit myself."

Draco snorted again, not bothering to hide his amusement this time, "Nearly did. And if you count what happened today, I did piss myself so I'm halfway there."

Weasley chuckled as he twirled his wand through his fingers, "After Hogwarts, I only ever played for fun at the Burrow, but I miss being on a broom."

"Me too." Draco sighed. "Nothing like a stadium full of screaming fans and the wind in your hair."

"Hermione hates flying. I don't get it. It's exhilarating to be a thousand meters in the air with the feel of a broom between your hands."

"Didn't she ride a bloody dragon?"

Weasley laughed fondly, "Yeah, she's mental. Still hates flying though. Something about heights, I dunno."

Draco shifted uncomfortably, "So you two...still going strong then?" He wasn't sure why the fuck he had asked that; it's not like he gave a shit.

"Merlin, no." He chuckled softly, "She broke it off with me pretty soon after the war ended. She's not much for the domestic life of a Weasley and I don't blame her, but I wanted kids, she didn't so...we're just friends."

Draco hummed thoughtfully as Weasley shifted in his seat. "What do you think of that Kieran bloke?" Weasley asked.

Draco scoffed, "Wanker."

Weasley pushed a puff of air through his nose, "Pillock. I don't like the way he's been cozying up to Hermione."

"Still nor over her then?" Draco smirked.

"No, that ship sailed. But she's my best friend and I don't want some magic-hating muggle trying to...I dunno." He sighed.

"She can make her own decisions. And she's smart enough not to fall for his librarian thing, surely." Draco sniffed.

Weasley let out a humorless laugh, "You clearly don't know Hermione."

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The next day started our sunny, but as the clouds rolled in and the group got closer to the town

"She's only got about one-thirds tank of petrol, but the others were even less, so it'll have to do."

Granger held up a red container filled presumably with whatever 'petrol' was and said, "I siphoned what I could out of those."

"Smart." Keiran replied with a small nod. Granger shot him a smirk as Draco rolled his eyes.

"Who's driving?" Archie inquired, puffing on his cigar and letting a plume of smoke billow up into the air.

"I'll drive." Sonny offered.

Ginny exclaimed, "Shorgun!" as The Weasel whined, "Gin! No fair!"

"Don't be a sore loser, Ron." The redhead replied with a wide grin, slapping her pouting brother on the shoulder.

As Granger magicked the engine to start and the group readied the vehicle, Ruby stood beside Draco, bobbing her head to her music before Draco nudged her with his elbow.

She removed her earmuffs as he asked quietly, "What does 'shotgun' mean?"

"It's what we say when we want to claim the front seat during a drive. The first one to yell 'shotgun' gets to sit in the front." She replied flatly as she slipped the earmuffs back on and continued stroking the deranged furby.

Draco hummed thoughtfully as he began to feel rather excited that this was about to be his first ride in a muggle automobile. He had seen cars on the roads during the few times he snuck out to muggle London with Blaise and Theo back in the summer during fifth year or when he and his mother would have to brave the muggle world to get to King's Cross, and he was always curious as to what it would be like to be in one.

With the truck started and all of their supplies loaded, they began filing into the spacious compartment in the back that had five seats attached to the walls on either side facing one another. Draco sat closer to the front so he could stare out the window as they drove. Potter sat beside Draco who scowled at the Chosen Git. His scowl deepened further as he saw Kieran sit directly across from him, with Granger taking the seat to Kieran's left as they chatted about books. Sonny plopped down in the driver's seat which made the whole vehicle shake as she slammed the door shut with a loud squeak of metal on metal.

"Hold on to your arses, folks!" Sonny exclaimed as she placed her right hand on the wheel in front of her and her left one on a small stick that protruded from the middle of the vehicle's control panel. The truck lurched violently before screeching down the road.

Draco held onto his seat for dear life as Ginny whooped from the front seat, the truck hurling through curved roads.

After what he could only assume was about forty-five minutes of winding and twisting and turning, his stomach began to gurgle uncomfortably and his breakfast threatened to make a reappearance. He swallowed thickly and let a deep breath out through his mouth.

"You don't look so great, Malfoy. You gonna hault?" Potter asked quietly.

At the mention of haulting, Draco suppressed a gag as Potter tsked and pulled a small item out of his bag before handing it to Draco.

"It's peppermint gum. Should help with the nausea. I used to get car sick all the time when I

He nodded sadly as they began walking back to the road.

The group was standing around a small tent as he and Granger approached. Potter, Longbottom and Kieran were admiring a new cache of weapons as Ginny noticed their arrival.

"How's Little Malfoy, Malfoy?" Ginny asked with a bright grin. Before Draco could respond to the uncalled-for attack on his *not-little* cock, the Weasel popped out from behind the tent.

Draco sneered as the Weasel yelled excitedly, "Look at these trousers! They have so many pockets!"

The ginger git was wearing camo fucking cargo pants.

Granger looked at Draco before turning back to the Weasel, "Are there anymore of those

trousers, Ron?"

"Loads in that tent!"

Draco's eyes widened as he whipped his head to Granger, shaking it from side to side, "No."

"Yes."

"Absolutely not."

"So you'd rather walk around in piss stained trousers?"

"Honestly yes." He sniffed as she rolled her eyes.

"You're wearing them, Malfoy. You smell like a urinal."

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Draco pouted as he slipped on the cargo trousers, silently cursing the barrage of large pockets and heinous green pattern. At least he looked good in green.

*Could be worse*, he thought to himself, *they could be Gryffindor red.*

He stepped out of the small military tent and frowned as Sonny gave a sharp whistle in Draco's direction.

"Oh, he's back in the camo pants!" Ruby exclaimed as she bounced up and down, clapping her hands together. "And you and Ron are matching now! Like twins!"

The Weasel scowled as Draco bared his teeth and growled, "We are *not* twins."

Ruby giggled and held her hands up placatingly as Sonny gave Draco a pat on the shoulder. "Green is your color, pretty boy. Glad to see you back in something practical. And you hate it so that's a plus." She smirked as his scowl deepened.

The Scor stood, "Good, now tha' the rich brat has gorten more clothes, can we get a move on?"

"Fuck you." Draco spat, shooting him a rude gesture.

"Me and Neville checked the road up ahead and it looks pretty clear. I think we should take one of these trucks, see how far we can get on the highway." Porter cut in, shooting Draco a scathing look.

"Right, I say we find the truck with the most petrol still in the tank, but I don't know how to hotwire military vehicles." Sonny chimed in.

"But you know how to hotwire normal cars?" Harry asked, his brows raised.

Sonny shrugged, "My dad was a bit of a hooligan in his youth. Taught me some tricks."

"Well, we have magic; remember? We'll get one started no problem." Ginny replied, shooting Sonny a grin.

After a few minutes of the group searching each truck, Archie whistled and waved the group over to a towering olive green vehicle with wheels the size of Hagrid's hut.

of Andover, the number of Rotters that stumbled out of their hiding places grew. The group was tired, smelly, hungry and ready for a rest by the time they reached the small village. Draco thought it looked quite picturesque, minus the skeletal remains and debris that littered the streets.

"Look." Longbottom pointed to a small pub that seemed to be wildly out of place from the colorful little shops surrounding it. The facade was painted all black and the sign above the establishment read '*The Bubbling Brew*' with an image of a smoldering cauldron painted beneath it.

"What are we looking at?" Sonny asked curiously. "The abandoned shop?"

"That's a Wizard pub. Charmed so muggles look right past it." Potter replied, eyes still glued

on the shop as great big droplets of rain began to fall from the sky.

"If that's a wizard pub, then we need to get out of here now or find somewhere to lay low until this storm passes." Ginny remarked, an air of anxiety lacing her words. "I've got a bad feeling and I don't want to run into any wizard-Rotters."

As the group split off, with Granger, Mabel, Kieran, Longbottom and Ruby heading to the nearby church to see if it could be a safe place to take refuge, the rest of them wove through the small streets in search of a vehicle large enough to fit them all. Draco hoped they didn't have to drive today; he was far too exhausted and the idea of sitting in a vehicle again had his stomach roiling.

"There!" Weasley shouted as he pointed enthusiastically at a small-looking bus that read 'Danforth's Home For The Elderly' on the side.

Potter peered into the windows and nodded, "It'll be a tight squeeze but I think it could work. Let's—"

Before Potter could finish his thought, a small silvery otter came bounding up to them and the frantic voice of Granger spoke, "Church. Vampires. They're—" and the voice cut off, the otter disappearing into wisps.

"Did she just say fucking vampires?!" Sonny exclaimed. "Like bloodsucking, nightstalking, garlic-hating vampires?!"

"Fuck!" Potter yelled.

"We—we need to...okay, we need silver or—or stakes! We need stakes!" Ginny rattled off hysterically.

"The bulletts are spelled with UV, right?" Draco asked.

"Bullets. Yeah, UV. Why?" Potter replied, eyes crazed. Draco chewed on his lip before answering. "I-I think the UV would kill them, severely injure them at least. It's technically sunlight, right? If we use the guns, we can probably incapacitate a nest. But my best guess is we probably could take no more than five or six of them between us."

"Everyone disillusion, now!" Potter commanded as he turned to run toward the church.

Draco grabbed Potter by the arm, yanking him to a stop. "Vampires can see through disillusionment! And they'll smell us coming before we can get through the doors!"

Potter's eyes were wild and panicked as they flicked to the church and back to his.

"What do we do?" Sonny said calmly, although Draco could make out the fear in them.

Draco looked up and down the street and spotted a small restaurant across the road and

something Sonny had said struck him as he started running towards it before Weasley yelled, "Where are you going?!"

"Stay here. I have an idea!" Draco threw over his shoulder.

He found what he needed immediately when he entered the small kitchen and ran as fast as his legs could carry him back to the group.

Draco handed a bulb of garlic to Sonny, Ginny, Weasley, Archie and Potter as he began rubbing the head of it over his body, the group giving him equal looks of confusion. "During my time under the same roof as the Dark Lord, he recruited many Vampires. I learned a few things about their kind. Namely that sunlight can kill them in seconds and Sonny, you weren't far off, they despise the smell of garlic. Can't smell anything past it and it makes them feel sick if they get too close to the stuff. The house elves had to uproot all of our garlic patches and weren't allowed to cook with it. I think it'll mask our scent and weaken them at the same time. Maybe it'll even make the sun bullets more effective."

"So we're just going into a nest of vampires with guns that might not work and smelling like Jino's Italian Bistro?" Sonny hissed.

Potter mumbled a curse under his breath as he started rubbing the bulb on his clothes, "We don't have a choice."

The rain began pouring now as they rubbed the heads of garlic over themselves under the cover of a shop awning. Once the small group was sufficiently covered in the pungent scent, Potter cast a strong water-repellent charm over them, which would keep the rain from washing off the protective odor, before turning to Ginny.

"Give one of your guns to Sonny," Potter said quickly as he handed his own extra weapon to Archie.

Archie shook his head, "I'm afraid my carpal tunnel makes for a bad trigger finger."

"Fuck," Potter shot a spell at the vehicle as it roared to life, "Okay, get in the van and wait until we send red sparks into the air, then haul your arse to the front of the church and be ready to get us out of there."

Potter turned to Draco, holding the gun out to him, "Safety is off and it's locked and loaded. Hold it tight, put your finger on this trigger, point it at a bloodsucker and shoot."

Draco tentatively reached for the gun, feeling the weight of it in his hand. It was heavier than he had expected and his heart hammered in his chest as they crept toward the church in the center square.

"Gin, Sonny, sneak 'round the building. See if there's a back entrance. We'll raise hell at the front and distract them while you find our people."

With twin nods, Sonny and Ginny ran stealthily to the side of the building before disappearing around the corner. A blood curdling scream sounded from inside the church and Draco's blood began to boil. That was Mabel.

They ran up to the large church doors and Potter cut a glance to Draco and Weasley. They nodded once before Potter pointed his wand at the entrance and yelled, "*Bomberdi!*"

The doors blew apart and Potter rushed through with Draco and Weasley on his heels. Draco expected mayhem, he expected to be attacked the moment they entered, but the church was silent save for small whimpers. The church's stained glass windows had been covered, cloaking the

She finally cut her gaze to his and lifted a brow before looking down at his crotch. His eyes widened, "What? No!"

"Malfoy," She sighed, "I already saw it and it looked pretty bad."

He squawked, "Bad? I said it was cold, okay? It's normally much more -"

"Merlin's beard! Please stop! I mean, that it was bleeding pretty heavily and you don't want it to get infected."

His face burned as he pinched his eyes shut, hoping that a hole would swallow him up and he wouldn't have to show the Golden Girl his bloodied cock. Said bloodied cock chose that moment to sting so ferociously that he let out an involuntary whimper.

"Fuck! Fine." He growled as he removed his hands and balked at the state of his normally beautiful cock.

Granger squeaked out, "Um, okay I'm - I'm going to siphon the blood away and then I'll have to - er -," she cleared her throat, "touch it to disinfect it and seal all the cuts."

"Should have let that Rotter eat my fucking brains," He grumbled as Granger knelt down and began siphoning the blood.

A cooling sensation spread along his shaft as she cast the disinfectant spell and he let out a deep sigh of relief.

He tensed as he watched her small hand lift his member with soft, tentative fingers and felt her magic wash over his cock as she closed each cut with practiced wand movements.

The blood that had flushed his chest suddenly made a swift descent south and his eyes widened as he realized he was about to *obno*.

His cock twitched in her delicate hand and she stiffened. He closed his eyes, trying to redirect the course of his mind.

*Dead pigmy puff. Lord Voldemort's soggy balls. Potter and Weasel naked.*

That last one almost worked, but when Granger's fingers caressed the underside of his cockhead, he felt it jump and harden.

Granger cleared her throat again as he looked down at her; her hand now holding his half-hard member.

He hung his head in shame, "I—I'm so sorry—I—"

"No, it's quite alright. It's a natural response." She replied clinically. "Happy to know you've still got full functionality."

He huffed out a laugh, "Happy are you?"

She snorted and rolled her eyes, "Ecstatic."

Hesmirked as she shook her head, but he noted her attempt to hide the small smile that played on her lips.

"Right. Good as new." She said as she stood, casting a scourify on her hands and holstering her wand.

Draco cleared his throat as he tucked his once again beautiful cock back into his trousers.

"Thanks."

She nodded, "I can still see the piss stain on your trousers."

He hung his head, "I know."

"Let's go find you some new ones?"

atop Draco. Granger slashed her wand through the air and severed its head, letting its limp body fall to the forest floor.

Draco groaned as he let his head fall back into the dirt.

"Are you alright?" Granger asked, a hint of genuine concern lacing her voice.

"Leave me." He mumbled into the forest floor.  
"Don't be so dramatic. Up you get!" Granger sidled up beside Draco, grabbing his bicep and hauling him to his feet with much more strength than her small frame should have been capable of.

Draco stood on wobbly legs as Granger dusted sticks and leaves from his coat.

"Were you bit?" Ginny asked.

He shook his head as he turned to face them. The two witches eyes suddenly grew wide as Ginny began howling with laughter and Granger averted her gaze.  
His brows pinched as Ginny choked out, "Merlin, Malfoy! Put that thing away!"

He looked down to see that his dirt and blood-covered cock was dangling pathetically over his unbuttoned trousers and a large wet spot stained the front of his pants.

He swiftly covered his crotch with both hands which caused him to hiss as he made contact with the cuts on his cock.

"You're hurt!" Granger scolded, her face scarlet as she averted her gaze from his groin.

"Fucking Potter mashed my dick into the ground." He grumbled as he cast a scourgify on his now piss-soaked trousers. He could feel that the yeti-fur trim had become coarse from the urine and nearly cried. *They were ruined.*  
"And you've got a nasty gash on your face." Ginny said through dwindling chuckles.

"Ginny, it's not funny." Granger admonished.

Ginny smirked and looked directly at Draco's cock, "It's a *little* funny."

*Little? Was she talking about his -*

"Hey! It's cold!" He yelled as the redhead cackled.

Granger shook her head as she looked over her shoulder to Ginny, "Go let the others know everything is fine. I'll patch Malfoy up."

Ginny threw Granger an over-exaggerated wink and sauntered away, still giggling softly as Granger rolled her eyes. She looked up at Draco's face with a crease between her brow.

"I'm going to heal the wound on your head, okay?"

With his hands still cupping his throbbing groin, he nodded as she lifted her wand to the side of his face and began muttering an incantation. He was able to see more clearly the constellation of small umbrella-colored freckles that dotted along her nose and cheeks, the small divot of a long-ago healed scar that bisected the tail of one of her eyebrows and could detect the faint coconut and sweet almond scent of her hair. Her magic was warm and soft, brushing gently over his cheek and forehead as the pain receded and was replaced by a strange feeling of contentment.  
He swallowed a lump in his throat and croaked out a hoarse, "Thanks."

She nodded, pulling her bottom lip between her teeth as she looked up at the canopy of trees and cleared her throat.

"Alright, let's see the damage."

His brows furrowed, "The damage?"

cavernous cathedral in darkness with the only light coming from rows of lit candles at the dais at the back of the space.

Rows of empty pews sat on either side of a long runway and there, sitting back to back on a set of chairs, was Granger and Kieran who had their hands tied behind their backs and cloth wrapped around their mouths. Longbottom was sprawled unconscious on the floor in front of them, one of his eyes swollen shut and blood coating his neck.

Draco's eyes went wide as saucers as his gaze finally fell to Mabel, who was laying motionless beside Longbottom, her fiery hair stuck to the side of her face where thick blood was smeared. As he took a step forward, Potter shot his hand out, clawing at Draco's arm. Draco glanced at him and saw him staring up into the balcony above the altar, where at least ten vampires stood, each smiling menacingly down at them. Draco's jaw clenched painfully as he noticed one of the vampires was holding a struggling Ruby by the shoulders.

"Well, well, well. More blood bags have arrived. Aren't we lucky? We didn't even smell you come in." The vampire in the middle said as his sinister grin widened. His bald head reflected the candlelight and Draco could just make out intricate tattoos that traveled from his neck and disappeared into the collar of his shirt.

Potter darted his gun up and fired off a shot, but the vampires dodged. Draco had forgotten how fast they were because within the blink of an eye, the vampires had moved from the balcony. Now, two were stalking their left flank on the other side of the rows of pews, while two more flanked their right. The bald one now stood on the dais beside Kieran and Granger who were both thrashing wildly at their restraints. He still had a grip on Ruby who, bless her, was kicking her legs fiercely.

"You think your little muggle weapons are going to kill us little humans?" A tall vampire with long blonde hair to Draco's left laughed as he stalked closer. Potter had his gun trained on the bald leader as Draco pointed his own shakily at the advancing vampires and he assumed Weasley did the same to the ones on the right.

The blonde vampire took another step closer and stopped suddenly, inhaling through his nose before coughing violently and stepping back. Another female vampire looked at the blonde curiously before turning to Draco with a sneer. She took a step toward Draco, but once she got to the same point the other did, she hissed and spat on the floor, sucking in great heaving breaths as if she were breathing in poison.

The vampires that surrounded them began hacking and coughing so ferociously that they didn't even hear when Harry yelled, "Now!"

Then, everything happened at once. Draco aimed his weapon at the female vampire who was rubbing at her bloodshot eyes and pulled the trigger of his weapon. The bullet hit her in the thigh, which was not where he intended and, startled by the force of it being shot out, the gun slipped from his hand. The female shrieked in pain from the bullet wound to her thigh, but as his gun hit the carpeted floor, it let off another shot that hit her directly in the head and she fell to the floor in a limp heap.

The writhing blonde vampire nearest him hissed and made to grab for the gun as Draco scrambled for it, wrestling the weapon from the snarling bloodsucker. Draco heard pops of guns going off and shouting and screaming but he could do nothing to check the well-being of his

companions as the vampire knocked the gun from Draco's hand and pinned him to the ground to straddle him, coughing and hacking all the while.

Draco tried to lift his hips and buck the vampire off, but its hold on Draco's wrists tightened painfully and Draco felt as a bone in his wrist snapped. He let out an involuntary scream just as a bullet pierced through the cheek of the vampire. His face combusted into flames and ash at the site of the wound and the vampire fell off of Draco and hit the floor with a dull thud.

Weasley stood over him and extended a hand to Draco and pulled him to stand. Draco cradled his wrist to his chest as he picked the gun off the floor and looked around.

The vampires were dead. Ginny was on the dais untying Granger, then Kieran from their restraints as Sonny cradled a sobbing Ruby tightly. Draco let out a relieved breath that Ruby seemed unharmed. Traumatized, yes, but alive. The same could not be said for Mabel, whose skin was pale, almost blue and her eyes were glassy and unseeing as a barely conscious Longbottom held her limp hand. Draco swallowed the bile that filled his throat and turned, walking briskly down the runner and out onto the steps of the church to vomit into a planter.

"You alright?" Porter sighed as he stepped out and sat dazedly on the top step. Weasley joined him and did the same.

Draco shook his head, wiping his mouth on a small handkerchief he pulled from his coat before answering, "No."

"Same. I need a stiff fucking drink," Weasley agreed. "Archie is probably worried sick," Porter mumbled as he shot a small string of red sparks into the sky.

"I think my wrist is broken. Can...can someone—"

"I'll go get Mione," Weasley said as he pushed off the step and stumbled back into the church. "Thank you. For today. I don't know what we would've done—"

"Please don't—" "Just take the bloody thank you, Malfoy," Porter breathed, exasperated.

The screeching of tires rounded the corner and the van came to a halt in front of the church as Archie barreled out of the driver's seat.

"Did everyone—is anyone—"

Porter and Draco exchanged looks before Draco turned to Archie and shook his head solemnly, "Mabel."

Archie let out a gust of air as if he'd been punched in the gut, staggering back a few steps before he said, "There's a cemetery just there. We should bury her and then I want to leave this place and never set foot here again."

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After Granger had set the bone in his wrist and he drank the first of many sips of Skelgro from their makeshift apothecary, they did exactly what Archie suggested and buried Mabel under a towering oak tree in the church's cemetery as the rain pattered down through the canopy.

They didn't linger long and as they filed into the small vehicle, Draco and the others were filled in by Granger as to what happened when they had first entered the church. According to her recounting, the vampires cornered them as soon as they stepped through the doors and Granger was only able to send a partial patronus before she was overpowered. Apparently the vampires

Rotters, removing his helmet-covered head and swiveling to the next Rotters whose decaying arms were outstretched. His sword cut through the limbs of the Rotters as Kieran swung his sword down splitting its head in half. He deftly severed the heads of the other two Rotters before flicking his sword, blood splattering from the blade onto the concrete as he panted.

"Show off," Mabel muttered, while Draco caught the impressed glance Ginny threw at Granger. The latter shaking her head as a small smile played on her lips.

Draco's lip curled into a sneer.

"Well done, Keir," Sonny said as she gave a small clap.

"Let's check the area for supplies. Guns, ammo, medicines. Anything you think could be useful." Granger tossed to the group before Ginny looped her arm with Granger's and tugged her toward a set of large tents along the street as the rest of the group paired off, leaving Draco and Ruby standing alone.

His sneer intensified as he considered that the group thought he was as helpful as a teenager with rainbow gloves and a cursed furby tucked under her arm.

Draco began walking to the edge of a copse of trees before Ruby called out, "Where are you going?!"

He looked back over his shoulder, "To use the little boy's loo. Go find Sonny or Mabel or whoever; I don't care."

"You shouldn't go anywhere alone," She said in a sing-song voice as he rolled his eyes and continued walking away.

He marched a few meters into the treeline, stopping for a moment to listen for any movement in the thick woods. Hearing none but the soft chirping of birds, he sniffl, placing his wand in his holster as he unbuttoned his trousers.

That Destiny song was stuck in his head and he began humming the words he could remember quietly as he pulled out his member and began relieving himself, one hand leaning against the large tree.

"I'm a survivor, I'm a survivor...something, something...I'm a survivor." He had to admit, it was very catchy.

Suddenly the forest went deathly quiet. The birds stopped singing and so did Draco as he continued to relieve his bladder, but the hairs on the back of his neck stood on end. As he straightened and contemplated the change in atmosphere, a Rotters jumped out from a large oak tree behind Draco, causing him to let out an unholly scream reminiscent of when he saw a cloaked figure devouring a unicorn in the Forbidden Forest in first year. Before he could pull out his wand, the Rotters pushed him to the ground and Draco's face slammed into the forest floor. His exposed and still leaking dick scraped against jagged rocks and sharp branches as he was pummelled into the dirt, the Rotters scrabbling for purchase and scratching at Draco's thick trench coat.

Draco's left hand was still wrapped around his cock and was therefore useless as it was sandwiched between his body and the ground. He tried to swing his elbow into the Rotters' snarling face but he didn't have a good angle and *Fuck! He was going to die with his dick out.*

Suddenly the weight of the Rotters lifted from his back and he peered over his shoulder to see Ginny and Granger standing side by side. Ginny had her wand pointed at the undead man and heavy ropes were now tied around the Rotters's body as she levitated the snarling creature from

to-shoulder at the front of the group, while Granger and Ginny chattered quietly behind Draco's group. His ears perked up when he could just make out the sound of his name.

"—or Malfoy."

"Gin, please shut up." Granger whispered softly.

"Well, they're both - And the way - both - at you." Ginny whispered back, Draco only catching bits and pieces.

Before he could analyze the whispered conversation about him, the group halted abruptly and he narrowly avoided bumping into Archie walking ahead of him. He peered over the group and tilted his head at the gigantic olive green monstrosities blocking the road, noting a large sign at the center of the makeshift blockade that read "*Road Closed. DO NOT ENTER.*"

"Right. I think we've found the first checkpoint out of London proper." Archie mumbled, puffing heavily on his cigar.

"Shh! Do you hear that?!" Ginny asked.

They all silenced and listened as a faint humming noise filtered through the barrier just on the other side of the trucks.

Porter turned to the group. "The street looks to have lots of overhead tree coverage, so we won't have the protection of the sun in there. Heads on a swivel, everyone. Don't break formation. We get through it as quickly as we can."

Draco's shoulders tensed as the muggles held their weapons tightly and the Gryffindors pulled out their guns and wands. He pulled out his own wand and gripped it so hard his knuckles turned white as the group advanced over the concrete barriers and through the narrow opening between the two large vehicles.

Draco's eyes flitted to the dried brown streaks soaking the asphalt, the remnants of human flesh and entrails that littered the trails of old blood.

His breathing became heavy as the group moved forward, and the humming became more pronounced, until they realized it wasn't a humming at all, but a growling. A man in a camouflaged uniform was just visible, his head caved in and the contents of his skull scooped out, much like the witch he'd first seen at St. Mungo's. The rest of his body was obstructed by another monstrous vehicle, but as they moved around the truck, Draco's stomach flipped and he had to stifle the need to wretch.

The man's torso looked like it had been picked clean of tissue, muscles and organs, while his legs twisted unnaturally as four undead soldiers fought over the remaining flesh of his calves. Their teeth gnashed at his bones and ripped out tendons, which snapped like unholy rubber-bands.

"Should we disillusion?" Draco asked quietly.

Granger shook her head. "Can't risk not being able to see each other if we have to fight."

"We need to save our ammunition too, so someone will have to dispatch them. Nose goes," Ginny whispered as she touched a finger to her nose. Draco's brows furrowed as he watched the rest of the Gryffindors quickly touch their own noses as did Ruby, Mabel and Sonny.

"Oh for fuck's sake." Kieran grumbled as he pushed through the group and approached the distracted Rotters, sword poised in front of him as he whistled. The heads of the Rotters snapped to him as they all dropped their lunch and the man's destroyed legs fell to the ground with a dull thud. The Rotters snarled and got to their feet as they ran toward the Scot. He swung at the first

wanted live human pets to keep as a steady source of food as the outbreak had severely affected their food supply. One of the vampires attacked Mabel and didn't stop, and this led to Neville getting the shit kicked out of him and bitten.

While Draco was wrestling that blonde vampire, the bald leader had intended to bite Ruby, but she, being the little badass she was, bit his ear clean off, and as he howled in pain, he left himself open to be shot by Sonny who had snuck in through the back with Ginny.

The car ride was silent as they drove; small sniffles could be heard every so often before Sonny spoke, "There's a CD player up here, Rubes. Why don't you hand me your favorite mix?" And that's how they spent the last thirty minutes of the trip to Wiltshire, listening to a very sad but beautiful song about driving that Ruby said was by "a band called Incubus" which Granger assured him was just a band name and they were not actual Incubi.

Draco, nauseous and in pain, finally started recognizing landmarks and scenery as they neared the manor and he began directing Sonny to his ancestral home.

His heart beat uncontrollably as they pulled into the narrow lane of the estate and finally lurched to a stop outside the towering goblin-wrought gates of Malfoy Manor.

# I'M A SURVIVOR

**G**

ratefully, it was another sunny day as they trudged their way out of London and wended through roads that were packed with abandoned automobiles and enormous, overturned red buses.

Draco walked beside Ruby, who had pulled out her music man contraption and began fiddling with the buttons before she noticed his interest.

"Destiny's Child. Wanna listen?" She asked as she held the earmuffs up.

Draco shrugged, "I suppose."

He placed the earmuffs on his ears and started when what sounded like violins boomed through his eardrums and a moment later a woman's voice began singing.

*'I'm a survivor. I'm gonna make it. I will survive, keep on surviving.'*

He thought the song was a bit on the nose to their current predicament as he listened, but was impressed at the ingenuity of muggles to have figured out a way to have music available to them on the go. He personally would have preferred a classical piece by his favorite Wizarding composer, Franz Van de Vijver. When the song was over he removed the earmuffs and passed them back to Ruby who asked excitedly, "Sooooo, what did you think?"

Not wanting to be rude, his pureblood manners kicked in as he said, "Destiny has a lovely voice."

Ruby giggled. "Destiny's Child is the group's name. There are three singers."

"Oh, well, they have lovely voices, but it's - er - not really my style."

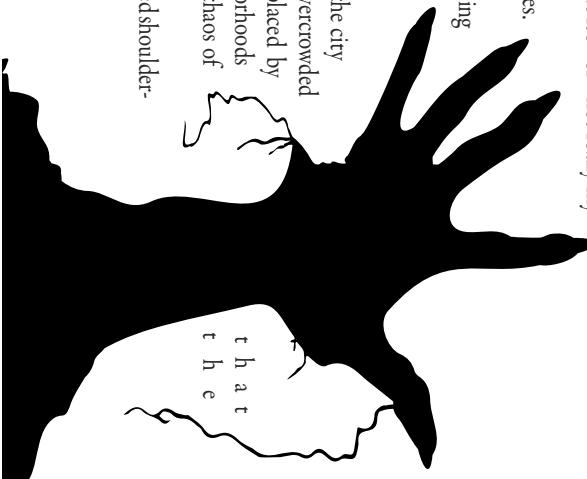
Ruby shrugged, "I have other CD mixes.

We can find something you like."

Draco's cheek twitched in the beginning of a smile as Ruby slipped on the earmuffs and hummed along to the music.

They had walked far enough out of the city that the scenery had begun to shift. Overcrowded buildings and modern shops were replaced by rural roads and small, quaint neighborhoods seemed less outwardly affected by the chaos of outbreak.

Porter, Weasel and Longbottom walked shoulder-



See, he could be useful. And...nice.

# CHAPTER NINE

## MALFOY WARD

Draco sucked in a harsh breath as he stared at the intricate iron gates of Malfoy Manor. The gates swung open in greeting as he stepped up to them, but as he passed through the threshold, he could feel that the normally heavy wards that should have pulled at his skin were extraordinarily weak. They felt more like a tickle against his magic than the assault they should have been. Malfoy Manor used ley lines and ancient familial wards to keep the estate safe from a maelstrom of unwanted attacks or visitors and his stomach sank at how it was clear they hadn't been strengthened in some time.

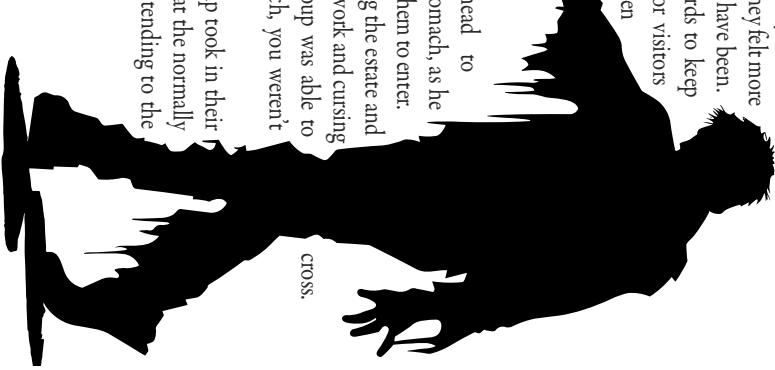
A throat cleared and Draco turned to see the group was standing just on the other side of the gates.

"Oh, right." He said absently, shaking his head to dislodge the growing feeling of unease in the pit of his stomach, as he walked to the gate and began adjusting the wards to allow them to enter. The wards were unenthusiastic about the muggles entering the estate and it took him nearly five minutes of incantation, heavy spellwork and cursing under his breath until they finally relented and the group was able to

"Jesus Christ, pretty boy, when you said you were rich, you weren't lying," Sonny said wide-eyed.

The walk up the long path was fairly silent as the group took in their surroundings. Draco's heart raced harder as he noticed that the normally bustling gardens seemed to be unkempt, no house elves tending to the

CROSS.



hedges, no peacocks roaming and cooing. With each step closer to the large ebony oak doors, Draco had to tamp down his growing fear that his mother would not be safe and holed up inside.

"Draco," Potter called quietly. "If—if we get in there and your parents are..."

"Malfoy," Potter said. "Malfoy is... Well—Do you want us to go in first? Just in case, so you don't have to see..." Potter trailed off, rubbing the back of his neck awkwardly.

Draco's shoulders dropped as he shook his head vehemently, "No. No, they're not—They're in there. Or they got out." His voice cracked, his voice wasn't even convincing to himself. Ruby sidled up next to Draco and linked her hand in his, giving it a reassuring squeeze. He took a deep breath and squeezed her small, rainbow gloved hand back.

Pushing open the heavy doors, they swung open on silent hinges. The foyer was dark, but as he walked further in, the sconces on the walls began to flicker to life, and the scene before them made his stomach lurch.

The walls were splattered with dried blood and the portraits that hung on the walls were skewed and many were stained, their canvases torn. The foyer was littered with the small skeletal body's of this house elves. House elves that had raised him, that had tended to his family for generations were now just piles of brown bones that had been picked clean of flesh. Small little skulls with sunken eyes stared blankly at the ceiling. There were other skeletons too, larger ones, human ones, most faceless and fleshless. The ones who still were somewhat intact had colorless skin that looked like it had been vacuumed to their bones, as if they had been sucked dry; their skulls destroyed and devoid of brain matter.

Draco's breath punched out of him as he let go of Ruby's hand and fell to his knees. It was then that he knew his parents were not safe at all. A tentative touch on his shoulder caused tears to well in his eyes as he tried to control his breathing. "It's not them, it's not them."

"We'll find them, boy-o," Archie's gentle voice echoed around the silent space as he gave Draco's shoulder a comforting squeeze.

Draco sucked in a trembling breath as Archie pulled him to his feet and tucked him into his side. Archie's strong hold on Draco's shoulders felt like the only thing keeping him standing as they walked over the piles of bones and sunken skin, the little unseeing skulls.

The group split up into groups and began the tedious task of checking each of the eighty-eight rooms for any signs of life.

Draco led Archie, Granger and Longbottom to the West wing of the manor, the wing that belonged to his parents. It was so dark in the corridor that they had to use their wands to see where they were stepping. The sconces and torches that should have flickered on, were torn from their places on the walls and laid scattered unceremoniously in the hallway.

Draco rounded his shoulders as they reached the end of the long corridor and were met with the double doors that opened into his parents' suites. He looked back at his group, Archie giving him an encouraging pat on the shoulder as Granger and Longbottom nodded holding their wands aloft in one hand and their guns in the other.

Taking a fortifying breath, he gently pushed the doors open. The large suite was swallowed by thick darkness, their wand light unable to do much to lighten more than a few steps ahead of them as they gingerly walked further into the room. The large windows had been covered by

Draco hummed thoughtfully. "And how exactly do you expect to create a cure?" She rounded her shoulders as she tensed, "I don't have to list off my credentials to the likes of you."

"That's not what I'm asking," Draco gritted out through clenched teeth. "Trust me, I know you're the Brightest Witch of Our Age. My father never let me forget that I was academically second best to you. I'm not saying you aren't capable of it; I'm merely curious as to your theories."

If Draco didn't know any better, he could've sworn that a dusting of pink tinged her cheeks before she responded.

"Oh," She mumbled, looking rightfully abashed. "Well, it's not a typical zombie uprising like the Saudi Arabian plague of 1722 nor the Southern American Zombie outbreak of 1905."

"How so?" He asked, resting his elbows on the tobacco-colored chair as he steepled his fingers together.

Granger leaned forward, "Both were a result of dark wizardry and necromancy. And I'd need to do more research about other zombie outbreaks throughout the centuries, but I'd bet those started the same. If these Rotters started as necromanced, they wouldn't be able to infect others who then turn into zombies. It just doesn't work that way."

Draco let out a small laugh, "Of course! Like Inferi!"

"Yes! A sorcerer would have to reanimate each corpse to create an army of the undead for whatever nefarious reason."

"But Rotters turn after getting bit. So you're saying—"

Granger nodded, her amber eyes bright. "Exacth! So obviously, it's transmitted through the bite, but my theory is, if I can test the blood and saliva of an infected individual, I can try to isolate the virus and find out how to counteract the mutation or at the very least try to make a vaccine."

"A vaccine?"

"Oh, it's like a potion that can make the ingestor immune to a virus or infection. But I would need a laboratory to conduct my experiments, which is why we were hoping to get to Hogwarts."

"I have a lab," Draco blurted as Granger blinked slowly. "At the manor, I have a lab. For potions, mostly. But you could use it—to—er—for research or experiments..." He trailed off.

Granger's eyebrows pinched together, her mouth popping open in surprise. "Really?"

Draco swallowed thickly and nodded. "It's got state of the art equipment and I could help you.

I took an advanced course on magical maladies after Hogwarts," He shrugged nonchalantly.

"You—you want to help?" She asked softly.

He could have sworn her voice sounded almost hopeful.

He nodded and wiped his curiously sweaty hands on his trousers, "Seems like a good theory."

"Jesus, get a room you two. Blegh!"

Draco and Granger started, as Ruby made a gagging gesture. Draco had forgotten that they were still surrounded by several other people who were now all staring at them with looks ranging from confused to amused.

Granger cleared her throat as Longbottom popped his head into the living room, "Me and Mabel made shepherd's pie! Who's hungry?"

Draco's previous need for sustenance had abandoned him as his stomach was currently lodged in his throat.

Granger swallowed her bite before saying, "He means taekwondo. And I'm not very good."

"Oh, I'd love to spar with you! My taekwondo skills could use some brushing up." Sonny replied as Granger gave a small nod.

"And you, Archie?" Porter asked before taking a large gulp from a bottle of water.

"I was happily retired. Realizing now that I should've just blown all my pension on that trip to the Bahamas like I always planned." He laughed, but the cheeriness of his response didn't quite reach his eyes.

"And your?" Granger asked the Scot who seemed startled at being addressed.

"I was a librarian."

Granger perked up, as did Draco at this revelation, while the rest of the lions groaned in unison. "I wanted to be a librarian when I was little! What was the strangest book you've ever read? Oh, what was the most popular book at your library? No! What's your favorite book?" Granger rattled off, barely taking a breath.

The Scot's lips quirked. *Quirked!* What the fuck was happening? Whatever it was, it made Draco's insides squeeze uncomfortably.

"I'd be surprised if you knew of it. It's *Whiskey Galore* by Compton Mackenzie."

Granger nodded her head vigorously, her mane of curls bouncing with the movement. "My father loved that one. *'Love makes the world go round? Not at all—'*

"—*Whiskey makes the world go round.*" The Scot finished, an actual smile creasing his eyes. *A smile!*

Draco hated him.

The Weasel cleared his throat loudly. "Shall we get a move on, then?"

Draco never thought he'd be grateful to the Weasel for ending that conversation so abruptly. Yet he wasn't quite sure what bothered him about it.

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As the sun inched closer to the horizon, their group chose a frankly hideous home to stay in for the night. It was a two-story, brick flat attached to a row of identical looking flats that stretched down the entire street.

Inside, the home had clearly been occupied by an elderly woman, judging by the copious amount of lace doilies that covered every available surface and the eye-watering, powdery smell of perfume.

After they all unloaded their supplies and settled the sleeping arrangements, the group gathered in the small living room as Mabel and Neville tinkered loudly in the kitchen preparing food.

Granger sat in the corner of the obnoxiously floral sofa with a book, her brow furrowed in concentration as her eyes flew across the pages. She sat squeezed beside Porter, who was chatting quietly with Ginny on his other side.

"So you said there are spells that don't work against Rotters," Draco interrupted, "but there are some that do?"

Granger flicked her eyes to him before shutting her book with a snap as she nodded. "Curses don't work. Any spells that could be lethal to a human doesn't harm them. But they aren't impervious to strong non-lethal charms and spells, like binding charms or jinxes. I found that lumos solare was quite effective as a means to stave off an attack. Hence the UV bullers."

bedsheets and the room was eerily silent, causing the hairs on his arms to stand on end. Draco knew this was the study that connected to the bedroom, then the bathroom was off to the left. He twisted and headed for the bedroom and as his outstretched hand reached for the ornate silver handle, the door to the main suite slammed shut. They whipped around, the light of their wands slashing to and fro as they formed a tight circle, backs pressed against one another.

A shadow sped across the room silently and all Draco could hear was the group's panicked breaths as Longbottom whispered, "Rotter!"

"Malfoy, is there a fireplace in here?" Granger whispered frantically.

His eyes widened as he understood her question and pointed his wand in the general direction of the stone fireplace and shot off an *incendio* spell. The fire roared to life and the room filled with light just as the snarling maw of Lucius Malfoy lunged and sunk his bloody teeth into Archie's neck.

Archie let out an unholy cry as Draco watched in frozen horror as his father's teeth pulled away from Archie's neck with a chunk of flesh and tendons, blood spurting from the now gaping hole. Pushing Archie to the floor, Lucius pounced on top of him just as Granger and Longbottom pointed their wands at his back and yelled in unison, "*Incarcerous!*"

Thick silver chains shot out of Grangers' wand at lightning speed, wrapping around Lucius' hunched form causing Lucius to let out a deafening animalistic roar as Longbottom's steel chains tightened around his fathers' legs.

Lucius continued to snarl and growl as the chains seemed to tighten around him, his teeth clacking with each snap of his jaw. Draco rushed to Archie's side, frantically pressing his hand to the gushing wound.

He began *accio-ing* healing potions from his bag, pouring them indiscriminately onto the wound as blood continued to pour from the exposed flesh. Archie gasped for air, his breathing labored and wet-sounding as he coughed, thick blood splattering from his mouth.

"Malfoy, you can't save him." Granger implored. "He was bit!"

"No, no, no! *Vulnera Sanentur!*" Draco yelled, frantic, his voice trembling as he attempted the wandwork with shaking hands. Archie let out a choked gurgle, his hands flailing, clutching at Draco's arms until his body convulsed and finally went still, his hands falling limp at his sides.

Draco stared at Archie's unblinking eyes. He just stared and stared. Draco's hand still pressed against the wound, and a small whimper escaped his throat as he shook his head. "Malfoy." There was a pressure at Draco's shoulder, but he couldn't look away from Archie, couldn't hear anything except his father still thrashing and snarling wildly against his restraints on the floor next to him. "Malfoy, you shouldn't be here for this. Come on."

Strong hands pulled Draco up and he stood, dazed and unable to tear his eyes away from Archie's lifeless body as his vision started going dark at the corners.

A garbled voice drifted to his ears, "I think he's in shock, Hermione. I'm going to take him down—I don't know where—but I'm just going to get him out of here. Are you good to—" "Yeah, Nev, I'll take care of it."

Draco was organizing ingredients in his potions cupboard, labeling each glass container with his memories and tucking them onto their shelves, when the potions bottles began to rattle, some ingredients turning deep crimson in their vials. The next moment, he was sitting on a chair in the

Child. She's absolutely obsessed."

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kitchens. How did he get here?

He blinked, sucking in a stuttering breath as Longbottom walked into view and sat at the table opposite him. Longbottom pushed a steaming mug in front of Draco.

"Chamomile and lavender tea with calming draught. It'll help." Longbottom said kindly, pushing the mug closer still. "Go on."

Draco's hands circled the mug, letting the warmth soak into his numb fingers. Why were his fingers numb? Why were they bloody? Why did he need a calming draught?

"What—" He began to ask before Longbottom interrupted.

"Tea, Malfoy. Please."

Draco looked down at the dark golden liquid and it felt as if he were staring at it from someone else's eyes, his hands — Were they his hands? — gripping the handle and bringing it to his mouth. The hot tea coursed down his throat, warming his chest from the inside out and he let out a deep shuddering breath.

"Finish the rest, mate."

"I'm not your mate." Draco said instinctively, his voice coming out more hoarse and robotic than usual, but Longbottom just snorted as Draco gulped the remainder of liquid in his cup.

"Yeah, I suppose not. Not yet at least." Longbottom shot him a good-natured smile. "How are you holding up?"

"Fine— I—" I'm confused, I think." Draco looked around the kitchen and his eyes went wide as he realized he was in the Manor kitchens, the memories of his father, of Archie flooding through him like a landslide, knocking the air from his lungs as he slumped against his chair and brought his hands up to his head, grasping at his hair tightly as he choked out. "Archie."

He closed his eyes, picturing a three inch iron cauldron that sat unused in the corner of his lab

and poured the memory from his parent's suite into the large receptacle, grabbing its heavy lid and placing it on the cauldron with a heavy clank.

"I'm so sorry, Draco." Draco looked up at the use of his first name to see Longbottom staring at him with sympathetic eyes, but he felt nothing. "About Archie and your father. I understand what you must be feeling and it's okay to not be okay; you know? You can feel however you'd like to feel. Anger, sadness, numbness. I've felt them all too."

"Are they—Did Granger—"

"I actually came to talk to you about that." Granger strolled into the kitchen, sitting down heavily in a chair, turning to Longbottom and asking, "How is he?"

Longbottom opened his mouth, but Draco snapped, "I'm right bloody here."

Granger looked at Draco, as she folded her hands on the tabletop, "And how are you? You look more alert. Are you Occluding?"

"How am I?" He let out an incredulous scoff. "Of course, I'm Occluding, I just watched my... friend be cannibalized by my zombified father, and then you just killed them both, or killed them again or whatever. How do you *think* I'm doing?"

"I don't mean to be insensitive to your emotions and I realize that was traumatic for you, but time is of the essence and it can't wait for you to process your grief, I'm afraid." Granger said softly, but not unkindly, pulling her lips into her mouth before continuing. "I didn't kill them. They are currently heavily restrained down in the dungeons."

The group deftly took down hundreds of Rotters during the many grueling hours of walking. They encountered several large hordes that blocked off large sections of streets, forcing them to either climb the roofs whenever possible or backtrack and go several blocks in the wrong direction before being able to double back.

Draco tried practicing his spell aim at some of the stragglers that would pop out of small shops or automobiles and felt his accuracy was getting better. It would only take one or two spells in rapid succession to sever their heads and he didn't even throw up once. He would say that that was an improvement.

Just past midday, they stopped at a small cafe, the golden trio clearing the shop before signaling to the rest of the group it was safe to enter. They all sat on available surfaces and chairs as Longbottom levitated large sandwiches from his satchel and distributed them.

Muscles declined the offering, instead pulling a nutrition bar from his rucksack and chewing on it with loud smacks that made Dracos teeth grind with agitation.

Draco inspected the sandwich and noted basil leaves, tomatoes, a layer of mozzarella, prosciutto and what he was assuming was a balsamic glaze. He took a tentative bite and nearly groaned again in ecstasy. It reminded him of Blaise's house elf, Flora. He wondered what had happened to Blaise, Theo, Pansy. His throat began to close and he quickly swallowed down the thought, taking another bite.

"God, this is delicious. How do you have fresh food? We've only been able to find some bruised apples and sprouted potatoes. Everything else is rotten." Mabel inquired.

Longbottom swallowed his mouthful and smiled before shooting Mabel a wink. "Magic."

She blushed. And Draco had to stop his eyebrows from shooting to his hairline. Was Longbottom *firing*?

"So," She-Weasel cleared her throat, "what did you all do before all this?"

"I was a primary school teacher" Mabel replied. "Taught Miss Ruby when she was young. She was a little tyke with a big attitude."

"Was?" Sonny quipped as Ruby rolled her eyes.

"And you?" The she-Weasel—*Ginny* asked Sonny.

"I was a personal trainer."

"Train' tuff wa?" Weasel grumbled unintelligibly around an unchewed mouthful of food as

Draco's lip curled at the lack of etiquette.

She-Weasel—*Fuck* — Ginny rolled her eyes, "Sorry about my brother; he's a troll."

"Oi!" Weasel shouted.

"Allow me to translate," Ginny continued, "Trainer of what?"

"Oh, like a workout trainer. Got people in physical shape. Running, drills, kickboxing, weightlifting, jiu jitsu, you name it."

"Wow. So you'd be able to kick my arse using just your hands then? I've always wanted to learn hand-to-hand combat!" Ginny said excitedly.

"Anytime." Sonny smiled widely and nodded enthusiastically.

"Hermione knows Tiki wandoo." Weasel said around another mouthful of food.

done, if it weren't for... Well, it doesn't matter now."

"Do you still think that we're beneath you?" She questioned with a small tilt of her head.

He paused, for probably longer than appropriate, before shaking his head. "No. I stopped believing that a long time ago."

She hummed thoughtfully before quirking her lips, "Good, because I'd kick your rich arse if you still believed that utter rubbish."

He huffed out a small laugh. "I've never spent much time with muggles before now though, so I'm—I'm still unlearning some preconceived ideas about you."

"And I've never spent time with wizards, so we can learn and unlearn together." She bumped her shoulder lightly with his before nodding her head towards the golden trio. "And what about your friends? What's the story there?"

Draco rolled his eyes, "They're not my friends. Whatever the opposite of friends' is, that'll be us. The Dark Lord, he started a Wizarding War—the Second Wizarding War—and they were on the good side. Even before then we didn't get along. Call it school rivalry or jealousy. We hated each other and I don't think the sentiments have changed. I was—not very kind to them."

Sonny gasped theatrically, "Not *You*! Unkind? I can hardly believe it."

"Har, har." He said flatly.

She chuckled, "And the Granger girl?"

He stumbled over his feet before composing himself, "What about her?"

She shrugged, "Just seems like you've both got a lot of... tension."

"That'll be my relentless bullying of her parentage, her bushy hair, her buck teeth." He sighed heavily. "But she strangled my pastrami neck."

"Or punched my beautiful face." He grinned as Sonny snickered.

"Atta girl. I knew I liked her." She whispered. "Well, it looks like we'll be spending a lot of time together, so maybe you can... I dunno, be nice? Maybe stop calling the gingers variations of *Weasels*."

Draco let out a loud snort causing Granger to whip her head to him as she cut him a scathing glance. "They'll think I've been Imperious'd if I suddenly start being chummy."

"I dunno what imperioused is, but maybe just be less combative, pompous, arrogant—"

He held up a hand. "—Yeah, yeah I get it. I'll think about it. Happy?"

She flashed him a toothy grin.

"What was that round silver thing with the earmuffs that Ruby was showing Granger earlier? At the shop?" Draco asked curiously, hoping to change the subject.

"Round silver thing? Oh! The discman."

"Disc Man." She enunciated, "It plays music."

His brows creased, "It plays music from that tiny thing? Where does the record go?"

"Gods, wizards still listen to records? How retro." She snorted. "It plays from a CD. It's like a mini-record. The 'earmuffs' are headphones where the music comes out."

"Hm, I should like to hear some music from this man." He replied thoughtfully.

"DISC MAN." She said slowly. "I'm sure Ruby would love to get you to listen to Destiny's

Longbottom cut his eyes to hers, his eyebrows furrowing as Draco asked, "You—I thought—Why?"

"When you all came into the church, guns blazing, I can't say I was surprised to see the effect of the UV bullets on the vampires. Harry told me that was your idea." He nodded as she lifted the corner of her mouth. "Smart."

His stomach flipped at her compliment and he adjusted his posture, sitting straighter in his seat.

"Remember how I said I had some theories about the virus?" She continued as Draco nodded.

"There was an article in the paper the day you were admitted to St. Mungo's actually, a blip of reporting, really, compared to the news about your Quidditch accident, but they mentioned something about a previously-extinct bat species being found in Romania and bringing it to England for testing shortly before the outbreak hit the muggle world. And it had me thinking... what if... what if this virus is vampiric in nature? I mean, so many characteristics lineup and after the incident in the church... I think my theory could be correct." She tapped her finger rhythmically on the wooden surface.

"I was in Diagon looking for a book, *Vampires Magiae et Anatomia*, which was authored by a well-known vampire hunter in the 18th century by the name of Georg Andreas Helwing. Vampire covens since its publication have largely eradicated its existence. There are very few copies in circulation, but I think it could give me some insight into the biology of vampirism."

"So, you think the bat was..." Draco trailed off as his brain began processing and connecting dots.

Granger shook her head. "I don't know, but it's the best theory I've got so far. I suspected that we were dealing with a magical malady from the outset, but the Rotters, they have an extreme sensitivity to sunlight, and based on the way your father reacted to my silver chains, I'd say they also have an aversion to silver. Rotters feed on human flesh, but they also drink the blood of their prey, as we've witnessed with exsanguinated bodies. Vampires and vampire bat species are sanguivore, but perhaps this mutation evolved into being carnivorous, or in this case, cannibalistic as well."

"Okay, that's a great theory and all, but what does this have to do with Archie or—Malfoy's father?" Longbottom asked, concern etching across his brow.

Granger took a deep breath as she leveled Draco with a look. "In order to research the virus itself, I need live hosts. Your father, being magical, and Archie, non-magical, would be ideal test subjects."

Draco let out a disbelieving laugh. "You're joking."

"Hermione, I really don't think this is the ti—" Longbottom protested.

"Now is the only time. Do you want to watch more of your friends die, Draco?" Granger said bluntly. "Because I certainly don't."

He swallowed, picturing Ruby in Archie's place and shivered shaking his head.

"Then agree to let me put Lucius and Archie to use instead of us burying them and losing the small advantage we have to find a solution to this virus."

Draco bit the inside of his cheek as he considered. He and his father had certainly had a strained relationship since fifth year and neither had made much of an effort to reconnect, but he

was still his father. The father that Draco would beg for scraps of attention and pseudo-praise, the same father who sold his only son, his only heir, to a megalomaniac in order to further his own standing. The same father that Draco was positive had eaten his mother, his house elves, the entire Manor staff. He shook his head, dislodging the morbidity of his thoughts.

"If you're trying to determine if the virus is vampiric, wouldn't you also need a vampire test subject as a baseline for any experiments?" He asked.

She hummed a small noise of agreement, "Quite right. I have the next best thing."

Draco and Longbottom looked at each other before shooting Granger expectant stares as she huffed and stuck her arm into her beaded bag, reaching into the depths up to her elbow. She slowly pulled out a severed ear and placed it on the table as Draco and Longbottom gawked.

"Is that—"

"The ear Ruby bit off the vampire? Yes." She responded with a challenging raise of her eyebrow.

"Now, do you give me permission to run some experiments on your father and Archie?"

Draco rubbed his hands down his face and sucked on his teeth before he answered, "Fine, but I'll be there for any testing and approve, or not approve, any methods you may use." He said flatly, "There's no love lost between my father and I. But Archie, it's not my call."

Granger nodded once with a slight dip of her chin as she began to stand, "The others don't know what's happened yet. I'll tell them."

"No!" Draco blurted as he stood, blood rushing to his head as he staggered, his voice softer. "I'll tell them."

Porter nodded quickly, either unphased or ignorant to the Scors' rudeness. "Ron, me and Hermione can lead. Nev, Gin, why don't you bring up the rear. Our new friends can stay in the middle. Pick off any Rotters that get through our ranks." He looked at Draco's group, "Stay with Malfoy. If we get separated, he can send one of us a patronus and we can reconvene at a safer location."

Draco cleared his throat and lifted his chin, "No. I—I can't um—I can't conjure a patronus."

The lions blinked at him for several moments, likely processing exactly why he couldn't cast the spell, before Sonny spoke.

"We have an extra walkie." She held her hand out to Mabel who dug in her satchel before pulling out another small black box and handing it to Sonny. "You know how to work one?"

Harry nodded and tucked the black box into his cloak, "What channel?"

"Two."

"Alright. It's nearly eight o'clock, so we'll walk as far as we can until nightfall and set up camp."

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They climbed up to the roof of Weasley's Wizard Wheezes and began hopping across the shingled and lopsided roofs and parapets connecting each building. When they reached The Leaky Cauldron, they climbed down a creaky fire escape and quietly filed into the tavern and out into the debris-strewn streets of muggle London.

The sun was stifling even this early in the morning and Draco could already feel the back of his neck burning as he cast a wordless skin-protecting charm on his delicate and exposed flesh. Ruby chatted quietly to Mabel ahead of him as Sonny flanked his right side, with Muscles and Archie behind them. The lions held their weapons tightly, their heads swiveling up and down the streets as they moved, occasionally holding up a hand to halt the group at each street corner.

They walked swiftly through several blocks, Draco craning his neck curiously at all of the strange muggle shops; A storefront window with floor to ceiling televisions (he knew this because of his mandatory Muggle Studies class during eighth year), a shop called 'Toyland' that had a horrifying creature in the window named 'Furby' that was frightening and surely haunted (which Ruby begged to have), and a shop called 'Black Diamond Tattoo' which made his own Dark Mark prickle and itch.

"Did you really try to kill your Headmaster?" Sonny whispered quietly enough so only he could hear.

He stiffened before swallowing thickly and flicking his eyes to hers, "Yes."

Sonny stared at him, but he didn't see judgement, only curiosity. "Why?"

He cleared his throat, "It's complicated."

"Well, we've got along journey ahead of us and I'd like to know that I didn't pick up a psychotic killer wizard." She shrugged.

He grimaced as he let out a deep sigh, "Well, my family supported a madman who wanted to eradicate muggles and muggleborns. I grew up believing that non-magical beings were beneath wizards - beneath *me*." He took a deep breath before continuing, "At first I wanted to please the Dark Lord. Wanted to be part of his ranks, prove myself, make my father proud, but then I was tasked with killing the Headmaster in order to weaken the other side's power or else that madman would kill me. Kill my family. I was in too deep, I knew that, but... I had to do it. Would have

witch's terrible faux pas."

The witch looked at him quizzically, her brow furrowing before she scoffed, "Pretty boy."

"Beg your pardon?" He asked, confused. This was not how this part usually went.

The witch suddenly slapped him forcefully across the face and yelled, "PRETTY BOY!" His eyes shot open and he gasped as he stared into the grinning face of Sonny, "There he is. Good dream?" She glanced down at his lower half, still covered in a thin sheet.

He peeked down at where she had looked and was horrified to see he had a fairly perky morning erection tenting his trousers and bedding. He squawked and bolted upright, covering his shame with his pillow and clearing his throat as he glanced around the room to see who else had witnessed his body's traitorous reaction to not having a shag in Salazar knew how long.

"Everyone is busy getting ready for the trek. Up and at 'em, naughty boy!" Sonny cackled as she sauntered out of the room.

As Draco made his way down to the main floor of the shop, he stopped at the top of the stairs and watched as Mabel organized food supplies and handed them to Longbottom to shrink and place carefully into a large satchel. Archie and the Scot were chatting quietly in the corner as Porter, the Weasel, and the Weasel inspected their weapons. Sitting on the ledge of the low windowsill overlooking the street, Ruby and Granger sat side by side as they talked animatedly. Granger smiled brightly as Ruby pulled a circular silver object from her small rucksack and handed it to the Golden Girl.

The round object looked roughly the size of Draco's hand and had a long black string attached to it. At the end of the string was something that looked peculiarly like black earmuffs but smaller. He watched curiously as Granger placed the earmuffs on her ears and fiddled with the gray contraption before laughing heartily and tapping her foot as if to the sound of music.

A loud throat clearing shook him from his reverie and he whipped his head down to the foot of the stairs where Sonny stood. She tossed him something and he snatched it before staring at the item in confusion.

"A chocolate bar?" He asked quizzically. "A nutrition bar. We already ate breakfast while you were having your beauty sleep. They taste terrible, but you'll need your strength for the trek to Wiltshire. Eat."

He unwrapped the item and bit into the bar as Sonny walked over to Archie and Muscles. It had a terribly chewy consistency, but tasted like a chalky version of Nandor's Nougat Clusters and he was able to choke it down fairly quickly.

"Alright everyone!" Porter's voice commanded the room as all eyes fell on him. "The journey to Wiltshire is about a three day walk from here if we don't have any incidents, but by my estimation, we're looking at five days give or take. We know that the city is crawling with undead - er - Rotters, but cloud cover looks minimal today, so getting out of London will be the hardest part. If we stay away from the shadows of buildings, we should be alright. All major roads have been blocked off so taking an automobile wouldn't be prudent nor would it get us far, so we'll be on foot for a majority of the time. We'll stick to sidestreets and rooftops until we're out of the city, and can stop somewhere for the night. Any questions?"

"You've all got the guns, so I think you should lead the pack." Muscles grumbled.

## CHAPTER 10

### NOT READY FOR THIS JELLY

**I**t was the middle of the night when Draco finally dragged his feet up two flights of stairs and practically crawled to his room, his eyes still glossy and red from breaking the news of Archie's death to his muggle companions. Kieran didn't say a word, hadn't said a word since before the church, he only methodically fiddled with a beaded necklace, a small cross dangling from one end as his fingers seemed to count each red bead. Muggles were so strange.

Ruby certainly took it the hardest, running from the parlor, throwing her Disc Man on the floor and disappearing up the stairs to her temporary room. A tearful Sonny said to leave her be, so he did. He understood more than wanting to self-isolate, self-soothe. Not wanting to burden others with...well, himself. He would find her in the morning, but right now, he needed a pepper-up potion, and he needed to get pissed.

He dropped his satchel at the door and beclined to a bottle of firewhisky. He always kept a bottle of vintage Crag Na Dun hidden for emergencies in a secret shelf behind a portrait of a hawthorn tree in the corner of his suite. Pulling out the nearly full crystal decanter and tugging out the stopper, he took three gulps and coughed as the third went down the wrong tube. He pulled out his wand and shot off an *accio* toward his bag as a pepper-up vial shot



outstretched hand. He downed it in one go and felt the neurons throughout his body fire up, his sluggishness disappearing, tipping the bottle up once more and taking a long swig.

As the firewhisky coursed through him, he paced the length of his quarters, feeling increasingly restless. He wanted to fly a fucking broom. It had always been his escape when faced with any stressors and the word 'stress' in this instance was extremely generous.

After the first glorious shower he'd had in days (scourgesfies could only do so much) and a cheeky wank to expel the nerves and anxiousness that had settled in his chest, he huffed, downing another swig of firewhisky, grimaced and huffed again. Perhaps he would go do an inspection of the Manor, see if any portraits could tell him what happened to his...

With a long suffering sigh, he walked to his satchel and located the black jumper he had secretly kept and shrunk from his first "clothing" shopping he did with Sonny and shrugged it on, pulling the hood over his head. He walked to his magically extended closet and found his favorite pair of black joggers. He pulled those up his legs and breathed a heavy sigh of relief at the small comfort of a shower and comfortable clothes. Yet he was still antsy, desperate to release the pent up energy that had wigged its way into the pit of his chest.

He made his way down on wobbly legs, the decanter clutched in his grasp as he meandered through the halls. The portraits, some intact and some shredded or broken to pieces in the corridor, were empty of any ancestors. He just couldn't get a win, could he?

He meandered past the doors to the library and pictured how gobsmacked Granger would be when she saw it, then immediately frowned at the idea of her finding it without him and missing the look of awe on her face. Then, he scowled at the idea of that sour-faced Scor stepping foot inside his favourite part of his home, sitting in a dark corner as he and Granger pontificated about muggle things and whispered about *his books in his library*. With a sneer, he shot off a little spell that would take care of that problem.

He walked past the sitting room where he had gathered his muggle companions earlier in the evening and told them that his father had nearly decapitated Archie and the old man died gasping and gurgling in his arms. Draco shuddered and took a swig of his bootle as he ambled in, his foot colliding with an object, causing it to skid along the floor before stopping its trajectory against the leg of a small end table. His vision doubled as he squinted at the object and realized it was Ruby's music player, minus the earmuffs. He picked it up carefully and turned it over in his hand before glancing around the room for the earmuffs, spotting them tucked beneath a small chaise longuer.

Tongue poking out of his mouth, it took him several minutes of trying to place the small little plug into the small little hole on the side of the device, letting out a satisfied *Hah!* once he finally got them connected. Removing his hood temporarily, he tentatively placed the ear piece over his ears and started clicking buttons in hopes one of them would get the music to—

*Aha!*

A fast beat thundered through the earmuffs and he started at the volume as what sounded like a record scratching began a consistent beat.

*Kelly, can you handle this? Michelle, can you handle this? Beyoncé, can you handle this? I don't think they could handle this.*

He glanced around the room surreptitiously before he began bobbing his head to the beat as

# VERY HELPFUL & USELESS

Draco sat across from a beautiful looking witch at his favorite French restaurant as he tittered on about something or another. She reminded him of someone, but he couldn't quite put his finger on it. She had thick hair that framed her delicate face with rivulets of curls and small freckles that dotted her nose and

cheeks. It was nearing the moment in their date where he would normally invite them back to his quarters for a little nightcap and ravage them senseless before making some excuse about needing to show up early for Quidditch practice and practically shoving them through the floor.

"—and she actually showed

up to the gala in the same gown she wore to the Gambol & Sanford benefit dinner four weeks ago, can you believe it?" The witch blathered.

"Fascinating," Draco flashed his signature smile, "How about I take you back to my manor? I have a vintage bottle of Romanée-Conti Grand Cru and you can tell me more about this



Sonny and Archie chuckled and Weasel let out a short behind his hand. Draco pushed to his feet quickly.

"Oh, come on, pretty boy! We're just having a laugh!" Sonny chuckled.

"Draco, don't go! I was joking!" Mabel pleaded.

"Thanks for dinner, Longbottom." Draco threw over his shoulder (he still had manners, after all) as he stomped up the stairs.

The room was dark, only lit by the light of the moon streaming in. The Scot sat at the small window overlooking the street and neither of them acknowledged the other as Draco removed his boots and coat and crawled into his transfigured cot, tucking his wand beneath his pillow.

He seethed silently, staring up at the charmed ceiling of the night sky as stars shot across his vision. He wasn't upset that the muggles had called him useless or that the Gryffindors laughed at his expense.

He was angry because he knew he *was* useless.

the women began to sing. He wondered idly if this was the same group of Destinys' offspring. It sounded like them, he thought.

*I don't think you're ready for this jelly. I don't think you're ready for this, 'cause my body too boozylicious for you, babe.*

He chuckled and swayed his hips to the music, completely bewildered as to what 'boozylicious' meant but if it was what he *thought* it meant, he had heard that he had quite a nice arse himself from several previous dalliances.

He sang the chorus, easy enough to remember, and swung the firewhisky bottle around as he danced, that knot in his chest loosening slightly with each step.

As the song ended, his breathing was labored from the surprising exertion of shaking one's bum and his head began to swim in that tell-tail sign that he was approaching the thoroughly sloshed stage of his drunkery.

A moment of silence stretched as he caught his breath, before a slow guitar melody began drifting through the earmuffs as Draco sat heavily on the leather couch in front of the hearth, pulling his wand out of the small pouch in his jumper and shooting a spell at the fireplace, the flames roaring to life. He took another, albeit smaller, sip of his bottle as the song played, letting his head tip back onto the back of the sofa as he listened.

*And sooner or later it's over, I just don't want to miss you tonight.*

Images of his mother flittered through his mind and he shook his head slightly, trying to dislodge the tightening in his throat when he thought about his father gnawing on her brittle bones.

*And I don't want the world to see me, 'cause I don't think that they'd understand.*

His eyes shot open as he stared at the flickering fire. The world never did understand him, did it? He tried to make a name for himself, one not tied to his evil father or to his participation in the temporary destruction of the Wizarding World, but he would always be a traitorous Malfoy in their eyes. He couldn't blame them. A few Quidditch wins and well-placed charitable contributions would never wash that stain clean.

*When everything's made to be broken, I just want you to know who I am.*

His eyes burned and tears built in his lashes as he blinked the threatening emotions away, sniffing quietly as the song continued. A haunting melody that eerily and annoyingly resonated with him on a fundamentally deep level. It made him think of his mother and Mipsy and of every self-deprecating thought he had ever had. He was broken. And not just because of the outbreak, but even before then. So, he did cry then. Choked and raw and utterly pathetic.

A muffled "Malfoy!" startled him so terribly that he may or may not have let out a rather embarrassing squeal as he furiously wiped his tears away with the back of his hand, twirling around to see Granger standing in the doorway.

Her mouth was moving, but he could only hear the gravelly timbre of the man singing.

"What?" He coughed and yelled, hoping she hadn't witnessed his weeping.

She pointed to his ears and his brows pinched, before he remembered that he could remove the source of the music so he could communicate with her.

The room was silent without the earmuffs, the only sound was the shuddering of the flames licking the stone of the fireplace. Granger stood there, staring at him almost appraisingly before her eyes flashed with something he couldn't decipher. If he were a betting man, he'd say it looked

something akin to resolve. As if she had decided something pertinent in that half a second.

She pointed lazily at the glass bottle in his hand, "I could use a drink. Care to share?"

He gulped and nodded as he spoke, "How—how much of my...*performance* did you happen to witness?"

She sauntered into the room as he held the bottle toward her, which she grabbed, walking to the couch and plopping down with a sigh.

"Oh, I saw enough." She said with mirth in her eyes as she tipped the bottle back and gave a long gulp, grimacing slightly as the column of her throat worked. She shot him a mischievous grin, "I've never seen someone move like that, it was...truly remarkable. Like a drunk ballerina."

He winced, the mortification nearly unbearable as he cleared his throat, "So, when I was—"

"Dancing? Yes. You *are* very boootylicious."

He let out a tiny squeak, "And the - er -"

"The crying? Yes. Although, I was surprised that Boootylicious was so emotional for you."

He glowered, "It was a different song."

"Ah, makes sense." She nodded sagely, taking another frankly enormous swill of liquor.

"What do I have to do to get you to never tell another soul what you saw here tonight, Granger?"

She hummed thoughtfully before she clicked her tongue, "Tell you what, Malfoy. I'll keep this between us and you'll owe me a favor that I can cash in at a time of my choosing."

Draco scoffed, "That is a terrible deal that I'd be stupid to take."

"Suit yourself. Ginny is going to love this." Granger chuckled absently, "Perhaps I can show her the memory. You've got a pensieve somewhere in this place, right?"

"You evil little witch—" Draco scowled and huffed, "Fine."

She flashed him a pleased little grin at his acquiescence, tipping the bottle back and taking a quick sip.

"What are you even doing up?" Draco asked.

She let out a heavy sigh, letting her head fall against the back of the couch, "I couldn't sleep. Too much pent up energy and my nighty wank didn't cut it." Draco choked on air as she continued, unbothered, "Came down to try and find some drink." She wiggled the decanter slightly, its amber liquid sloshing inside the glass. "And what about you? Figured you'd down some Draught of Peace and have a nice long lie-in in your four-poster."

"Yes, well, seeing your father eat a man really isn't conducive for a restful night's sleep, believe it or not." He replied flatly.

"Right, sorry." She grimaced, taking another impressive gulp of firewhiskey, "We've seen so much death the last few weeks that I feel like I'm going numb to it. How are you holding up?"

"Did you or did you not just walk in on me shaking my arse to muggle music and then immediately bursting into tears? I'd say I'm obviously doing just brilliant. Absolutely chuffed with life at the moment." He rolled his eyes, wiggling his fingers in the direction of the bottle as she reluctantly handed it over.

She hummed in acknowledgement, "I was nearly catatonic when I watched Parvarti die, then Luna, then Seamus, then..." She let out a heavy sigh, "I don't even remember a lot of it. Funny thing, shock."

"How did you come to?" He asked, ignoring the slight slur to his speech as he took a sip from

different from my peers well before then. But no, I'm afraid if you were a witch, you would have been notified at age eleven and sent to Hogwarts to study. You're how old?"

Ruby's shoulders slumped, "Almost fourteen."

Granger hummed, "When's your birthday?"

"September eighteenth."

Granger chuckled, "Mine's the nineteenth! What are the odds? I knew I liked you."

Ruby shot Granger a wide, toothy grin.

"Why were you all in Knockturn Alley today?" Draco interrupted plainly.

Sonny elbowed him in the ribs, "What he means to say is we are so grateful you were there."

"Owl! No, what I mean to say is *why were you there?* That place was a death trap and as far as I knew, none of you lived in Wizarding London, so why were you there? Where we just so happened to also be?"

Potter tapped his fingers on the wooden table before answering, "I had a flat in Muggle London where we were staying, Grimmault Place. Sirius left it to me before your aunt killed him." Draco flinched as Potter continued, "We were preparing to floo to Hogwarts and help McGonagall fortify it, but the Ministry cut off travel without warning. Kinglsey didn't even know it was happening." Potter sighed.

"People were being attacked, the streets were teaming with the undead, and we tried to help. We tried to fight, but Luna and Seamus got bit. We watched them turn that night and...we couldn't kill them like the others. We consulted with Kingsley who informed us that before communication went dark with other International Ministries, reports were coming in that Wizarding undead have a kind of resistance to certain magic. So we researched—well, mostly Hermione researched all she could the last couple of weeks about what spells work against the wizarding-infected and which don't, learned some of their habits, weaknesses, learned as much as we could about the outbreak through muggle reports. She had the idea to use muggle guns and was able to develop the specialized weapons."

"Right." Sonny said slowly, clearly confused by all the wizarding jargon.

"How are you communicating with Kingsley if the floo network is down?" Draco inquired. "Patrons, but only when necessary. We also have a portrait of Phineas Nigellus Black that can relay information to McGonagall through his portrait at Hogwarts."

Patronus. Draco's heart gave a small pang at the thought of not being able to send his mother one. He'd never been able to cast it, try as he might and he hadn't even considered it as an option. He certainly had no happy memories now to conjure.

Draco swallowed, "So you were in Knockturn because...?"

Porter huffed, "We were in Knockturn looking for something."

Draco cocked an eyebrow, "Something?"

"Nothing you need to concern yourself with yet, Malfoy." Granger sniffed.

Draco scowled, "Don't forget you need *my* library."

She shot him a saccharine smile, "And hopefully you'll prove your usefulness then."

He let his spoon clatter against his bowl, "I'll have you know I'm plenty useful."

"Well, maybe not useful, but definitely entertaining." Mabel mumbled as Draco whipped his head in her direction, mouth hanging open in indignation.

"It smells divine, Neville." Mabel shot him a small smile. "We haven't had a hot meal like this in weeks."

Longbottom scooped the stew into each bowl before sitting next to the open seat beside Mabel.

"Well, dig in everyone." Longbottom said softly as the rest of the table began devouring their meals, moaning at the taste.

"Sorry the spoons aren't *silver*, Malfoy." Granger sneered.

Draco shot her flat smile, "I'm *sure* you are."

Metal spoons clanked against the porcelain bowls as the group tucked into their stews.

Draco looked down at his bowl and lifted a spoonful of potato, carrot and rich-colored broth to his mouth. He nearly groaned at the taste of the herbaceous flavors and earthy vegetables. It was something Mipsy would have made for him on a cold winter evening and he repressed a pang of sadness at the thought of his self.

"Bloody delicious as always, Nev!" The Weasel exclaimed loudly as he pushed his now empty bowl away and rubbed his stomach.

Merlin, Ron, you always eat as if someone's going to snatch it away from you." She-Weasel scoffed, rolling her eyes.

"I was hungry." He grumbled with a scowl as Mabel cleared her throat.

"So, I'm Mabel. And you're Neville." She gave Longbottom a kind smile before looking to the Weasel. "And you're Ron. What about everyone else?"

Porter cleared his throat, "I'm Harry."

Ginny: "The redhead gave a small wave.

"Hermione. And what about you?" Granger said, addressing the rest of Dracos' comrades.

"I'm Sonny."

"Hiya, I'm Ruby." The teen gave a small salute.

"Archie! Pleased to meet you all. Though I wish it were under different circumstances."

Everyone around the table nodded goodnaturedly.

"Wasn't there one more from your group?" Granger asked as she looked around the table.

Sonny placed her spoon in her bowl with a small clatter, "Kieran. He's—well, he's still coming to terms with the whole..." she flapped her hand in the air, "Magic thing."

Draco scoffed as Granger whipped her head toward him. He stiffened and lifted another spoonful of stew to his mouth.

"Of course." Granger replied kindly, "I know how overwhelming it can be finding out there's a whole other world than the one we knew."

"How so?" Mabel asked as she spooned more stew into her mouth.

"I'm muggleborn."

The muggles gave her equal looks of confusion before she cut a glance to Draco who looked down at his bowl quickly.

"Both of my parents were muggles." She explained, "I found out I was a witch at age eleven. Went to Hogwarts and was thrust into a world of magic. It was—difficult."

"You didn't know you were a witch until you were eleven?" Ruby asked with wide eyes. "Does that mean *I* could be a witch?!"

Draco dared a glance at Granger whose eyes softened as she smiled at the teen, "I knew I was

the nearly depleted bottle.

"Ginny slapped me."

He choked again, slamming a fist into his chest repeatedly to dislodge the ache as he wheezed, "What?"

Granger giggled, a feminine, cure little laugh, the corners of her eyes crinkling as she nodded, "Yeah, she slapped the fuck out of me and it brought me back to reality. Back into survival mode, which I suppose I was already pretty familiar with."

Draco let out a disbelieving laugh, "Right, well, don't go getting any ideas if I go catatonic. I remember your backhand. My cheek had the imprint of your hand on it for hours."

"And I'm a much better fighter now than I was in third-year. I wouldn't want to send you into another coma." She chuckled, a seductive little thing.

"Oh, har har! As if you could actually do any real harm." He scoffed, "You're like the size of an underdeveloped pygmy puff!"

Her eyes narrowed as she stood, one hand coming to her waist as she cocked her hip, "You don't think I could take you in a fight?"

He let out an ungentlemanly snort as he shook his head, "Please. I *know* you couldn't, Granger."

A sinister grin stretched across her face as she ran her tongue along the inside of her cheek.

"Well, let's see then. Get up."

"You—Wait, I'm not going to actually fight you, Granger."

"Why? Scared, Malfoy?"

"Hah! Of you? No. Of hurting a woman? Yes."

"Oh, please. I spar with Harry and Ron all the time. Just admit you're scared and I'll let it go." She quipped with a snug grin.

Draco sucked on his teeth before pushing himself to stand and setting the bottle down on the side table with a thud.

"Fine, but if I hurt you—"

"Sure, sure. If you hurt me, I'll have no one to blame but myself and the firewhiskey."

They moved into the center of the room and he helped her tug a large settee to the corner in order to give them room to move about. He watched her settle into a sort of crouched position, making her look even smaller, and she angled her tiny little fists in front of her face. Draco snorted and kept his arms at his side as they circled one another.

She lunged with a fist heading for his face, which Draco dodged thanks to his Seeker reflexes, but she sent her other fist up and into the side of his ribs causing him to let out a little *oof!* as she retreated, a defiant little grin splitting her face. He scowled as he brought his own fists up in front of him, a mimic of her own stance and started approaching her, intending to sweep a leg under her feet to knock her off balance, but she parried and twisted behind him, her upsettingly small-yet-rock-like fist knocking into his kidney with a *thunk!* as he doubled over with a groan.

She was hopping up and down at the edge of the room, still grinning like a maniac, and Draco was surprised to find himself grinning as well as he regained his stance. Her fingers gave him a *come hither* motion and he let out an amused huff. Okay, he really wasn't even trying before, but now that she was mocking him, he decided that she *did* ask for this. He threw his fist at her side and before it made contact, she grabbed his forearm and twisted her body, her back now at his

front, and hooked a leg under his at the same moment she tugged his arm and *yanked* causing him to be launched over her shoulder. He hit the ground with a loud and painful thud, landing on his back, groaning again as she moved to sit on top of him, straddling him, her small hand wrapping around his throat.

"Well, I'd say I've got you by the throat, Malfoy."

"I suppose you do, Granger." His voice came out much more gravelly than he had anticipated, but he smirked. "Be gentle with me."

His eyes widened as she squeezed her fingers around his neck causing an unexpected surge of randiness to course through him, his hands coming up instinctually to her waist as his cock twitched in his joggers.

She arched an eyebrow, the corner of her mouth twisting with amusement as she squeezed harder. "Don't tell me you like to be choked, Malfoy."

Apathetic sound escaped his throat as he felt his face turn crimson and his cock harden, pressing painfully against her inner thigh. Her grin widened as she slowly, maddeningly repositioned her hips, slotting her center atop his groin.

His mouth popped open, his hands moving lower, from her waist to her hips, of their own volition, fingertips squeezing her flesh lightly.

She bit her plump lip between her teeth to hide an amused grin as her gaze flicked to his grip on her hips before flitting back to his, with a look he could only describe as lust because he was sure he sported a mirrored look in his own eyes. Her hips gave an excruciatingly slow roll and his cock twitched again at the friction, her mouth popping open with a slight intake of breath.

In a moment of madness and firewhisky, he slowly guided her hips to grind against him with purpose and stilled the urge to groan. They were both panting heavily when he used his grip on her hips to flip them suddenly, her landing beneath him with a small squeal as he pinned her hands above her head. Her legs wrapped around his waist and he buried his face in her cunts, rolling his pelvis against her, his cock painfully hard as it pressed against her hot core. This time they both groaned as he pulled back slightly to stare at the terrifying creature beneath him. Her wild hair cascading around her, her back arching, her breasts brushing against his chest as she licked her lips, leaving them wet with saliva. Their eyes locked, hers half-lidded as they shared breaths.

"Malfoy..." She whispered.

His head swam and he felt lightheaded, as if he would fall off the face of the earth with how much he wanted to kiss her. Her head lifted minutely, her lips grazing his own and he closed his eyes. Which was a bad idea because he immediately felt as if the world *was* spinning on its axis and he *was* falling. He released her hands, dragging himself off of her just in time to projectile vomit onto the antique rug near Granger's head.

And that was the last thing he remembered.

"It means you were a stupid little shite in school with the sensibilities of a soft, effete little silver-spooned brat, but you were never a killit!" She quipped harshly, tilting her chin up defiantly. Draco's fists clenched at his sides, his fingernails digging into his palms as he bent down so their faces were level. "What other kinds of spoons are there if not silver?" He bit out through clenched teeth.

Granger's face twisted with rage, "Ugh!! You privileged little —"

"Okayyyy," Potter cut in awkwardly, "Um, there are two rooms upstairs. Why don't we all just get settled and meet back down here in a bit for dinner and talk logistics about tomorrow?"

Granger's lip curled before she twirled on her heel, her hair smacking Draco in the face as she stormed off.

As their groups split off at the top of the stairs to file into the two large rooms, Draco's group hovered at the threshold before The Weasel cleared his throat.

"It's not much but 'Mione is the best at transfiguration so she can make some more beds for you."

"Unlike you, Weasel, I don't need Granger doing everything for me." Draco sneered.

The Weasel's face grew beet red before he mumbled something unintelligible and stomped toward the other end of the hall and slipped into the room.

There was one large bed, which Mabel and Ruby claimed, and one hideous eggplant-colored couch, which Sonny claimed. Draco easily transfigured three plush cots along the walls.

"Cheers, boy-o!" Archie clapped Draco on the shoulder before tossing his pack onto the makeshift bed.

The Scot moved to an empty corner and began unraveling a sleeping bag, placing it on the ground.

Draco scoffed, "And what's wrong with the cot?"

"It's unnatural." Kieran mumbled.

"Kieran —" Sonny began.

"No, it's not natural! And we've done fine enough on our own without — without their kind!"

Draco was frozen in place, anger bubbling to the surface as he and Kieran stared each other down. This muggle thought *he* was unnatural! His magic was unnatural. Now that was a laugh.

"Enough, Kieran!" Sonny snapped. "We haven't been fine! Or did you forget that we lost Gwen? Or what about Charles or Mr and Mrs. Crowley or the O'Briens, hmm? We've survived off three hours of sleep a night and stale biscuits and tinned food for weeks. They have helped us! And they'll continue to help us and we'll be grateful for their magic and their manpower. There is no 'their kind' and ours. It's the dead versus the living and we need all the help we can get."

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They all sat in awkward silence as Longbottom hoisted a large black cauldron into the center of the long wooden table. He removed the lid and steam billowed from it as the delicious aroma of stew wafted through the space. Granger opened a small beaded bag strapped along her torso and wordlessly summoned small bowls and spoons from the depths of the bag, each bowl and utensil floating gently around the table and landing softly in front of each person.

"That smells divine —" Mabel looked at Longbottom expectantly.

"Neville." Longbottom replied, pink staining his cheeks.

# CHAPTER 13

# ROCK TIME BOY

Draco and Granger were still staring dumbly at one another as Theo came rushing through the door, "Ah, well, kneazle's out of the bag then, hey?"

"What don't you understand about 'guard the bloody door', Theo?!" Daphne growled.

He grimaced. "Right, well, Potter walked by and distracted me, so really it's The Chosen One's fault?"

Daphne glared as Theo continued, "What?! They were going to find out eventually! Plus, Potter said Draco and Granger were working on a cure and I'm sure this little development might be something they should know."

Astoria and Daphne's heads whipped to Draco, "You—you're working together? On a cure for this?"

"Well, maybe not a cure exactly. We don't think that we can bring people back from the dead, unless..." he cut his gaze to Granger who shook her head, "Right, yeah, can't do that, but at least find a way to make those already alive impervious to a Rotter bite."

"Rotter?" Theo asked.

"The bloody zombies," Draco supplied irritably, "But you were bit, Stori, and you didn't turn. This - this is the break that we needed!"

Granger let out a heavy breath, as if she hadn't realized she'd been holding it, "Maybe—maybe it's your blood curse, or something with your blood that could be fighting the virus." She gnawed on her lower lip,



"We'll need to take samples of your blood for testing. And, well, you probably shouldn't leave this room. We don't know if you're infectious, or whether or not you may still turn. For all we know, your blood curse could just prolong the incubation period of the virus."

"Oh, so now she's going to be your lab rat?" Daphne sneered.

"Daphne," Astoria croaked as she slipped a silk robe over her shoulders, "It's fine. I'll do whatever I can, whatever you need."

Granger eyed Daphne sceptically, "Are you going to claw my eyes out if I attempt to extract a few vials of her blood?"

Daphne glowered, her tongue poking against her cheek. Astoria gave her sister a meaningful look, a small widening of her eyes before she flicked them to Granger, then to Draco.

Daphne let out an exasperated sigh, "If she's alright with it, I suppose I'll keep them retracted for now." Daphne said through gritted teeth before Astoria cleared her throat meaningfully. Daphne rolled her eyes, "And...thank you for - both of you—for—helping...and, I guess, I'm sor—I'm sor—ugh."

Merlin's staff Daph, don't hurt yourself!" Theo chuckled as she threw her hands in the air.

"You know I hate apologies!" She whined.

Granger worked quickly, extracting two vials of Astoria's blood as Draco stood there frozen, still trying to process the events of the last fifteen minutes.

"Um, Draco," Astoria croaked, "Do you have the potion?"

Draco jolted, "Fuck, Stori, here." He swept up to her side, uncorking the potion vial and gently tipped the contents into her parted lips. She sighed contentedly as he watched the potion take effect, the color slowly returning to her cheeks, the mottling on her skin receding. Daphne gently smoothed Astoria's hair away from her damp forehead, letting out a relieved breath.

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Draco and Granger made their way down to his potions lab, two vials of Astoria's blood in hand, and debated whether or not to tell the rest of their companions about Astoria's...*condition*. He was surprised that Granger's self-righteousness didn't make an immediate appearance. Instead, she was the one who suggested that telling everyone might cause panic or discontent and he was hard pressed to agree with her. Ultimately, they decided that Granger would tell Potter, and Draco would tell Sonny, and the four of them would figure out when or if the rest of the group should know.

For now, they were both buzzing with anticipation to start analyzing Astoria's blood as they pushed through his lab doors. Granger plopped heavily onto a stool, "What the fuck just happened?"

Draco doubled over the top of the work bench dramatically and heaved out a breath, "I genuinely do not have any fucking clue. But, now I can guess why her blood curse symptoms were worse than they should have been." He straightened, "Shall we crack on? See if we can figure out what the hell we're working with?"

Granger hopped to her feet, a determined glint in her eye, "Fuck yes."

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"Ughhhhh!" Granger growled, slapping her hands on the work table. "How can the virus still be so prevalent in her blood?! Lucius's blood looked exactly the same! There's no reasonable

please, Draco. D-don't, don't, I—I—"

Draco's hands came to bracket his head, "Oh my gods. Oh, fuck, oh gods, no."

"WHEN?!" Granger bellowed, her wand now aimed at Daphne's chest.

A sob broke free from Daphne as Astoria's tired face peered around her sister; her voice raspy, "It's alright Daph."

Daphne shook her head, tears spilling down her cheeks as Astoria's feeble hand pushed her aside and she continued weakly, "Last week, we got cornered by the undead. Blaise, Theo, Daphne and Pansy were fighting them off, but one slipped through and bit me. I didn't want to die, but I knew it was only a matter of hours. So I told everyone once we got to a safe location later that night, told them they had to do it, before I turned and hurt someone."

"She asked us to kill her, but we—I couldn't. I *wouldn't*." Daphne said defiantly, mascara running down her ivory cheeks. "Not when she was still...so, we tied her up and waited. The next morning came and she hadn't turned. We don't know why or how, but she didn't and she still hasn't. And - and if you try to kill her, you'll have to fucking kill me too." Daphne's voice cracked, but she jutted her chin and pushed her shoulders back challengingly.

Granger's arm fell to her side and she and Draco just stared at the sisters, dumbstruck, before they turned to each other with wide eyes.

"She didn't turn." Granger mumbled, confusion written all over her face.

"Dazed and astonished, Draco echoed, "She didn't fucking turn."

pushed his hand through his mussed hair as he opened the lid to the cauldron and peered at the potion. He turned to Granger who stood at his side, her arm brushing his softly. Her eyes were bright as she asked, "Did we do it?"

He shot her a toothy grin and nodded, twisting to wrap his arms around her waist, pulling her off her feet and into a tight embrace. Her own arms came to wind around his neck as he breathed, "It's perfect. Thank you, I couldn't have done this without you."

Her arms squeezed his neck tighter as he gently dropped her back onto her feet. She slowly pulled back and gazed up at him, a smile playing at the corners of her mouth, "Anytime. I rather enjoyed working with you."

He smirked, "Yeah? I've never had a potions partner as attuned as you. That swottiness has grown on me."

"Please," she snorted, the minty air of her breath puffing along his neck and chest, "You're just as swotty." She punctuated the last word with a swift tug at the hair at the nape of his neck, which sent an electric jolt down his spine.

He glanced down at her as she glanced up, their faces so close. The hands on his neck started to twirl the hair at his nape and his skin erupted in goosebumps. He hadn't even realized her shirt had ridden up until his thumbs absently rubbed circles into the soft skin of her hips.

She bit her lush bottom lip between her teeth and whispered, "We should probably get that potion to Astoria."

He swallowed on a gulp and blinked. Then blinked again. Right, his friend was literally dying upstairs and he was here panting like a dog hoping for...hoping for what exactly?

He shook his head and straightened, pulling his arms away from her warmth, her own falling from his neck as they each took a step backward, "Right. Um, yes. Okay. I just--er, let's get one phialled up and take it to her."

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Draco couldn't help but sneak glances at Granger on their walk up to the sisters' suites and everytime he turned his head to her, she was already looking at him. They'd both smile, blush and look away, clearly both just giddy from having created a complex potion in half the time it should have taken, until finally they approached the door.

He was so excited to give Astoria the potion that he didn't bother knocking; instead he turned the knob and he and Granger waltzed right in. Right in, to see Daphne perched on the bedside, a cloth in her hand as it dabbed at Astoria's back. Astoria was topless, her back facing the door and an angry, red bite mark on her shoulder-blade.

Daphne bolted upright, angling her body in front of Astoria, her hands coming up in placation, but Draco couldn't process what he had seen. Granger's gasp had him turning to her, his brows furrowing, as she cupped her hands to her mouth.

Granger's eyes were wide as her hands fell to her side. Then Granger's eyes hardened as she pulled her wand from her thigh holster and demanded, "When?"

Daphne flicked her eyes to her own wand, sitting just out of reach on the nightstand. Draco's mind finally caught up.

"No," He shook his head in disbelief, "Daph, please tell me that's not what I think it is."

Daphne's chin wobbled, tears welling up in her lash line, "She's fine. She hasn't turned. P -

explanation why she isn't turning!"

It had been six days. *Six maddening days* since they discovered Astoria's apparent resistance to the virus and they were no closer to having answers, hitting a dead end around every corner. First, Astoria's blood showed the presence of the virus, which they had both naively hoped that there would be no trace of in her system. The second hit was that the virus still seemed to be attacking her healthy cells, which were already weak due to her blood curse.

They were at a loss.

Granger rested her elbows on the table, hands raking through her tangle of curls as she yanked at the roots in frustration. Draco tapped his wand against his thigh, desperate to come up with a way to lift their spirits, when inspiration struck.

He pushed to his feet, moving around to her side of the workbench and bumped his hip into hers until her watery eyes looked up at him, dark circles punctuating the tiredness he felt in his own.

"Come with me." He said with a jerk of his head as he moved to the doors, not waiting to see if she had followed him. He was crossing the threshold when he heard her exhale and he smiled to himself as her footsteps came up behind him.

Continuing down the hall in tandem, she asked flatly, "Where are we going?"

He flashed her a smile, "You'll see."

She huffed, "I'd really prefer not to see anyone right now."

"You won't. It's late and we're taking the staff corridors there." He said as he pushed open a door, concealed within the wall and stepped into the dimly lit hall.

After several minutes of walking (and whinging, on Granger's part) he came to the end of the corridor and pushed open the service door, stepping into the grandiose music room. Draco spread his arms wide, "Ta-dah!"

Granger stepped out after him and glanced around in confusion, "Are you...going to serenade me with a harpsichord?"

He grinned and shot her a wink, "Only if you ask nicely, but no." He moved to the corner of the room and flicked his wand at the large green gramophone that perched atop a glossy oak table. Static emanated from the sound horn as Draco adjusted the DiscMan that sat off to the side and double checked the wires were in their proper places. He clicked the play button on the CD player and turned to see Granger staring at him with raised eyebrows.

*Just gimme the light, yeah yeah. Just give me the light, yo yo.*

Her eyes widened as the man's voice crackled and echoed from the gramophone's horn, "How

He lifted his chin, feeling quite proud of himself, "I spelled the DiscMan to play from it by attaching some of the wires to the mechanisms in the gramophone. Tricky bit of magic and I can't adjust the volume, so it's a bit loud, but Ruby was ecstatic."

She let out a disbelieving snort, "And you've had time to do this when?"

"When you go all glassy eyed and focused and don't even notice when I slip out of the lab for my forced afternoon high-tea with Ruby and Buckbeak." He shrugged, then began shaking his shoulder to the beat of the music. "Come on, loosen up, let's get some of that pent up energy released, so we can come back to the research tomorrow with fresh eyes."

She rolled her eyes, but he could see the smile she tried to bite back as he shook his shoulders more aggressively, moving towards her slowly. "Malfoy, I really think our time would be better served working on the vaccine. Not—not dancing to muggle music."

He ignored her protest and invaded her space, his shoulders and hips finding the beat. "What do you think he's saying? "Just gimme the light and pass the dough, bussinallacappleamo"? Is that some kind of muggle saying?"

She let out a full laugh then, the action lighting her face instantly and he grinned widely at being the one responsible for it. She shook her head, still chuckling, "I think it's Jamaican Creole mixed with English in some bits. I don't think anyone really knows what he's saying."

Draco hummed as he continued to move, crowding into Granger until she begrudgingly began tapping her foot and nodding along, albeit fairly unenthusiastically. *Well, that just wouldn't do,* he thought as he began pumping his fist into the air directly next to her face. She let her tongue glide over her teeth, another smile breaking free until she batted his arm away, "You're a terrible dancer."

He feigned shock, a hand coming to clutch at his chest as he gasped in indignation. "Words hurt, Granger. Especially heinous lies." He sniffed, "We both know I am both Bootylicious and an excellent dancer; thank you very much."

The song changed and Granger sucked her lip into her mouth as she groaned, "Oh, I do love this song."

Draco grinned, a laugh bubbling out of him as she began snapping her fingers together in time with the snapping of the song. "Yes, Granger! Let the music guide you!"

*Hem Marmalade down in old Madam Rouge*

*Struttin' her stuff on the street*

*She said, "Hello, hey Joe! You wanna give it a go?"*

He was giddy and frankly impressed to see Granger letting loose and singing long to the words, holding her wand up to her mouth as if it were a microphone.

*Gitchie gitchie, ya-ya, da-da (hey, hey, hey)*

*Gitchie, gitchie, ya-ya, here*

*Mocha Chocolata, yea-ya*

*Creole Lady Marmalade*

They both raised their arms in the air, grins splitting their faces as they jumped and shimmied. He swallowed thickly as Granger writhed, slinking down to the floor and resting on her haunches, crooking a finger at him playfully as she sang the words into the tip of her wand.

*Voulez-vous coucher avec moi, ce soir?*

*Voulez-vous coucher avec moi?*

His eyes nearly popped out of their sockets as the words she sang registered. The lyrics were positively scandalous as was the way Granger's body wriggled and bounced.

*Touch of her skin, feeling silky smooth, oh*

*Color of coffee au lait, alright*

*Made the savage beast inside roar until he cried*

*More! More! More!*

He hadn't realized that he had unconsciously moved closer to her, or did she move closer to

suddenly became unusually tighter at her praise. He chanced a glance over to Potter and Theo, who were in roughly the same position, but Theo was grinning like the cat who got the cream as Potter rattled off instructions. Draco realized that Theo was giving Potter his so-called "fuck me eyes" and scoffed, that was never going to happen.

Draco refocused as Granger's low voice murmured, "Okay. Now aim for the head and shoot."

She stepped back and Draco nearly moaned at the loss of her heat at his back and the scent of her perfume. Or was it her shampoo? He took a steady breath, aiming the barrel of the weapon at his target and pulled the trigger. He startled at the force of the shot and his bullet whizzed past the armor and into the field behind the pitch.

Draco scowled as he looked behind him to see Granger holding back a laugh, "I did everything you told me." He accused.

More gunshots sounded, but Draco didn't bother to check on his friend's progress. Theo would be even worse than Draco, surely.

"Yes, but practice makes perfect. Give it another go. Keep pulling the trigger, so you can get used to it."

He huffed, but turned back to the target, sucking in a breath and pulling the trigger once, twice, three, four, five times until the trigger refused to produce more bullets and still nor a single shot hit the bloody armor. Not the head, nor the arm, not even the body and he was beginning to feel frustration bubble up as he growled.

Granger bumped her shoulder with his, "Ron was an abysmal shot at first, but he's picked it up now. You will too. Come on, load it up." She handed him a fresh clip and gave him an encouraging lift of her eyebrows as he removed the old clip and snapped the new one in.

She beamed, "See? Already better than Ron was."

Hegave a self-satisfying grin at that as she came up behind him again, her chest pressing against his back as she peered around his broad shoulders, "I'll help you take the first couple of shots, so you can see how it's done."

He rolled his eyes at her cheeky wink, but swallowed harshly as both her hands swept up his arms, her hands resting on the underside of his forearms. She lifted his arms slightly and pushed her hips into his, forcing his body to turn slightly to the right.

"Now," she whispered, "shoot."

He took aim and his bullet ejected from the gun, burying itself in the groin of the suit of armor with a *tink!* and he let out a disbelieving scoff, "I did it!"

Granger laughed, the sound of it causing little pixies to flutter in his stomach, but did not move away from her vigil against his back. "You did! Well done! But unfortunately, Rotters won't die from cock wounds. Again."

It took nearly two hours of coaxing and swearing and Granger giving him words of encouragement before he finally hit the helmet consistently. Granger was pleased, even honoring him with applause as Draco bowed theatrically. He felt like he had played the Quidditch finals to a full stadium and he hadn't even noticed that Nott and Potter had wandered off the pitch at some point.

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Draco used his wand to cut the heat of the green flame at precisely the right moment. He

made Draco's mouth water.

"Would you want to...do it with me?" She asked coyly, the minx.

He nodded eagerly, perhaps a bit too eagerly as he took another step.

"Good. You're a shite shot and I've been dying to teach you! Come on!" She said brightly as she patted his cheek twice, rather hard, and skipped out of the potions lab, leaving Draco blinking at the space she had just stood.

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Draco found himself on the quidditch pitch on his estate, squinting against the blinding sun as Granger set up "targets" which were suits of armor that she had pilfered from the various hallways in the manor. Potter stood several meters to his right and explained (as if to a toddler) the mechanisms of the weapon to Theo who stood beside him, bouncing on his heels excitedly.

Somehow Theo had overheard that Draco was getting a special lesson in muggle weaponry and whinged until Potter volunteered to teach him as well.

Theo, this is important. Please pay attention. Gun safety is crucial. These are as deadly as a wand in the wrong hands." Potter adhoniished, already exasperated.

"I get it, Potter. Safety button. Red, dead." Theo saluted. "Can I hold it now?"

Potter rolled his eyes. "No. You'll watch me and Hermione shoot a few rounds first."

Theo pouted dramatically as Granger siddled up beside Draco. She pulled her weapon free from its holster and spent the next five minutes showing him how to remove and insert the ammunition, a *dip* she had called it; before her and Potter stepped up to magically drawn red lines in the sand, each a relatively far distance away from the suits of armor.

Both Gryffindors held the guns straight out in front of them, gave the other a nod, and then began pulling their triggers in rapid succession. Each bullet that left the chamber made a deafening pop sound as it collided with the metal from the armor target and each time, Theo whooped enthusiastically. After what was roughly twelve or so rounds, the pair stopped and appraised their shots. Draco saw that Granger's bullets were all clustered together on the helmet of the target and Potter gave her a high-five (What was he, twelve? Honestly.)

Granger turned to Draco and grinned brightly, "You're up, buttercup!"

He rolled his eyes and fought the grin that threatened to overtake his lips as she reloaded a clip and handed the weapon over to him. He took it hesitantly and held it loosely in his fingers as Granger tutted, "You have to hold it like you mean it."

He wrapped his hand more tightly around the handle, careful to keep his finger off of the trigger. "Like this?"

She nodded, "Good. Now, let's see your stance."

He tried to mirror how her and Potter had stood, shoulders tight and legs apart, but she risked and stood behind him. He fought to keep his focus on the task as she tapped her palm to his upper thigh, "Feet further apart and move this leg back to help support you on the kickback. Almost a dueling stance."

He did as told and preened as she gave a low "Perfect" over his shoulder.

Her warm hand caressed his elbow as he held the weapon out in front of him, "A little higher. Yes, good."

He was grateful he had forgone his tailored trousers and opted for his black trackies as they

him? Their bodies brushing as they moved in tandem, her head tipped back as she let out a laugh, her curls bouncing behind her. He felt lighter than he had in days, weeks, years even as they danced.

The song changed again and the beat slowed, as did their movements. Granger stepped into him and suddenly whipped around, pressing her arse into his front, letting out a delicious little giggle, flipping her riotous hair over her shoulder as she turned to peek at him. His hands found her waist, to steady her, to steady himself as they moved their hips together in time with the sensual beat.

*I want you to rock the boat*

*Rock the boat, Rock the boat, Rock the boat*

*Work it in the middle*

*Work the middle, Work the middle, Work the middle*

*Change positions on me*

*New position, new position*

*Now stroke it, baby, stroke it for me*

*Stroke it for me, stroke it for me*

Gods, if he thought the lyrics before were scandalous, he underestimated how risqué muggles could get with their music. He stifled a groan as her arse pressed against him, his fingers digging into the flesh of her waist as they grinded. Her arms lifted and settled themselves around his neck and her warm fingers brushed against his nape.

Displeased with not being able to see her face, he turned her by the hips to face him and pulled her against his chest, her hands instinctually resuming their perusal of his shoulders and neck, until those deft fingers began playing with the hairs at his nape; an activity of theirs that he was becoming quite fond of. Her eyes were hooded and he was sure his pupils were blown black with lust, no firewhiskey to dull his senses this time. She was interested, now he was sure.

"Am I interrupting something?" Blaise drawled from the doorway as he and Granger jumped apart.

"Salazar, Zabini! Don't sneak up on people during the zombie apocalypse, mate!" Draco yelled, heart beating wildly as he clutched his chest. He chanced a glance at Granger who was looking anywhere but at him, her chest heaving and her cheeks nearly the color of a Weasley.

Blaise arched an eyebrow, leaning casually against the door frame, "Right. Apologies for the intrusion."

"I, um, I should—I'm going to go take a shower and call it a night." Granger squeaked out, "I'll see you in the lab in the morning, Malfoy."

She nearly sprinted out of the room, Draco absently tilting his head to watch her perky bum saunter away. Once she was out of his line of sight, he whipped his gaze to Blaise with a scowl.

Blaise's eyes were alight with humor. "Wow, I really didn't think you had it in you. Finally made your move. Odd time to do it at the end of society as we know it, but I suppose the phrase 'Last man on earth' comes to mind."

"Oh, fuck off!" Draco scoffed as he flicked his wand, cutting the blaring music. "What are you on about?"

Blaise pushed off the threshold and moved into the room, sliding gracefully into one of the

settees, "The flame you've been carrying for Granger since school, obviously."

Draco balked, "I beg your pardon?"

Blaise leveled him with a look, "Oh, are you still in denial about that then?"

"I'm not in denial about anything. I never carried *a flame* for Granger in school. That's – that's preposterous." Draco said defensively.

Blaise let out a long-suffering sigh as he pulled out his wand, "I see. *Expecto Patronum*." Draco groaned as Blaise's regal silver spotted jaguar materialized. Or was it a leopard? He could never tell the difference. He hated cats.

Blaise, not taking his eyes off Draco said, "Theo, please come to the music room as soon as possible. Draco needs a swift kick up the arse."

"Oh, for fucks sake, don't bring that doft into this," Draco whined, throwing his head back as Blaises' feline patronus leaped past him.

"Let's just say that you *didn't* have an embarrassing crush on her in school, although you did. But let's say you didn't...you can't deny that you do you now."

Draco pursed his lips and narrowed his eyes, "No, I don't. Do I think she's attractive? Of course. She's obviously grown into her looks and anyone with two working eyes could see she's gotten fit. But that's all it is." He sniffed, his chin jutting as he attempted to exude indifference. "See? Denial." Blaise said simply with a flourish of his hand as he rested his ankle atop one of his knees.

"Gentlemen!" Theo announced out of breath as he bounded into the room like an untrained crap. "Blaise, I'll hold Malfoy down while you do the wailing then?"

Draco pinched the bridge of his nose as Blaise shook his head, "A proverbial kick in the arse, Theo. Question. How long has our dear friend here had the hots for Granger?"

"Since at least third year." Theo supplied immediately.

Draco spluttered, "Wha—that's—I have not!"

"Ah, I see." Theo nodded at Blaise and took a seat on the settee, steepling his fingers together. "Draco, darling, we shared a dorm room for seven years and your silencing charms were not as good as you thought they were back then."

Draco felt panic bubble up as he blurted, "Yeah? Well, I know that you got a blowie from Oliver Wood in the Quidditch locker rooms in fifth year!"

Theo chuckled fondly, "Oh, Wood! He had a devilish tongue, he did."

"Fine!" Draco bellowed, "Fine, yes, okay! I had a stupid bloody, childhood crush on her. And I knew there was no way I could pursue it, not only because she was a stuck-up, insufferable twat, but because my father would have beat me bloody if he knew I had feelings for a muggleborn. Because of my family's involvement with the Dark Lord and the duties that fell on *me* because of it. I had to be mean to her. I had to." His chest was heaving and he strangely felt on the verge of tears and simultaneously lighter at the admission.

"We know, mate. That's why we just let you work it out on your own." Blaise said gently as if attempting to not frighten a wounded animal. "But now, with the world gone to shit, you're stuck in a house with her, you should go for it."

"*I was* going for it until you interrupted." Draco said through clenched teeth.

"Wait, did—did something finally happen between you two?" Theo jumped up, grabbing

"I've only prepped about nine ingredients so far. You could start by grinding the four pods there into a fine powder; the consistency of asphodel!" He pointed with his wand to the edge of the table. She nodded, but didn't look up from his notebook. Instead he watched as her eyes flew across the pages, flipping to the next and the next and the next.

"Malfoy, this is genius. I mean, I never would have thought to add Manticoe Blood. Or Caladrius Tears?! And crushed Hydra Dragon scales for magical regeneration? Where did you even get these ingredients? And Hydra Scales? These are all *extremely* rare."

He grimaced and bit the inside of his cheek, "I—er—traded lifetime VIP box tickets for every Quidditch World Cup for the next fifty years to a contact I met who was a potions smuggler—don't look at me like that—a potions smuggler in Mozambique. The scales were naturally shed, of course, making them less magically potent than I would have liked, but I can't be sure any of the other ingredients were obtained honorably..." He turned back around to see Granger shaking her head disapprovingly as she began grinding the pods in a mortar, her technique a bit shaky.

"Here," He moved around the table and came to stand behind her as he held his hand over hers, moving the pestle to stand vertically as he helped her grind, "like this. That way the surface of the tool is grinding more evenly."

He hadn't realized how close he had gotten in her space until she turned her head, now inches from his neck. So close he could feel a little gust of air leave her mouth. He stepped away quickly, moving back to the other side of the worktable.

He didn't have time to analyze whatever that had been, instead busying himself with placing the rehydrated and veinless mantis under a stasis charm, occasionally stealing glances at her as she worked dutifully, crushing the pods exactly as he had shown her.

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The next few days flew by with neither Draco nor Granger getting much sleep. They worked considerably well together, flowing through the steps as if they had done this a thousand times. He would finish with stirring one element of the potion and turn to ask Granger to start simmering the next ingredient to find her already flicking a purple flame beneath another cauldron, his notebook perched in her other hand as she followed his written instruction to the letter.

By day three (three days ahead of schedule), they had added all of the elements, every rare ingredient and herb, stirred the potion thousands of times, clockwise, counterclockwise, incanting with intention and then left the potion to brew for exactly twenty-two hours, twenty-two minutes and twenty-two seconds.

Draco took a deep breath. They did everything they could, there was no reason the potion shouldn't be perfect, but there was always a chance in potion making that something could go wrong and this liminal space waiting for a complex potion to brew always did his head in.

"I need to get out of this lab," Draco said, "I feel like my heart may explode from the anticipation."

"Well," Granger turned to him with a beguiling smirk, "I know of a good way to release some energy."

Draco's eyes widened before he could school his features. He mentally patted himself on the back. Of course she wanted him. Zombie apocalypse or no, he was still a charmer, he thought smugly. "You do, do you?" He said seductively as he took a step toward her. She nodded as she twirled a lock of hair around her finger and sucked her bottom lip into her mouth. The sight

"Astoria's curse has accelerated, she's deteriorating faster than she should. I-I need to brew the potion for her, but it'll take me days and I don't think she has that long."

Granger's demeanor instantly changed, her healer instincts kicking in as she dropped her arms, "Let me grab my bag and I'll go see what I can do. I don't have a lot to offer when it comes to potion making, but I can come help you when I can."

He let out a relieved breath and nodded, "Thank you and I'm sure you'll prove to be a great help. There's about sixty-six ingredients that all require different preparation, so any help would cut down brewing time by a lot."

They kept a brisk pace through the manor as he showed her to the Greengrass guest suites, giving her instructions on how to get to his potions lab once she was able. As Granger knocked on the sisters' door, Draco gave her a quick nod as he continued his hurried steps around the corner, down the steps, down a long hallway, around another corner, down another flight of steps, then another and another, until he pushed open his potions lab.

It was exactly as he left it, of course. The cloyingly sweet smell of herbs and flora assaulting him in a way that made his heart sing and his blood pump. This was where he felt most in his element. More so than even the Quidditch pitch.

He rolled the sleeves of his Oxford and summoned his potions notebook. He began flicking his wand, cleaning surfaces, pulling cutting boards from their homes, summoning ingredients from their cupboards and arranging them by what would take the longest to prepare, intent on starting with those first, and got to work.

He hadn't realized how long he had been working until a knock on the door pulled him from his task of rehydrating and deveining purple mantis. He noticed that the natural light that normally illuminated the space wasn't coming from the windows. The torches on the walls had lit at some point without him noticing, indicating that it was now evening. He had been working for hours without stopping for breath.

"Come in." He called as the door opened and Granger stepped in.

He did stop his task then, setting down his wand, "How is she? Did you able to—" "Granger held up a hand and nodded, "She's stable. Her diagnostic was very similar to some scans I'd seen of muggle patients with sickle cell disease when I did my residency at the Royal London. Neville was able to find some intact toad caps in your estate garden and brewed a tea that helped bring her fever down, fight off any infection and Daphne was kind enough to offer to do a transfusion."

"Transfusion?"

"It's a muggle process of delivering healthy blood from a donor directly into the bloodstream of a sick patient. It seems to have equalized Astoria's vitals for the time being. Now, how can I help?"

"That's—" He shook his head, awed, "That's incredible. I didn't know you could do that."

"I've always said that the wizarding world would benefit greatly from incorporating muggle advancements into their practices." She shrugged as she walked up to his worktable and pulsed his open journal toward her. He suddenly felt very self-conscious about her looking at his work, some of it purely streams of consciousness and hypotheses and theories when he was in the beginning stages of his research. He resisted the urge to snatch it out of her hands.

Draco by the shoulders and shaking him slightly.

Draco gave a sheepish smile, "Not exactly, but..."

"Oh! Butts are good! I love butts!" Theo exclaimed, jostling Draco even more.

"It's new. Tentative. I don't know if she'd well, if she'd actually—" Draco replied, biting his lip.

"Well, considering the looks you were giving each other as you rutted against her, I'd say that she definitely would, mate." Blaise said.

"Ooooo, was it the 'fuck me' eyes?!" Theo asked, clapping his hands together excitedly as Blaise nodded in confirmation.

"Look, it's just precarious. I-I think she might like the Scot." Draco said.

"I mean, the bloke's a fucking tree that I would climb, if you know what I mean." Theo quipped with a wink as Draco heaved out a dramatic wrench.

Blaise leaned forward, resting his forearms on his knees, "If I were a betting man, and you both know I am—you still owe me two hundred galleons, by the way, Malfoy—I'd say you have a better shot."

"I agree that I'm better than the Scot—" Malfoy mused.

"I didn't say that—"

"—but why do I owe you two hundred galleons?"

"We played Royal Runes the night before your injury and I won." Blaise said simply. Draco scoffed indignantly, "I was in a coma and then woke up in the middle of a cannibalistic outbreak! But sure! Let me just pop over to Gringott's and get that for you, fucking wanker."

"Alright, don't get stroppy." Blaise mumbled.

"Mummy, Daddy, please don't fight." Theo added with a facetious pout.

Draco took a deep breath in through his nose, shutting his eyes tightly, opening them as he slowly blew out through his mouth, "Right, well, are we quite done here? I have a favor to ask you, Blaise."

Blaise straightened in his seat, giving Draco his undivided attention, "Anything, you know that."

Draco nodded, chewing on his cheek, "Can—can you send a patronus for me?"

"Of course. Who is the recipient?"

"My mother."

Both of his friends exchanged a look before Theo spoke, "Um, isn't she..."

"I don't know. I mean, the manor was littered with skeletons, most unrecognizable, but I just," He sighed, "What if she didn't make it back from France before Britain was locked down? What if she's out there somewhere? Stuck or—or trying to make her way back."

Blaise's mouth drew into a straight line as he mused, "She is the most Slytherin person we know, if anyone could survive on their own, it would be her."

"Cunning and resilient." Theo agreed.

Blaise stood, clapping Draco on the shoulder and flicking his wand. His jaguar formed slowly out of the tip in silvery wisps until its corporeal form materialized and it stalked the length of the room before settling at Draco's feet.

"Fire away." Blaise said with a tilt of his head.

Draco sucked in a shuddering breath as he crouched down toward the beast. It sat dutifully, its

tail flicking gracefully behind it.

"Mother, if you're alive...I'm at the manor. I'm-I'm alright. I'm with friends. Send me a patronus, if you can. I-I love you."

With a flick of Blaise's wrist, the glowing jaguar bounded through the wall and into the night.

They waited for a response well into the early hours of the morning, each second chipping away at the hope that had planted itself in his chest.

But no response came, and it was then that Draco remembered all too well that a person can

hope all they want, but rarely do the gods listen.

the crystal down on the wooden table with a thunk, "Well, that's just fuckin' braw. Cannae escape this sin even at the bottom of a bottle."

A series of guffaws and outraged scoffs sounded from the snakes as Granger stood abruptly, "Kieran, would you like to go walk the grounds with me?"

Draco straightened and turned to look at Weasley, who turned to look at Draco with disgust and disbelief on his freckled face. Weasley mouthed *what the fuck* as Draco stood there slack-jawed and watched Kieran as he nodded, guiding Granger out of the room with an abnormally large hand on her back. Bloody sausage fingers, they were.

"Oookay," Theo said, confusion evident, "I could do without the tension of whatever that fucking was, so I am going to retire to my quarters. Lovely seeing you Griff again. Ta." And with that, he pushed off from the table, grabbed the bottle of Dryveræft and sauntered out of the room. Draco would definitely need a sleeping potion tonight.

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The next morning Draco made his way to Astoria and Daphne's suites, knocking lightly at the door before it swung open.

Daphne's eyes were bloodshot, dark circles suggesting that she hadn't yet slept.

"Thought I'd give you both the night to rest. May I come in?" Draco asked.

She sighed heavily and moved aside so he could enter.

His eyes locked on Astoria's sleeping form in the large bed, her cheeks sunken and her frame delicate and thin. She looked dead, aside from the fact he could see her small body shivering, muscles twitching.

"How long has she gone without the potion?" He asked Daphne as he perched on the bed, flicking a rudimentary healing diagnostic.

"Twelve days."

He hummed as the diagnostic charm materialized above Astoria's head. Draco sucked in a breath as the blaring diagnostic flared with alerts in nearly every category.

"Fuck! Daph, what the fuck? This is worse than I've ever seen it. Her white blood cell count is through the roof, and her antibodies are practically nonexistent."

Daphne sniffed. "We ran into some trouble on the way. Took a lot longer to get here than we had hoped."

"Those potions should have relieved symptoms for four weeks, not twelve days! It's going to take me days to brew the potion. I-I don't—" he took a deep breath, "I need to talk to Granger. Can you send her a patronus?"

Daphne shook her head as her lips wobbled, "Can't. Not since...well, not since before the war."

"Fuck." He stood, walking briskly to the door before turning back, "Go to my rooms, summon all the blood replenishers in there and give her all of them. Got it?" She nodded. "I'll see if Granger can keep her stable while I start brewing."

He sprinted down the hall, up the stairs, down another hall, to the left, up another flight of stairs, and down a long corridor until he reached the wing where the Griffindors were staying.

"Granger!" He bellowed. Gods, he was out of breath, "GRANGER!"

A door at the end of the hall opened and Granger walked out, a crease between her brow.

"What?!" She said rudely, crossing her arms.

helped him survive up to this point. Is that a problem?"

"No," Pansy said slowly, eyes narrowed, "I just find it hard to believe that muggles are in Malfoy Manor without having exploded as soon as they passed through the gates. And I suppose the statute of secrecy is null and void considering the state of the world, but how? How did this happen?"

Draco waved a hand, "I reset the wards. Removed the anti-muggle curses. They're actually not so bad. They've got this thing called a DiscMan, you'll love it."

"And cargo pants!" Weasley added enthusiastically.

Draco shot the ginger a scathing glare as he continued, pointedly ignoring the mention of the pocket-ridden monstrosities, "And they took to learning magic was real surprisingly well considering. Well, except for the Scot."

"The Scot?" Pansy asked.

"Our other companion. He – well, he doesn't care for magic much." Sonny said, holding back a grimace as Draco rolled his eyes again. Much more of this eye-rolling and he'd wind up with a headache.

"He's a right prick." Draco supplied.

"Almost as much as you are." Granger grumbled, causing Draco to whip his head in her direction. What the fuck was her problem? He thought they had been getting along as of late. Did he say something? Offend her unknowingly? Was she upset the Snakes were here? Maybe she thought they all still hate muggles. Draco's eyes narrowed, he'd ask her later and set it right, whatever it was that peeved her.

"Ooooooo!" Theo exclaimed excitedly as his gaze danced between Draco and Granger, his hands rubbing together. "Got any popcorn, Longbottom?"

"Wha' the fuck is all this then?" Kieran's gargantuan frame lumbered into the dining room, beads clutched in his hand as he stared around at the new faces.

"Salazar's sweaty sack!" Theo balked at Kieran's towering form, "Wait! Let me guess. You're half giant on..." he made a show of contemplation, "your mum's side?"

Weasley burst out in a fit of laughter; his hand coming to clutch his stomach as he cackled, Draco trying and failing to stifle his own laugh.

Sonny sighed and poured herself two-fingers of firewhiskey, "Kieran, these are Draco's friends. They're here because...well, I don't actually know. Something about a potion."

"Great, more devil magic." Kieran mumbled as he crossed the room and picked up a bottle of firewhiskey.

"Devil magic?! As if we'd worship Lucifer," Pansy scoffed, "He isn't nearly as powerful as Hecate."

The Scot shot Pansy a look of revulsion as he uncorked the bottle and grabbed a crystal tumbler. Draco's lip curled, "What do you think you're doing?"

The Scot continued to pour himself a glass as he glanced at Draco, "Cannae a bloke wet his whistle?"

"That's a two-thousand galleon bottle of Drycraff. A *magical* and highly vintage bottle of firewhiskey."

At the word *magic* the Scot paused with the glass at his lips as they drew into a frown, setting

## CHAPTER 14 THE HEROES, THE WORLD DIDN'T ASK

**T**wo weeks passed quickly with Granger and Draco testing and analyzing, retesting and reanalyzing Astoria's blood. And one thing was glaringly obvious; they had no idea why or how Astoria's body was fighting off the virus, because it looked like her body *wasn't* fighting it off. They had done so much testing that they were out of blood to test, so while Granger went up to the sisters' suite to collect two more vials, Draco found himself out on the grounds, meandering through the rows of what once were vibrant variations of magical roses. His mother tended to these daily, and now without her attentions, they were withered and drab, only a few buds peppered the overgrown bushes.

"Hiya, Pretty Boy."



Draco turned and watched as Sonny strolled down the narrow walkway, machete swinging lazily from her hand.

He gave her a tight smile, "What are you doing out here?"

"Just finished a little training session with Pansy, Neville and Ginny," she said casually as she slung her machete smoothly into the sheath on her back, "I thought Pansy would be too prim and proper to get her hands dirty, but she actually packs a pretty mean right hook."

Draco nodded as they meandered down the stone-paved path, side-by-side. "Yeah, she once gave me a black eye because I accidentally stepped on her vintage Louboutin's." He scowled, "Then laughed at me for crying, but it *really* bloody hurt."

"Was this in school?"

"Oh, no, that happened last year."

Sonny chortled, "Well, she's—she was incredible."

"She is," Draco agreed.

"And did you two ever..." Sonny questioned.

"Hm? Oh. Back at Hogwarts, yeah for a bit, but never serious. We both knew our parents had our spouses chosen for us since we were in nappies." Draco shrugged.

"And was that the only thing stopping you both from being together?"

Draco let out a small scoff, "Salazar, no. We were better as friends, she's like a sister."

"A sister you...shagged?" Sonny arched an eyebrow.

Draco's face pinched in disgust, "Ugh! Don't be crass. Obviously not."

She bumped her shoulder into his, causing him to stumble into a rose bush, "Your friends are really quite good fun."

"Ow!" He groaned, righting himself, tugging his cable-knit jumper from the clutches of the brambles. Sonny snorted and Draco swiped his tongue along the front of his teeth as he glared at her.

"These gardens are beautiful," Sonny said, bending at the waist to smell a particularly large, mauve Ceridwen Rose.

"They were my mother's pride and joy. Used to be much more lively out here." He replied,

swallowing the snitch that had formed in his throat.

"My mother used to garden too, had a veritable apothecary, but she *hated* roses." Sonny chuckled. "Said their thorns pricked her one too many times for her liking."

"My mother would be appalled, but I have to agree with yours," Draco snorted, "What did she grow then?"

"Oh, loads. But her favorites were lilies. She grew probably twenty varieties in our tiny back garden. I used to help her make a lily extract that she called 'Mary's All-Purpose Tincture', but friends around the neighborhood called it 'Mary's Magic Medicine.' She always sold out of the stuff." Sonny chuckled fondly.

"Hmm, yes, certain lily species do have magical healing properties." Draco cleared his throat, "Is she—did she—er—recently? Or..." He trailed off awkwardly.

"Oh, no, she passed away years ago, when I was still a teen. She was diagnosed with early onset dementia." At his look of confusion, she clarified, "A disease of the brain. It affects cognitive

He chuckled then, "I don't have the oil, you know how oily my hair gets already," he nodded sagely, "but I have some Moon dew Balm inside. Your suite is free and you still have half of your wardrobe here."

She perked up then and gave a small gasp, "Oh my Morgana, I think I left my cherry red Prada boots here!"

"Let's get inside, then. You lot look like you could use a shower." He gave her a performative sniff, "And you smell like you could use one."

He laughed as she swatted him playfully and they meandered back into the manor, arm-in-arm. Draco left them to eat while he went to the library, finding Ruby sitting cross-legged in his favorite alcove clutching Buckbeak to her chest. As soon as she saw him, he saw her shoulders relax as she pushed herself to her feet.

"Anyone dead?" She asked flatly, her muscles tensing once more as she seemingly braced for the worst.

"No," He shook his head and smiled, "Everything's fine. My friends are here actually. Want to meet them?"

Her eyes brightened as she nodded enthusiastically, "I didn't think you had friends. You're very offputting."

He roved his tongue over his teeth in annoyance and leveled her with his best glare as she held her hand up.

"I'm kidding! God, you're so easy to rile up." She chuckled and he could have sworn the evil furby rolled its eyes at him. The fucking demon.

He and Ruby walked into the dining room to the most bizarre and happiest sights that Draco had witnessed in years. Blaise was chatting stoically with Ginny as the redhead told him the tale of the vampire church, waving her hands wildly, re-enacting the moment Ruby bit the ear off of the vampire. Draco noticed the curve of a smile forming on Blaise's cheek, a dimple there that rarely made an appearance on the usually stoic man.

Theo was shoving roast chicken and mash into his mouth—rather uncouthly in Draco's opinion—as Potter chattered quietly with he-Weasley on Theo's other side. Neville was piling a plate with pao-sips and roast chicken while Sonny chuckled at something Pansy said at the far end of the table.

Draco cleared his throat, grabbing the attention of the now-larger group. He placed his hand on Ruby's head, which she batted away, "Snakes, this here is Ruby. Ruby, that's Blaise, Pansy, and Theo. Theo is a menace just like you, so steer clear."

Theo's eyes widened comically, his mouth hanging open in a disgusting imitation of The Weasel's terrible table manners, "Draco, that's a—a child. You know I hate children. Why are you introducing us to a child? And what in Salazar's name is that demon-creature she's holding?" Ruby looked up at Draco with an arch of her brow, waiting to hear his response. He rolled his eyes, "It's a furby. And she's not just a child, she's a *muggle* child. And a damn brave one at that. Don't be rude." He shot Ruby a wink as he looked around, "Where's Astoria and Daph?"

"Up in their guest rooms." Pansy supplied quickly, "What the fuck do you mean 'muggle'?"

"He means," Granger's voice carried as she entered the dining room and sat at the head, pouring herself a hefty glass of elf-made wine, "that some people in this group are non-magical. They

led Astoria to sit. It was then that Draco noticed Astoria looked deathly pale, her eyes sunken in and her normally bright blue irises were nearly swallowed by blackness. She was looking at him, but not really and Draco's heart sank. How long had she gone without?

Draco pushed himself to his feet and began shakily adjusting the wards to allow the snakes through. As he worked, Theo spoke. "Oi, Potter, how have you not Avadatd this twat yet?"

"It's been a near thing." Potter retorted as Draco rolled his eyes and Theo chortled. After a few minutes, the wards were modified and the gates creaked open as Pansy flew through and tackled Draco into a bone crushing hug. He heard her sniff into his chest and mumble, "Your hair looks ridiculous."

He chuckled as he swiped the moisture from his cheeks and gave her a squeeze. Someone cleared their throat loudly.

Pansy let go of him reluctantly and Draco turned to see Granger standing off to the side, arms crossed and eyes narrowed before she turned on her heel and began marching up the path and back to the manor.

"This is going to be so fun." Theo grinned wickedly at Granger's retreating form, likely planning how he could get under the Golden Girl's skin.

"What's wrong with her?" Ginny asked, pointing to where Blaise and Daphne were assisting Astoria's weak form down the path.

"Blood curse." Theo supplied quickly as he sidled up to stand beside Draco. "She ran out of the supply you gave her a few days ago, so we didn't have much of a choice but to make the trek here and see if we couldn't find your research and recreate it." He slapped Draco hard on the back, making him pitch forward slightly. "But luckily we don't have to now that you're here! The gods are finally smiling down on us!"

"If any of you are hungry, we have a roast on the table. Feel free to—" Neville cut off his sentence abruptly as Theo shouldered past Draco and sprinted up the path, yelling something along the lines of *Fuck yes'* as Pansy looped her arm through his.

"I was so worried about your mother. Is she inside? Lucius?" She asked hopefully, craning her neck to stare up the path.

He swallowed a lump in his throat and shook his head softly. "No, they...no."

Pansy flicked her gaze back to him, her brows pinched together until understanding dawned. Tears welled in her eyes as she squeezed his forearm. "Oh, I'm so sorry, Draco."

He swallowed the lump in his throat, "I don't think it's fully sunk in actually. Er, I suppose Goyle and Milicent? Adrian?"

"Adrian was in Russia last I heard, Goyle and Millie didn't return our owls to meet at Theo's before things went to shit. They could be alive for all we know." Pansy shrugged, her tone laced with forced optimism. They both knew that the rest of their friends, family, acquaintances — they were likely all dead.

He gave her a shaky smile and squeezed her hand with his free one, "I'm just grateful you're all here. Never thought I'd see you again."

She flashed him a forced, watery smile, before it disappeared. "It's horrible out there, Draco. I couldn't even bring my Louboutin collection or my Moondew Oil. And I don't think I'll ever get the smell of rotten blood out of my hair."

functioning; memory loss, behavioral problems, difficulty with language and communication. It's the most horrible thing to experience, to watch your parent or in my dad's case, your wife, forget who you are. Forget who *they* are."

"Fuck, Sonny, that's—" he placed a comforting hand on her shoulder, "I'm sorry. And your father...did—did he..."

She tossed him a sad smile. "Losing my mother like that destroyed him, but he did the best he could with a rebellious and grieving teenage daughter. I don't think our relationship ever recovered after we lost her though. Me and him don't really speak often, or *didn't* speak often, you know, before the outbreak." She shot him a grinace.

Draco nodded, "I understand, more than most, what it's like having a complicated paternal relationship."

"I don't think I ever said how sorry I was, about your father. That must be difficult...seeing him like that." Sonny said sadly, squeezing his forearm gently.

Draco cupped the back of his neck awkwardly, "Most would say he got what he deserved. He was...not a good person." He let out a small chuckle, devoid of humor, "Bit of poetic justice that he's helping create a cure for this...for muggles included."

"Well, he was still your father; it's okay to feel...well, however you feel about it."

Draco made a noise of agreement. "And where was he, your father I mean, when this all went down?" Draco asked curiously, but also with the intention of changing the subject.

"He was out of the country, like usual. At least, last time I heard. But he was hard to get a hold of before all this happened, so when phone lines got jammed and radio signal was lost...Well, I just pray he stayed on his boat and found a remote island somewhere or something."

"He has a boat?"

Sonny hummed in confirmation, "A sailboat. Always on an adventure, that one. Him, the wind and the sea, he always said." She chuckled, but Draco could see the tightness around her eyes. "So what are *you* doing out here? Figured you'd be stuck to Hermione's hip in the lab."

"I'm not stuck to her hip," he mumbled, rolling his eyes as he absently stroked a petal with the tips of his fingers, secretly ecstatic to be talking about Granger instead of their dead parents, "we just work well together and we're determined to make the connection between —"

Sonny snorted indelicately and rolled her eyes. "Please, you follow her around like a lovesick puppy. And when she's not around, like right now, you look like a *lost* puppy." She bumped her hip into his playfully, shooting him an exaggerated pout. "I never see you anymore."

Ah, he saw this coming. Sonny had been curious about his relationship with Pansy, testing the waters to see if he was still unattached. Now, she was jealous he had been spending all his time with Granger. He was, of course, accustomed to women getting jealous and clingy when he started to become unavailable. He had had a sneaking suspicion that Sonny may have been harboring feelings for him, naturally, and here it was. And while Draco had certainly *thought* about it, perhaps wanked about it once or twice, he would have to let her down gently.

"You know," he placed a tentative hand on her shoulder, "I think you're great. And I am certainly flattered that you'd like to '*see me more*', he shot her a charming smile, "And I get it, I do, but I think we should just be friends." Draco said placatingly, parting her shoulder lightly before stuffing his hands into his trousers.

Sonny just stared at him, blinking once, twice. Poor thing was stunned speechless, she was not going to take this well.

"Okay?" She said slowly, drawing the word out.

"It's not that I don't think you're attractive, you are! Well fit and a little scary, which is actually pretty hot, but I think it would complicate our friendship—"

He was interrupted by Sonny doubling over, a hearty belly laugh escaping her and echoing into the gardens. His brows furrowed. *Oh no*, he thought, *his rejection had her in hysterics*.

He held his palms up, as if attempting to not scare off a wild Satyr. "Sonny, really, you're wonderful, I mean that. But I just don't feel the same w—"

Another boisterous laugh ripped through her as she fell onto the ground and clutched her stomach, waving her hand in an attempt to silence him. Draco looked around, a bit uncomfortable by her display, however warranted it was.

"Oh!" Sonny wheezed through uncontrollable laughter. "Oh god, Pretty Boy!" More hysterical laughter, although it was tapering off (but only slightly) as she pulled herself to stand by clawing at his clothing on the way up. "You ate," she said through dwindling chuckles, wiping glistening tears from her cheeks, "*really* something else."

He nodded, happy she was understanding. "I know, so are you, I just—"

She let out a hard snort, "Oh, please stop, my stomach hurts." She put a hand on his shoulder, lips wobbling as she seemed to be attempting to hold back more laughter; "Draco, I'm a lesbian."

His brows creased. "You—"

She nodded, a small squeak escaping her throat as she bit back a grin. "—Like women, yes. Been laying it on thick with Pansy, actually. Do you think I have a shot?"

"But I thought—"

"That I had the hots for *you*?" She doubled over again as a new fit of laughter crashed over her. Draco scowled.

"Well," he sniffed, affronted and mortified. "I—I'm glad that's sorted then."

"Oh my god," she choked out through giggles, "you are such a doon."

"Right, I'm going to go." He said sharply, face as fiendfyre, turning on his heel and marching back to the manor, Sonny's wheezing and chortling following him up the path.

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Back in the lab, Draco was still a bit miffed about being so wildly wrong about his assessment of Sonny's feelings for him, that he began to wonder if he was also wrong about Granger's feelings. Maybe he was reading those signals all wrong too.

But he was Draco bloody Malfoy! He never had to work for a woman before, so he felt wholly out of his element. Unmoored. Perhaps he should start laying on the charm? Seduce her? See how she responds to a little harmless flirting?

His musings were cut short as Granger sucked in a breath, face pressed up against the omniscope. "What is it?" He asked.

Granger shook her head, pulling another slide of Astoria's freshly acquired blood and placing it beneath the omniscope. She pressed her eyes to the looking glasses and gasped again.

"What? What is it?" He asked again, more urgently. Without removing her face, she beckoned him over with a quick wave and he crossed over to

## CHAPTER 12 THE SWAKIES

"**W**

hat the fuck!" Theo shouted.

"Oh my gods!" Pansy screeched. "We—you—how did you—"

Draco had fallen to his knees as tears spilled over his lashes and down his cheeks and he pulled in a great shuddering breath, looking up into the shocked faces of his best friends, their eyes as wide as galleons.

"We thought you were dead!" Theo exclaimed, his fingers wrapping around the bars of the gate as he squeezed his head through.

"I—" Draco couldn't catch his breath, he was sure he would wake up and this would all be another dream. "Are you really here?" He whispered.

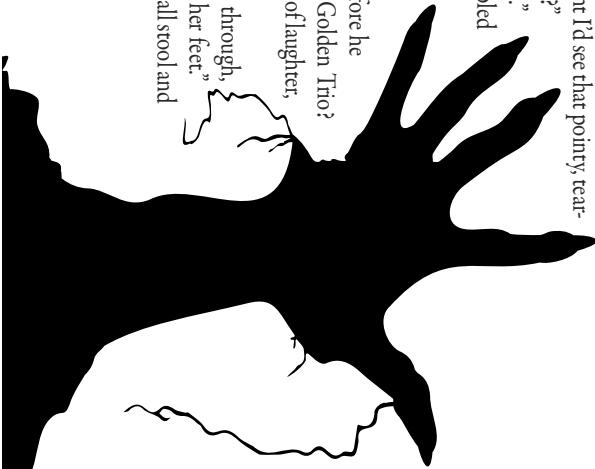
Theo nodded and cracked a grin, "Never thought I'd see that pointy, tear-filled face again, mate. How the fuck are you alive?"

Draco sniffed, voice cracking, "I had some help." A housefull of Slytherins. Great. Weasel numbed from somewhere behind Draco, the sound pulling the attention of the snakes as they narrowed their eyes at his companions.

"You're taking the piss." Theo's jaw dropped before he turned back to Draco, "The Gryffs? The fucking Golden Trio? At Malfoy Manor?? With you?" He let out a bark of laughter. "Oh, I cannot *wait* to hear this."

"Yes, we'd all love to, but mind letting us through, Malfoy? We're knackered and Astoria is dead on her feet."

Blaise grumbled as he transfigured a rock into a small stool and



you want a gun instead?"

Draco shook his head vehemently. "No, I think it's safer for everyone if I stick to a wand and—er—this." He held the axe up, "just in case. Jinxes only to incapacitate them and then I can dispatch."

Weasley nodded as Potter spoke to the group. "Okay, everyone disillusion until we get to the gate. Miione, Nev, you're with me to the left of the path and Ron, Sonny, you're with Malfoy on the right and we'll break the disillusionment once we see what we are dealing with."

Everyone nodded as they began casting disillusionment charms, Draco shooting a charm at Sonny as she too disappeared.

Potter's disembodied voice rang out, commanding and confident, which was oddly comforting,

"Ready?"

As the enormous gate came into view, he heard grumbling coming from the other side but couldn't make out shapes or bodies or Rotters, or anything at all. The closer they got to the gate, the louder the overlapping grumbling became and then the distinct sound of a woman's voice furiously whispered, "Oh, for fuck's sake, move over! Let me do it!"

Draco's heart fell through his stomach and flipped as if he were taking a nosedive on a broom. He dropped his axe and ran as hard as his legs would pump and cast a *finito*, ending his disillusionment as he skidded to a halt at the gate, his fingers wrapping around the bars. No one was there.

"Oh my fuck." A male voice whispered.

"Hello!" Draco yelled.

Then, a whispered *finito* had the haggard and dishevelled faces of Pansy, Theo, Blaise, Astoria and Daphne materializing in front of him. All of his meticulously shelved potion phials shattered.

her workbench in three strides. She slid the omniscope over to him and he gave her a questioning look before dipping down and looking through the eyepiece.

His brows pinched and then raised as his mouth popped open as he observed the cells and deciphered the omniscope's readings. He straightened and turned to face her with wide eyes.

"What did you see?" She asked breathlessly.

"I—The virus is..." He trailed off, as his brows pinched together.

Granger nodded vigorously, "Her white blood cells are being shielded and the virus is dying without anywhere to regenerate. But why? Why now?"

He shook his head, at a loss.

"Maybe..." Granger shook her head, brows pinched. "Well, when I saw Astoria two days ago to monitor her vitals, she looked ill again, you know, ghostly. But when I was extracting her blood this morning, she looked healthy, spry. When I asked, she said she had just taken another dose of the potion." She chewed on the inside of her cheek. "What if—what if the potion helps her fight the blood curse symptoms, but it's also helping her fight off the infection?"

"The potion? My potion?"

She nodded manically, eyes wide. "Think about it. It's the only variable that's changed. This virus affects the host's blood; her blood curse does the same. What if one of your ingredients or... or a combination of your ingredients—is fighting the virus?" She grabbed a quill, dipping it in ink before scribbling in Draco's journal as she spoke, "What was the duration of action when you first created the potion?"

"The potion typically should alleviate her symptoms for up to four weeks," his eyes widening in understanding, "and now it only lasts two, which I noticed when they first arrived, but didn't stop to consider why." He mused. "The first time you extracted her blood, she hadn't taken the potion dose yet."

"Exactly. We should test it. The potion against Lucius and Archie's blood. See if it works to attack the virus in another infected wizard or if Astoria is some kind of medical anomaly." Granger said absently, still scrawling away.

"Fuuuuck," Draco breathed, feeling as if he'd just been hit in the stomach by another bludger, "Okay, fuck. I'll—I'll go get some samples from the dungeons and bring them back up." He added as she hummed in confirmation, waving a hand.

And, without his permission, a small seed of hope sprouted in his chest.

Granger had been slightly manic as he handed her the fresh vial of Lucius' blood, and he watched her, transfixed as she cast a wordless shield charm over them both and methodically extracted a few droplets with her wand, transferring them to a glass slide. He swallowed thickly as she adjusted the omniscope, her hands trembling minutely as she sucked in a deep breath and pressed her face to the eyepiece.

A beat passed and Draco chewed on his cheek as he watched the crease on her forehead deepen slightly before she removed the slide and tucked it in a new one beneath the scope. He was nearly about to scream at her to say something, when her head popped up, her eyes wide as she turned to him.

"Oh my gods, Malfoy," she breathed.

"What?!" He asked, eyes wide.

Granger squealed as she jumped up from her stool, lifting up on her tiptoes to plant a wet kiss on his cheek. Draco was too dazed to do anything other than stand there stunned. "Your potion is actively shielding healthy cells against the present virus particles, albeit very slowly and there's not many healthy cells to shield, but it works Malfoy!"

Granger was already back to her station, shoving her eyes against the eyepieces as Draco attempted to move his bloody feet and slow his racing heartbeat. But all his brain could do was revel in the touch of her lips on his cheek. He could still feel the wetness that had clung there. And she said he was a genius. She said *he* was a genius. She *did* like him. Didn't she?

"So, your potion effectively combats the virus for two weeks, but doesn't fully shield all virus particles. Meaning they are still able to hijack her blood cells and reproduce. *But* whatever combination of ingredients in your potion seems to be shielding her cells temporarily, thus allowing her healthy cells to attack the viral parasites." She rattled off quickly, before sucking in a breath and carrying on, "Obviously, we need to continue testing before I'll be confident enough to bring this to Kingley, but I think it's safe to say that we need to narrow down which ingredients from your potion are most effective. Then we try to create a new, more potent version and see how long until another dose needs to be administered to Astoria. Of course, the more potent we are able to get the potion, the less people will have to take it. Maybe we brew it during a magically enhanced time period, like a new moon or a planetary alignment. Mabon is coming up." She said absently as she picked up his research journal. "Malfoy?"

He cleared his throat, shaking his head as he came to, "Yes, et, yes."

She shot him a shy smile. "You really *are* a potions genius."

He scoffed, heat crawling up his neck, "Oh, yes. I accidentally made a temporary vaccine and have no idea what ingredients could be combating the infection. A regular Nicolas Flammel."

Granger snorted, "Well, I'll be honest that a lot of those ingredients are new to me, so perhaps you can teach me as we go along?"

"Ooo-hoo! Well," He teased good-naturedly, "alert the Daily Prophet! The Golden Girl, Miss Top Of Her Class, needs ex-Death Eater and former childhood bully to teach *her* something!"

"Oh, fuck you!" She laughed as she crossed her arms. "Hogwarts went through like six potions teachers during our time there, not to mention I was fighting a new kind of evil most of the time, so forgive me that potions was never my strong suit."

"Excuses, excuses." He sniffed as he pulled up a stool and sat as close as he could to her without being creepy. "This is actually so great for my ego, so I'm *happy* to teach you, Granger." He said with an exaggerated wink.

He was pleased to see a faint blush creep up her chest as she procured a blank piece of parchment. "Okay," she cleared her throat, "so from the top. Billwyg brains—ugh, I know that one. Your notes say that they were effective in helping with blood flow as opposed to their wings. Hmm, yes." She jotted the ingredient down on the blank parchment. "Forest Helbole; Effective in reducing pain and anxiety. Not likely that one." She went on, "Indrik Horn; To assist in reducing headaches and fatigue. The note here says 'Don't get the powder in your nose or you'll feel like you just drank a pepper-up and will worry your heart will explode.' What's an Indrik?"

He tilted his head in contemplation, "Er, it's similar to a unicorn, but much huskier, like abull."

the wards at the perimeter of the estate.

He shot to his feet, alarm evident on his face as he sent his chair skidding across the floor. Potter cautiously rose from his chair, pulling his wand from its holster, "What is it, Malfoy?"

"Something just set off the wards at the gate." His breath began to quicken, his heartbeat thundered as he looked wildly around the table, his companions sharing equal looks of shock and befuddlement.

Porter took a steady breathing, "Ron, go grab our guns."

"It could just be a couple of Rotters," Ginny offered hopefully.

Porter nodded, "Or it could be a horde passing through. If there's too many of them, specifically wizard Rotters, congregating around the wards, I don't know if they would hold, even with Malfoy's pureblood wards. We should to go assess and dispatch as many as we can."

Weasley had already sprinted out of the room and the rest of the group began heading towards the foyer. Draco palmed his wand, his hand already sweaty. He knew it wasn't his mother, his mother was dead and she certainly wouldn't be having issues getting through the wards, but a small part of him hoped desperately that it was her standing outside the gates.

As Draco tried to redirect his thoughts to the task at hand, he watched Sonny crouch down to Ruby's height and hand her a radio as she mumbled, "Stay here okay? I'll radio you once the coast is clear and you radio me if...I dunno, if anything happens in here, okay? And I'll come running." "I want to come! I can fight too!" Ruby shouted, tears brimming in her lashes.

"I—I have to keep *you* safe. Please, just—please stay."

Draco could hear the tremble in Sonny's voice and his magic flared once more at the sensation of the wards being brushed again. The muggles had lost nearly half their group in such a short period of time, and judging by how little Draco wanted to leave Ruby in the Manor all alone, (fuck the Scot who was hiding in his rooms) he could guess Sonny's trepidation.

Ruby just snuffed and nodded, stuffing the radio in her back-pocket as she adjusted the demon furby—*Buckbeak*—in the crook of her elbow and pulled out her little pocket knife. Draco sidled up next to the teen and held his palm out, "Let me see your knife."

She gave him a questioning look, but placed the knife in his palm without complaint. He turned it over in his hand and muttered an incantation before passing it back to her. She tentatively took it back and looked up to him with wide eyes as she spoke, "What did you do to it?"

"I cast a spell that will make your aim true. Throw it and it'll stick pointy end first in your target and then it'll fly right back to you handle first. If you need to use it, throw it as hard as you can and then run and as you're running just leave your palm open and it'll come back to you. You know how to get to the library?" She nodded. "Good, you're the only other person besides me and Granger that can get through the wards. Hide in the stacks until I can find you. It'll be fine."

She nodded and he gave her a forced smile as he turned towards the group as they prepared to open the doors, turning back once more to see Ruby, her jaw set, clutching her little knife and her little demon. He said softly, "No biting ears off today, hey?"

She gave him a forced grin that was more like a grimace and shook her head.

Draco forced himself to breathe and organized a few potions bottles on their shelves as he wedged himself between Sonny and Weasley, the former handing him Archie's old axe, which he took in his dominant hand, wand in his other. Weasley turned to him with an arched brow, "Did

tiny demon.

Draco's eyes widened and he frowned, pointing an accusatory finger at her, "Who gave you the idea for that name?"

Just then he heard a snicker and turned to see Ginevra fucking Weasley's shoulders shaking from obvious laughter; her head turned away from Draco.

He growled, "You little fu—"

"Okay!" Potter said as he stood holding a wine glass at the head of the table. *Why the fuck is Potter sitting at the head?* "Thanks as always, Nev, for preparing such a feast! And happy birthday to Sonny! I'll never forget you putting Ron in a chokehold and watching as his face turned as red as his hair yesterday. Chin chin!"

A chorus of cheers and happy birthdays erupted from around the table as Draco's head whipped to Sonny.

"Birthday? It's your bloody birthday today?" Draco asked, feeling more and more like the worst person to ever live.

Sonny gave him an apologetic smile. "Yes, well, I'm not big on birthdays, but *someone*," she cut an accusatory glance to Ruby, "let the cat out of the bag."

"I'm sorry we haven't been very present. That's mostly my fault." Granger said sheepishly as she accepted a plate from Neville.

"Rubbish. It's my fault, I should have never shown you the library." Draco replied absently as he poured himself a hefty glass of elf wine from the Malfoy wine cellar.

Ginny let out a snort. "As if you could have kept her away."

"Too true. Where's Kieran?" Granger inquired as she looked around the table.

Draco held back a scowl as Sonny answered with a heavy sigh. "He's—well, he took Mabel and then Archie's—you know, he took it pretty hard. Hasn't been spending much time out of his room the last week. He did ask for—er—a book though. I don't suppose you've got the bible in that library of yours?"

Granger choked on a sip of her wine as Draco's brows furrowed. "The bible? As in, the muggle religious text?" He scoffed, disbelief lacing his tone.

She hummed in affirmation. "He grew up in the Catholic church and has always had a deep connection to it. I think he could use some restoration in his faith. But I don't know shit about shit when it comes to religion, so I'm just speculating."

"No," Draco said slowly as he rolled his eyes, "I can't say that we have many muggle religious fairytales here."

Sonny shrugged as Granger rapped her fingers on the wooden table. "I can look, tomorrow. Or maybe, summon one from nearby."

Draco sneered at his plate as if the roasted honey parsnips had personally offended him. He wouldn't bother telling her that the nearest town or home was far outside the range someone could summon an item.

The Weasel scoffed, "Well, just don't tell him you used magic to acquire it, or he'll surely throw it in a handmade fire. Afraid it will get our magic cooties on him or something."

Draco let out an amused puff of air through his nose and made to take another bite of the delectable roast chicken when he felt it. The wards. Someone—or something—had just set off

Native to Russia's mountainous regions."

Granger's eyes narrowed. "And we are using their horns?"

He rolled his eyes. "Yes, but don't lose your pretty head, they shed them naturally and bury them beneath dense earth, so they're extremely hard to find, which makes them very rare and costly, but not unethical."

"Hmn, alright then, but likely not affecting the virus." She crossed it out as she went on, "*Strix* quills; Effective in increasing hemoglobin count. Oh interesting, I think I've heard of this one."

Draco waved his hand lazily. "Yeah, some kind of magical bird or owl, I don't know. My contact had two *Strix* which he mated in Bucharest. Greek origins. Super rare and *wildly* pricy ingredients."

He looked thoughtful for a moment before scowling. "But I'm pretty sure he overcharged me by several thousand galleons now that I think about it, the bastard."

"Hmn, promising." She said thoughtfully as she scribbled the name of the ingredient on the parchment and flipped to the next page of his journal, "Pulpé Soporiferous root; Effective in reducing nausea, but smells like troll feet?"

"I mean honestly, how it's supposed to reduce nausea when it was the cause of mine is beyond me." He quipped.

She giggled as she turned to face him. "I love all of your notes, the way you scribble your thoughts into the margins. It's like getting a peek inside your head. You know, you're funnier than I anticipated."

He felt his cheeks flush as he chuckled, moving a stool to sit beside her, nearly caging her in with his legs as he peered over her shoulder as she scribbled. "I couldn't *just* be devilishly good looking." She scoffed as he leaned in and pulled his notebook between them, wincing at his less than perfect penmanship that was scrawled along the corners of each page. "I probably should have rewritten everything though, to make it cleaner research, but I never imagined I'd have the Brightest Witch of Our Age flipping through it in my lab."

She palmed her forehead, turning to stare up at him with a pained expression, "Oh, please don't, I hate that moniker."

He set his elbow on the table beside her, resting his head on a casual fist, "Why? You are." "I'm what?" She said, her voice higher than normal as she looked down at his journal, avoiding meeting his eye.

He ducked his head forcing her gaze to his. "The brightest witch."

"Pfft, please," she turned fully towards him, her knees grazing his inner leg before they made their home in the warmth between his thighs — "And what about you, Potions Prodigy?" She quipped, cheeks pink as she mirrored his posture so her arm pressed against his, a cheek resting on her open palm.

His stomach flipped, a sheepish grin splitting his face as he tapped the journal that sat between them with a finger. "This is nearly *two years* of meticulous research, I'm sure you could have done it in two *months*."

"Maybe if I had you helping me." Her bright eyes bored into his, almost eager in their intensity as she stared up at him through her lashes.

Draco swallowed thickly, deciding to throw caution to the wind, tugged a loose curl which had escaped the confines of her bun and watched it, mesmerized, as it bounced back into place. "We

do make a good team, don't we? Who would have thought."

The smile she gave him had his heart near fit to bursting, an overwhelming kind of feeling as if he could conquer the world, as long as she continued to look at him like that.

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That night, after hours of narrowing down which ingredients were the most likely to be combating the virus, Granger and Draco found themselves strolling to the kitchens to rustle up some dinner; sure that it was much too late for the others to be awake. As they neared the kitchens, they heard the unmistakable sounds of groaning and slurping. They had both heard their fair share of Rottter noises and lifted their wands silently in unison as they crept up to the door that sat slightly ajar.

"Are you sure my father and Archie are locked up?" Draco whispered.

"You were the last one down there!" Granger's panic-faced voice whispered back.

Peering into the slit of the open door, they both sucked in gasps at the scene before them. Harry fucking Potter was starkers naked, arse propped up on the countertop (Honestly, unsanitary), head thrown back in wild abandon as Theo knelt between his legs, devouring him like he was a man lost in the desert and Potter's cock was the straw to an oasis stream. Granger turned to look at Draco with shocked eyes, his likely mirroring her look of horror as they silently backed away from the doors, sprinting down the hall and into the conservatory, huffing and panting once they shut the doors.

"Oh my gods!" Granger squeaked out, "I mean, good for them, but on the table where we prepare our meals?! I'm going to have to take a strong scourify to that counter."

"No, no, we have to burn the countertop now. Actually, the whole kitchen." He choked out, "It's unsalvageable."

"You may be right. So rude." She tsked. "It's a communal space."

"I didn't know Potter was gay." Draco said thoughtfully. "I thought him and the she-Weasel were still together."

"He's bisexual, actually." Granger supplied. "And no, him and Ginny haven't been together for ages."

"Bisexual? Ah, of course, the Bi Who Lived." Draco nodded. "I always thought his obsession with me was more than hatred."

Granger snorted. "Oh my gods, does your ego ever take a day off?"

"No. Not even on holidays." They both burst out into laughter.

They continued giggling until a demonic voice echoed in the corner of the conservatory. They both tensed. Draco knew that wasn't the sound of a Rottter nor the sounds of passion and truly did not want to go investigate, but Granger clutched onto his arm as she pulled him quietly towards the source. More demonic laughter echoed and he tightened his hold on her arm as they moved further into the balmy solarium. Holding their breath, they inched around a planted Purple Monstera Philodendron that vined all the way to the top of the vaulted glass-domed ceiling, wands in hand as they came face to face with Buckbeak.

Granger burst out in a fit of laughter, burying her face in his chest as she tried to control her giggles. Draco nor daring to move lest she let go of him.

"That bloody monstrosity!" He growled half-heartedly, pointing an accusatory finger in its

think you knew I had a Healing mastery. And how did you hear about the Polyjuice?"

He scoffed, intent on only addressing her first statement and *not* divulging that he had read her memoirs. "It was hard *not* to know about your mastery when it was splashed all over the front page of every news publication last year. Not to mention your very professional healing of my..."

"Your cock." She supplied helpfully, the grin in full bloom on her delicate face now. "Well, my..."

At the mention of his cock, it twitched in his trousers as if summoned. Perhaps it was remembering how gently she had caressed it.

He cleared his throat, "Yes. Thank you again by the way. He is very grateful."

"He?"

"My cock."

"Right. Little Malfoy." She laughed. He scowled.

A bright silver, corporeal tree frog hopped through the stacks and plopped silently onto their work table before Neville's voice began spilling from the little frog's mouth, "Dinner is ready in ten minutes. Why don't you both take a much needed break and join us tonight?"

Granger huffed as the frog spoke again, "I know I posed that as a question, but it is not up for debate. Hermione." The frog turned to Draco, "Talk some sense into her and we'll see you both in a mo."

Neville's patronus disappeared in a puff of silver as Granger levelled Draco with a look, "I just have two more chapters of this to fini—"

Draco shook his head, "No. We need to get out of this library, Granger."

"But I love this library." She whined, clutching her current book to her chest.

"Yes, and it will still be here later. But we haven't seen the group in days and I'm starving. I can't live off one more of those protein bars from your little beaded bag."

With another growl that he was becoming so fond of, she slammed the tome down on the table and pushed to her feet, "Fine, but I am only alocating one hour to this and then we are coming right back here."

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As Granger and Draco entered the hallway that led to the dining room, the sounds of Ruby's laughter, chattering voices, and the clinking of cutlery filtered through the corridor. Pushing open the doors, they were greeted with the smells of a proper Sunday roast, complete with yorkshire pudding and what looked to be a whole roast chicken.

*How the bloody hell did Longbottom get his hands on a whole chicken?* He thought.

At the sound of their entrance, the group turned and they received a chorus of "Ahhh, look who it is!", "Pretty boy, we missed you!", "Finally peeled yourself away from the library aye, Mione?", "Sit, sit! Let's eat!"

Draco's attention caught and flitted to the end of the table where Ruby was waving her arm and patting the seat next to her. Draco couldn't help but smile at the enthusiastic teen, walking up to the offered seat. As he went to sit down, he saw the terrifying fury creature resting on the chair and he shot Ruby a lighthearted scowl. She laughed and picked the creature up, depositing it on her lap and brushing a hand over the top of its fury head.

"I don't get why you don't like Buckbeak." Ruby said distractedly as she continued stroking the

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Draco spent the rest of the week poring over old texts from medieval vampire hunters, hoping to find any additional weaknesses, but it was much of the same that a fourth year would learn: Garlic, silver, fire, a stake through the heart and of course, sunlight. Meanwhile, Granger had her nose stuck in about fifty different books ranging from blood magic to healing to zoology. She had finished *Vampiros Magiae et Anatomia*, and had a nearly twenty foot scroll filled with her illegible little scribbles of information she deemed important.

Draco had pried it out of her hands long enough to finish it himself and added a few notes to his own research journal. Namely, how the hunter had been turned towards the final pages and attempted to document his transition. It was a fascinating bit of history, one that made it make sense why this hunter's accounts were largely destroyed by vampires over time in an attempt to keep their strengths and weaknesses hidden from mortals.

Draco had heard not hide nor hair from the Gryffindors or his muggles since he and Granger began researching and he was starting to feel a bit cagey. Although, she was right, having someone to bounce ideas or theories off of was quite intellectually stimulating and he found himself smirking more often than not at her excited little squeaks when she read something interesting or her rough little growls when she hit a dead end. But he wanted to do something.

He was uncomfortably hot in the suit he had picked out for the day, the stuffy alcove they had set up camp in the last few days exacerbating his overheating body. He huffed and peeled his suit jacket off, rolling the sleeves of his white Oxford up to his elbows and cast a quick cooling charm.

"I think we should begin trying to isolate the virus and start analyzing blood samples. Tomorrow." He said as Granger pulled her mass of curls onto the top of her head and stuck her wand through it. The action sent a cloud of her vanilla and coconut scent wafting into him and as he breathed in her sweet perfume, he noticed the long slope of her neck, also dotted with a myriad of small freckles.

She nodded absently as she twirled her quill between her nimble fingers, nose still tucked between the pages of a 19th century book called *Rare and Extinct Magical Creatures of Asia* and hummed, scribbling more illegible scratch onto her parchment before looking up at him. Her eyes widened and she lost control of her twirling quill as it fell with a clatter onto her parchment, ink splattering onto her notes before she cleared her throat, "What?"

Now it was his turn to give her a strange look. Perhaps she was also mentally taxed on reading. "I think we should begin trying to isolate the virus tomorrow." He repeated, obnoxiously louder and slower. "Conduct analysis of the vampire blood as well as Archie and fathers' blood."

She sighed and slumped in her chair, "Yes, I suppose I have been putting it off for far too long. I would've liked to have started on that days ago, but I just feel like I am completely out of my depth here. None of these bloody bat species I've read about have matched the description of the one in the paper and I just—" She sighed, "I think I've bitten off more than I can chew."

"Granger, you have a mastery in Healing. You brewed Polyjuice Potion in second year and you defeated one of the most sick dark wizards to ever live. Not to mention, you kept Scar Face and Ginger Twat from facing certain death for seven years. You are, unequivocally, realistically, the only person alive in all of Great Britain that could figure this out."

She bit the inside of her cheek to hide the obvious smirk that threatened to break free, "I didn't

direction. "Buckbeak, you evil mutant, you scared us half to death!"

Still giggling, he grabbed her hand, unlatching it from his arm so he could thread it through the crook of his elbow as he led her further into the foliage-covered space and away from the fury abomination. Their laughter died down when they approached the gleaming telescope in the far corner. She gave him a questioning glance as she disentangled from his arm, much to his chagrin, and stepped up to the scope, "May I?"

Hunched as she bent at the waist and pressed her face to the eyepiece. From this angle, Draco had a perfect view of her perfect ase and had to adjust the growing erection in his trousers as she let out a sound that was somewhere between a sigh and a moan. He would sacrifice his Moondew Essence to hear her moan like that for him.

"Oh, it's beautiful. Venus." She pulled away and straightened, turning to Draco with a radiant expression, "That's my favorite planet."

"Oh?" He asked nonchalantly as he settled himself on a settee, discreetly placing a pillow over his swelling crotch, "Why's that?"

She chewed on her lip, tossing a thick sheet of curly over her shoulder, and damned her signature swot voice, "Well, it represents passion, love, beauty, and of course, desire. It's further away from the sun, but its surface is still hotter than Mercury's and it's the brightest object in the sky except for the Sun and the Moon and has been that way for millennia. Not to mention that she's named after Aphrodite who was punished by Zues for inspiring love between gods and mortals."

"Kind of like you, then?" He asked.

"Like me?"

You've inspired a lot of things that, for centuries, were kept separate; your Muggleborn Education Initiative, your Wolfsbane Welfare Act, your Fair Labor Bill for House Elves." He ticked each item off on a finger.

"Been keeping tabs, have you?" She smirked, her eyebrows lifting in surprise.

"Just a consistent patron to my *Daily Prophet* subscription is all."

She rolled her eyes playfully, a small smirk playing on her plump lips, sighing wistfully as she moved to sit beside him, staring up through the glass dome of the conservatory.

"And," He went on, "you'll be happy to know that Venus completes its retrograde rotation in four days, meaning that it's the perfect opportunity to create a more magically potent potion formula to test with Astoria. That way, if it doesn't work, we always have Mabon at the end of the month."

Her head snapped to him as she beamed, "Oh, that's – brilliant, Malfoy, really!"

They both fell into an easy silence, heads tipped back as they rested on the back of the settee, staring up at the inky black sky dotted with specks of light. Draco couldn't help but roll his head to stare at her profile. Her face open and relaxed, her lips pouting as he watched her brain work through some puzzle.

"Well, I suppose we should –" she turned to face him, brows knitting together, "What? Why are you looking at me like that?"

"You just," He squinted his eyes, "You're just different than how I imagined you being."

She sucked her lower lip between her teeth, "How so?"

He pushed a puff of air out through his nose. "Just less obnoxious." She made a small sound of protest as he ignored her and went on, "More...secure in yourself, confident, yet unrestrained and...I don't know, it's liberating to be around you." He shook his head, "I don't know if that even makes sense."

Color crept up her neck as the corner of her mouth lifted, their heads nearly touching, "No, it does make sense. I don't think we'd have ever...hung out in the real world. But I suspect that had we joined forces during the war, we would have been a force to be reckoned with."

"Oh, Voldemort would have cowered at our union." He laughed before his smile slowly receded as he was sucked into the depths of her amber eyes. "I'm sorry for everything. For calling you a mudblood, for antagonizing you throughout school, for doing nothing while my aunt tortured you here, in my home. I hope you know that, while I still have many flaws, I am not that person any more."

Her hand found his own as she threaded her fingers through his, "I know, I got your letter... after the war."

"I never got a response, which I half expected, so I figured you *intendio*'d it after seeing the Malfoy seal." He grimaced.

"Well, I didn't trust you then. Thought you were just trying to fix your tarnished reputation. But I did read it. Probably a hundred times actually." She said, absently brushing her thumb over the skin of his knuckles.

"And now?" He asked softly hopeful in his penance. "Do you trust me?"

"I think so, yes." She whispered quietly.

"Good." He whispered back, "You can."

She didn't respond for several moments, before she whispered shakily, "What if we don't figure this virus out. What if...what if we lose more people. I-can't fail."

His chest heaved with the force of his sigh as he wrapped an arm around her shoulders, pulling her into him. "I'm with you in this. We won't fail."

She let out a soft chuckle, "Look at us, getting all sentimental."

"Thank Merlin that an aggressive outbreak that's likely killed a majority of the world brought us together, huh?" He chuckled, tapping her leg with his. "Who else would keep you from spiraling? Who else would I bicker with about the efficacy of Moonew Essence on my gorgeous hair? Who else would teach me how to shoot a gun, hm? Who would you shake your bum with, if I weren't around?"

She burrowed tighter into him, laying a warm hand on his stomach as her muscles relaxed,

"Thank Merlin."

He stretched his hands out in front of him as if reading a news headline. "The Golden Girl and the Slytherin Prince: The Heroes the World Didn't Ask For, But Certainly Need."

She batted his hands away as she snickered, "More like, Brightest Witch and Blonde Bitch."

"Oii!" He protested. "Just for that, I'm hiding Buckbeak under your bed."

He cut off abruptly, realizing he had been babbling, and found a slack-jawed Granger staring at him as if he had three heads, "Y-yes. Yes, that's exactly what I've been thinking." She looked at him thoughtfully, "I'd forgotten how good you were at potions."

"One of the only things I was better at than in." He chuckled, "And in addition to studying magical maladies, I got a potions mastery in France after the war."

Her eyes practically popped out of her head before a small dirot creased between her brows, "Wait, why the potions mastery if you knew you'd be playing professional quidditch?"

His shoulder shrugged, "Well, I did attempt to work in the potions field, but no one wanted a Death Eater as an apprentice. So I had to find another career. Still practiced and studied when I wasn't training or playing. I was hoping to find a cure for Astoria's blood curse."

"Blood curse?"

He nodded, "It affects—er, affected—the women of the Greengrass family, dating back centuries. I made some good headway, was able to create several versions of a potion that helped alleviate a lot of her symptoms temporarily but...I suppose it doesn't matter anymore. She's probably dead. But, I studied hematology and malevolent curses to a nauseating degree, so that might help us in our research."

She looked at him as they arrived at the doors to the library; an appraisal if he were to guess, and her eyebrows raised slightly before she nodded, impressed, "That is wildly convenient. It will be helpful to have an extra set of competent eyes on the research. I'll admit, I've...struggled in the past with potions and I've never had someone to bounce ideas off of before."

He tamped down the need to push his shoulders back and lift his chin at her use of the word 'competent'. Instead he dipped his chin and muttered a spell that would allow Granger to enter the library and pushed open the heavy wooden doors.

Granger gasped, as he knew she would, and his stomach did a strange summersault when he looked at her wide eyes and mouth hanging open in shock. He let her soak it in, her eyes wandering up the three floors of shelves and watched, well-pleased, as they flicked over the thousands and thousands of ancient and rare texts. She finally ripped her gaze away to turn her now scowling face at Draco, who furrowed his brow. Without warning, she punched him, hard, straight in the pectoral and he wheezed, a hand coming to clutch at his abused tit.

"OW! What the fuck was *that* for!?" Draco whined.

"Just for you being a rich prat and having this at your fingertips, you bloody prick." She huffed, "How do I find the books I need?"

Draco was still rubbing at his sore chest, "Just summon it if you know the name, if it's more of a general topic you need, there's a ledger there," he pointed to the nearly one meter tall book that sat atop a black marble plinth, "you can spell it to open to a particular topic and it will show you what sections you can find those books in."

"Well, then I suppose if you or anyone else needs me for the remainder of our time in Wiltshire, you can find me in here." She said with a wistful sigh as she shot off a summoning spell and sauntered over to the ledger, effectively dismissing him.

He scowled, "Yes, well, if it's all the same to you, I'd like to pull some books as well."

She waved an impatient hand, not even looking up from the ledger as she muttered topics under her breath, the book flipping between pages rapidly.

as she had come up. He was well and truly a fucking knob.

It wasn't until four days later when they finally spoke.

Draco was in his rooms, reading *Vampiros Magiae et Anatomia*, when a small knock on his door sounded. He snapped his book shut irritably, placing it under his pillow, and strode to the door, pulling it open with a groan.

"Ruby, please. I don't want to go gnome hunting again—" His sentence was cut off at the sight of Granger; her curls cascading around her as she crossed her arms and stared past him and into his suites.

"Malfoy." She said by way of greeting, "Me and Kieran tried to go to the library earlier, but there's a ward placed. Won't allow us to enter. I need to look for that book."

Draco was grateful for the years he spent schooling his features, lest he be eaten by a madman's snake, and increasingly thankful he had the foresight to make sure the Scot couldn't get his grubby, Nundhi-sized paws on his family collection, "Oh right, you have to be accompanied by a Malfoy in order to gain entry."

She narrowed her eyes, "So, can you take me now, then?"

He swallowed thickly, mind slightly panicked that the book she was looking for was currently tucked beneath his pillow, but nodded. He supposed they would have to work together on this virus research eventually, embarrassment be damned.

"Sure, just—erm—one second." He noticed her mouth opening to reply, but he quickly shut the door to his suite and sprinted to his bed, pulling the worn tome from its hiding place and vanishing it back to the library.

He checked his reflection in the mirror, shooting off a quick hair charm and assuring he had nothing stuck in his teeth, before he pulled open the door to find Granger standing in the same spot, her arms still crossed and an impatient foot tapping against the floor.

As they made their way to the library, Draco cleared his throat at the same moment Granger began speaking.

"I'm sorry about—"

"I'm hoping to—"

They stared at one another for several moments before Draco spoke, "You were hoping to...?" "I was hoping to begin blood analysis on both Archie and Lucius as well as extract samples from the vampire ear this week after I make a little headway in the library. I have some theories I'd like to test. And I haven't been able to find your lab."

He nodded slowly, "Oh, right. Of course. And I've also been thinking. We need a magical equivalent of a "vaccine," right? Something that builds resistance in the bloodstream before infection takes hold or purges the virus if caught within a short time window. Of course we'd need to start by isolating the virus from our—er—*test subjects* blood. Then, we could test the isolated virus against different elements, like colloidal silver, concentrated alliinase and perhaps that," he waved a hand, "—er, UV light and monitor how the virus reacts to each. Not to mention looking into incorporating magical elements of course, like Wolfsbane potion ingredients or Mandrake venom...what have you. Depending on our findings, we could make a potent version of all of the successful elements and create a potion to—"

# CHAPTER 15 WINGER WINGER CHICKEN DINNER

**“**I can't believe we've figured it out, Draco! You're truly a mastermind! You're going to be in history books!" Granger gushed as she held her hands to her pink cheeks.

"I've been known to be a genius occasionally." He quipped as she playfully swatted him on the chest. He caught her wrist in his hand and used his hold to jerk her into his chest. A gust of air pushed out of her as she melted into him, staring up into his face. Her expression cautions, but her eyes half-lidded as she smoothed her hands along the planes of his chest.

"I think this calls for a celebration, don't you?" She said breathlessly.

He skinned a hand along the side of her hip before letting it slide down to the curve of her arse, cupping and kneading it gently. She sucked in a breath, her back arching, causing her breasts to press into him as he felt her nipples pebble beneath her blouse. His other hand threaded into the wildness of her tresses, curling at the base of her neck, eliciting a sinful moan from her lips as he dipped his face toward hers.

He hummed, pleased with the sounds she made, the sounds *he* pulled from her, "I know how we should commemorate this accomplishment." He ghosted his lips across hers, his tongue licking at her cupid's bow.

Her lust-filled eyes bored into him, pulling him closer by the lapels of his shirt. "Yes." She panted softly against his lips, closing the distance and opening up for him as his tongue swept inside her mouth, reveling in the taste of her tongue as it danced against his.

"DRACO, GET UP!"

Draco's eyes flew open and he groaned at the godly sounds of someone banging on his suite door. He raised his head and groaned again at the very painful erection that tented his sheets, wrapping a fist around his cock and squeezing in hopes of reducing some of the pressure.

"DRACO! UP, YOU LAZY GIT! IT'S LAKETIME!"

Hesigned and let his head thump against his pillow as Pansy continued to wail her fists against the wood. He was so tired from exhaustive days



in the lab. And horny, due to said exhaustive days in the lab with *Granger*, who damn her, sucked on the end of her quills whenever she was thinking, which was all the bloody time. He had to cast increasingly more notice-me-not-charms on his erections and he was painfully desperate for release, or for a break in their potions research.

Granger and Draco had gone through each potion ingredient, meticulously testing its properties against infected blood and were able to determine several ingredients that were promising in boosting healthy blood cells or shielding host molecules to block viral cell entry, but were still at a loss for what combination of ingredients were successful at battling the aggressive virus more effectively. Testing all of these ingredients against four different control groups (Astoria's, Lucius', Archie's and vampire blood), was daunting, but they finally created a new potion that utilized more potent magical plant and creature extracts, brewed it during Venus's retrograde and had administered this new potion to Astoria last week. Now, they had nothing to do but wait to see if the new potion was able to fight off the virus more efficiently or for longer than two weeks.

The weather had been pleasantly sweltering during the day, but the promise of autumn began encroaching in the evenings with cooler nights and everyone had decided a few days ago that they should all make time to get out of the manor and enjoy some sunshine. Pretend that everything was normal and there wasn't a virus, or Rotters, or death or cures. Just classic dissociation, which Draco was absolutely fine with. The promise of seeing Granger in less clothes also didn't hurt.

"WE'RE LEAVING WITHOUT YOU, YOU PRICK! YOU CAN MEET US THERE!" Pansy howled, smashing her fist against the door one last time before he heard her heels clicking down the hall.

"YEAH! ALRIGHT! I'M UP!" He bellowed as he pushed his sheets off and hobbled to the bathroom. He would need to deal with his hard on, maybe twice, before Little Malfoy could be trusted in a pair of swim trunks.

After an invigorating shower, two wanks to the thought of Granger telling him to be a good boy and get on his knees and worship her cunt, and a healthy application of Essence of Moondew to his finally recovered hair, he threw on his swim trunks and made his way down to the lake situated in the furthest corner of the property. As he made his way down the path, he could hear splashing and the boisterous laughter of Theo as a playful scream came from Ruby. Draco smiled to himself, happy that the teen, despite the horrors she had witnessed over the weeks, was still able to be a kid. It was more than he could say for himself. His childhood ended abruptly once he watched his school teacher be eaten by a giant snake.

He crested the clearing and chuckled at the sight of Theo launching Ruby into the air as Potter used a *Lemnopus* spell. Her little scream echoed as her flailing body landed in the center of the lake. When she resurfaced, her face was split in a toothy grin and she yelled, "Again!"

Draco made his way over to Pansy and Daphne, who were sunbathing on lounge chairs and chatting castially to Sonny, the latter shooting him a wink as he sat beside them. Draco's eyes flicked along the beach, finding Ginny, Blaise, Longbottom and Weasley taking turns jumping off the dock. His brows furrowed as he asked, "Where's Granger?"

Pansy and Sonny exchanged a look before they both snorted loudly. Sonny answered, "She went up to the manor about ten minutes ago to try and convince Kieran to join us."

## CHAPTER III THE LIBRARY

The next few days were relatively somber for his muggle companions, and Draco tried to avoid Granger like the plague, choosing to hide in his rooms as much as possible or run around the estate grounds with Ruby. Anytime he recollects that night's memories, he physically cringed at himself. The night was fuzzy at best, but he had obviously been so pissed that he tried to kiss the fucking Golden Girl and dry humped her like a randy fifth year. He had clearly misread the signs she was certainly *not* giving him, thanks to the half a bottle of firewhiskey he had consumed in what was likely only an hour. He supposed his weak stomach had saved him from himself by emptying its contents near her nonetheless.

It seemed Granger was avoiding him as well. The only time she'd spoken to him was a few days ago, when she informed him that she would be observing and conducting low risk studies on Archie and Lucius for the next few days, and that she would let him know when she would begin more extensive experiments. Since then he had only ever caught glimpses of her when she came up from the dungeons to grab dinner, retreating back down as fast



"Y-yes, up in my rooms."

"Bring them and give her two full vials. Quickly!" Granger commanded, lifting a vial up to Ruby's lips.

"Drink this, for the pain."

"W-we don't know if the potion will work. Astoria already had the potion in her system when she was infected—a-and what if it doesn't affect muggles the same way?" Draco muttered rapidly, almost to himself as panic roiled through his chest; his mind's potion lab filled with overflowing cauldrons and rattling potions bottles.

"It has to," Granger barked as she stood. "Kieran! Make yourself useful and pour a dropper full of this potion directly into her wound every sixty seconds." She held out a vial as the Scot made an odd gesture, touching his forehead then his chest and both shoulders before he marched over and took the vial without a word, kneeling next to Ruby and staring at his watch before Granger spoke again, "Draco, come with me."

He shook his head, realizing only in that moment that Ruby had a tight grip on his hand, "I-I can't—can't leave her."

"You can and you *will*, we need to secure the manor and I have an idea so *get up!*" She ordered.

Ruby's grip loosened and he tore his gaze away from her wound as it continued to ooze thick blood onto the floor, looking into her tear-streaked face as she muttered through gritted teeth, "Go, I'll be—ah!—I'll be fine. Just come back, kay?"

He wiped his eyes with the back of his hand and nodded as he stood, following Granger across the manor to the main foyer.

"You remember how the Ministry blanketed the country in anti-Apparition wards?" Granger said urgently as he nodded. "Well, McGonagall told me that they used similar principles when creating protective enchantments around Hogwarts and that she utilized a tweaked version of a *Lumos Solare* spell into their wards to create a daylight net of sorts around the school. I-I think we could create one now around the perimeter of the manor."

"How?" He urged.

"This estate knows you...your blood...I think we can cast a blood ward, like at the gates, but instead of keeping muggles out, we're keeping out the undead. Then you could use intention to blanket the manor in," she waved her hands indiscriminately, "sunlight protection of sorts, starting here at the entrance."

He dipped his chin and took a calming breath, sweeping all of the shards of broken potion bottles and ingredient vials into the corner of his mind and, without prompting, used his wand to slice an opening in his palm, blood pooling and dripping down his forearm. He pressed his bloodied palm to the dark oak doors and began chanting the Malfoy protection wards that he had memorized as a child, substituting any anti-muggle verbiage for "undead" and weaving in the sunlight spell. Heat pulsed beneath his palm and he watched in awe as the golden ward took hold, spreading like veins and seeping into the walls and floors with fervor until he felt it. A lock clicking shut.

"I think it worked." He breathed, "We need to get everyone inside."

He turned to see Granger's otter patronus solidifying from the tip of her wand as she relayed the command for everyone to fall back to the safety of the manor. They sprinted back to the

# CHAPTER 17

## LUMOS SOLARE

**“N**O!!!” Draco bellowed as the Rotter’s head was severed by his spell, its teeth tipping muscle and sinew out of Ruby’s calf as it tumbled to the grass.

Draco caught her small form as she stumbled back with a scream, blood spurting from the wound. He shot off a bombarda that eviscerated four approaching Rotters as he dropped his axe, hefting the teen into his arms and sprinting toward the Manor, throwing curses behind him haphazardly.

He heard Sonny give a loud, guttural growl as her form appeared next to him. Her machete swung violently, hacking and slicing the undead as they began surrounding them, their decaying bodies dropping where they stood. Draco spared a split-second glance to Granger; unadulterated rage at watching the muscled cyclops manhandle her, and watched as her elbow cracked into Kieran’s face as he released his hold. She sprinted towards him as Theo appeared on Draco’s other side, his wand carving through the air as orange and red spells flew from its tip. His friend’s usual grin was replaced with a crazed, rageful scowl as he yelled, “Go! We’ll hold them off!”

Longbottom, Weasley and Granger met him halfway, their wands firing off spells as they raced up the manor steps. Draco skidded to a halt, laying a howling Ruby on the cold tiles and caught a glimpse of Kieran’s mishapen nose, a river of blood pouring down his chin as they all stumbled into the conservatory. Granger summoned vials from her beaded bag and began siphoning the blood away from Ruby’s wound with trembling hands.

"Oh my gods," he heard Daphne whisper, her voice cracking, "what can I do?"

"Barricade the first floor entrances; doors, windows, everything." Draco rattered off, unable to look anywhere but at the chunk of raw flesh dangling from Ruby’s little leg.

"Astoria, you have more of the blood curse potion, right?" Granger asked sharply, pouring a dropper of Dittany into the wound.

conservatory just as Blaise, Ginny, Theo, Potter and Sonny ran up the stairs, flinging themselves through the double doors with dozens of Rotters right on their heels.

The group took a fortifying stance as the growling and snarling horde cleared the steps. Draco braced as the Rotters flung themselves through the door...and disintegrated into ash as their bodies hit the invisible ward.

He let out a relieved sigh, the tension in the room melting as Granger began to cackle maniacally, the rest of the group dumbstruck as Rotters continued to combust as soon as they crossed the threshold.

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The sun finally rose as morning came and went with Draco and Sonny keeping vigil at Ruby's bedside as the teen fell into a fitful sleep. Granger continued to monitor Ruby's vitals, noting that the teen was currently fighting off a severe fever, her tiny body shuddering in waves as sweat poured from her brows. Draco could see Theo pacing back and forth in the hallway, gnawing on his fingernails as Potter sat with his head in his hands.

The wound on Ruby's calf, while no longer bleeding, was still angry and raw, nearly unresponsive to wound-stitching potions or healing spells.

"How—how long until we know if the potion worked?" Sonny whispered, her voice cracking on the last word.

"Couple more hours maybe. We—" Granger grimaced, taking a steady breath, "We should restrain her just in case."

Draco's head whipped to her, "You said it would work."

"Yes, I—I think it will, but we don't know, Malfoy. We have to think about the possibility—" He held up a palm to silence her, rubbing the other over his weary face, "Okay. Just do it."

The next few hours crawled by, with Draco sitting beside Sonny as they watched Ruby's chest expand and contract, her breathing becoming less and less labored. Granger had cleaned and wrapped Ruby's ankle and now sat on her other side, observing the teen's vitals every few minutes. Draco noticed that the once blaring red diagnostic, now seemed to be leveling out, her fever receding and her blood pressure returning to normal levels.

Ruby gave a small groan as her eyelashes fluttered, her bloodshot eyes opening a crack as they all stood, hovering over to her.

"Gave us a fright there, Rubes." Sonny choked out, brushing Ruby's blonde hair from her forehead as Draco unclamped her restraints and tucked the demon furby into her arms.

The teen gave a half-hearted smile, tugging Buckbeak into the crook of her elbow as Sonny spoke again, "Pretty Boy thought you'd like to have Buckbeak here when you woke up."

Ruby looked to Draco who gave her a tight smile that didn't quite reach his eyes as he spoke, "Thanks for saving my arse out there."

"You're still an average fighter, even with magic." She joked before her face fell somber, "Am I going to turn into a Rotter?"

Granger cut in with a reassuring smile, shaking her head, "No, Ruby. It's been well over fifteen hours now since you were bit. I'm confident that if you were going to turn, you would have by now. We gave you the potion Draco created and I think it's safe to say that it works." She turned to Draco with a beaming smile and he couldn't help but flush.

Granger in a tight grip and dragging her toward the manor with the rest of the group, as they picked off dozens of stray Rotters who trailed after them.

Draco turned back to Ruby, panting hard, "Thanks."

"Don't mention it." She smiled. Then in slow motion, her smile fell and turned into a scream as she looked down.

Draco followed her line of sight to see a Rotters crawling on the ground, the woman with no face, her torso nearly removed from her legs from Draco's axe wound, her innards spilling out onto the grass as her hand gripped Ruby's ankle.

Draco's wand lifted in a flash and shot off a powerful severing charm that seemed to shake the earth, but too late, as the Rotters sunk her decaying teeth into Ruby's calf.

dotted with small figures ambling down the path and heading straight towards the estate. The thirty-Rotter horde would soon be a hundred-Rotter horde.

His stomach dropped as he heard Ginny mutter a soft *Fuck* from behind him, "It's gotta be the—the lights and the music drawing them here."

"Okay, we'll have to break disillusionment, so we don't accidentally hit each other and we pick them off one by one. No guns or it might just attract more this way," Potter said, his voice steady and confident. More confident than Draco felt as the wards continued to rattle at the assault they bore.

Draco whispered quietly to his left, where he knew Sonny's disillusioned form would be, "I think you'd better get back to the manor for reinforcements and tell them to shut everything off!"

He heard rather than saw, Sonny's heels crunching along the gravel path as she ran back towards the manor. The small group wasted no time as they broke their disillusionment and began hacking away at the horde as the undead slammed up against the ward's borders.

Draco's left hand slashed his wand through the air, sending severing charm after severing charm, taking a break only to swing his axe with his right arm into the necks of several snatching Rotters. The wards shuddered as more and more Rotters slammed against the estates' defenses, snarling and scrabbling at the wards.

"There's too many!" Blaise shouted over the growling Rotters and howling winds as his wand shot out rapid red spells. "They're going to break through the wards!"

"They can't! If they get in here, we'll have to abandon everything! The potion—they *can't* get in here!" Draco bellowed, slicing his axe into the torso of a female Rotter; the skin on her face absent as what appeared to be drool and thick brown blood oozed out of her exposed cheek. The Rotter fell to the ground with a soft thud as he swung his axe into the next oncoming body.

"Fuck!" Draco heard Theo shout as he dared a glance behind him, watching Granger, Weasley, Pansy, Kieran and Ruby rush into the fray, eyes wide and weapons aloft.

The wards trembled and glowed red hot before they buckled, shattering completely as the horde, now several meters long and dozens of undead bodies deep, poured over the threshold of the estate, scrabbling over each other.

"Fall back!" Potter shouted.

Draco didn't move, just sliced and hexed and hacked at the Rotters that rushed toward him.

"Draco!! Move!!" Potter bellowed.

"We can't let them get to the manor!" He screamed as a heavyset Rotter made to swipe at him. He dodged, swinging his axe into the man's collarbone with a sickening crunch. The Rotter snarled, his head bent at an unnatural angle as he grabbed hold of Draco's lapels and pulled.

Draco pushed against the man's chest, attempting to fire off a severing charm as his rotted teeth cracked inches from Draco's face.

"DRACO!!" He heard Granger scream.

The Rotter suddenly froze, its mortled gray and black-veined skin turning an icy blue as Draco peeled away from its grip, falling onto his arse, watching Ruby pull her dagger from the man's broad chest. As soon as the blade exited the Rotter's chest, he exploded, the remnants of him falling to the ground like shards of glass.

Draco scrambled to his feet and whirled around to see Kieran holding a screaming and kicking

"You'll need to stay off that leg for the next few days though," Granger continued in a louder voice, "but I'm sure Theo would love to keep you company!"

Theo bounded in, hands tucked into his trouser pockets with the Chosen Git trailing behind him. Theo shrugged with an air of nonchalance. "I suppose me and Potter here can cancel a few plans and spare some time to entertain. How are you feeling?"

Ruby sighed, settling further into her pillows, "I feel like most of you look...like shit."

Draco let out a bark of laughter, "Yeah, well, forgive us for prioritizing your health over a shower, you little shithead."

Sonny chuckled, "But glad to see you haven't lost your spunk. Are you hungry? We haven't got much, but I'm sure Neville could rustle you up a toastie."

Ruby's lips twisted in faux-contemplation until she said, "Actually, I am starving...for brains."

The room was silent for a split second, shocked at the morbid joke, until everyone erupted into laughter, all doubling over and clutching at their sides as they cackled. Draco shot her a rude gesture as he attempted to catch his breath, his cheeks aching from laughing so hard, grateful that she had indeed not lost her spunk, nor her comedic timing.

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Draco and Granger had begun preparing the necessary ingredients ahead of Mabon days ago, flowing seamlessly through the workload as if they were sharing a single brain.

And now they were in the home stretch. The final brew needed to simmer for a full twenty-four hours during the height of the autumnal equinox and as Draco flicked his wand, producing a small blue flame beneath the cauldron precisely when the sun was highest in the sky and set the portion to bubble, Granger began clearing off the disorderly worktables.

He watched her, unabashedly, with his arms folded across his chest as she directed unused ingredients back into their vials. She stoppered them, shrinking each bottle and floating them gracefully into a small satchel, equipped with cushioning and extension charms, that they had intended on bringing with them on their journey to Hogwarts the day after tomorrow.

"Take a picture, it'll last longer." She said, not bothering to look up from her task, but he could hear the humor in her voice.

He straightened, "I don't have a camera in the manor, but I'd like a picture of you. Preferably one where you're biting on the end of your quill and then your brow goes all..." She turned to him then as he mimicked her adorable little scowl, "On a loop."

She snorted before she let out a large yawn, stretching her arms over her head like a feline, "I'm absolutely knackered."

"Mmm, well, we've slept a total of probably two hours in the span of two days." He said as he rubbed a hand down his face.

"So, now we've got twenty-four hours to kill. I guess we'll just...rest?"

He swallowed thickly, "Well, actually I, er, have a gift for you. I had intended on giving it to you the night of the party, but..."

Her eyebrows shot up as a small smile split her lips, "A gift?"

Heno added, his hand coming to rub the back of his neck awkwardly, "Yeah, um, I don't know if you'll like it. I normally would have gotten someone I'm...interested in, something lavish and extravagant, but I don't think the shops are open. Plus, I didn't think you'd like jewelry or...I don't

know...gowns."

"I think you're right." She chuckled, sucking her bottom lip between her teeth, "And '*interested*' are you?"

"Have I not made that clear?" He let out an exaggerated grimace, "They should revoke my pureblood gentleman membership."

He crossed the room slowly, stopping in front of her and grabbing hold of her hips in a tight grip as her hands came to smooth up his chest, linking her fingers behind his neck.

"I am so *very* interested, Granger. Ever since you shoved your wand beneath my chin." He flashed her a cheeky grin.

"Oh? Which time?" She chuckled, "You like when I take charge, is that it? Boss you around?" She tugged harshly at the hairs at the nape of his neck and he let out a low groan at the sting, nodding slowly.

"I love it when you're bossy." He whispered.

She hummed, a pleased little sound as she lifted onto her toes and ghosted her lips along the curve of his ear, "Well then, give me my gift."

He blew out a harsh breath, biting his lip to keep from taking her right then and there, and cleared his throat, trying and failing to stop the blood from rushing to his cock. "It's—it's up in my suite."

She pulled back with a seductive smile, "Lead the way."

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Once in his suite, he warded and silenced the door, unwilling to let Theo or Blaise or anyone else disturb them this time. Granger meandered over to the bookshelves of course, pulling the occasional book out of its slot to finger through the pages before returning it to its home.

She peeked at him over her shoulder, her riotous hair obscuring most of her face as she spoke, "My gift?"

He jolted, "Oh, right!"

Draco moved to the trunk in his closet, opening it gingerly and pulling out the suede covered book. He held it behind his back as he approached her; his heart beating wildly in his chest at the thought that she would hate it or think it foolish.

"It's stupid." He said preemptively.

She rolled her eyes and huffed, "I'll be the judge of that, thank you."

He blew out a breath and laid the book in her outstretched hands.

Her eyes roved over the tome, a petite hand coming to smooth along the cover and he watched with bated breath as she opened the cover and she read the title page aloud, "*Venus: Evolution Dece et Eius Planete. The evolution of the goddess and her planet.*"

She looked up at him then, eyes bright and color high on her cheeks, "You remembered.. This is—this is wonderful, Draco."

"Well, there's more, um and I fear this is the stupid part." He sat beside her on the bed and flipped the next few pages where the margins were filled with his scrawl; notes on his thoughts, notations about the parallels between the goddess and Granger, small and truly terrible stick figure drawings (his personal favorite being a cupid shooting an arrow at a poor rendition of Draco) and a plethora of childish Uranus jokes.

"And I couldn't very well let them go to waste, rotting in Malfoy Manor while we head out to our inevitable deaths." Pansy chimed, sauntering into the ballroom in a black floor length gown, covered in meticulously embroidered black rhinestones.

"And I'm assuming you did the decorating?" Draco asked, unable to stop flicking his gaze to Granger.

"Yes, well, this one" she hooked a thumb at Ruby, "wanted a rainbow theme and I'll be damned if I ever attend a party that has primary colors as decorations." Pansy sniffed, eyes traveling down Sonny's form, "And it's not purple, Granger. It's plum and it complements Sonny's skin perfectly."

Draco watched in amusement as Sonny seemed to melt at the compliment, sipping on her champagne flute to hide a small smile.

The night was a blur of firewhiskey games and dancing, a surprisingly well-choreographed dance routine by Theo, Ruby and Weasley to a jaunty tune about being an all-star, a rockstar and breaking the mold. They received a standing ovation from the audience.

Draco found himself on the veranda of the ballroom with Blaise, Potter, Ginevra and Sonny playing a vibrant game of exploding snap, when he felt a particularly strong push against the wards at the east end of the perimeter. Over the weeks the stray Rotters would sniff around the property and a pair from the group would go and dispatch, but every once in a while it would be a smaller horde. Nothing that they couldn't handle, but this time, the wards seemed to brush against his magic more urgently.

"Rotters at the perimeter." He straightened, "Seems like a horde. It—the wards are—I don't know, sounding an alarm of sorts."

Porter nodded as he stood, "We'll all go."

Ginevra and Blaise both nodded in confirmation, standing quickly as they made their way through the ballroom. Granger, who was in the center of the room laughing with Ruby as they twirled to the music, turned and gave him a questioning look.

Draco shook his head, indicating that they had everything under control, and tossed her a small smile as they exited and marched to the front door. Draco whipped out his wand and snatched up Archie's axe—well, *his* axe now—that he had snatched by the door as the others grabbed their own weapons of choice.

In practiced formation, the group disillusioned and split off, Porter, Ginevra and Blaise bringing up the rear and Sonny and Draco walking ahead as they moved silently to the east edge of the property.

The lively song that echoed over the grounds from the open veranda grew softer as they moved away from the Manor. Overlapping groans and snarls could be heard along the perimeter as their small group approached, the wards buzzing uncomfortably against Draco's magic as high winds whipped around them, occasionally carrying the din of laughter or the beating drum of the music. Rounding a tall hedge, Draco and Sonny stopped short at the sight of at least thirty Rotters, all corralled against the invisible barrier of the property's perimeter. The horde was far larger than any that had stumbled upon the manor over the weeks and Draco could feel the strain on the already weakened wards.

Draco felt movement to his right as Porter whispered, "Look. Up the path."

Draco's eyes strained in the moonlight, the winding road coming into focus. The road was

*All you ladies, leave your man at home  
The club is full of batters and their pockets full grown  
And all you fellas, leave your girl with her friends*

*'Cause it's 11:30 and the club is jumpin', jumpin'*

"Pretty Boy! Come dance!" Ruby shouted over the music as she spotted him across the hall.

He smiled, walking over and pulling out a thin oak box from his coat and handing it to the teen with a wink. "Happy birthday, you little nightmare."

She flashed him a grin, flicking open the top of the box to reveal a goblin-wrought, bejeweled dagger, the driftwood hawthorn hilt intricately carved with depictions of merfolk and magical sea monsters. He had raided the trophy room on the fourth floor which, over the centuries, had become a storage unit of sorts for items that were too sentimental in some form to the Malfoys to be kept in their secured vaults.

Weasley gaped, "Holy hell, Malfoy!"

Ruby's eyes widened comically as she tentatively ran a finger along the knife, fingers trailing over the aquamarine and ruby gemstones inlaid in the hilt before she looked up at him. "This is for me?" She asked timidly, voice laced with awe.

He nodded enthusiastically, "It was my mother's mother's mother's great grandmother's... I think... from what I can remember. The story goes that this knife came into her possession as a gift from a pirate king who imbued the jewels with magic." He pointed at the largest ruby stone, "Touch the ruby to your palm when you stab and the knife will burn an attacker from the inside out and touch this one," he flipped over the blade and pointed to the largest sapphire, "and it'll cause the blade to freeze the assailant—or in this case—Rotter into a million, tiny little pieces."

"Wicked!" Ruby said brightly.

"Codric, Malfoy, that's a bit dark for a kid." Weasley grumbled as he appraised the knife.

"I'm not a *kid*. I'm a *teenager*." Ruby said with a roll of her eyes as she lifted the blade and flipped it confidently between her hands. "And don't forget that I've killed Rotter's too."

Draco smiled widely, oddly proud. "Exactly. You're probably better with a knife than most of us. I'll be glad to have you watching my back out there."

"And will you add that boomerang spell onto this one too?" She asked hopefully.

"Already did." Draco winked.

"And is that hawthorn wood? Like your wand?"

Draco turned to see Granger, resplendent in a yellow-gold satin dress complete with a daring slit that ran up one side, showing off her equally golden skin. Her curly haloed around her and he could have sworn he heard angels singing from the heavens.

"Wow, Hermione, you look lovely!" Sonny ambled over, wedging herself between Draco and Ruby.

"Pansy forced me into it. I feel wildly overdressed." Granger said with a shake of her head, smoothing her hands down the dress awkwardly, "I'm assuming she accosted you as well? Purple is your color."

Sonny gave a small spin as she laughed, "She did. Said this may be the last time she ever gets to use these gowns."

He swallowed heavily, desperate to decipher how she felt about the gift, watching her face for any expression. He saw her throat bob on a swallow as she lifted her watery gaze to his. "This is the most thoughtful gift anyone has ever given me." She whispered, reverently stroking the cover. "Thank you."

He let out a relieved breath, "You're sure? If you hate it or think its daft—"

She cut him off with a searing kiss, her hand curling behind his neck to pull him against her. He grunted and opened his mouth, letting his tongue caress hers as it licked against his softly before she crawled into his lap. His hands found her hips and curled along the curve of her arse as she slotted against his growing erection.

Her mouth trailed hot and wet kisses along his neck while he squeezed the flesh of her backside, biting his lip to keep from coming in his pants. *Gods, he should have had a wank today*, he thought as she sucked and bit at his pulse point.

Her hips rocked forward and pressed against his now-full erection and he stifled a whimper at the contact. *No, he actually was going to cum in his pants*.

She let out a small squeak as he lifted her off of him, flipping her onto her back and plopping her in the center of the bed while he smoothed his hands down her form reverently. "I'll be right back." He said between kisses along her chest before straightening and pointing a commanding finger at her. "Don't move."

He tucked his painful erection into his waistband as he hobbled to the bathroom and shut himself inside, pulling his cock free and stroking its length. He needed to release, lest he embarrass himself and ejaculate prematurely on her hand or somewhere equally as mortifying before he even had the chance to bury himself inside her. He was intent on making this moment with Granger last as long as possible and he'd be damned if he came before he was able to watch her shudder with pleasure. He was a gentleman after all.

He pictured her supple body spread out on his bed, her curls bouncing as she rode him and he bit the inside of his cheek to keep from crying out as he worked his hand over his throbbing cock. It only took another few strokes before he was spilling his release along the bathroom tiles. He waved a wandless charm to vanish the mess, tucking himself back into his trousers before checking his reflection in the mirror, assuring his hair was perfectly mussed.

He took a deep breath, trying to control the fluttering pixies in his stomach, as he opened the door and found Granger laying in his bed right where he left her. Except she was fast asleep, her limbs spread out in all directions and a soft snore emanating from her open mouth.

*Well, fuck.*

His shoulders slumped and he cautiously approached her sleeping form, contemplating whether or not he should wake her. But she looked so peaceful and angelic, asleep in his bed and he shook his head, deciding that a quick kip before they ravished each other wouldn't be such a bad thing. In fact, the warmth of his bed was beckoning him to join the beautiful witch as he let out an enormous yawn and crawled beneath the comforter, scooping her up gently and placing her beneath the warmth of the duvet.

She made a soft little noise as he pulled her close, wrapping his arms around her and the tension he hadn't even realized he was carrying released as she burrowed into his chest. He relished in the way their bodies moulded together, his leg tucking between hers as her leg settled over his hip.

It wasn't long at all until he fell into the best sleep of his life, dreams of a goddess with voluminous

curls and a sharp tongue dancing behind his eyelids.

Draco awoke with a groan as something pressed against his groin. He opened his eyes a crack

to see that the sun had set and the fireplace had kicked on, basking the room in flickering orange. They had moved positions during their sleep, her back now tucked against his front, his arm draped over her small frame and he fought back another groan as Granger rolled her arse into his

groin again. Little Malfoy was at full attention, straining against the constraints of his trousers and he tightened his hold on her in hopes that her sleep-grinding would cease, but she let out a soft whimper as she gave another wriggle of her hips and his eyes shot open fully.

"Granger...?" He whispered questioningly.

"Mmm, I'm so tired but I want you." She mumbled, twisting her arm behind her and twining between their bodies to run a hand along his bulge.

He let out a choked exhale, burying his face in her vanilla scented hair and trailing a hand up her stomach to rest on her sternum as he kissed along her exposed neck.

"I'll give you anything." He murmured into her golden skin.

She turned her head to look at him through hazy eyes, her lip curling with the start of a sleep-infused smile as she began turning fully in his arms to face him. Her leg hoisted over his hip and he grunted softly as her core slotted against his cock and she gave an experimental roll, her tongue coming to lick lasciviously at his lips.

A flick of her wrist had both of their trousers disappearing, leaving them only in their undergarments and he shivered at feeling the warmth of her skin make contact with his. He ran his hands down to the hem of her shirt and tugged as her arms lifted, allowing him to pull it up and off, revealing her perfect breasts encased in a black, nearly transparent bralette. Her nipples poked through the flimsy lace and his mouth salivated with the need to taste them.

Her soft hands tugged his shirt up and he shifted to allow her to pull it over his arms, their lips finding each other in a slow and languorous kiss, hands caressing exposed skin.

His hand found the meatiest part of her outer thigh and squeezed, pulling her pelvis tighter against him as he gave a tortuously slow thrust. Her mouth popped open on a soft mewl as his cock pressed against her aching cunt and he moaned at the feel of her dampness seeping through the material of her knickers.

His hand found the clasp of her bra and deft fingers released the fastening, allowing her breasts to spill free as he sucked a pert nipple into his eager mouth, sucking and giving the tightened peak a gentle nip. Her hand wended between them, diving into the waistband of his pants as she gave a slow stroke along his length, his hips thrusting into her palm. He was so close again to coming on her hand that he pulled her arm away and tried to distract her with a filthy kiss along her collarbone, making sure to leave a purple mark along her throat.

His hand found its way between them and he ran the pads of his fingers along her clothed slit, panting heavily at the feel of her wetness soaking through the fabric before pulling the material aside and tracing the edges of her cunt with a featherlight touch. Her back arched when he gathered the wetness from her opening and rubbed languid circles around her swollen clit, keeping the pressure light before pushing a finger into her tight heat.

"Does this mean I'll get to meet more wizards and witches?" Ruby exclaimed.

"Our magical minister has said that Hogwarts was able to house thousands of magical and non-magical beings, so yes," Granger laughed. "I assume you'll even have kids your own age to run amok with."

"Well, I have been desperate to get to my family and leave this place, so I'd leave tomorrow if I could." Kieran said gruffly.

Draco grumbled, "No one's stopping you, you oaf."

"Draco," Granger chastised sharply. He sucked on his teeth, daring a glance at her and the glare she gave him had him deflating and mumbling a quiet *sorry*.

"Good. So we're all in agreement. We'll head to Hogwarts after Mabor." Granger said.

The Scor shook his head. "I intend on getting to my family Glasgow."

"Not a problem, it's practically on the way." Porter said.

"So, *everyone* is going?!" Pansy scoffed.

Sonny cleared her throat, "Pansy, you're an incredible fighter. You'd be a valuable asset to our group on the journey."

Pansy rolled her tongue along the inside of her cheek as she stared at Sonny, who, bless her, raised her eyebrows hopefully. Pansy rolled her eyes, "I guess we're going to Hogwarts."

Draco turned to Granger and they both smiled before Ruby piped up, "So, we'll still be here for me and Hermione's birthday this weekend right?"

Draco's stomach dropped. He had completely forgotten that they almost shared a birthday and that said birthdays were in a few days time. Normally, he'd raid the Malfoy coffers and buy something outlandishly expensive and one-of-a-kind. But he had nothing to offer either of them besides this dreary manor.

"Um, yes, I suppose we are. I had nearly forgotten my birthday was coming up." Granger laughed.

"Can we have a party?" Ruby asked hopefully.

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As Draco made his way to the ballroom, he could already hear the cacophony of music and the boisterous laughter of the group before he even made it down the first flight of stairs. He chose to don his favorite suit, a deep green that it appeared almost black and was tailored to perfection. Gods, he missed his tailor.

Striding into the ballroom, his eyes bulged at the space, nearly unrecognizable now. Bright colored fabrics of tulle and chiffon blanketed the previously dark walls to almost resemble the inside of a circus tent, but much less kitschy. Hundreds of candles were charmed to hover near the top of the vaulted ceiling which casted the spacious room in a gentle glow. Tables were set up along the wall with what looked like high-end hors d'oeuvres and small flutes of bubbly beverages. The large double doors were propped open to the expansive veranda that twinkled with floating, bright orbs as the magically enhanced music filtered out onto the grounds.

Blaise and Theo, naturally, were in one corner pouring themselves hefty tumblers of firewhiskey while in the center of the room, Ruby danced with Weasley to a song Draco hadn't heard before, but he was fairly positive it was Destiny's Child. The pair both jumped wildly, twirling and laughing loudly as the music began to crescendo.

Kieran's fist slammed on the table as he stood. "She's fuckin' bit and you didnae think tha' was something all of us should've been told?"

Granger didn't flinch, instead she lifted her chin and raised an eyebrow. "Actually, Kieran, after the few conversations I had with you, I felt you were the only person that couldn't handle that information. We kept her in her rooms under tight observation and it's safe to say Draco's potion has kept the virus at bay and she is not a threat."

Draco reveled in the muscle that twitched in the Scot's jaw as he seethed. "She could infect us." She is sitting right here and unless you plan to ingest my blood, you can relax." Astoria quipped harshly.

"Quite right, the virus is only transmitted via bodily fluids like blood or saliva entering your bloodstream. So, if you're quite finished?" Granger leveled Kieran with a glare as he huffed and sat rigidly in his chair. "Draco and I are going to be brewing as much of this temporary potion as possible during Mabon next week and we'll be administering a vial to each of you before we leave."

"Before we leave? Leave where?" Pansy asked, eyes flicking between Granger and Draco. "The Ministet has a team of experts working on sourcing a very rare ingredient that I believe is the key to a permanent cure, so while his team finds what we need, we'll need to head to Hogwarts with a supply of the brewed batch so they can work on mass production until we can work on the permanent cure."

Pansy scoffed. "I'm not going back out there. We nearly died trying to make it here."

"Pansy—" Draco started.

"No, Draco, we have everything we need here. Shelter, hot water, food—"

"Actually, er, I was going to tell everyone tonight that I'm, er, we're running out of food. I reckon we have about two weeks of rationing left before we'll have to venture to nearby villages and scavenge more supplies." Longbottom added with a grimace.

Pansy spluttered. "W-well, I'm not going back out there."

"Pans, what are you going to do here, hm? Grow your own pumpkin patch and tend to a garden? Even if you had food here, are you going to cook your own meals?" Draco asked pointedly. "Hogwarts is contained and safe."

Pansy threw her hands in the air. "Daph? Stori? Back me up here."

The Greengrass sisters had a silent conversation that consisted of eyebrow raises and shoulder shrugging before Daphne spoke. "If there's a way for whatever's left of the ministry to help Draco and Hermione create a permanent solution to the virus, we're going."

"I'm going too," Blaise said and Draco did not miss the wink he threw at Ginny, who rolled her eyes. He also did not miss the flush that crept up her neck. Interesting.

"Not like anyone asked my opinion," Weasley interjected, "but my family is at Hogwarts, our friends, or what's left of them. Plus strength in numbers if we have any hope of rebuilding."

"Well said, Ron." Potter said with a dip of his chin. "Are what are your thoughts, Theo?"

Theo beamed, showcasing each of his perfect teeth in a wide grin. "I think Hogwarts sounds lovely, Potter. I'll be joining you as well. Plus, you lor need my sharp wit and irresistible charm or the journey will be entirely too depressing."

Potter nodded, trying and failing to hide a smile as he cleared his throat and pulled off his ridiculous glasses to clean them on the sleeve of his shirt.

He watched her face, enraptured as his finger worked her, her head tilting back to expose her sun-kissed throat as her breathing quickened. His thumb flicked her sensitive clit as his finger curled and her body jolted as she keened. Her fingernails dug into the skin of his shoulders as her hips thrust in time with his digit.

"Unh, gunna make me cum—" she panted, "-with just your fingers."

"Yes, gods, please, let me see. Let me feel it." He whispered breathlessly against her lips as he added a second, curling them purposefully against her inner wall and pressing gently against it. She shuddered, her whole body tensing as her climax peaked and washed over her. He felt her walls contract and squeeze and he let out a groan as he watched her eyes roll back and her body convulse.

He pulled his fingers free once she had ceased shaking and she sighed, her body melting into him and capturing his lips in a filthy kiss. He didn't even notice her casting another nonverbal vanishing charm until he felt the wetness of her release slip against his exposed cock as it slid against her slick opening.

He grunted harshly, staring into her gold-flecked eyes as she rolled her hips, the movement causing her drenched cunt to slide against his length, coating it in her dripping release.

Her hand snaked between them once more as she grasped hold of his cock and slotted his weeping head against the opening of her entrance. Their breathing hitched on twin gasps as her hips tilted, causing the tip of him to breach her tight warmth.

"Fuck," He choked out against her mouth as she keened, "so tight. Fu-u-cking perfect."

His hand clasped the back of her neck, the other squeezing the curve of her arse as he pushed in a little further before pulling back out to the tip. The next thrust had him halfway into her wet heat and he blew out a harsh breath, trying desperately to control the need to sink into the hilt.

He pulled out again to the tip only to thrust in painfully slow. He spared a glance away from her flushed face to stare at her curl-covered sex, dripping with arousal, then to his cock, slick and shining with her juices, as it pumped into her.

"Gods, you're beautiful!" He whispered, glancing back up to take in the beauty of the witch before him. Her splattering of freckles that dotted her nose and cheeks and the tops of her shoulders, the beauty mark that graced the hollow of her collarbone, the small scar on the underside of her chin.

Her hand smoothed up his shoulder, raking through his hair, running a tentative finger along the scar on his head, a grin lifting at the corner of her mouth as she whispered, "You used to not think so, but I suppose everyone is allowed to be wrong at least once in their lives."

He snorted, pressing a kiss to her cheek as he pushed in another inch causing them both to groan.

"Fucking pureblood tosser, I was. But I always thought you were beautiful." He whispered in time with a slow thrust. "It drove me mad that I wasn't allowed to have you."

"You have me now." She whispered back. "What'll you do with me, hmm?" She rolled her hips and her cunt enveloped him fully. They moaned as their pelvises connected, both gasping as her walls pulsed around his length.

He groaned as he spoke, tightening his hold on her as he pulled his cock halfway out of her throbbing cunt, "I'm going to rile you up as often as I can," *I must*. "Going to beg you to give me a

peak inside that glorious brain.” *Thrust.* “Going to let you boss me around and pretend I hate it,” *Thrust.* “Going to worship this tight cunt,” *Thrust.* “For as long as you’ll allow.”

She suddenly pushed him hard onto his back, his cock springing free from the home it found within her as she climbed on top of him, her hair a tangled mess falling around her like the mane of a wild lioness. She propped herself on her knees and grabbed hold of his aching cock and placed his reddened tip back at her opening before she slowly sunk down, sheathing his length deep within her and rocking her hips in an agonizing circle.

He hissed as his hands gripped her hips, assisting in moving her in time with his thrusts while her own hand came to wrap around his throat. He groaned loudly, thankful he had cast a strong silencing charm as she squeezed hard, restricting his breathing only slightly as she rode him. Her hips rocked back and forth, his own pistonning up and into her dripping cunt.

His hands found purchase on her shoulders and pulled her down to him, her breasts pressing against his chest as he captured her lips, their tongues meeting in a whirling dervish as he felt his spine tingle, warning him of his impending release.

Her grip tightened at either side of his throat and his hands winded into her curls, pulling her closer still, desperate to have everything she was willing to give him, desperate to devour her.

“Spit in my mouth.” He begged on a whimper; his voice constricted by her grip on his throat.

“Fuck, need more of you, all of you. Please.”

Her eyes rolled back, their thrusts becoming frantic and punishing, the slapping of skin and the smell of sex so erotic he thought he might die. The hand that gripped his neck loosened only to grab his cheeks as she moaned, “Open.”

He wasted no time in obeying the command, popping his mouth open eagerly as she gathered salivain in her mouth and let it fall onto his awaiting tongue.

He swallowed, moaning at the taste of her and nearly *did* die when she lowered her face to his and swept her tongue into his mouth. She brought her pelvis flush against his and swirled her hips as he basked in the feel of her cunt spasming, her walls finally, *finally* milking him.

He rocked his hips up as he held her waist and moaned as her body convulsed, her cunt rippling through her orgasm, squeezing his cock in waves until his own release pulsed through him and he let out something close to a grunt and a growl.

She fell limply on top of him as they panted, chests heaving with exertion. It took him several moments before his arms would work well enough to stroke along the smooth skin of her back.

He let out a choked laugh as he felt her pulse her cunt purposely around his halfhard cock still buried inside her and laughed harder when she did it once more and he felt his length begin to twitch and harden further.

“Are you trying to kill me, witch?” He wheezed as she finally peeled her head off his chest and propped her chin on his pectoral.

She gave him a cheeky smile. “Just thinking about how Little Malfoy really *isn’t* an appropriate name for your cock. He is quite satisfactory.”

He rolled atop her as she squealed, nipping lightly at her lip. “Quite satisfactory? Try again.”

“He is a reasonable and acceptable appendage.”

He gave her nipple a sharp pinch as she yelped and he clicked his tongue. “One more time.”

She chortled, giving him a swift peck on the lips. “He gets an O for Outstanding. Absolutely

The hand he had buried in her hair closed in a fist, tightening the strands in his grip and eliciting a small moan of pleasure from her lips which he promptly swallowed. His other hand coasted down her back, smoothing along her backside before squeezing the supple flesh of her arse and pulling her pelvis against his.

Their mouths popped open on twin moans and he shivered as his hardness pressed into her stomach.

“Draco, my love, are you pleasuring yourself without so much as a silencing charm?” Draco and Granger stiffened as Theo’s muffled voice floated through the door. “And to not even offer if I wanted to watch? It’s like you don’t care about me at all.”

“Fuck off, Nott!” Draco shouted.

Draco groaned, his head coming to thump on her shoulder. “Five minutes is not nearly enough time to do all that I’d like to do to you.”

She let out a long suffering sigh and parted his head in sympathy. “I’m afraid not. But we could snog for five minutes?” She offered amiably.

He whipped his head up, eyes bright and grinned, “Well, let’s not waste any more precious time then, Granger.”

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“Neville, you absolute legend. That steak was incredible.” Weasley groaned, patting his full stomach.

“It really was so delicious. I’m ecstatic to not have to eat in my room!” Astoria said excitedly.

“What’s for dessert?” Ruby asked brightly.

“Oh, um, well...” Longbottom replied sheepishly.

“Actually, before dessert, I have something of an announcement to make.” Granger said as she rose from her seat beside Draco.

She cleared her throat, folding her hands together as she spoke. “As most of you know by now, Draco and I have been working on developing an antidote for the Rotter infection and we’ve made excellent headway thanks to Astoria and Draco. Draco created a potion that helped alleviate Astoria’s blood curse symptoms and over the course of the last few weeks, we’ve realized that the potion has been effective at preventing the Rotter virus from replicating *temporarily* and we have some promising theories that could help to prevent the virus from replicating *indefinitely*.”

“Wait, wait...you mean the blood curse potion or whatever stops the spread of infection?” Ginny asked.

“Yes, temporarily. About two to three weeks give or take until the individual would need to readminister the potion.”

“And how could you have possibly tested tha’ unless you had access to someone who was infected but not yet turned?” Kieran chimed.

Draco cut a glance to Astoria who flushed, but straightened, placing her napkin gracefully beside her plate. “I was bitten about a week before we arrived here, but didn’t turn.”

current temporary potion, plus they'll need our assistance on the new potion, once we source some Strix milk of course."

"So, after Mabon..."

"Yes, with Mabon next week, we can brew as much as we can then and head on the road as soon as possible. We can't stay here forever."

He blew out a loaded breath, "I can't say I'm thrilled to leave the safety of the manor, but I suppose you're right. Have you told the Gryffs?"

She hummed, "Mm, well, Harry knows. But we figured we'd wait to tell everyone at the same time if you're alright with it?"

Draco chewed his cheek in thought, "I imagine a few of my friends, namely Pansy and the Greengrasses, won't be too chuffed to head back out there...into the real world."

"Well, they're welcome to not come." She shrugged.

"Granger..." he admonished, leveling her with a look.

She grumbled, "What?"

"Are you still jealous?" He asked as he pulled on his hoodie.

"Don't be daft." She quipped, "Why is your hoodie pink?"

"Ugh," he threw his hands up. "Bloody Ruby dared Theodore to turn it bubblegum pink and I can't figure out the countercurse."

"You can't brew the most complex potion I've ever seen, but you can't figure out the countercurse?"

She said disbelievingly.

"Theo is very good at charms," he said defensively.

She leveled him with a look and he sighed, "Okay, fine. *And* Ruby is tickled every time she sees me in it. She cackles like a rabid hyena and...I dunno." He shrugged, embarrassed at his revelation as he perched on the foot of his bed.

"You're really very cute, you know?" Granger said as she pushed herself to stand, walking over to him and settling herself between his open thighs, hands braced on his shoulders. "Is it the pink hoodie?" He joked, a flush of heat coloring his cheeks as he ran his fingers along the curve of her hips.

"No, pink is a terrible color on you. Makes you look like a swollen cock. I meant that it's cute how you date on Ruby. She's become quite special to you."

"Mm, I suppose." He said absently as he squeezed her waist. "Also, please don't say *swollen cock* around Little Malfoy. He's quite excitable."

"Well, tell him to pack it in because we're telling everyone the plan at dinner tonight." She said with two hard smacks to his cheek before turning to walk away.

He groaned, grabbing her wrist as he stood and pulled her into his chest. His hands found the dip of her waist, one hand curling around her lower back and the other ghosting along the curve of her neck before snaking into the tangle of her curls. Her hands smoothed up the lines of his arms, settling on his shoulders as he leaned down, bumping his nose gently with hers. His lips brushed hers tentatively and she melted on a sigh, her lips parting as she opened for him.

He swept his tongue softly along her bottom lip and they both exhaled needy little breaths as her tongue licked his. Her arms twined around his neck, tightening their hold. Their kiss became fervent, their tongues moving against the other as if attempting to memorize each taste bud.

substantially massive."

He flashed her a pleased grin, smoothing her hair out of her face, brushing his lips softly against hers, "I told you, it was cold that first time you met him."

their shelves in search of the small bottle of Strix milk, desperate to get the hell out of there as quickly as humanly possible.

"What are you looking for?" Longbottom asked again.

"Strix milk. Small glass bottle, pealtescent white liquid." Draco said absently, glass clanking as he frantically searched the vials.

He heard Longbottom mutter '*Actio Strix milk*' and Draco straightened, silently kicking himself that he hadn't considered utilizing the simple spell. He really needed to get a grip.

His heart sank when, after several anticipatory moments, nothing happened. Wherever the ingredient was, it wasn't in the manor.

"*Tuck*." He growled.

"Anything I can do to help?" Longbottom offered.

Draco sighed, pinching the bridge of his nose as they strode out of the suite and stopped in the middle of the hall. "No." He grimaced, "But, thanks for...um..." He gestured broadly, "for...you know."

Longbottom snorted, raising a bushy eyebrow and crossing his arms over his broad chest, "I don't think I do know. Please enlighten me."

Draco rolled his eyes, "You're really going to make me say it?"

"I am." Longbottom said with mirth in his eyes.

Draco ran his tongue along the inside of his cheek before gritting out, "Thank you for...accompanying me in there."

"Don't mention it, *mate*. What are friends for?" Longbottom winked.

Draco rolled his eyes so hard he was sure he glimpsed his considerably large brain, "*Don't* push it."

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Draco had just gotten out of the shower when the door to his room burst open and he squawked, pulling the nearest article of clothing over his exposed cock.

Granger waltzed in, her hair a wild and glorious thing as she marched over to his desk and fell heavily into the wing-backed chair with a sigh, "I spoke with Kingsley."

"Ever heard of knocking, witch? I'm indecent! Or were you just hoping for a peek?" Heginrinned.

She rolled her eyes, but he saw the little smile that lifted the corner of her lips, "Nothing I haven't seen before."

He chuckled and summoned a pair of sweatpants before shucking them on, "So, what did the Minister say?"

She let out a primal growl, "He said he wasn't aware that Strix were being bred in this century, but assured us that he'd reach out to magical consultates, those who are still operating, to detail our findings and see if anyone has any leads on Strix milk. He encouraged us to brew as much of the blood curse batch as possible with the ingredients we have, administer it to anyone willing to take it, and head to Hogwarts by next week if possible with the rest of the batch. He intends on administering it to their team of Aurors."

"Next week?" He spluttered.

She nodded solemnly, "We've already been at the manor for months. Far longer than I had anticipated and Kingsley said their team of researchers will need our guidance on replicating the

## W W W P R E T T Y W W W

"I'm actually looking for...uh, extra blankets. Do you think I could check in there?"

"Extra blankets...?" Draco said skeptically with a raise of his brow. Each room in this manor housed an ostentatious armoire comprised of dozens of hand embroidered throws and blankets.

Longbottom shrugged, a small smile playing on his scruffy face. "You're trying to go in there right? You looked like you could use some...support and it was the first thing I thought of that wouldn't give me away."

"Well, it was a terrible attempt and I don't need support." Draco scoffed.

"So, you just gonna keep wearing a hole in the rug out here then?" Longbottom challenged, then with a roll of his eyes, "Just let me help you stubborn bastard."

Draco would never admit it, but he was suddenly grateful that Longbottom was a persistent and insufferable bleeding heart, because he *really* didn't want to go in that room alone.

He nodded once as Longbottom twisted the handle and pushed the wooden door open. Draco's breaths began coming in faster and faster as he peered into the still dark space, unable to get his feet to move past the threshold.

"Just stay here for a moment."

Draco didn't, *couldn't*, respond as he attempted to control the rattling of potions bottles on the shelf of his mind and Longbottom did not comment on Draco's labored breaths or frozen figure. Instead, the bearded man skirted around Draco and walked into the room, casting an unintelligible spell on the floor and vanishing the bedsheet covering the windows with a graceful flick of his wand. Sunlight immediately flowed into the suite, bathing it in a soft afternoon glow, giving Draco the courage to take a tentative step inside as he swallowed the snitch in his throat.

"What were you looking for in here?" Longbottom asked.

"Oh, er, think it'll probably be in the washroom." Draco's voice trembled, his eyes zeroing in on the spot where Archie took his last breath.

There was no puddle of blood dried into the rug like he had imagined, but he could just make out a faint light brown circular stain. That was the spell Longbottom had performed, a strong scourge. *That was quite...considerate*, Draco thought, his eyes burning as he turned towards the bedroom door.

He pushed open the door and nearly fell to his knees when the unmistakable scent of his mother's perfume hit him like a bludgeon. Roses and verbena.

Draco willed the stinging behind his eyes to fuck off, turning his head at the sound of Longbottom sidling up beside him as they both took stock of the room. The bedroom seemed largely undisturbed from any morbidity and he let out a sigh of relief at not finding his mother's decomposing corpse tangled in the sheets of his parent's colossal four poster. Another image that his traitorous brain had supplied him on more than one occasion. Instead, the sheets had been stripped and his mother's armoire was slung open, clothing items strewn haphazardly on the floor, but no trails of blood, no bones.

"Washroom?" Longbottom asked quietly from his vigil at Draco's side.

He pulled his gaze from his mother's wardrobe and nodded to the door in the corner of the suite as they approached it. Longbottom held his wand aloft as he twisted the knob and flung the door wide. But it was just an empty washroom. No Rotters or decaying elves.

Draco beelined to his mother's vanity with trembling hands, pulling ornate glass bottles from

## CHAPTER 18 GOOD BOY

Draco awoke to the sound of rain patterning against the windows as he cracked his eyes open. He and Granger had fallen back asleep rather quickly after their romp and it must've only been a few hours since then, considering that the sky outside was still pitch black.

He turned on his side to stare at the sleeping witch, laying on her back as he tracked her soft breathing with each rise and fall of her chest. He was grateful for a few more hours with her, before they'd have to leave not only the safety of the manor, but also its amenities. Not to mention that they'd be surrounded by the others for days, maybe weeks.

He scowled as he thought about what would happen when they actually *got* to Hogwarts. They'd be surrounded people there too. When would they ever get time alone after today? Would they be provided a private lab?

His scowl softened as he imagined living out his teenage fantasies of fucking... *someone* in broom closets between class as students meandered past. Or bending her over a desk and sliding into her glorious cunt. Or taking her to the Astronomy Tower,



getting to his knees and letting her ride his tongue until she saw stars. Fuck, and now he was hard.

Slowly reaching out, he pulled the crisp bedsheet down to reveal her perfect breasts. His mouth watered as he ran the pad of his thumb gently over the soft peak, watching as it pebbled.

She hummed faintly, a delicate sigh, and he smiled to himself, caressing her other exposed breast as he leaned his face towards her chest. He watched her face intently as his tongue darted out and gave her peak a broad lick.

Granger's mouth popped open as a little puff of air pushed past her lips, his tongue roving gently around her tender flesh before attaching to her nipple and giving a soft suck.

Her back arched and she let out a louder moan as he sucked and licked and nipped until her eyes opened, still half-lidded with sleep. Her hand lazily tangled in his hair and he released her breast with a pop as he kissed along her chest, smoothing a hand down the side of her waist and stopping to squeeze at her hip.

Her breathing picked up as he pushed the bedsheet lower, eyes still fixed on hers, and gently nudged her legs open. He ran featherlight touches over the crease of her thigh, his thumb brushing the soft curls of her mound as she hummed, thrusting her hips, asking silently for him to touch her where she needed.

He pushed up on an elbow to press his lips softly to hers, his tongue licking against her cupids bow as he coaxed her mouth open. Her tongue met his in a delicate twirl and he groaned into her warm mouth as the pad of his middle finger ghosted along her damp center, bringing the moisture to her clit and circling the bud as she mewled.

Dragging his knuckle down her folds, she gasped as he pressed his finger into her easily and crooked it, feeling every inch of her silky cunt ripple. Her walls clenched around his digit as his thumb pressed against her swelling clit.

He devoured her moan, sweeping his tongue into her mouth as his finger worked her before he pulled back to admire her gaping mouth and heaving chest. He pulled his finger from her, bringing it to his mouth as she let out a sigh. His eyes rolled back as he sucked her arousal from it, tasting her and himself from before.

He pushed himself to his knees, his cock springing against his stomach as he pulled the bedsheet off of her, baring her glistening cunt to the heated air. He maneuvered himself lower on the large bed, settling between her open legs as she propped herself onto her elbows, watching him intently.

He tore his gaze away from her, glancing down at her throbbing cunt, glossy and slick in the flickering firelight, his thumbs gently spreading her lips open. He groaned as he watched her sex contract around nothing, the movement causing a drop of arousal to spill down the crease of her arse.

"Are you going to stare or are you going to eat?" She panted breathlessly.  
He flicked his gaze to hers, a small and expectant arch of her brow had a slow grin splitting his lips.

"So bossy." He tsked.

Without warning, he used a broad tongue to lick a long strip up her center and inwardly preened when she cried out. His lips attached to her clit and gave it pulsing suckles as her elbows buckled and her back hit the mattress, her hands raking through his hair and pulling his face into

## CHAPTER 16 JUMPIN', JUMPIN'

Draco was a coward.

He had been pacing in front of the doors to his parent's suite for the last twenty minutes, trying and failing to muster up enough fortitude to enter the godsdamned room. But every time his hand reached for the door handle, all he could picture was the gurgling sound Archie made as blood bubbled out of his gasping mouth. Then his mind would go to even darker places, supplying images of his father tearing into his mother's flesh, the sounds of his teeth gnashing and scraping against her brittle bones.

He cringed, shaking his head and face as he growled in frustration.

"Alright there, mate?"

Draco started, turning to see Longbottom striding down the hall, concern bleeding through his tone.

Draco looked back to the door as he rolled his eyes and grumbled, "Don't call me that and yeah, just fucking great."

Out of the corner of his eye, Draco could see Longbottom stare the closed suite doors then back to Draco before the Gryffindor spoke,

wasn't the only person breeding them and I'd hate to have to journey to the bloody Carpathian mountains to try and hunt one."

Draco barked out a laugh as he raked his hands through his hair. "I had some. My potions *contact*—dealer sounds so seedy—he threw it in with my order; said it was good moisturizer for aging skin. He boasted that he had apothecaries across London lined up to purchase crates full. The stuff smelled like corpses though so I gave it to my mother." He laughed again, "And you're telling me, you think it's the key to the vaccine?"

She nodded again, eyes bright as she captured her plump bottom lip between her lips. "I do. Do you think it could still be here? In your parent's suite maybe?"

Draco grimaced. He had not been back in that room since he watched as the life drained out of Archie's eyes. She must have seen the pained look on his face because she dropped the book and strode over to him, smoothing her hands along his shoulders as he melted into her touch.

"I'll check." She said softly.

He shook his head firmly, shooting her a grin that was probably more like a grimace as he pulled her against him, smoothing his hands up her waist. "No, no, I'll check. I'm no coward."

her.

He grunted, plunging his tongue into her and slurping her arousal greedily as she grinded against his face. He rolled his hips, attempting to relieve the pressure of his painfully hard cock as it pressed into the mattress.

"Unhh! Yes, yes, yes." She chanted as his lips connected to her clit once more. "Oh, fuck yes, there, don't stop."

He groaned against her, eager to obey the command as his fingers found her entrance beneath his soaked chin and pushed two inside her, pressing them against her inner wall as he felt her cunt squeeze around them like a vice.

"Oh gods, yes! Such a good boy, sucking it so good, oh fuck!" She moaned. His eyes rolled back as he ground his cock against the bed, mouth sucking rhythmically at her clit until she grunted, her body tensing as he felt her orgasm wash over her, her cunt rippling, a fresh gush of arousal flowing out of her and into his mouth. He growled as his own orgasm spilled from him, coating the bed and his lower stomach in his release, his body convulsing and trembling as he came.

The hold she had on his hair loosened slightly as she rode out the last of her climax, his chin dripping with her juices as he lapped at her offering, both sighing in pleasure.

He let out a slight hiss as she pulled his head back by his hair, her chest still heaving.

"Too much." She panted, parting his cheek. "But holy fuck, that was —"

"Fuckin' incredible." He finished, wiping his chin with his forearm as he crawled up her naked body and settled himself atop her.

Her hands skated over his back as she lifted her lips to his, tasting herself on his tongue. She chuckled softly and he pulled back with a questioning arch of his brow.

"You liked when I called you a good boy?" She asked innocently.

His cheeks heated as he cleared his throat. "Well, I hardly think it's a surprise that I like to be praised."

"Hmm," she hummed. "And do you like when I rough you up, pull your hair?"

He smirked, nodding slowly.

"Good boy," she snirked. "And what about spanking?"

"No," he said quickly before looking thoughtful, "actually, with you? Yes, probably. What do you like?"

She hummed, twisting the hair at the nape of his neck as she spoke. "I like all of those things too. Being dominant and being dominated. Being worshipped. Being made to beg and whimper. Making *you* beg and whimper."

"Fuck, say the word and I'll be on my knees for you." He breathed, "And riding my face? How was that?"

"I'm just shocked your mouth can do more than complain and aggravate me." She said, eyes bright with humor.

He snorted. "Yes, well, I may have been a man about town before the outbreak."

A small scowl appeared on her face as he chuckled, kissing her cheek. "I know," she said as her scowl deepened, "you were splashed all over the front pages with a new witch on your arm every week."

"And now they're all dead," he whispered into her ear, taking her lobe between his teeth, "and even if they weren't dead or walking around with decaying skin, I'd still only want *you*."

She rolled her eyes. "Wow, how romantic. Talking about the decaying skin of your previous conquests. You're really bad at pillow talk."

He feigned outrage, rolling onto his side and clutching his chest dramatically. "I am an excellent post-coital conversationalist, I'll have you know! Didn't you hear the bit about only wanting *you*?"

He pouted as she rolled her eyes. "Well, I'm one of the last women alive, so that doesn't instill confidence."

He jumped up onto his knees, his limp cock bouncing as he settled his hands on his hips. "I'll scream it from the rooftops right now!" He threatened, watching as she rolled her eyes again, her lips twitching at the corners.

"I'll go wake all of our friends, and the fucking Soot and the Rotters and tell them that Draco Malfoy only has eyes for the brilliant, gun-wielding Hermione Granger!" He shouted.

She rolled her lips into her mouth, attempting to hide the mirth that he saw on her face at his absurd declaration as he flopped down next to her once more with a bounce.

"I'm curious," Draco said.

"About?"

"When did you realize you liked me?"

Her face scrunched in thought, "I'm not sure I like you *now*." His mouth popped open, a small outraged squeak escaping his throat as she chuckled and sighed, "I don't know. The night I found you dancing and crying to muggle music was the first time I saw you as more than the little boy who tormented me in school. But really, I think it was just working with you on the potion. You're smart and you anticipate my needs and you've got these ridiculously attractive forearms."

He flushed, bringing his arm out and flexing, "These old things?"

She rolled her eyes, before her expression turned into a slight grimace, "We should probably not tell anyone about, er...this, us, until we get to Hogwarts."

He pushed out his lower lip, "What? Why? Are you embarrassed?"

"What? No! I don't care what anyone thinks of my choices. I just think it would be quite a big adjustment for everyone and the journey to Hogwarts is going to be hard. We need everyone at their peak and I'd rather not deal with the questions or the tension."

"You mean it'll absolutely crush Weasley?" He deduced, internally pleased at the thought.

"No," she said slowly, "nor crush, but you both haven't had the best history. And he's protective."

"Ugh, I'll never be able to keep my hands off of you now that you've given me a taste. But fine, as long as I get to see the look on that Scottish bastard's face when he hears you're mine."

She chuckled, "Yours, hm?"

"Obviously." He rolled his eyes.

"So possessive." She retorted, "I'm no one's."

He huffed, "Fine. I'm yours then."

She hummed, looking thoughtful until a slow grin lifted at the corners of her delicate mouth, "Alright then."

A smile split his cheeks before it fell into a pout, "If I'll be days, weeks maybe, until we'll be able

She cleared her throat, nodding vigorously as she flipped through more pages of the worn journal. "Er, yes, when you said *that*. From what I remember, the hunter, on one of his journeys to a village in Transylvania, describes them as vampyre owls with features of a bat! Here!"

Her finger thrusted at a passage as she read. "Strigoi were a bird-like creature who terrorized the townspeople of Cisnădiara for centuries. Legend claims the demon-like creature drank its weight in blood and feasted on children's innards, its bite deadly. Many in this village still believe that the Strigoi were an ill-omen that could summon their Vampyre masters, as well as cause plagues and death. They believed that garlic amulets were able to ward against the winged demons and still baptize their younger children in garlic oil on holy days. Villagers hunted these creatures to near extinction over fifty years before my arrival, but many claims to have witnessed Strigoi and subsequent Vampyre attacks since then. I spoke with a community of hags, ostracized to the foothills of the province for their unorthodox religious practices, who claimed that Strigoi still lived in cave systems along the Carpathian mountains. The hags adamantly proclaimed that these beasts' lactated a foul-smelling liquid that was effective in treating a wide variety of sicknesses, but the beasts were elusive, aggressive and the liquid difficult to extract. One hag, the eldest, claimed they used the liquid on a child who had been believed to be bitten by a cave-dwelling Vampyre days prior. They said the child was not expected to live through the night, but was well by morning." She looked up at him expectantly.

"I'm afraid all my blood has evacuated my brain," He said dazedly, watching her bare breasts still spilling out of the cups of her bra as he covered his still hard cock with both hands, "I'm not following."

"He goes on to say that he would be traveling to the Carpathian range to find evidence of Strigoi, but he never finds them because on the fourth night, he gets violently attacked by a nest of vampires and turned. He barely escaped with his life."

"Right." He said slowly, brain still trying to catch up.

"Well, he didn't look very hard, did he? Remember I told you about that rare bat species found in Romania right before the outbreak? The townspeople said a Strigoi bite was *deadly*. What if that bat they found was a, I don't know, an evolved species of Strigoi? What if that new species of Strigoi or Strix started this mutated strain of vampirism, Draco! Where did you say your dealer mated them?"

His eyes widened as he breathed, "Bucharest...Romania. Fucking hell, Granger!"

Draco was stunned, gaping like a fish and standing naked in the center of the lab, his cock even harder (somehow) at watching her brain work and also hearing his given name on her tongue.

He cleared his throat, "So, the Strix bat thing is the cause of the outbreak and the cure?"

She nodded her head, her curls bouncing over her shoulders, "What if the idea that its milk was poison was just legend? I've seen firsthand that when people don't understand something, they're quick to condemn it. I don't think it's poison, I think the hags were right, I think it's a remedy for vampirism and that's why the vampires attacked him. To protect their secret."

"I want to fuck you so bad right now." He whined.

She threw him a sinful grin before remembering herself and shaking her head. "Later, Draco! We're using Strix quills in the potion, right?"

He pushed his bottom lip out in an exaggerated pout before sighing, "Yeah."

She looked thoughtful, "How do we get our hands on Strix milk? I mean surely your dealer

gently stroked the fabric of her knickers. He nipped playfully at her lip, "And what about here? Can I touch you here?"

A soft whimper escaped her throat as she nodded. He used one thumb to move her knickers to the side and used his other to softly brush against her folds, her back arching at the contact. He groaned, a pained sound, as he felt the slickness of her cunt, already soaking with need. Need for *him*. His thumbs found each of her lips and held them apart as he stared down at her dripping and pulsing sex.

"Fuck." He breathed, running his middle finger through her wetness, bringing it up to the little, swollen bundle of nerves. "This all for me?"

She let out a soft cry as her body shivered, his finger circling her gently, "Y-yes."

He ran his finger through her juices gathering more of her wetness before bringing the digit up to his lips; his eyes rolling back as he sucked the finger into his mouth, relishing in the earthy-sweetness of her. He hummed as he removed the digit with an audible pop before dropping it back to her cunt and slowly pushing it into her warmth, crooking his finger against her inner wall. Her head fell back on a cry as he worked her, adding another finger as his thumb glided against her clit.

"Oh gods, Malfoy." She groaned, "Need to feel your cock."

He growled as he felt her walls pulse around his fingers, "Yeah? I need to feel this silky cunt milking me."

"Ughnh!" She moaned before sucking in a breath, her body stilling. "Oh my gods!"

"Can't even wait to have my cock in you, hmm, Granger? Going to cum all over my fingers?"

He panted as his fingers worked her.

She moaned again before pushing him away, her face flushed and hair tousled, "Not No, Malfoy. I – milk!"

His brows pinched, "Sorry?"

"Strigoi milk!" She shouted as she jumped off the counter and sprinted to the other side of the room, tossing books and parchments aside in her search, mumbling things like '*Greek mythology*' and '*Can't believe I hadn't made the connection!*'

"Strigoi milk." He echoed dumbly as she nodded. "Okay, and that's something you have to research, er, now?"

"Striges. Striga. Strigoi. STRIX. MALFOY!! I knew I'd heard of them before!" She shouted as she pulled an ancient tome free from beneath a mountain of books and began flipping through it. *Vampires Magicae et Anatomia.*

"Strix." He said dumbly, brain still trying and failing to do anything but remember the feel of her wet cunt and how close he was to finally being inside of her.

"I remember reading about Striges in a book on Greek mythological creatures when I was a kid. They were referred to by several names over the centuries and across cultures, but the creatures were said to be winged guardians of infants with potent nutrient rich milk that could heal ailments. Then on my read through of the hunter's journal I saw the term *Strigoi* and didn't think anything of it. It didn't register to me until you said—" she cut off abruptly, cheeks reddening.

"Until I said I wanted your silky cunt to milk me?" He supplied helpfully, still unsure where she was going in her manic rambling.

to be alone again."

"It'll be a long-term edging experience." She suggested.

"Please don't try to make it sound sexy."

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After several more rounds of vigorous sex in various positions on every surface of his suite, he ran a bath in his gargantuan claw foot tub, pulling Granger between his legs as she settled

against his chest.

He drew small circles onto her exposed skin, kissing her shoulders and neck as they discussed administering the potion and preparing for their group's departure from the manor. His cock hardened against her bum as she ranted about giving him another firearm lesson.

"We'll also need to do something about Lucius and Archie." She said cautiously, her head twisting over her shoulder as she caught his eyes.

His cock deflated.

"Right. I suppose we can't just set them loose."

Her eyes narrowed. "Probably not, no."

He nodded. "I'll dispatch them tonight. I'll see if Sonny wants to be there...for Archie."

"I can do it, if you—"

He shook his head, "No, really, it should be me. I know it's not really them anymore anyway, but I'd rather you not be there."

"Why not?"

"Because I will, without a doubt, throw up."

"Again...nothing I haven't seen before."

\*\*\*

Midday came and went and he and Granger had successfully brewed a whopping six batches of the temporary potion. Enough to administer to at least two dozen more people and enough to keep Ruby and Astoria virus-free for at least six months, according to Granger's calculations. After they vialized it and distributed it to the group, taking a dose for themselves, Granger dragged him into the drawing room where she had set up targets made up of old Malfoy busts at the other end.

He managed to hit his targets more than he missed them and had to tamp down his growing need at her freely given praise now that she knew it turned him on.

Porter and Theo had come in halfway through their lesson and Draco's eyes bulged as he watched Theo expertly reload his weapon and sink each bullet right between the eyes of his long-dead relatives marble statue. Even Granger shot Porter an impressed raise of her brows, to which the Chosen One just smiled and shrugged.

Draco now found himself, with a pep in his step, meandering down to the kitchens. Pushing his way through the doors he found Longbottom whistling a jaunty tune as he organized cans of food into his satchel with Daphne, Sonny, Blaise and Ginny chattering cheerfully at the small table in the corner. They all straightened as he approached, ending their conversation abruptly.

Longbottom turned and gave Draco a friendly smile, which he begrudgingly returned as he sat down, eyeing the others warily, sure they had been talking about him.

"Hungry?" The Gryffindor asked.

Draco nodded and Longbottom dipped his chin before reaching into the satchel and pulling out a can of beans, setting it in front of Draco along with a small tin opener.

Draco lifted his flat gaze to Longbottom who seemed to be stifling a laugh he said, "Something wrong?"

A small snort escaped Ginny and Draco turned to see the group with tears in their eyes and barely contained glee.

"Well, I see Sonny has told you about the first time we met." Draco sniffed.

The group burst out into laughter and he couldn't help but rolling his eyes and letting out a large snort as he shook his head.

"Bastards," He mumbled as he grabbed the tin opener and began using it the way Mabel had shown him all those weeks ago. The metal was still jagged around the edges, but it lifted easily and he didn't even cut himself.

"Well done, Malfoy!" Longbottom said, clapping him on the shoulder.

"I truly didn't think you'd do it." Blaise added with an impressed purse of his lips.

"Oh please, as if *you*'d be able to do it, Blaise." Ginny quipped.

"What are we doing?" Weasley asked as he waltzed into the kitchen with Theo and Astoria in tow.

And that's how they wasted two hours. Each witch and wizard attempting and largely failing to open a can of beans the muggle way.

After the group thinned out and headed to bed early, mentally preparing to leave the manor at daybreak, Draco and Sonny quietly headed to the dungeons.

Without a word or a glance his way, Sonny gave Draco a solemn dip of her chin as she stared at a snarling Archie. Draco took a fortifying breath as he palmed the handgun Granger had given him, staring at his father whose hands were outstretched through the bars of his cell, teeth gnashing and desperately reaching for a meal. The father who had given his son every material thing that gallions could buy, the same father who taught him to be a bigoted, hateful boy. The father who cared less about his paternal duties and more about his status and wealth and power. Draco surprised himself that he didn't feel the need to occlude for this. Perhaps, he was truly becoming numb to death or perhaps he subconsciously felt that his father was already dead long before today.

He lifted the weapon and shot off two bullets, both hitting their targets. And then it was done. And he didn't even vomit.

Sonny had excused herself to her room and Draco found himself in the first floor parlor.

He poured himself a hefty glass of Dracraft firewhiskey before heading to the gramophone, pressing play on the discman as the tune floated through the room.

Draco considered how far he'd come since waking up in St. Mungo's all those weeks ago, scared and sheltered and utterly helpless and now he *was* a survivor. A survivor who was doing something good for the world for once. He sipped his drink as he stared out of the window watching the rain lash against the window panes, lightning crackling in the distance as he hummed along quietly to the words he had now memorized.

*I'm a survivor*

*I'm not goin' give up*

dream before smoothing down the curve of her backside over her denim clad arse.

He pulled back slightly, lips still grazing hers as he said, "Can I touch you here?"

Heddn't wait for a response as she kneaded her flesh softly and she keened, her mouth popping open on a moan. He pulled her body flush against his aching cock straining the front of his joggers and used the opportunity of her open mouth to slide his tongue into its warmth, her tongue melting against his in gentle sweeps. Gods, the taste of her. He could have cum right then.

He moaned into her mouth, a pathetic, desperate thing, as her hands raked into his hair. Her nails scratched against his scalp as their kiss became more hurried, their exploring hands becoming more frantic as she clawed at his hoodie, helping him pull it off only to attach to each other's mouths once more.

He ripped her flimsy shirt down the middle, exposing her bra-covered breasts. He pulled back, panting and heavy-lidded as he smoothed his hands up her waist, sliding up to her chest, his thumbs brushing softly over the lacy material of her bra.

"What about here?" He said, voice husky and wanton. Her gasp turned into a moan as he shoved the torn material of her shirt aside, dipping his head down, his lips attaching to the mounds of her breasts as he sucked and kissed and nipped his way across her exposed chest.

Her hands fumbled with the drawstring on his trousers and he finally released her goosebumped flesh and panted, "You're a dream. I can't believe this is real—" He broke off with a whimper as her warm hand dove into his trousers and palmed him over his pants.

He flung his arm out, positioning it against the end of their worktable, intending to swipe everything off of it and hoist her up so he could devour her, but she shouted, "WAIT!"

She cast an impressive wandless and wordless spell and a few of the books and parchments and small vials of ingredients that littered the worktable hovered neatly over to another bench before she nodded her go ahead.

"Gods, you're incredible." He shook his head, chuckling lightly before swiping the remaining contents onto the ground. He hauled her up by her waist, siting her against the edge of the table as he settled between her open legs. She pulled his undershirt over his head, leaving him bare chested as he rid her of the remnants of her shirt and rucked the cups of her bra down to suck a dusky, pebbled nipple into his needy mouth.

She moaned, her grip on his hair tightening as she pressed his face harder into her chest, silently urging him on. His hands found her hips and pulled her against his straining cock and he nearly choked at the feeling of her heat.

"Pants off." She panted, between scorching kisses along his shoulder, "Needed you for so long."

"Fuck." He groaned as he nodded enthusiastically, obeying her every command. He slipped his trousers off and batted her hands away as she attempted to undo the buttons and zipper of her denims. He peeled them reverently from her hips, down her thighs, his eyes drinking in each new expanse of skin he exposed until she was bare, save for her bra and knickers.

Her legs opened further, inviting him between them and he was ever-so eager. His hand tangled in her curls as he brought her lips to his once more, her hands exploring the planes of his shoulders and chest. He pulled back reluctantly, his hands slowing their hungry exploration as he smoothed them up the soft skin of her thighs until his thumbs were able to caress the crease where her thigh met her hips. Her fingers dug painfully into the skin of his shoulders as his thumb

Enjoy your walk with the troll, but don't forget to answer his riddles three."

"What is your problem?!" Granger shrieked.

"ME?!" Draco barked a laugh before pointing a finger in her face, "You attacked me and my hoodie first!"

"Yes, well, it's distracting!'" She screamed as she slapped his finger away.

"My hoodie is distracting?!" Draco scoffed, "Well, I am so sorry, Granger. Perhaps the magic-hating Scot will be less of a distraction for you."

"And Pansy can be a good distraction for you!'" She shouted as she shoved his chest.

"Fine—" he began to say, before his arms fell to his sides, "Pansy? What—Wait—"

They were both breathing hard, chests nearly brushing as they stared at one another before dawning washed over him.

"Do—do you think me and Pansy...?" He said quietly.

Granger's eyes widened momentarily before they locked on a spot beyond his shoulder. She scoffed, "Why would I care if you were?"

Granger: "Draco wedded, dipping his chin until he caught her gaze again. "Just to be clear, me and Pansy are *not* together. Haven't been since fifth year. I don't *want* to be with Pansy."

Granger sucked on her teeth, her rage still simmering behind her eyes, "It's none of my business." Draco would think back on this moment often and consider the other choice he could have made. He could have continued to be a coward and nodded politely at her clear disinterest, stepped back and continued working on their potion while the Scot swooped in. But Draco had killed dozens of Rotters by now, he had shot a gun, killed a vampire, made muggle friends, gotten along with the lions and created a potion that could help thousands. He wasn't a coward anymore. And hell, if she rejected him, he could just fling himself off the roof. He's *pretty* sure the drop would be fatal.

Draco swallowed thickly, pushing a puff of air out through his nose and stepping further into her so that their chests brushed. "What if—I want it to be your business?"

Granger's throat bobbed with a heavy swallow as she rasped, "What?"

He stared her down, silently trying to convey his intent while simultaneously mustering up the courage to tell her what he felt for her. Or to show her. He took a strengthening breath, "You heard me."

Granger's eyes flicked between his own, searching his face and whatever they found seemed to be the right answer because she suddenly grabbed hold of the front of his jumper and pulled his face down to hers as she spoke lowly, "I don't want you to touch Pansy. Or Sonny. Or Daphne or anyone."

His heartbeat hammered as he panted and balled his hands into fists at his sides. "Who can I touch?"

The corner of Granger's mouth lifted minutely as she whispered, "Me."

Her hands pulled his jumper, bringing his lips to hers in a searing kiss.

Draco groaned, the air gusting out of him as if he'd been punched in the solar plexus, his hands immediately finding Granger's waist and pulling her tighter into him. Her soft lips were pillowy against his, almost tentative in their exploration, as if she was savoring the feel of his just as much as he was hers. His hands squeezed the dip of her waist just to double check that this wasn't a

*I'm not gon' stop  
I'm gon' work harder  
I'm a survivor  
I'm gonna make it*

*I will survive  
Keep on survivin'  
Ackem.*

Draco turned to see Blaise and Theo walking in, amber liquid sloshing out of the crystal tumblers as they sidled up next to him.

"How's it going with Granger?" Theo asked with a waggle of his eyebrows.

"How's it going with Potter?" Draco retorted as he watched Theo's face fall, a flush crawling up his friend's neck.

"Potter, Theo??" Blaise asked, eyes bouncing between Theo and Draco before realization struck,

"We didn't come here to talk about me, Blaise." Theo sniffed, taking a gulp of his whiskey as Blaise rolled his eyes.

"Fine. I don't think I want to know. We saw Sonny on her way to bed, she mentioned that you... Well, that you might want some company." Blaise offered with a raise of his eyebrow.

"So, daddy, dearest is officially dead?" Theo asked as Blaise swatted him over the head.

"Theo, please have some tact, for fucks sake." Blaise admonished.

Draco chuckled, a small laugh devoid of any real humor, and lifted his glass in salute, "Yeah, I guess I'm officially the last living Malfoy."

Blaise's lips twisted, a crease forming between his brows, "Narcissa could still be out there."

Draco sighed and shook his head, "No, if she was, she'd have found a way back here, or gotten a message to me somehow."

"You don't know that, mate." Theo chimed. "Do you want to send her one last patronus?"

Blaise flicked his wand, his silvery feline materializing from its tip.

Draco downed the rest of his drink and dusted invisible lint off of his pink hoodie. "No, I've made my peace with it. She's gone." He cleared his throat, "Right, I'm off to bed. See you in the morning."

Theo and Blaise lifted their glasses in farewell and Draco missed the pointed look his friends exchanged as he stalked out of the room and up the stairs. Closing the door to his suite behind him, he took a deep breath, blowing out the heaviness of the day on an exhale as he dropped his forehead to the wood.

"You alright?"

"Fuck!!" He shouted, twirling around to find Granger perched on his bed, the book he gifted her open on her lap.

"Sorry!" She chuckled, her hands coming to cup her mouth, "didn't mean to scare you!"

His shoulders relaxed and he straightened, "Merlin, no, it is a surprise. A good one. I didn't think you'd want to risk it tonight."

She shrugged, closing the book with a snap and setting it on the nightstand before crawling on her hands and knees to the edge of the bed.

"I thought you might also like a distraction tonight." She murmured, sucking her lip between her teeth as she pulled her shirt over her head, revealing her perfect tits.

"Gods, you're perfect." He purred, his cock hardening as he walked towards her, pulling off his hoodie as he stopped at the foot of the bed.

Her brown eyes, heavy-lidded and full of sinful promises, looked up at him as her hands curled in the waistband of his trousers and wiggled them off his hips.

His length sprang free and she wasted no time wrapping her fist around his base as he grunted, his cock hardening painfully at her touch. Her lips curled in a seductive smile as she gathered her saliva and spit it onto his throbbing tip, causing him to growl and his hips to thrust involuntarily.

Her hand worked the moisture along his shaft, stroking him with the perfect pressure, her thumb rubbing over his head on each upward pass, until finally she pressed a gentle kiss to his tip.

He let out a gust of air as her lips parted and her warm mouth enveloped his swollen tip, her tongue flicking wicked swirls along the underside of his sensitive head. He groaned as she bobbed her head, working his cock deeper down her throat, sucking and licking. He felt his cock hit the back of her throat and his knees buckled as she moaned, the vibration sending sparks prickling low in his abdomen.

His hands carded into her curls as he held her gaze, her eyes watering beautifully as her throat constricted around him.

"Fuck, fuck, fuck, Hermione!" He whined, panting heavily as he pumped into her.

She hummed and he watched in awe as her eyes rolled back and she brought a hand to rub at her dripping sex.

"Uhh, fuck, you like when I say your name, Hermione?" He asked breathlessly, brushing her tears away with his thumbs.

Her pace increased as she nodded, moaning around him again, her throat rippling against his length, her hand working faster circles over her clit.

"Oh gods, want to pour my cum down your throat. Fucking drown you in it." He whimpered, his hands gripping the roots of her curls.

She looked like a goddess, cheeks flushed, tears pooling down her face and neck, lips parted around his cock as the sounds of her slurping and his panting filled the room. Her climax ran through her, her body tensing and her eyes rolling back as he groaned loudly. He pulled his cock out of the back of her throat, letting his cockhead rest on her tongue as strings of his release pulsed out of his tip and pooled in her hot mouth.

They both shuddered through their orgasms as the last of his seed spilled onto her tongue before he pulled out, his hand holding her full cheeks gently.

"Don't swallow yet." He panted, "Let me see. Show me what a mess you've made of me."

She moaned as she unhinged her jaw, her mouth popping open to let his seed flow down her chin.

"Oh, fuck, Hermione. So perfect, aren't you?" He asked as he dragged the pad of his thumb through the trail of cum as it ran down her chest. She nodded, her mouth still agape, cum still waiting on her tongue.

"Mmm, swallow the rest." He begged breathlessly.

Her mouth closed and he watched her throat work on a swallow before her pink tongue darted

"Kieran, why don't you and Granger team up?" The she-Wæsel suggested as the Scot nodded amiably. He would never call her Ginni again, the little ginger twat.

It took everything in Draco to not scream and stomp his foot as he watched the muscled idiot lift Granger on his shoulders as if she weighed nothing. Granger's squeal made him want to set fire to something. Preferably Kieran's ridiculous man-bun.

Needless to say, Ruby and Draco did not win a single game and Kieran and Granger had won every single one, ending their victory with a vomit-inducing embrace. He had never seen the Scot smile as much as he did while swinging Granger around as they chanted, "WINNERS! WINNERS! CHICKEN DINNERS!"

He made an excuse to leave the lake early, citing a need to apply a topical Burning Bitterroot Balm to his blazing skin, which was true. On top of everything, Draco had forgotten to apply a sun-shielding skin charm and ended the day as red as a lobster with his skin feeling as if he'd walked into a firefly curse.

Pansy and Sonny joined him on his trek back up to the house and he grumbled his goodbyes as he trudged up to his room in a right state.

He applied a layer of the topical lotion and downed a vial of Dreamless Sleep and welcomed sweet oblivion.

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Draco and Granger were lost in thought as they made their way to the lab after checking on Astoria. It had been just over two weeks since they administered the new Venus-enhanced potion and Astoria looked like hell, her blood count had dropped and the presence of the virus in her system was back to concerning levels. The duration of the new potions efficacy didn't change much and Draco and Granger were both feeling disheartened, to say the least. Yes, the original potion worked to keep the infected host from turning temporarily, but based on their testing, the potion would need to be readministered every two to three weeks to keep the infected host from succumbing to the virus. They wouldn't be testing the theory on Astoria, but they were sure. Without the potion, Astoria would turn.

They were back to the drawing board and were none too pleased.

"So, we have ten days until Mabon to figure out a new combination of ingredients," Draco said absently as he tapped his quill against his lips in thought.

"Ugh! I can't think with you tapping your stupid quill every two seconds." Granger growled as she pushed off her stool and began pacing the length of the potions lab. "And why are you wearing a hoodie? You look...ridiculous."

Draco looked down at the black jumper that he had become so fond of and frowned. "It's comfortable and the pocket in the front is convenient." He grumbled, "Pansy said it makes me look unhoused, does it?"

Granger scowled, "I'm going to see if Kieran wants to walk the grounds so I can get out of this stupid lab."

Draco straightened, "What?! But we have work and –"

"This outbreak isn't going anywhere and I need a break. Why don't you go see if Pansy is free to give you fashion advice or...I don't know, you can plait each others' hair." Granger spat.

Draco reared back as if he'd been slapped, "Oh, thank you. That's a perfect idea, I'll do that."

Once they were far down the beach, she finally ripped her arm from his grasp and shouted, "Malfoy! What are you doing?"

He stopped, turning to her with heaving breaths, and opened his mouth to respond. But he couldn't very well admit that he was jealous of the lumbering giant, or that he was two seconds away from hexing the muscles right off the man or that he was desperate for her attention. So he opted for, "Well, I just wanted to ask you what, er – if you – did you have *Vampiros Magiae et Anatomia?* I, er, tried to find it in the library the other day..."

He internally grimaced at the lame attempt at defection, which was partially true, but still a poor excuse. But Granger seemed to buy it as her features softened slightly. "Oh, yes...well, I wanted to give it another read through. In case, knowing what we know now, could bring any new revelations."

He nodded awkwardly. "And? Have you found anything?"  
"No," she sighed as she flopped down onto the sand. "But I'm not quite finished yet. I can, er, come bring it to you...when I'm done."

He sat gingerly beside her, leaning back casually on his elbows. "Great. Yeah, I, um – intended on doing the same thing."

"Great." "Perfect."

They stared at each other in silence for a beat as Draco tried to gather his wits, letting fistfuls of sand fall through his fingers.

"It's bloody hot." Granger groused. "Did you – um, want to get in?" She dipped her chin towards the water.

Draco gulped, absolutely beside himself with need to see Granger wet. "Yeah." He squeaked out, before clearing his throat and trying again in a lower octave, "Yeah."

Granger pushed herself to stand and Draco had to bite his knuckles to hold back a whimper at watching her perfect, plump arse jiggle and her hips sway as she sauntered into the water. Draco cast a wandless notice-me-not on his groin and attempted to not sprint into the lake after her.

They waded deeper into the water; Granger's shoulders submerging and he nearly frowned at the loss of her exposed skin until she sucked her pink lip between her teeth, biting the flesh softly as she flicked her gaze to him. Her lips parted as if she were going to say something and he was on tenterhooks until –

"Oi! Malfoy, Hermione! We're going to play chicken! Come on!" Weasley yelled from down the beach.

Draco nearly grumbled an excuse to not play the ridiculous children's water game, but then his brain supplied images of Grangers' wet thighs bracketing his head and he tripped over a rock beneath his feet, accidentally splashing water in Granger's face in the process of righting himself.

"Oops! Sorry, Granger." He grimaced. "Yeah! We're coming!" Draco yelled to the group as Granger gasped and spit out a stream of lake water.

"Pthhhht. It's alright." She replied as they waded out of the water and strolled over to the rest of the group.

"King Kraken is my partner!" Ruby, the little cockblock yelled excitedly.

"Oh, um, actually –" Draco started to say.

out to lick the remnants of him from her lips and chin.

"Fuck, I love you." He blurted as he watched her eyes go wide. "I mean—I didn't mean—oh gods, I—I'm sorry, I didn't mean to say that now. I wanted to say it at a more meaningful time, but I think —"

"—Draco—"

"—you must have sucked the sense out of me or something because it's far too soon, right? I'm an absolute idiot and I've spoiled this moment—"

"Draco!" She shouted, pushing up to her feet to stand before him, her hands skating up his bare chest.

He snapped his mouth shut, turning his shameful gaze to hers, expecting to see rejection in them, but seeing only humor and affection.

He blew out a breath. "I'm sorry."

"Shut up." She pressed the tips of her fingers to his lips as she continued in a soft whisper, "Do you mean it?"

He nodded slowly as she let out a puff of air. "I don't know how or when we got here, but I think love you too." She said quietly as his stomach swooped and plummeted into his arse, "Although, I do wish we weren't having this conversation while I'm covered in your cum."

His face split in a toothy grin as he pressed a kiss to her fingers. "It's the hottest and best day of my life actually."

Draco sucked on his teeth, his jaw clenching, "Who cares if that prat joins us?"

"Oi, don't be rude, Pretty Boy. He's been struggling and I mentioned that I tried to get him out of this room but he refused, saying he wanted to pray. I think Hermione just feels badly that he's isolating." Sonny said.

Draco scowled, crossing his arms over his chest as a sopping wet Ruby bounded over to them, "Pretty Boy! Come play mermaids with me!"

Draco heard Pansy and Daphne snicker. He arched a brow, "Ruby, do I look like a man that wants to play mermaids?"

The teen settled her hands on her hip in a frightening imitation of Professor McGonnagall, and arched her own brow at him, "Pansy said she used to make you play. And that you had a mermaid name and everything."

Draco whipped his head to Pansy, the traitor, who was resolutely looking down at her nails. Draco mumbled, "It was a mer *man* name and yes, she forced me to play with her by threatening that she would hex all of my suits to be Gryffindor red."

"Oh, please," Sonny pleaded excitedly, "what was his merman name, Pansy?!"

"Pansy, don't you da—" Draco said through clenched teeth.

"— King Kraken." Pansy supplied with an insidious smile.

They all devolved into fits of laughter as Draco questioned if he should just attach rocks to his feet and jump into the middle of the lake.

"Pleaaaase, King Kraken, pleaaaase?!" Ruby pleaded.

Draco huffed, shooting a sneer at Pansy, "Fine, but only if *Queen Aqualina* will join us."

Sonny cackled as Pansy scowled.

They were just getting to the good part, reenacting a scene where the Sea Monster (Ruby) had caught Queen Aqualina in her net and King Kraken was hoisting Pansy up by her waist and attempting to save his aquatic queen by cutting her free with his triton (which was a transfigured stick), when movement on shore caught Draco's eye.

Granger, resplendent in a white sundress, was staring straight at him, but she looked (apart from absolutely breathtaking)...seething. His brows knit together as he tilted his head and Granger seemed to snap out of whatever thought had her in a tailspin. She turned on her heel and marched up to the bulky Scot; flashed him a knee-weakening smile and pulled her dress over her head, tossing it aside to show off a bright yellow two-piece swimsuit.

Draco dropped Pansy in the lake with a splash as he watched Kieran's gaze crawl down Granger's exposed form hungrily. Granger just batted her fucking eyelashes at the muscled tosser. "Um, King Kraken?" Ruby asked as Pansy spluttered as she came up for air, but Draco didn't respond. Instead, he waded out of the water and marched up to Granger.

He caught the tail end of her comment to the Scot, "— glad you came out."

Draco cleared his throat as they both turned, the Scot's face forming a deep scowl. Good.

"Ah, Kieran. Finally decided to get out of my guest room, did you? Wonderful!" He shot him a venomous smile. "Please do enjoy your time by my beautiful lake as well, there's an open lounger next to Daphne. I'm just going to grab Granger for a moment, it's urgent." He didn't wait for the Scot to respond. Instead, he grabbed Granger by the arm and pulled her down the beach as she squeaked out some expletives he pretended not to hear.

"I told you, it's evil!" Draco said, relieved that his unease was finally shared by the group.

An amalgamation of low snarls in the distance set the hairs on Draco's neck on end as the group assembled their practiced defensive formation and began winding their way through the slick streets.

Rotters darted out of nearly every building as the group expertly dispatched them, Draco's aim much more precise than when he'd first wielded Archie's axe. However, the growling of a distinct horde grew louder and louder with each street they cleared until the swarm descended and the group was forced to retreat to the rooftops.

Ruby's injury proved to be giving her more trouble than she let on as the teen struggled to climb a fire escape and was nearly dragged down by clawing Rotters before she stabbed his father's cane into an eye socket and wrenched her injured leg free. Theo carried her on his back after that until the group finally reached the Cathedral, sweaty and exhausted.

The large wooden doors were barricaded with muggle bicycles and rubbish bins with thorned metal (which he learned was called *babawire* or some such barbaric muggle invention) woven throughout the heap. The scrap was piled high enough to ward anything from making its way inside, including their group, demonstrated by the bits of rotted flesh and Rottor limbs that were tangled in the debris. Potter led the charge, creeping along the side of the stone building until they located a side entrance that was obstructed by thick planks of wood nailed into its facade. A bit of spellwork from Blaise and the blockade was removed, allowing the group to slip inside the cavernous church.

The space was eerily reminiscent of Hogwarts' Great Hall with domed ceilings and archways. Impressive stained glass windows cast the space in a mosaic of colors as they moved past rows and rows of wooden benches.

"It was locked up from the outside. I don't think anyone is in here, but I'd like to clear all the back rooms," Potter whispered. "Don't need an Andover repeat."

Weasley and Longbottom nodded and crept towards the back of the cathedral as Blaise, Ginny and Potter slipped silently into a corridor off to the left, leaving the rest of the group standing uselessly in the center of the church.

Minutes went by without so much as a clatter before Potter and company emerged, looking grim.

"What is it?" Granger asked in a whisper.

"Clergymen." Potter said, not bothering to lower his voice. "Looks like they, erm—"

"—Killed themselves." Ginny finished with a grimace. "Don't go in the back room with the red door."

"This side's clear." Weasley said as they all converged. "There's a connected mortuary down that way and kitchens in the opposite direction. No food though, bugger it all."

As the group split off to inspect their temporary safe haven, Draco meandered about until he found a washroom. He frowned at his reflection in the dusky mirror and, using his hands (like a peasant) instead of a hair charm, ran his fingers through his locks, taking great care to tousle them just so with a bit of Moon dew balm (he was running low, the horror) before making his way back into the corridor.

He collided with a wall of hair and pulled back, spitting out strands that had accosted the back

of his throat, and came face-to-face with Granger, who was sporting a hungry, ravenous look. Oh, he loved that look.

"Need something, Granger?" He asked innocently.

"Don't play coy, Draco." She said with an arched brow as he shuddered at her use of his name. "Come."

He obeyed the command, considering he very much did want to come, and followed dutifully on her heels as she made her way down a passageway. She pushed open a door that led into what he could only describe as a smaller version of the cathedral. Although, instead of the dais containing a golden altar, it held a large wooden coffin.

"Er, Granger?" He asked nervously.

"What?"

"That's a coffin."

"Well spotted." She said as she marched up the dais and began removing her coat. "Ten points to Slytherin."

"And you want to—here?"

"As good a place as any." She said, now removing her assortment of weapons from her person.

"But this is where funerals are held."

"We're held. And you used to sleep in a dungeon...with ghosts and poltergeists."

His mouth formed a contemplative mope before he conceded her point, "Touche. No," he cut in as she unbuttoned her trousers, "Leave the trousers on."

"Why?"

"I dunno, in case we have to make a swift exit."

"Mm, sensible. And my top?"

"Off. You can run with your tits out."

"Logical." She nodded as she removed her top and freed her breasts from their confines, her dusky nipples pebbling in the cool air of the room. His mouth watered.

Draco strode up to the dais and, without preamble, dropped to his knees and sucked a hardened nipple into his mouth, letting his tongue rove along the peak as she let out a soft sigh.

"Such a good boy for me, aren't you?" She moaned as he plucked the other nipple between two fingers. "You look so good on your knees."

He released her breast with a pop before spinning her and pushing her chest against the cool wood of the coffin, leaving her pert arse on display before him.

"I'll look even better buried inside your tight little cunt." He panted as he tugged her denims over her hips and plump arse, down past her thighs, leaving her bare to his hungry gaze. "Fuck, I want to devour you."

Still on his knees, his mouth was the perfect level to lick a broad strip up her cunt as she let out a surprised, breathless moan. He sucked her clit into his mouth, his tongue flicking rhythmically as she began to fall apart beneath his attentions.

Just as her release began to crest, he pulled back and stood, taking his throbbing erection in hand and guiding its leaking tip to her dripping entrance, "Need to feel you cum on my cock, witch."

She thrust her hips back, impaling herself on his length as they both groaned. Her denims still

clinging around her thighs, restricted her movement, causing her already tight cunt to feel like his cock was being strangled. A delicious choking as he began moving in and out of her, watching as her arousal coated his length.

"Fuck, Hermione. I –" He grunted, slowing his thrusts as he used his two thumbs to spread her arse open, letting a string of saliva fall from his lips and drip into the cleft of her arse. "Gods, I'm – you're just so – fuck – you're perfect."

Her cunt spasmed, clamping down on his cock as her head fell onto the top of the coffin's glossy surface. She turned, her cheek pressed against the wood as she caught his gaze and, the little minx, bit her bottom lip before her eyes rolled in ecstasy.

"Unh, fuck, fuck, fuck, okay," he panted, pulling his aching cock out slowly with a hiss before slapping a palm against the globe of her arse, "new plan."

"Ah! What—?"

"Pants off. Need your legs wrapped around me and —"

"And?" She prompted as she stood upright and twisted in his arms. "Draco, stop staring at my

tits. My legs wrapped around you and..."

He snapped his eyes back to hers. "Right, apologies. And need to see you."

"See me, hm?" She let a smile grace her delicate face, soft and sweet, and just for him.

He returned an equally gentle grin before pressing his lips against hers and nodding. "Want to look you in your pretty face whilst I fuck you senseless."

She chuckled, her lips opening as she swept her tongue into his mouth. With a snap of her fingers, her trousers and knickers vanished as she pulled away.

"Well," he said, lifting her by the thighs and placing her on top of the casket as he settled his hips between her legs, "that was an impressive little trick."

"I'm full of surprises. Open." She commanded, smacking his cheek softly.

"That, you are." He groaned and unhinged his jaw, settling his tongue on his bottom lip.

She spit a string of saliva onto his awaiting tongue and he wasted no time in swallowing the gift before his lips descended on hers in a desperate kiss.

"Such a filthy little pureblood, aren't you?" She panted against his lips as her fingers danced along his cock, bringing his length to her soaking cunt.

His head fell back between his shoulder blades as he groaned, pushing his tip into her warmth.

She licked a strip up his exposed throat. "You like being my filthy little pureblood?"

"Fuck, yes." He nodded, rather enthusiastically, his fingers digging into the flesh of her arse as he fought the desire to thrust to the hilt.

She moaned, rolling her hips as her cunt swallowed more of him. He held his breath as he stared into her eyes, transfixed as she arched her back and pleasured herself on his cock.

Her legs wrapped around his hips and pulled at the same moment he pushed into her fully. The sounds that left their lips were guttural and throaty as he sunk into her heat, his pelvis flush against hers.

Their lips grazed, breaths mingling as she adjusted to him and he attempted not to spill into her at the feel of her walls rippling and squeezing.

"Oh fuck, I love you." She blurted, and that was his undoing.

He held her thighs in a vice as he rolled his hips, his cock sliding in and out of her with punishing

"Kingsley is anxious for our arrival so you can both start on mass producing the vaccine. He says that their wards are weakening and Hogwarts' perimeter is being inundated with Rotters by the hour and they've already lost too many to the hordes during supply runs. They need the vaccine before they are confident enough to start sending teams to clear the swarms." Porter scratched at his mass of hair. "By my estimation, we are about two days to Glasgow and another six days at least to Hogwarts. Kingsley doesn't want to wait that long, so he's sending Charlie and four others on Thestrals to pick up you and Hermione and three others from Glasgow Cathedral."

Draco's brows creased, unease curling its way along his intestines. "And who are the lucky three?"

"We were thinking Ruby, Sonny and Ron." Potter replied. "Ruby shouldn't be out here exposed any longer than she already has been and we don't think Sonny would want to leave her side, plus she is an exceptional fighter and you all could use her skills in case things go south. And Ron because he is a damn good Auror and you lot are precious cargo."

Draco let out a relieved breath, "And you?"

"Good." Draco said, earning an elbow in the kidney from Granger before he surprisingly, and sincerely offered a thick, "Thanks, Potter."

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The energy in the group was buzzing with anticipation as they approached Glasgow, particularly from Kieran, who was more lively than Draco had ever seen him, prattling on to whoever would listen about his excitement to get to his sister and mother or pointing out underwhelming landmarks along the way.

The amount of Rotters their group encountered increased as they neared the large Scottish city and Potter suggested that the "Precious Cargo Group", including the Greengrasses and Pansy split off and make their way to the cathedral while Theo, Potter, Longbottom, Blaise, and Ginny escort Kieran to his family home.

"Nae chance," the Scort said as he shook his boulder-sized head, "I'll be quicker on me own. I'll find them and bring them to tha cathedral in half tha time."

"Kieran, surely you'd want someone—" Sonny implored before she was interrupted.

"-Dinnae fash, I'll be quick."

And before anyone could raise another objection, which Draco certainly would not, the Scot had split off down an alley and stalked around a corner, his sword held aloft until he slipped fully out of sight.

"He's going to die." Every head in their group snapped to Buckbeak who was tucked under Ruby's arm, the demonic voice still reverberating along the empty cobble street.

"Everyone heard that, right?" Draco asked as the group nodded.

"Yeah, okay, I'll admit, that was quite sinister, Buckbeak." Ruby tutted, smoothing back its tufted grey fur before looking innocently back at the group, "He doesn't mean it, obviously."

Theo pointed an accusatory finger at the toy, "It should be burned...with fire!"

"Oh, now you've done it." Ginny whispered, eyes still glued warily to the beast, "The demon is coming for you next, Nott."

Pansy shivered, "I feel like its eyes are following me."

came through earlier with some news.”

Draco’s eyebrows raised, curiosity piqued as he hummed and flicked his gaze to the smaller tent.

“I heard you and Hermione made things somewhat official last night.” Longbottom said with a wink. “I’m sorry to have missed seeing Ron’s face, but I was absolutely off my mash. Don’t remember anything after Pansy and Harry swapped knickers.”

Draco snickered before controlling his features, “Yes, well, kneazle’s out of the bag, I suppose.”

“Mm, you two make sense, oddly enough. Hermione seems happy and so do you. You make a good team. Created a bloody cure and all.”

Draco cleared his throat, “It’s not a cure, it’s a vaccine at best, but...thanks, I guess.”

“Malfoy!” Potter shouted, his mop of hair going this way and that as he stuck his head out of the entrance of the tent, “You’re gonna want to hear this.”

Draco pushed his way through the tent flaps, his eyes immediately landing on Granger who flashed him a coy smile as she took a seat on her other side. Draco’s eyes snapped to Weasley, who made a sound of disgust, before Granger straightened and turned narrowed eyes to the ginger.

“Right, so Malfoy,” Potter cut in, taking a measured breath as he rubbed the bridge of his nose, “Kingsley was able to make contact with an associate in Romania—a high ranking officer in their Ministry who’s been holed up since the outbreak. It seems that there was an unsanctioned muggle

expedition into the Carpathian Mountains to mine for ore and other precious minerals earlier this year. Kingsley’s contact confirmed that the Romanian Ministry was already aware of the resurgence of a new or unknown species of creature. It is believed that an explosion in one of the mines unearthed them. The ministry kept the development under wraps until they could conduct research on the creatures and formulate a plan to monetize the discovery. One of their researchers defied protocol and smuggled one of the new species out of their research lab and into Britain and sold the creatures milk, talons, feathers etcetera to various apothecaries. That’s where we now believe ROT-456 originated.”

“So, Strix? Or a new species altogether?” He asked, mind whirring.  
“From their research, they believe that the creature discovered was a cross-species of Stryges and a species of vampire bat, thought to have gone extinct over one hundred years ago.” Granger cut in.

Draco’s eyes went wide as he turned his gaze toward her, “You were right, you bloody genius.” Her lips twitched into a smirk as she averted her eyes and shrugged a shoulder, “The signs were cut in.

Draco’s eyes went wide as he turned his gaze toward her, “You were right, you bloody genius.” Her lips twitched into a smirk as she averted her eyes and shrugged a shoulder, “The signs were there.”

“Don’t be modest, it doesn’t suit you.” He retorted, “So, what does this mean?”

“Well,” Potter huffed as he slumped into an empty chair, “Kingsley assembled a small team to the Carpathians to search for the beasts and bring them back to Hogwarts for testing. And the team was successful.”

“Salazar’s Sack, how did they manage that?”

“Thestrals, my brother, and luck.” Weasley said, “Charlie spent two years in those mountains studying Transylvanian Two-Toed Dragons and knew the terrain quite well.”

“With access to the Strix-er-bathybrid,” Granger continued, eyes bright, “imagine how much more potent the potion will be!?”

strokes until her nails dug into his shoulders and the casket began making questionable noises.

“Unh—fuck, yes—oh gods—I’m questioning—fuck—the structural integrity—yes, Draco, harder—of this coffin! Yes, fuck me!”

“FUCK—made for my cock—fuck—if it collapses—oh, fuck, Hermione—before I can empty inside you—gods, just like that!—I’ll be very cross—fuck!”

Draco’s mouth hung open in awe as he watched Hermione’s orgasm rip through her, her legs wrapping tightly around his waist, her body tensing as she came undone. It was the most beautiful thing he’d ever witnessed.

Her gaze pierced his as her orgasm crested and then, lost in the depths of her honey, he stilled as threads of his own release spilled into her.

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A casual walk back to the group after their worlds-altering coupling proved not so casual as Draco and Hermione entered the main cavern to raised eyebrows from their companions and a curled lip from Weasley.

“What??” Hermione asked defensively.

“Did you forget what a bloody silencing charm is?” Ginny chuckled. “Gonna summon every Rotter in the vicinity making a raucous like that.”

Hermione’s eyes went wide before her expression turned to a grimace, “Oh, gods.”

“Yes, you said that quite a lot. Screamed it, actually.” Theo quipped. “Good shout, Malfoy.”

Draco shot him a delighted grin, lifting a proud chin.

“Oh my gods. Did Ruby...?” Hermione squeaked, hands coming up to cover her face. Draco winced.

“She’s in the kitchens with Neville, ordered to keep her Discman on, volume up until I say. You’re welcome and congrats on dropping the L-word.” Sonny smirked.

“Oh my gods,” Hermione whispered, the words muffled through her hands still pressed against her face, “we are so sorry.”

Draco flashed Weasley a pleased smile, “I’m not.”

# CHAPTER 21

## THE QUEST FOR MIRACLE

### SPIRITUALITY IN THE CRITIQUE OF CONVENTIONS

Draco awoke to a particularly aggressive hard-on, thanks to a lovely little dream about Granger riding his cock, spitting down his throat and calling him her “little spit bitch.” After a risky wank in bed he made his way to the tent’s spacious living area to borrow a wand so he could do his morning hygiene routine, but found the area devoid of his companions save for Buckbeak, who was sitting ominously on the chaise in the center of the room.

Draco startled as the disembodied voice of the furry demon echoed through the space, shouting something robotic and hellish that sounded awfully like a taunt, if he were to guess.

“Die,” *Abright*, Draco admitted, *that was much more intelligible*.

“Bloody menace you are.” He grumbled, throwing the hellion a rude, two-fingered gesture before pushing out of the tent flap and into the gloomy, damp morning.

Ruby, Theo, and the Greengrasses could be seen at the small creek

at the edge of the campsite gathering water and drying oak,

firewood, while Kieran sat lumbering against a large

unsurprising to anyone, reading his little black book.

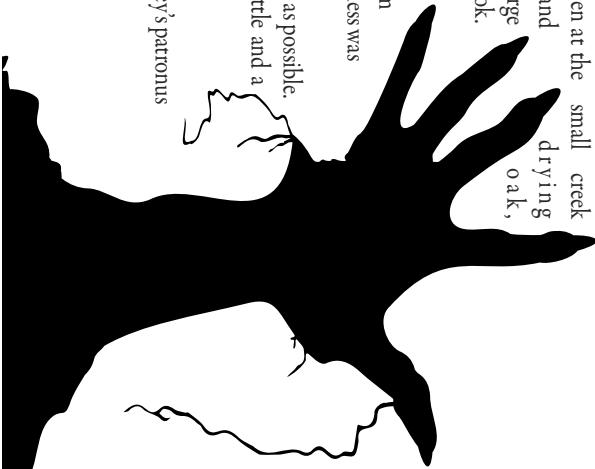
Longbottom stood nearest the fire, his wand flicking about, frying up what looked to be tiny sausages and beans as Draco sidled up beside him and held his hands above the warmth. Being wandless was becoming increasingly more inconvenient.

“Where’s Granger?” He asked as non-chalantly as possible.

Longbottom snorted as he summoned the kettle and a satchel of tea, “Morning to you too, mate.”

“Ugh, still not your mate. Where is she?”

“With Harry and Ron in the other tent. Kingsley’s patronus



however, had some decency and summoned a blanket from a chair before pulling away and wrapping her exposed bottom half. "On my god, Ron—what are you—oh god."

Draco looked down at his still painfully hard cock (truly, he had never seen it look more gorgeous) covered in Granger's arousal and gleaming in the moonlight.

He glanced towards Weasley, who was staring at Draco's beautiful cock as if it were Voldemort reincarnated. The redhead's visage turned a sickening greenish hue before his blue eyes flashed to Draco's. Weasley maintained eye contact as he proceeded to projectile vomit (Draco didn't even know a human body could hold that much liquid. Truly, it was like a waterfall) into the grass.

And just like that, Draco's once-in-a-lifetime erection deflated.

"What is it?? Rotters?" The frantic voice of Potter pushed through the tent flap, weapon in one hand and his wand in another as his eyes darted around the campsite.

"Rotters?? Everyone up!" Ginny's voice rang from somewhere inside the tent. Granger groaned as she hid her face in her hands, "No!! Everything is fine!! Everyone stay inside!"

Draco began tucking himself back into his trousers petulantly as Potter's "auror" skills finally began piecing the scene together. His eyes glanced from Hermione to Draco to Ron and recognition sparked before he doubled over and bellowed with laughter.

Theo, Pansy, Ginny and Sonny pushed out of the tent, confusion muddling their faces.

"What the fuck?" Ron groaned before another wave of vomit spewed from his mouth like a Norwegian Ridgeback. (Honestly, how much liquid does the bloke have left in him?)

"It seems," Potter choked out through his laughter, "Ron here, just caught Hermione and Draco—"

"—No! Please—" Ron groaned and gagged before more vomit.

"Granger, is that a normal amount of liquid for a person to have in their body?" Draco asked, concerned now.

"Well, it's about time!" Ginny whooped. "Blaise!! Get out here!"

"About time?" Draco asked.

"Let's not get the whole group out here." Granger grumbled.

"About time that you two got together. Biggest swots I've ever met, but too stupid to admit you fancy each other." Ginny said matter-of-factly as Blaise pushed through the tent flap. "Blaise, you owe me a can of soup and you. Theo, owe me a bottle of liquor."

"Aw, they finally fucked?" Blaise asked with a yawn.

Ron, hands on his knees, asked between wrenching, "Wait, you *all* knew?"

"I beg your pardon? We are not stupid. We've been shagging for weeks." Draco added.

"Oh my god, someone kill me." Granger squeaked as Ron dry-heaved and said, "No, kill me."

"Which week exactly?" Theo asked.

Granger straightened, "Wait so, you all knew and were betting on when we'd—"

"I didn't know!" Ron cried.

"—yes, now, which week?" Theo said excitedly.

Draco and Granger exchanged a look before Draco spoke, "Three weeks ago."

"Hah!! Pay up, tossers." Sonny shouted as the rest of the group groaned.

# CHAPTER 22

## A.I. THE KING'S TWEAKED RAILS

"Theo, take that off."

"No, I think I look quite dashing."

Potter huffed, crossing his arms over his torso and running an irritated tongue along the inside of his cheek. "Theo, take it off, that's—that's sacrilegious—"

"I think you're just thinking impure thoughts about your priest, Potter. And *that's* sacrilegious."

Theo nestled with a wink as he straightened the white collar beneath his stolen black suit.

Potter's cheeks flushed as he cleared his throat and looked towards the ceiling as if needing strength from the heavens.

Ginny snorted loudly, slapping a hand on her knee, "Oh gods, Harry, you *are* having impure thoughts, aren't you?"

"Shut up." Potter grumbled as Theo peacocked, jutting a proud chin and flashing Potter an exuberant smile.

"Why would he be having impure thoughts about Nort?" Weasley asked distractedly, face pinched in confusion as he munched on a bag of crisps.

"Salazar, aren't you an Auror, Weasley?" Draco asked as he rolled his eyes. "They're shagging, obviously."

"Hey!" Potter protested at the same time Sonny covered Ruby's ears and glowered at Draco.

"WHAT!?" Weasley shouted before sucking in a stray bit of crisp into the back of his throat and devolving into a coughing fit. Weasley's head swiveled around and landed on Potter accusitorily, "Since when, Harry?!"

Potter rubbed the back of his neck awkwardly as he grimaced, "Er, a few weeks."

"Months." Theo corrected.

Weasley scowled, "And who else is secretly shacking up with a Slytherin?"

"Me." Ginny said nonchalantly.



Weasley shot her an unamused glare. "Har har."

"Not a joke, soon-to-be-brother-in-law." Blaise said, flashing Weasley a wide grin as he sidled up beside Ginny and slung a casual arm around her waist.

Draco relished in the color that drained from Weasley's face as the ginger swallowed hard and took a deep breath.

"Really, Ron, even I knew. Honestly, you should be more observant given your line of work in law enforcement." Ruby chided as she slipped on her headphones and began bobbing her head to the music, effectively removing herself from the conversation.

Weasley made a series of outraged squeaks and scoffs before huffing. "Excuse me for not focusing on the romantic conquests of my best mates during the zombie-bloody-apocalypse."

He grumbled, "What about you, Neville? Are you also secretly involved with a Slytherin?"

"Afraid not, Ron." Longbottom replied solemnly before catching the eyes of a Greengrass sister. "But only because Astoria hasn't given me the time of day. Yet."

All eyes snapped to Longbottom and Astoria, mouths agape. Draco's eyebrows jumped into his hairline. Longbottom had big bollocks. Draco would give him that.

"You—Sorry, what?" Astoria asked, eyebrow arching.

Longbottom shrugged a broad shoulder and scratched at the scruff on his chin. "Life's too short to not go for what you want and all that. You don't have to answer now, and you might not be interested but maybe when we make it to Hogwarts, I can show you my favorite greenhouse."

Draco caught Granger's eye and tilted his head towards the scene as if to say '*are you seeing this?*' to which she responded by sucking her lips into her mouth to suppress a grin.

"U-uhm, y-yeah, sure." Astoria stumbled before regaining her pureblood composure. "Fine, I suppose."

Weasley's wide eyes turned to Daphne as he gulped audibly, "Sooo...er, maybe you and I..."

"Absolutely not." Daphne replied quickly as she crossed her arms and turned her nose up.

Weasley nodded. "Right, right. Sorry."

"Okayyy, er, before this becomes more awkward than it already is, why don't we determine who is sleeping where and get some food in our bellies. The cavalry should be arriving by late morning tomorrow for the Precious Cargo group and I'd like to start winding down for the evening. Neville, you're on night watch with Kieran. Make sure to check the wards at least every hour."

"Speaking of Kieran, he should have been back by now." Sonny said anxiously gnawing on her lip.

"He should have taken a radio." Draco added. "Probably dead though, if Buckbeak is to be believed."

"Christ, Pretty Boy." Sonny growled. "He probably just got caught up. He's navigating a Rott-

infested city with two extra people. I'm sure he's fine!"

Draco held his hands up in supplication, "Okay, okay, sorry! You're probably right." Draco did not think she was right. "And in regards to the sleeping arrangements," he went on, "Granger and I will be taking the funeral parlor. Although, we'll have to fortify the coffin with a fair amount of stabilization charms. It barely held both of our weight."

"Dra—" Hermione's scolding was cut short as she suddenly straightened. "Someone's just

She flicked her wrist towards the tent's entrance, "Silencing charm and everyone is knackered and buggered, so no. Plus, it's more fun this way, don't you think? The risk of being caught?"

Draco bit his knuckles to keep from moaning at her naughtiness. "Gods, I love you."

"Us Gryffindors are famous for our impulsiveness."

"A trait I am truly coming to appreciate."

"Less talking." She growled as she unbuttoned her trousers and began pulling them down her hips.

He sprang into action, yanking off her boots and her denims down the rest of the way leaving her in only her black knickers. Her impatient fingers began working at the closures of his own trousers before he slapped them away, crouching down slightly in order to hoist her legs over his shoulders.

He pressed his nose to her center and breathed in the earthy scent of her as her fingers carded through his silken hair. His thumbs looped into the waistband of her knickers and she shifted her arse so he could swipe them down her legs and pocket them before he settled her knees on his shoulders once again and resumed his position of worship.

One broad swipe of his tongue against her sex and she was panting and tugging and scratching her nails into his scalp as he devoured her, each pass of his lips on her sensitive clit had her cunt dripping with her arousal and his own cock swelling to the point of pain.

Her fingers dug into his scalp, pushing his face harder into her sex as he sucked and licked and gorged on her offering until she let out a high-pitched squeak and he felt her body tense and twitch.

Before she had time to come down from her orgasm, Draco stood, releasing his erection from his trousers before tugging her to her feet and spinning her, pulling her back to his chest. He laid an open palm on her chest, fingers splayed against her collarbone, keeping her pressed against him as he slid his cock between her drenched cunt, coating his length in her wetness. Her moan echoed around the campsite as the tip of his cock stroked her swollen clit.

His harsh breaths fanned against her ear as he panted, "I'm going to fuck you now and it's probably going to last a very short time, but Little Malfoy is a resilient fellow."

Her chuckle was cut off by a moan as he pressed the tip of his cock into her entrance. "Fuck, you're so tight, Hermione." He grunted as he pulled out fully, only to thrust himself inside her again, his cockhead squeezing painfully past the resistance of her walls.

"Unhh, fuck yes, harder, Draco. You feel so good. Fuck me harder." She whined as she wiggled her arse, her cunt sucking his length as she impaled herself to the hilt.

He let out a pathetic choked sound as her soaked cunt enveloped him. His hand at her hip squeezed her flesh as he pistonned his hips, the squelching sound of their coupling filling the canopy as he fucked himself into her.

His balls began to tighten, his spine tingling as he felt her fingers begin to rub at her clit, his cock sliding beautifully in and out of—

—a blood curdling scream shattered through the campsite. Draco and Granger started and turned towards the tent to see a pale-faced Ronald Weasley standing at the entrance to the tent, eyes teary and as wide as galleons, jaw unhinged and nearly touching the ground.

Draco, cock still buried in Granger, felt, in that moment, the happiest he'd ever been. Granger,

peanut butter (Draco wasn't even sure where he procured the spread) and Pansy was dared to lick off as much as she could in thirty seconds.

Draco was feeling very warm and fuzzy and his cheeks hurt from smiling so much. All in all the game did indeed boost group morale and he watched in a daze as everyone slowly stumbled inside the tent and made their way to bed.

Ron pushed up from his seat, swaying on his feet before he hiccupped loudly, "Yer sure—" hiccup, "tha' yer bof arr-alright to take watch?"

Granger giggled as she dug in her bag and pulled out three small vials. "Yes, Ron, I've got a sober up potion here for me and Dra-Malfoy and an extra for you. You're pissed."

"Truly don't know wha' I'd do wiwutchya, Mione." Ron slurred as he snatched the vial and floundered through the tent flap and out of sight.

Rain pattered gently against the overhead enchantment as the fire snapped and hissed, its glow illuminating Granger's soft features as she leaned back in her seat.

"Can't remember the last time I had so much fun." She sighed contentedly.

Draco hummed in agreement. "Can't believe you said Kieran was the most attractive."

She chuckled. "Oh please, you know I was just winding you up."

"Ah-HA! So you *do* think I'm the most attractive."

She rolled her eyes as she downed her sober-up in one gulp. "I won't be feeding your already too big ego."

"Why not?" He pouted, "Fine, I'll feed yours then. You are *definitely* the person I find the most attractive out of our group. Out of the whole country, actually. Wait, no, *the whole world*. You're smart and caring and far beyond my league or what I deserve, but I am nothing if not selfish, so I will not be giving you up. You are compassionate and ferocious and I'm scared of you, in a good way, and you forgave me when you probably shouldn't have because I was horrible to you and to the wizarding world at large and you gave me a chance to be close to you and I would do anything to please you. Whatever you ask or need. I—"

"—Draco."

"Hm?"

"Shut up and kiss me."

He leapt to his feet and dropped to his knees in front of her chair as she widened her legs, allowing him to slip between them as he leaned forward. Her warm hands curled at the base of his neck as she brought her lips to his in a soft and tender kiss before she pulled back. Her brown eyes, golden in the firelight, pierced into his and he felt his stomach swoop at the intensity of her stare.

"You want to please me?" She asked.

He nodded eagerly as he licked his lips and she parted his cheek rather hard with the palm of her hand.

"Take that sober-up and then please me like a good boy." He let out a groan, or maybe it was a whine, as her legs widened further and she tilted her hips, allowing her center to grind against his groin. Her hand clapped over his mouth to silence his outburst as she shoved the vial into his hand and he ripped the cork out with his teeth, downing the bitter liquid in one gulp.

He flicked his gaze to the entrance of the tent as it flapped in the breeze before settling back on her, "Right here? You're not worried someone will hear or come out?"

brushed against the wards.

"Speak of the Devil himself." Draco grumbled under his breath.

Porter crossed to the side entrance and waited for Hermione to lower the wards before he pushed the heavy door open.

Kieran, bloody and gaunt, stood despondent in the doorway looking more like a ghost than a man and staggered through the doors, pushing past the group as if they weren't even there. As if he couldn't even see them.

If Draco didn't know any better, he would have thought the man was a Rottter himself with the way he stumbled dazedly to the dais and fell to his knees with a crack before the ornate altar. His head bowed as he clasped his hands to his chest and began to weep.

Sonny rushed to the man's side and placed a tentative hand on his bloody shoulder. Kieran started, his shoulders shaking as he sobbed and choked out. "They're dead. God took them from me. We're all dead."

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It was a testament to how traumatized the Scot was that he didn't even put up a fight when Granger scourgified his clothing and body of the caked on layers of blood and flesh that adorned him from head to toe.

Draco stayed well away from the man as he was coming out of the shock. While Draco didn't like him, he could understand the agony one suffers by seeing their family ravaged by this virus. If the Scot's mother and sister had succumbed to a Rottter bite, the poor bastard probably had to kill his own kin.

"I'll stay up with Neville for night watch," Weasley mumbled to Porter as the latter nodded in thanks.

"No."

All heads turned to Kieran who stood abruptly, his hair matted and limp, face drawn and sickly as he swallowed thickly as if he was fighting off a wave of nausea.

"Really, Kieran, you should get some rest – you don't have to—"

"I won't be getting any sleep tonight." The Scot said firmly, eyes downcast as he fidgeted with his coat. "Might as well be put to use."

Porter eyed the man stoically, likely assessing whether or not the Scot was fit to keep guard throughout the night and, after a moment, whatever the Chosen One saw he nodded his head in approval before saying, "Wake Ron or me at any point if you need to rest."

Kieran nodded before excusing himself to the washroom. The group stared at one another, not quite knowing how to help a man that didn't seem to ever want help. A collective melancholy was thick in the air as they all slipped off into their corners of the cathedral's back rooms and settled for a night of fitful rest.

Granger conjured some thick blankets and fluffy pillows to lay inside the spacious coffin they would call a bed for the evening and unprompted handed Draco her wand so he could apply a teeth cleaning charm.

Heavy rain pelted the parlors' high stained glass windows as they squeezed together inside the padded casket, their arms wrapping around one another instinctively. Draco was pleasantly surprised with how comfortable the coffin actually was, with Granger tucked tightly to him, her

face pressed against his chest as they both breathed out a weary sigh.

"I'm sorry," Granger whispered.

"Whatever for?"

Her face turned up as she stared at him through misty eyes, "About your parents. Kieran's loss I'm sure brought up some unpleasant thoughts for you. I know they have for me."

He pressed a soft kiss to her forehead, his arms squeezing protectively around her waist, "I suppose, yes, it made me think of my mum and Mipsy. And selfishly how happy I was not to witness her death." He chewed on his cheek in thought, "Lucius' death alone was horrible and... I guess I feel sorry for the Scot. Can't imagine."

Granger hummed in agreement, burrowing herself further into him as her nails traced small patterns into the fabric of his shirt.

"I've never asked, but are your parents..."

She let out a breath, "Last time I spoke to them was right after the first reports started coming in throughout Britain. Told them to hunker down and that I'd speak to them soon. I'd like to think they're safe. I heard Australia was one of the first countries to close their borders."

"When we make a more potent vaccine, we'll figure out a way to get there." Draco assured her with a squeeze.

"You know, you're very brave." She whispered.

He let out a small, self-deprecating chuckle and her head lifted from its home on his chest, leaving them face to face as her hand came to brush her fingertips along his jaw.

"I'm not." He shook his head. "Even you thought me a coward a few months ago."

"*You were* a coward a few months ago, but you've changed, or – or grown since then. You endured navigating the outbreak alone and living to tell the tale, you've befriended muggles and even let them help you. You've done things that are courageous and perhaps you've not done those things fearlessly perse—" he let out a scoff as she continued, her gaze penetrating as they stripped him bare, "–but you've done them bravely."

"Yes, well, Slytherins are good at self-preservation." He joked, flicking his eyes away from hers. "Don't do that." She huffed, her fingers gripping tightly to his jaw as she pulled his gaze back to hers, "You've done plenty that wasn't self-serving, for the good of others. That's why I—you know..."

"Love me?" He finished, pulling her closer as their noses brushed. "Mm, yes." She breathed.

A wide smile broke free as he nipped gently at her lip, "And you know why I love you?"

"Why?"

"Because you, Hermione, challenge me to be... I don't know, better, I suppose."

She chuckled, "I do love a challenge."

They were quiet for a beat before a thought struck him as he sighed contentedly, "Strange."

"What is?"

"That we're here right now, together – and it doesn't seem strange at all."

weeks, but I don't really know much about any of you. Could be fun!"

"Yes! Exactly! I knew you were my favorite Weasley." Theo beamed.

"Oii!" Ron scowled.

Draco watched in amusement as Ginny discreetly jabbed an elbow into Blaise's ribs, causing him to clear his throat and declare, "I suppose the last few days have been grueling enough that a bit of light-hearted merriment could be... fun."

Ginny clapped him on the shoulder as Theo pumped a fist in the air, "Right, I'll go first. Potter. Truth or dare?"

"Errr... truth?" The bespecked wonder asked warily.

Theo made a growling noise in the back of his throat and shook his head, "No, pick dare."

"Theo, you can't tell someone which to pick." Granger interjected.

"Fine, dare." Porter cut in, earning a gleaming smile from Theo and a glower from Granger.

"I dare you to strip down and show us your best blast-ended skrewt impression."

"Fucking hell." Ron grumbled, a look of disgust flashing across his already beet red features.

"Theodore!" Porter cried, throwing his hands in the air. "Absolutely *not*."

Theo clapped his hands together, "Wonderful, Porter. Hop to it."

"No, not *absolutely*, *Not*. I meant *absolutely not*." Harry signed, pinching the bridge of his nose as Theo winked.

"Come on Chosen One, you chose dare, so get on with it."

"You're just making up rules now." Granger scoffed.

Porter took two shots before stripping down to his pants and crawling on his hands and knees while simultaneously using his wand to send sparks shooting from his bum (much to the raucous laughter of the group) before he turned to Granger, "Hermione, truth or dare."

"Truth, obviously." Granger said through remaining chuckles as Porter righted his clothing. "Out of all of the people in our group, who do you find the most attractive?" Sonny cut in.

"Ooooooo, good one Sonny!" Ginny laughed excitedly.

Draco sat up straighter as he watched a deep blush creep up Granger's face, sucking her plump lip into her mouth as she contemplated her response.

"Actually, I pick date."

"Alright, kiss the person you think is the most attractive in this group." Ginny piped up with a wink. Draco's eyes bounced amusedly between the women as they leveled each other with silent but deadly looks.

"Yeah, go on Granger." Draco goaded with a smirk, lips already tingling and ready for hers.

Granger sucked on her teeth and ground her jaw before flashing him all thirty-two teeth,

"Well, Kieran is asleep and I wouldn't want to disturb him."

Draco scowled so hard he was sure that his face may be permanently stuck like that as he watched Granger kiss Sonny on the cheek and sit primly back in her seat.

As the night progressed, so did the group's collective inebriation, therefore each round of the game became increasingly more deranged with Longbottom admitting to a threesome with two Hufflepuffs in Professor Binns' classroom during the second annual reunion of Hogwarts alum and Theo being dared to act out his favorite sex position with Buckbeak (which was honestly perhaps a bit too far even for a demon furby). At one point, Ron was dared to cover himself in

Draco awoke, limbs tangled with Granger's, to an annoyingly full bladder. The sky was black outside and rain still beat against the windows and nearly lulled him back to sleep before his

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recreated the *Lumos Solare* spell, as well as hefty wards, around the encampment before joining the others around the roaring fire.

Gratefully, they had scavenged cans of food and water from homes along the way and attitudes shifted from pissy to deliriously giggly as they shoveled warm chicken noodle soup into their mouths.

Theo garneted a round of applause and laughter when he whipped out a bottle of firewhiskey from his pack that he must have smuggled from the manor before they left. He took a large swig before handing it around the group. More laughter echoed around the campsite as Ruby insisted on tasting the liquor and immediately devolved into a coughing fit, grimacing and dry-heaving.

"I told you you wouldn't like it." Sonny chuckled, swiping the bottle from Ruby's clutches. "But you'll appreciate it when you're older."

"Battery acid?! That's a five hundred galleon bottle!" Draco scolded, "Your palette is clearly lacking refinement."

The teen rolled her eyes as Draco's gaze slid to the Scot who sat at the edge of the makeshift circle, his religious book perched on his meaty legs as he flipped through the pages quietly, uninterested in conversing with anyone. That was fine with Draco.

Days ago, a heavy storm pounded against their shield spells as the group made their way north, though the Scot opted to walk several meters ahead, his hair plastered to his face as the wind and rain battered against him. Draco would have almost felt bad for the bloke except this was a personal choice, a self-imposed exile. Not wanting to "associate with witchcraft" which according to the muggle giant was "an abomination to the Lord" or some such nonsense.

Draco had expressed his confusion about religion then and how someone could be so indoctrinated and so deeply misguided and Granger had, not unkindly, reminded him that he himself had once been influenced by similar ideologies against muggles and muggleborns. That had shut him up and given him much to process, like how maybe he and the Scot were not so different. He shuddered at the thought. No, they were definitely different, but if Draco could update his own views, especially over the last few months, perhaps Kieran could too.

The Scot had finally, but begrudgingly agreed to shelter under their protection charms, but still made unsettling comments under his breath, muttering rubbish like "God's will" and "sinners" or grumbled small prayers like "protect me from this evilness" or "forgive them, Lord, for their wickedness." Granger had leveled him with sharp looks each time and Draco's teeth were nearly smooth from grinding them so hard in an attempt to keep from retorting.

"I'm going to bed." The Scot said, snapping his book shut and stomping into the tent.

"Me too, I'm knackered." Astorian nodded as her sister stood and they both said their goodnights. Ruby yawned and palmed his father's cane as she pushed to stand, "Me too. Don't stay up too late, kids."

Theo clasped his hands together, "Now that the adults are alone, how about a game of truth or dare?"

Pansy tsked as Blaise groaned, "Ugh. Theo we're not children."

"Well, hold on." Ginny straightened in her makeshift chair. "We've had a rough few days, weeks, months. It could be a good bonding experience. We've been forced into proximity for

bladder protested again. He took a moment to admire the beauty mark that rested below her left eye and the small scar that split the tail of her eyebrow, the sharp angles of her cupid's bow as soft puffs of air escaped her lips. Gods, she could stare at her forever, but the urge to relieve himself had him crawling silently out of the coffin and into the damp and pitchblack halls of the cathedral in search of the closest loo.

Wood creaked eerily, beams groaned and rodents scurried about as he finally located the washroom and emptied his bladder, still groggy and eager to crawl back into the warmth of their temporary bed.

The sounds of slurping and gasping filtered through the hum of rain and he shook his head, letting out a silent snort as he crept on the balls of his feet towards the noise. He'd bet that it was Porter and Theo at it again, or perhaps even Blaise and Ginny, although he expected that they'd be more discreet, especially given the heaviness of the night.

Thunder cracked as he tip-toed down the musty hall and peeked around the corner into the cavernous great hall. The space was far too dark to see much of anything as he moved further in.

He squinted at the brightness of the intermittent lightning as it flashed, and he caught a glimpse of the couple on the floor of the walkway between the rows of pews, the person on top gyrating and grinding on the person beneath them. A moan broke free and echoed along the walls.

*"Really," he thought disapprovingly, right here in the middle of the walkway.*

"Oi!" He whispered, "You're going to wake everyone!"

Lightning flashed again, closer this time, and illuminated the scene just as Kieran's bloody maw snapped to Draco, his teeth bared and snarling, a piece of flesh hanging from them. Neville, clawing desperately and feebly at Kieran's arms, let out a choked gurgle as blood spurted from the opening in his neck.

Draco sucked in a breath, frozen as Kieran stood upright with unnatural quickness, his eyes a depthless black, ink veins webbing his mortled skin. The Scot let out a throaty growl as he crouched, a movement Draco understood as a pouncing position before the Scot—or what was the Scot—indeed launched himself down the walkway at a sprint.

"FUCK!" Draco shouted as he bolted to the left and snatched up what he could only describe as a golden staff with an intricate cross at its top, and swung it with as much force as he could muster into Kieran's advancing figure. The corner of the golden cross connected with Kieran's jaw, ripping it from its hinge, taking teeth and skin with it as his head snapped to the side with the impact. Although the hit did significant damage, Kieran, jawless, outstretched his bloodied hands and lunged again.

Draco swung the staff once more, this time the corner of the jagged metal cross impaled the Scot's neck, lodging in the man's throat. With a swift tug forward, the cross severed through cartilage and tendons, leaving Kieran's head hanging on by the thread of his spine. His overlarge head fell back behind his shoulders, black blood spraying from the opening as his giant hands scrabbled for purchase, wrapping his fingers around the staff.

A shot rang out as a bullet pierced through the Scot's nearly-decapitated skull and he fell, motionless to the ground with a thud.

Draco turned, wide-eyed to see Ron standing in the archway, red hair messy from sleep, with a gun aimed at where Kieran had just stood.

"Neville!" He shouted, pointing to the altar as he ran up the walkway and fell to his knees beside him. Longbottom's breath rasped as he struggled for air. Thick blood bubbled from his mouth, the gaping hole in his neck jagged and shredded as blood poured endlessly from it too, soaking into the floor.

"Oh my gods. HERMIONE!!" He heard Weasley bellow, as Draco pressed his palms to Neville's neck, pressing hard to keep the blood from continuing to pour out of the wound.

"No, no, no, not again." Draco muttered, panic bubbling over the cauldrons in his mind as Neville choked, blood spilling over his mouth and dribbling down his chin as he attempted to speak. "No, mate-don't, please don't—"

Neville's green eyes were glassy and wide, as if he were pleading with Draco, as he choked and coughed, tears sliding out of the corners and slipping into his hairline. Draco removed one of his hands from the wound and grabbed one of Neville's in a tight grip. "It's alright, mate, you'll be alright. Hermione is coming. Stay with me."

Draco heard Granger shout and felt her fall heavily beside him, shoving him bodily out of the way as she poured healing potion after healing potion into the wound, her wand twirling as she muttered panicked spells. Neville's hand fell limp in Draco's grip as he sucked in a shuddered gasp, one last fight for breath before he went still.

"No." Granger growled, pointing her wand at his motionless chest. The golden spell sunk into Neville's chest and Draco then noticed the rest of the group; hands cupped over mouths, each holding one another from the sidelines. All of them holding their breath, hoping against logic for Neville's chest to rise.

It wasn't until Potter's strangled cry slipped from him that they knew it was over. Neville was dead.

"H-how did this—how did this happen?" Potter choked out through his sobs as Theo squeezed his shoulder, silent tears streaming down his own face.

"It's obvious, isn't it?" Granger's voice answered numbly, sniffing slightly as she used two fingers to gently shut Neville's glassy, unseeing eyes.

Draco wiped stray tears from his cheeks and answered, "Kieran got bit. But he never took the portion."

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As the sky lightened outside and the storm passed, they all sat silently in the church pews as they waited for the cavalry to arrive. Potter, Weasley, Ginny and Hermione had levitated Neville's body into an empty sleek mahogany coffin, procured from a back storage room in the mortuary.

Draco felt helpless, watching as Hermione held back her grief, her eyes dead and expression numb. She clutched stoically at Harry and Ron as they each wept over their friend, their family. She was occluding, and he couldn't blame her because so was he.

"We should take him with us. Back to Hogwarts." Draco blurted as the group turned toward him with red-rimmed eyes. "We can figure something out. We *will*. We can bury him by the greenhouses."

Hermione's eyes flashed with something akin to gratitude before going back to their dulness as the Gryffindors nodded sadly.

## CHAPTER 20

# RESIDENT FELLOW

**H**eavy rain and wind whipped violently against their shield charms as they erected their tents and prepared to camp for the night. They had walked north for days and the whole group was exhausted from the grueling trek. Even Granger's cushioning charms hadn't been enough to keep painful blisters from forming in Draco's boots.

They had been unable to stumble upon a vehicle big enough on the journey thus far, so reluctantly forced to enthusiastically forced to trip on foot. It was slow going

terrible weather encouraged countless Rotters to roam the countryside in search of a meal.

Temps were high and morale was low, but at least he and Granger were tasked with keeping watch that evening, which meant he'd finally get some time alone with her.

With the perimeter secured by Potter and Weasley, and thanks to Longbottom's borrowed wand, Granger and Draco had successfully



A loud series of bangs reverberated along the roof of the cathedral and a moment later, a Hebridean Black dragon patronus materialized in front of them.

"Your knights in shining armour have arrived" A gruff voice that Draco presumed to belong to Charlie Weasley said. "Meet us topside, you lot."

The group clamoured to the staircase that led to the cathedral's rooftop and pushed through the access door to the sight of five skeletal Thestrals with riders atop them outfitted in head-to-toe black combat attire and Quidditch gear. The creatures huffed, their breaths clouding in the dampness of the day as their hooves clomped anxiously against the roof. Two of the Thestrals were saddled together, their reigns harnessed to a single Hogwarts carriage.

Charlie pulled off his Quidditch helmet, a large smile stretching his face and assessed the group before his smile dropped. "Merlin, who died?"

"Neville," Ginny replied mournfully, flicking a stray tear from her cheek. "Just last night."

Charlie hung his head, as did the rest of the Thestral riders, and sighed. "Fuck."

"What's with the carriage?" Weasley asked, his chin quivering. "Suppose it can hold a coffin?"

Charlie nodded sadly, "Professor Flitwick, along with the help of Lupin, were able to mimic the Beaubatons' weightless carriages, so we could take all of you...and of course Neville. The ride won't be smooth, but it'll be better than another week of walking I should say."

"Thank the gods." Astoria whispered as she flung herself at a surprised Charlie and crushed him in a hug.

Draco stopped short, his eyes going wide as dinner plates when a sixth rider came into view and landed smoothly on the roof. A man with shoulder-length jet black hair, sporting a leather jacket, sat perched atop—not a Thestral—but a Hippogriff. And not just any Hippogriff, but *Buckbeak*.

"What—what are you doing here!?" Harry stuttered as the man that Draco had seen splashed across wizarding newspapers slipped off Buckbeak and smiled brightly, holding his arms wide for an embrace from the Boy Who Lived. "Kingsley, didn't say you were coming!"

"What Kingsley doesn't know, won't hurt him." The man winked, "Had to make sure my godson was alright, didn't I?"

Sonny leaned into Draco and whispered, "Who is *that*?"

"And what is *that*?" Ruby asked, pointing to the Hippogriff.

Draco blinked furiously before clearing his throat and muttering, "That is Sirius Black. And that is Buckbeak."

relentless rain as it lashed against the thatched roof.

A light knock sounded at the door to the washroom and he pulled it open.

Granger stood in the doorway, glancing behind her to the empty hallway as chatter sounded from the living room. She pushed him into the bathroom, kicking the door shut with her foot before curling her hands into his hoodie and pulling his lips into hers in a desperate kiss.

His hands curled around her waist as he groaned, his tongue sweeping against hers before she pulled back, breathing heavily.

"Gods, you were brilliant today."

"Oh?" He crooned, squeezing the curve of her arse, "which part?" Her hands raked through his hair as she licked into his mouth, "When you stabbed that fucker with your broken wand."

"Violence does it for you?" He panted, one of his hands snaking up her back and tangling in her curls as he deepened the kiss. She let out a soft moan as his hands moved to her thighs, lifting her onto the countertop, her legs wrapping around his hips.

Another knock rapped on the door and they both froze.

"Fuck," Granger whispered as she pushed off the counter and smoothed her hair in the mirror. Draco tucked his erection into his waistband with a scowl as she whispered, "I was checking your ribs."

She pulled open the door, finding Longbottom standing in the hall, his tall frame leaning lazily against the wall, his face sporting a cheeky grin.

"I was just checking his ribs," Granger blurted as Longbottom's eyes bounced between them. "Of course. You alright, mate?" Longbottom asked Draco, humor creasing the corners of his eyes.

Draco sniffed, rolling his eyes, "Don't and yeah, just sore. You?"

"Hm? Oh, yeah, fine. You were pretty good out there. Sorry about your wand."

Draco swallowed thickly, a muscle ticking in his jaw, "Yeah, me too."

"Ollivander is at Hogwarts and I'm sure he'd be happy to make you a new one." Granger offered.

Draco snorted, "I doubt the man I tortured and kept in my family's dungeons will be too keen on making me a new wand."

Longbottom lifted a broad shoulder before letting it fall, "Maybe not, but I'm sure he'd be happy to make one for the man who created a vaccine for the outbreak."

Ruby walked around the corner, Buckbeak tucked under one arm and his father's cane in the other, with Weasley on her heels.

"What happened to the demon?" Draco asked, eyes flicking over the abominations matted and muddy fur.

Ruby sighed, stroking its little head, "Got thrown from the van when it crashed."

"Well, he looks even more demented." Draco said, shooting the creature a look of disgust.

"What's for dinner? I'm starving." Weasley asked with a pout, parting his stomach hopefully.

Longbottom pushed off the wall and clapped his hands together, "Guess,"

Ruby and Draco exchanged a flat look as they all answered with a groan, "Beans."

our ties!"

"Go, go, go!" One of the thugs screamed as the remaining men began to pile into the van, leaving their comrades to fend for themselves against Draco's group. The engine revved and the tires squealed as the van peeled away.

Draco lifted the gun in his hand, took a fortifying stance and squeezed the trigger, just like Granger taught him. The bullet lodged in the van's rear tire causing the vehicle to lose control as it swerved off the road. Its front tires hit a berm as the van launched into the air and flipped onto its side. It hit the road with a sickening crunch of metal grinding against pavement before screeching to a halt.

Draco turned, seeing Sonny hack into the last of the thugs.

"Is anyone hurt?!" Potter shouted frantically as he united Daphne and Astoria. "Theo?!" "I'm here!" Theo responded breathlessly as the rain picked up once again. They all assessed the aftermath, bodies strewn about the street, blood soaking the wet pavement. Draco's eyes searched for Granger's until he located her, sitting on her knees and holding a hand to her stomach.

"Granger!" He shouted as he sprinted to her side.

She hissed as she pulled her hand away to reveal a blood-stained palm, "It's alright, it's just a graze."

"Fuckers!" Weasley growled as he ran towards the crumpled van, a murderous glare promising death for anyone who managed to survive a crash like that.

"Where's your bag?!" Draco asked wildly.

Granger snapped her fingers and her disillusionment charm vanished as her beaded bag appeared across her chest.

"Someone give me a wand!" Draco ordered as Longbottom shoved his cherry oak into his awaiting palm. Draco wasted no time accio-ing Dittany from her bag as Granger lifted up her shirt to reveal a deep gash in her side. Draco siphoned the blood, waving a disinfectant spell at the wound before squeezing a dropper full of Dittany shakily into the open gash. Instantly the wound began to stitch shut as Granger breathed out a sigh of relief.

"Thank you." She said softly, his eyes flicking to hers.

He let out a harsh breath, which caused a stab of pain to his ribs as he hissed.

"What?" Granger asked wide-eyed, her hands coming to his shoulders. "What is it?"

Draco lifted his hoodie, revealing bright blue and purple mortling on his torso, "Broken ribs, I think, from when that gold-toothed fucker kicked me."

Granger flicked her wrist, a diagnostic flaring orange along his two lower ribs as she muttered,

"I'll have to set these." She looked up, a slight grimace contorting her features, "It's going to hurt."

"Be gentle with me." He joked.

"Oookay," Potter said awkwardly from somewhere behind them, "we'll, er, go grab our things from the van and scope out the area for somewhere to camp for the night."

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Draco stared at his reflection in the dusty mirror of a small cottage they had found, opting to hunker down for the night and find a new vehicle in the morning. It was still late afternoon, but a storm had rolled in, causing the sky to darken dramatically, bringing with it whipping winds and

## CHAPTER 23

# GRIFFINDORS

"Bloody hell," Theo muttered, dragging his gaze unabashedly down Sirius' form, "Your Azkaban mugshot didn't do you any favors."

Potter pulled away from his godfather's embrace and shot Nott a glare over his shoulder.

Theo's hands raised in surrender, "You're still my number one, Potter, "Um, I'm sorry, but didn't you die?"

"Don't fret," Pansy questioned with narrowed eyes at the Black heir as she settled her hands on her hips and cocked her head.

Sirius barked out a laugh, "That is what the papers said.

"But I have risen again!"

Granger rolled her eyes, "When there was the... *incident* in the Department of Mysteries several years ago, Dumbledore knew that if Sirius had 'survived,' he would have been dragged back to Azkaban. So, we faked his death."

"My father said Bellatrix killed him," Draco said, brows furrowing,



"Said she watched him slip through the Veil."

"He did," Granger confirmed. "Only it wasn't *the* Veil. It was a portal. We used a Time Turner again and snuck into the Ministry before the fight and replaced it with—nevermind, it's a long story."

"Again?!" Draco said incredulously. "What do you mean 'used a Time Turner again'?"

"So, no, not dead," Sirius said with a bright grin, ignoring Draco's question and shooting a wink at Granger, which made Draco's stomach lurch, "Been just laying low at Remus's ever since. And now that the world's gone to shite, I can finally walk around without polyjuicing as a random French wizard."

"I think we've glossed over that Time Turner bit," Draco mumbled.

"I agree with Malfoy." Theo nodded. "Why don't we just use a Time Turner to go back and fix this outbreak nonsense?"

"Even the most rare Time Turner would only be able to go back twelve, maybe twenty-four hours at a push," Draco replied with a roll of his eyes as if the answer was obvious.

"Exactly," Granger affirmed with a nod. "We're stuck in this timeline, unfortunately."

"Ah, but we've got your big, beautiful brain in this timeline and it's already created a cure." Sirius grinned at Granger as he held his arms aloft. Draco's lip curled as Granger returned his smile and wrapped her arms around his waist.

"It's not a cure, per se," she mumbled against his chest before dropping her arms. "It's a vaccine, and I couldn't have done it without Draco."

All eyes flicked to him as he straightened and tucked his arms behind his back, lifting his chin. Sirius' eyes narrowed as his gaze raked critically down Draco's form.

"Malfoy," The Black Heir said, hostility lacing the two-syllable surname. "It really is astonishing that you somehow always manage to emerge from the rubble of destruction unscathed. Voldemort's reign, the Battle of Hogwarts and now this. It's lucky that our lot found you, hey?"

"Sirius," Granger growled.

Draco sneered and began to open his mouth when Potter interjected, "He has been quite... indispensable, actually, Padfoot. Not the tosser we once knew."

Sirius scoffed. Draco's blood boiled as he balled his hands into fists.

"Right, well, the Thestrals need to rest and water for a few hours before we push them too hard," Charlie said carefully, eyes bouncing between them, "Why don't we have some lunch?"

"I hope you like beans, then," Ruby grumbled.

"Oh, we won't be having beans. My stomach doesn't agree with them," Sirius said idly as he ran his hand gently along Buckbeak's flank, "I raided the Hogwarts kitchens before I stuck our..."

The group sat casually around a large communal table in the kitchens of the cathedral as Sirius conjured a veritable feast of roast chicken, mashed potatoes with herbs, honey-roasted parsnips, Yorkshire puddings and a pitcher of brown gravy. Draco's stomach growled audibly.

"Fuckin' hell, Sirius. I think I love you," Weasley said as he piled his plate high and began shoveling spoonfuls of food down his gullet.

"Yeah, well, get in line, my good man!" Sirius chirped jovially (Too jovially, in Draco's opinion) beside Granger as he began loading her plate up with food. Draco seethed as she looked up at him

restrain a flailing and screaming Granger.

His eyes zeroed in on her hands which were twisting and turning and his eyes widened as he watched her hands slip from her fingerless gloves and the restraints. Her hand reached behind her and produced the knife he had gifted her as she swiftly cut Draco's restraints then turned to Longbottom on her other side and slashed his ties quickly. Longbottom fished in his sock and pulled out his cherry wood wand and whispered a spell that had ropes coming to rest on their wrists again, though Draco could feel that they were merely an illusion. Longbottom tucked his wand into his waistband just as Gold-Tooth turned back around from the commotion Granger had caused. A distraction.

Draco's heart pumped frantically in his chest as Gold-Tooth addressed them, that menacing smile on display. "Thanks for the van, and the food," he stopped in front of Sonny who sent a glob of spit hurling into the bastard's chest. Gold-Tooth looked down at the spit dribbling down his coat, letting out a sigh before he reached behind Sonny, grabbing the hilt of her machete from its sheath on her back as he continued, "And thanks for the weapons."

Then everything happened in a blur of mayhem. Sonny pushed up to her feet, her hands still tied behind her back as she reared her head back and smashed her forehead into Gold-Tooth's nose with a crunch. Her machete clattered to the ground as he fell backwards, one hand clutching his gushing nose and the other pulling his gun from his waistband. Ruby moved behind Sonny, slashing her restraints as a man in a black hoodie aimed his gun at her. Sonny ducked as the bullet whizzed over her head and she grabbed her machete, slicing it up and into the groin of the man.

"Get them, you fucks!" Gold-Tooth shouted as he hobbled to the driver's door of their van, letting off a terribly aimed shot over his shoulder.

Draco picked up a broken half of his wand and clamored to his feet, coming up behind Gold-Tooth just as the fucker yanked the driver's door open. Draco lunged, thrusting the broken tip into the side of the man's throat, just below his jaw. The grotesque feel of the wand penetrating skin and muscle, caused Draco's gag-reflex to rear its ugly head before Gold-Tooth fell to his knees with a choked gurgle, his gun bouncing to the ground.

Longbottom scrambled to pick up the discarded weapon as shots rang out.

"DRACO, DUCK!!" Ruby bellowed as he crouched just in time to miss a shot aimed for his head by a man that had snuck up behind him.

Ruby whipped her knife towards the attacker and it careened over Draco's head, sticking in the man's chest with a dull thud, his gun falling to the ground. Draco stayed crouched, thankfully, as the knife flew out of the man's chest and soared over Draco's head once more, landing hilt-first in Ruby's outstretched hand.

Draco grabbed the weapon and turned around to take aim, but the fighting was frantic. Granger was stomping her boot on the head of Skull Mask, her hands still tied behind her back. Theo and Potter were back to back, attempting to remove each other's restraints. Weasley plowed shoulder-first into an attacker, tackling him to the ground. Pansy had somehow already removed hers and was throwing hexes at the man Sonny was fighting off. It was chaos.

Ginny yelled from the ground a few feet away, struggling against her restraints, "Ruby! Cut

one of her snacks and popping a handful of what looked like Bertie Bott's Every Flavour Beans into her mouth. Draco balked, "Aren't you worried about the bogey ones?!"

"What?" Ruby asked around a mouthful of sweets, staring at him like he had three heads. Ginny interjected, "Yeah, or the rotten egg ones! Blegh!"

"No and EW. What are you on about?"

Draco turned back to the road as Ginny began explaining the risk that was eating Bertie Bott's and his eyes widened as he saw several men in all black, over-large clothing surrounding Granger, Sonny, Potter and Weasley, weapons aimed at their friends' heads.

"Fuck!" Draco began reaching for his wand which was stuffed in his hoodie pocket, but before his hand touched the wood, a tapping sound rattled at his window.

A man with a gold tooth, a shaved head and muggle gun stood outside his window with a sinister smile as he shook his head and ripped open Draco's door, pulling him bodily from the vehicle and throwing him to the ground. Draco tried to scramble to his feet only to have the man swing his boot into Draco's ribs. He crumpled face-first into the ground as the wind was knocked from him, leaving him gasping for air.

"Get the others out of the fucking van and tie 'em up!" The gold toothed man shouted to his companions.

"Already on it, boss!" Another replied.

Draco tried to flip onto his back in an attempt to fill his wheezing lungs with air, his hand coming to hold his surely broken ribs, but the man pushed a boot into his back as the gang began pulling Ruby, Ginny, Longbottom and the snakes from the van and lining them up on the side of the road.

"Oi, Mac! Look at dis mountain man, bruv. He's gotta be over-what-a hundred kilos?"

Another man laughed as he held a large hunting knife to the Scot's throat.

"And this one here is a posho for sure!" Gold-tooth chortled as he crouched down to bring his face into Draco's line of sight. "You are a pretty boy, aren't ya?"

Draco clenched his jaw, rage boiling in his gut as Gold-Tooth laughed heartily and grabbed Draco's wrists, wrenching them behind his back and tying them painfully together. He was pulled up onto his knees, each breath he attempted sent a stab of pain in his side as another man with a skull mask pulled up to his nose began digging in Draco's pockets, finding his wand and holding it up.

"Don't touch that." Draco spat.

The man looked at the wand, then back to Draco before snapping it in half and letting it fall to the ground with a clatter. "Fuck you, posher."

Draco's vision tunneled as the man sauntered away to tie up his companions, leaving Draco to stare at the remnants of his wand, the wand that had *chosen* him when he was eleven, now just useless bits of wood.

"Need a distraction." A warbled voice floated on the wind, so quiet and distorted he wasn't sure if he had heard it or if it had come from his head.

He vaguely heard sounds of a struggle, someone swearing and growling. Granger.

"Draco." Ruby's garbled voice whispered beside him.

He turned his head to see her on her knees, her hands tied in front of her as the gang tried to

gratefully with those big brown eyes.

"So, what exactly happened to Neville? This place seems pretty well-warded," Charlie asked as he squeezed his sister's hand. Draco started, nearly dropping his cutlery. This was not proper table talk, he thought.

"That isn't proper table talk, Charlie," Sirius said through narrowed eyes. Draco's eye twitched. Ginny let out a long sigh through her nose as she shook her head, her red sheet of hair swaying with the movement, "No, we should talk about it. I'm still trying to understand it myself."

Draco focused on stabilizing his potions bottles as they rattled and swayed precariously on their shelves as Granger set her silverware down gently and wiped the corners of her mouth before she spoke, addressing the newcomers.

"One of the members of our caravan was a muggle by the name of Kieran." She pushed her shoulders back as she went on, "He was part of a muggle religion and had a somewhat averse view of magic. He believed it was an abomination. Unnatural."

"And he killed Neville? Because of this magic?" Sirius yelled, eyes going wild.

"No. Well, yes, he did kill Neville, but not necessarily because of his magic. Kieran was bitten and he didn't tell anyone. But...well, when Draco and I created the first successful batch of the vaccine, we distributed it amongst the group. The potion was proven to fight off the virus temporarily if one were to become infected. I believe that Kieran didn't take the potion because of this views. Perhaps he thought the potion was evil because of the magical means by which it was created, but I suppose we'll never really know."

"So, he got bit and decided to put all of you at risk? Because some muggle god told him that magic is evil?" Sirius scoffed, "If he weren't already dead, I'd kill him."

Sonny sniffed and wiped quickly at her eyes, "I could see that he was losing it there towards the end. Not being himself, isolating, obsessing over the bible. It's my fault. I-I should have said something-or, or talked to him."

Ruby laid her head against Sonny's shoulder, "It's not your fault. It's no one's fault but Kieran's. And if God is real, Kieran will have a reckoning, I'm sure."

Draco's lips twitched in a faint smirk, "You're far too wise for a teenager."

"Someone has to be around you lot." She grinned.

The table devolved into idle chatter as everyone ate, Draco's eyes flicking up constantly to watch Granger's easy demeanor as she chattered quietly with Sirius. Sirius asked her something indiscernible and she blushed, tucking her tresses behind her ears as she responded. Draco's lip curled involuntarily as he glowered until a poke in his side roused him from his contempt.

"There's practically steam coming out of your ears, pretty boy," Sonny whispered. "Relax, you possessive doit."

"Speaking of the vaccine," Charlie said around a mouthful of chicken (Gods, were the Weasleys all raised in a hovel?), "King said you had some extra for our team?"

"Oh!" Granger perked up, "Yes! I'll go grab them!"

Draco stood abruptly, "No, please, stay and eat, Granger. I'll grab them. Wouldn't want you to have to break up your little reunion."

Draco stomped through the cathedral and found his satchel sitting on a pew in the funeral parlor. He snatched it up angrily and half the contents spilled out onto the floor with a clatter as

he looked skyward, as if the muggle god were indeed testing his patience.

He kneeled and shoved the vials and potions ingredients back into the pack with an irritated sigh and noticed his mother's sapphire ring lying near the foot of the pew. He reached out a tentative hand and closed his fingers around the silver as he lifted it. It hummed with magic and he closed his eyes, imagining how her eyes always used to brighten when he would come home from international Quidditch games. How her arms would tighten around him and she would whisper 'Missed you, my Dragon.'

"Draco, what is your pr—"

He turned, startled as Granger appeared in the doorway and stared down at him with wide eyes.

"Oh!" She said shrilly, her face turning red. "Oh, Draco, that—that is, er, very lovely—but, I don't—oh gods, I don't think—"

His brows furrowed and then his own eyes bulged as he realized that he was down on one knee and holding, what one would assume, was an ornate engagement ring. He pushed to his feet quickly and coughed. "Oh, no! No, not. This is not—what you think it is!"

Her shoulders relaxed and she narrowed her eyes. "Why are you on a knee and holding a ring?" He pinched the bridge of his nose. "It was my mother's favorite ring. It, er, fell out of my bag and I was just admiring it. I don't—I wasn't—that would be mad if I—if we..."

"If would, yes," she huffed and crossed her arms. "I know why it's mad for me. But why is it mad for you? I am quite the catch."

He swallowed thickly and grimaced. "Well, ever since the end of the war, I—well, I had denounced the idea of marriage and a traditional betrothal. It—it had always been a pureblood requirement, something I had anticipated since I could walk, but after everything, I couldn't be arsed with doing what my parents had wanted anymore. That's why I avoided the subject of marriage and, according to my mother, 'galavanted all over the world on a broom.'"

She eyed him skeptically before nodding. "Good. Because I've never really agreed with the notion of signing my life away and having a governing body determine my place in society based on a bloody piece of parchment. I never really had dreams of a lavish wedding."

"Never?" he asked doubtfully.

She rolled her eyes. "I mean, yes, perhaps as a child I imagined it. But when I learned I was a witch and went to Hogwarts..." she let out a sigh. "I suppose, the traditional family life seemed far too mundane for me. So, you're not proposing and it's not a dealbreaker for you that I likely will never want to get married?"

He chewed on his cheek as he contemplated before shaking his head in finality. "No. But I do want to know you won't go running off to some other wizard with tattoos, and pureblood manners and luxurious hair."

Her eyebrow quirked. "Are—Do you mean Sirius?"

He pursed his lips and looked away. "Well, you two seemed very...familiar."

She let out a loud cackle as she doubled over. Draco rolled his tongue along his teeth in irritation.

"Don't know why that's so funny," he grumbled.

"Ohh, oh gods." She straightened and wiped a tear from the corner of her eye. "No, Draco, me

He shook his head. "Never, but I think I'd be good at it."

"Why's that?" She chuckled.

"Can't be harder than riding a broom, which takes much more skill. I mean, it's just putting along on the ground at half the speeds."

"Want me to teach you?"

His head whipped to hers. "I—I don't know if that's such a good id—"

"Don't be ridiculous." She replied with a lazy wave of her hand, but her expression belayed a hint of mischief. "You just said you think it would be easy and when will you ever get the chance again, hm?"

Draco bit the inside of his cheek as he looked back at the vehicle, then back at Granger, whose eyebrow raised in challenge.

He nodded. "Alright. Show me how to drive a muggle car, Granger."

"I'm not getting in a muggle car if that dimwit is driving. We've managed to survive the end of the world and this *would* be the way I would die." Pansy quipped as she walked up with Astoria and Daphne in tow.

"I resent that." Draco sniffed. "I'll be the best muggle car driver you've ever seen, Parkinson."

"NO MALFOY!! NOT THE GAS, THE BRAKE!! THE BRAKE!!" Granger bellowed.

"I AM PUSHING THE BRAKE!"

"Oh my gods, we're gonna die!!" Ginny squealed from somewhere in the back as Draco struggled to move the stick on the center console while also pressing the pedals on the floor with his feet.

"Everyone hold on!!! Weasley shouted as the vehicle made an ungodly grinding noise and jerked to a sudden stop, narrowly avoiding a tree that came out of nowhere.

The vehicle and its occupants were silent except for breathless panting as Draco swallowed thickly and dared to twist his head slowly to Granger in the passenger seat. She was white as a Hogwarts ghost as she whispered through clenched teeth, "The brake is the one in the bloody middle."

"Hey, what's that?" Sonny said, pointing to what looked to be the figure of a small child standing in the middle of the road. "Is that a Rotter?"

Potter cleaned off his glasses as he stood, hunching slightly as he moved to the front of the van and peered out of the window. He shook his head. "No, it's a little boy."

Granger unbuckled her belt and began pushing open the door before Draco grabbed her wrist.

"He could be infected."

"And we have a potion if he is." She countered, pulling her wrist from his grip and jumping out onto the road.

"Me and Ron will come with." Potter said, squeezing past the rows of seats and pushing through the double doors at the back of the van, Weasley in tow.

Sonny swung her sheathed machete over her shoulder as she hopped out. "I'm going too."

"Keep your eyes peeled." Ginny shouted at their retreating forms as the small group marched up the road.

A tinkling noise filtered through the van and Draco craned his neck to see Ruby unwrapping

*ahead, just makin' my way, makin' my way through the crowd.*“

Theo slapped his hands on the seat in front of him to the beat as he belted, “Dun dun dun dun dun DUN!”

“And I need you!” Ron pointed to Potter in the passenger seat who laughed and shook his head.

“Dun dun dun dun dun DUN!” Ginny shouted.

“And I miss you!” Granger laughed, nudging Draco with an elbow. “And now I wonder.”

He lost his fight with the grin he had been holding back as it broke across his face and he belted the chorus with the rest of the group. “*If I could fall into the sky do you think time would pass me by? 'Cause you know I'd walk a thousand miles if I could just see you, tonight!*”

“Oi;” Weasley lowered the volume as he pointed out of the window, “there's a petrol station up ahead, I reckon we stop and see if we can fill up. The tank is pretty low.”

“Perfect!” Theo clapped his hands together, “I need a wee.”

“A wee what?”

The car went silent, all heads snapping to the Scot.

“Did—did you just crack a bloody joke, mate?” Theo asked wide-eyed. “Merlin, you really are excited to be out of that manor, aren't you?”

The muscled knobhead shrugged one of his boulder-sized shoulders.

“No one laughed, so I wouldn't consider it a joke.” Draco grumbled softly, then let out a *oof* when Granger elbowed him in the ribs.

“I need to get out of this death trap.” Daphne barked from the back as the vehicle lurched to a stop.

“I hope they've got snacks,” Ruby said hopefully as the group poured out onto the wet pavement, eager to stretch their legs. The deserted station was packed tight with empty vehicles, some with their doors left wide open and some with obvious blood splattered along the inside of the windows.

Potter and Sonny checked the fuel pumps only to discover a sign on each pump that read *No Petrol* in nearly illegible script. Splitting up in smaller groups, they siphoned what little petrol they could from the abandoned cars, which wasn't enough to even fill one red fuel canister.

Gratefully, the rain had stopped, leaving the roads slick, but the occasional Rorter would hobble out of a car or a nearby building and were easily dispatched as the group foraged for supplies. Draco spied the Scot dusting off a black leather book as he pulled it from a vehicle and flipped open the pages.

“You finally find one, Kieran?” Sonny asked from a few cars down. The Scot nodded absently, still staring reverently down at the book in his over-large hands.

Draco's focus was pulled to Ruby who ambled out of the store attached to the station. She was carrying an array of sweets wrapped in brightly colored packaging. Draco rolled his eyes as Theo, arms also full of loot, ambled out after her sporting a pair of ridiculously neon pink sunglasses with reflective lenses and a red hat that said *I Visited Worcester and All I Got Was This Stupid Hat*.

As the group reconvened back at their vehicle, Granger sidled up to Draco as he poked one of the wheels with the tip of his wand.

“Have you ever driven a car before?” Granger asked.

and Sirius are—” She devolved into another fit and Draco huffed. “Sorry, sorry. He doesn't fly for my Quidditch team, if you know what I mean. He's like a brother, or an immature uncle. We've been through a lot together over the years.”

“Well, he obviously hates me.”

“He doesn't hate you, but he and your family have had a very tumultuous relationship over the decades. He'll take some time to warm up. And he doesn't know you like I've gotten to know you, so show him that side and...be nice.”

He scoffed. “It's like you don't know me at all.”

She shot him a severe look, “I seem to remember you still owe me a favor. So, how about I call in that favor now? You *will* make an effort to get along with Sirius because he is my family and his approval, while not a requirement for our...relationship, is important to me.”

“Ugh, fine!” He whined. “Fine, I will do my best to be cordial.”

“Good boy. I can't believe you were jealous of Sirius.” She snorted. “It's actually kind of cute.”

Draco scowled and crossed his arms petulantly, “I swear to Salazar, if you tell *anyone* about this conversation, I'll—I'll never eat your cunt again.”

She waved a hand lazily, “Don't lie. If I told you to get on your knees and make me cum with your mouth right now, you'd do it.”

He narrowed his eyes into slits. “No, I wouldn't.”

She leveled him with a glare.

“Unless, you *are* telling me to get on my knees, in which case, I suppose I would be amenable.”

He sniffed and shrugged a nonchalant shoulder.

After Draco used his mouth to get Granger off, and she returned the favor with vigor, they walked into the cathedral's main room to a bizarre scene.

Ruby was tossing a stick down the aisle and a large and shaggy black dog bounded after it, catching it in its jaws and prancing back before dropping the stick at her feet, its tail wagging happily as Ruby clapped her hands.

“Where'd the mangy old dog come from?” Draco asked, lip curling in displeasure. The dog snapped its head to Draco and bared its teeth with a low growl before it transformed into...

“Circie's fucking tits!” Draco yelled as Sirius stood where the dog had, looking quite put out. “He's an animagi!” Ruby squealed excitedly, “So cool! I've always wanted a dog!”

As the group prepped the Thestrals and loaded up the carriage, Granger distributed the vials of vaccines to the newcomers as Draco eyed Buckbeak nervously. Buckbeak seemed to remember Draco well if the look of utter contempt in its beady eyes were anything to go by.

Ruby sidled up next to him, holding her own version of the hateful creature, “Sirius!” She called over her shoulder as the Black heir swaggered over.

“What's up, Trouble?” he said with a charming grin.

“Can me and Buckbeak ride with you and Buckbeak?” The teen asked hopefully.

Sirius shrugged, “Don't see why not. Remember what I told you about greeting a Hippogriff?”

She nodded enthusiastically as she slowly stepped toward the bear and held eye contact. Draco held his breath, worried that the creature would gouge her like it had him all those years

ago. Buckbeak snapped its beak as the teen approached and she bent at the knee and slid one leg behind her, crouching into a fairly impressive curtsey.

Buckbeak chirped, flapping his wings before returning the gesture and crouching into a low bow.

Ruby turned to Draco with a beaming smile, which he could only return half-heartedly as she outstretched her hand and stroked it along the top of the creature's head.

"Taking notes, Malfoy?" Potter snickered as he appeared beside him, "Shocking how when you don't insult or provoke an animal that they can actually be quite docile, hm?"

"Oh, fuck off," Draco grumbled.

"Okay, come on, Draco. You and I are riding solo on Ragnar." Granger gestured to the largest Thesral at the head of the convoy.

His stomach flipped, quite pleased at the thought of having Granger's chest pressed against his back and her arms wrapped around him for the three-hour journey.

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Draco pouted for about an hour, his arms wrapped tightly around Granger's waist as she held onto the reins and Ragnar shot through the clouds. He was rather put out that she was the one who had the flying control, but as he considered it, he supposed she always *did* have the control, didn't she? Perhaps, he liked her having control.

Her curls whipped at his face, strands finding their way into his mouth as they flew. He buried his face into her shoulder and inhaled the sweet vanilla and coconut scent of her. Each swoop and dive the Thesral took had her arse sliding deliciously against his cock until it was fully hardened and tucked against the curve of her bum, throbbing and twitching with each moment that passed.

"You know I can feel that, right?" She yelled over the whipping wind.

He nipped lightly at her earlobe, "I wasn't exactly trying to hide it. Something about you and flying has me rather ravenous."

The devious little look she threw him over her shoulder had him positively feral as he bit his lip and groaned, dropping his head onto her shoulder.

The next two hours were spent in a daze as he watched small villages flash by. Charlie flew his Thesral beside theirs and yelled, "Hogsmeade up ahead in about five minutes! Land at the rendezvous point!"

Granger gave a salute as Ragnar tucked his wings and began the stomach-flapping descent. Draco whooped and Granger gave a squeal of delight as the ground sped towards them.

"I thought you hated flying!" Draco yelled.

"It's brooms I don't trust! Magical beings on the other hand!"

He shook his head and laughed as their rendezvous point came into view. She was truly an enigma that he would never understand, but gods, he'd spend his whole life trying to.

Ragnar glided smoothly to the vantage point at the peak of a mountain overlooking Hogsmeade and Draco dismounted before grabbing Granger's waist and helping her off. His muscles protested as he stretched and peered around as the remaining riders and his companions landed as well.

"What—?" Granger mumbled as she peered down into the town from the edge of the cliff.

"Harry, do you have the omniblinders?"

Porter marched over, rummaging through his satchel before producing the golden scope. He

clever, beautiful witch that he most certainly only won because he was indeed one of the last men on earth. Winner, winner, chicken dinner indeed.

A throat cleared—again, and he turned his attention to Potter, who sported a suspicious expression, "So," his eyes narrowed at Draco before flicking away to address the group, "like we discussed, me and Ron will rendezvous to the van just outside the gate and drive it up to the front door. It's going to be a tight squeeze, so budge up. There looks to be a small number of Rotters ambling throughout the property still, so once we give one honk, you'll all need to be quick getting in. Since Ruby's leg still isn't fully healed, someone will need to help her."

Draco dipped his chin, turning to Sonny, "I'll help her. Can you grab my axe?"

Sonny nodded as chatter died down and the group began hauling packs on, adjusting straps of bags and loading weapons. Draco took the stairs two at a time and was breathing heavy by the time he pushed open Ruby's door.

She was hobbling out of the washroom, wincing slightly each time her wounded leg touched the floor.

"Ready?" She asked brightly as she noticed him in the doorway.

"Yeah—actually, er—hold on. I'll be right back."

He sprinted down the hallway up two flights of stairs, down a long corridor and pushed open the door to his parent's suite. He located the item quickly, sparing a glance to his mother's jewelry box before grabbing his mother's favorite sapphire ring and bolting back to Ruby's room.

The teen had pulled on her rainbow fingerless gloves and had one leg extended as she perched on the edge of the bed.

Draco held out the cane, snake mouth poised and ready to strike. "It was my father's cane. It's a bit garish and he'd absolutely *hate* that you'd have it, but it should help."

She beamed, taking hold of it and using the device to push herself to stand, "Well, then I love it even more. Thanks, pretty boy."

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Less than two hours into the winding drive through the English countryside, Draco stared out of the small window at the scenery as it flew by. Instead of the English Longhorns that typically pastured along the hillside, he watched as dozens of Rotters dotted the landscape. Rain pattered on the windshield as they passed countless broken down vehicles, checkpoints strewn with abandoned belongings and small brownstone buildings with broken windows and phrases like '*Help Us!*' and '*Not Helped!*' painted on their facades.

Needless to say, the scenery was dreary, but at least he was crammed next to Granger, whose leg was pressed tight up against his.

Ruby sat cross-legged on the floor near the front, singing along loudly to her "Y2K" playlist comprised of something called *boy bands*, a term that seemed straightforward enough. Draco begrudgingly had to admit that all of the songs were catchy, if not a bit whiny, but it was when Ruby changed the disc and one of his favorite songs started up with a tinkling piano melody.

"Oh, I bloody love this song!" Weasley exclaimed from the driver's seat, cranking the volume up as he began singing, "*Makin' my way downtown*—"

"*Walking fast, faces pass and I'm homebound!*" Ruby continued.

Sonny chimed in, completely out of tune, but committed to her performance, "*Smiling blankly*

"Though I think with your bone structure, you could pull off a shaved head."

Sonny sucked her lower lip between her teeth, chancing a secretive glance towards Draco. Sonny's eyebrows wagged at him before she turned back to Pansy with a smile. "Thanks, Mc too. Are you good at braiding hair?"

"Of course," Pansy sniffed before arching a manicured brow, "it's one of the first things I perfected in debutante classes before I was eight years old. Why do you ask?"

"Oh, well, I may need some help with a new style at some point on the road." Sonny turned to fuss with the straps on her leather sheath, discreetly throwing Draco a small wink before looking back to Pansy.

Pansy cleared her throat quietly, pushing her glasses up by the rim, but Draco was sure he saw a blush creep up the witch's neck as she answered, "Sure."

*Sonny was good*, Draco thought. He had to give her credit for laying it on thick with a woman who, on a good day, ate romantic partners for breakfast.

"I'll plait yours, Kieran." Theo said with a playful wink, earning a not-so-subtle throat clearing from Potter.

"I'll let you tie my hair in a wee bonnie bow if it meant we get to leave this place." Muscles grumbled.

Draco shot him a venomous glare. "You're welcome for the private suite, by the way you ungrateful oaf."

"Good, you're all here." Granger said, marching into the room and dumping her rucksack on the couch beside Weasley who jolted awake. Silding up to Draco, she asked, "You have the vials?"

He nodded, retrieving twelve potion vials from his satchel and distributing them to each member of their group.

Draco handed the last to Granger, their fingertips brushing softly, eyes locking momentarily before hers flicked away, color staining the apples of her cheeks.

She cleared her throat. "Right, so Astoria and Ruby have already taken their doses. There shouldn't be, but please let both me and Dra—Malfoy know if you feel any adverse side effects. This dose should keep us all immune from Rotter bites until we get to Hogwarts."

Ginny inspected the bottle, holding up to the torch light. "Why are we taking them now if we haven't been bit?"

"Preventative measures for the trek. Worst case scenario, we get split up, someone gets bit and you aren't able to take the potion in time." Granger replied, pulling the small cork out with her teeth and lifting the vial in a salute before knocking it back.

She gave Draco a pointed look. They had discussed taking the potions first without fuss. *Lead by example*, she had said. He was confident in his—, *their* potion, and uncorked his own before raising it to his lips and swallowing it in one.

As the rest of the group followed suit, Draco spared a moment to stare at Granger as she talked quietly with Ginny. Her voluminous hair spilled over her shoulders and down her back in thick waves, her leg holster hugging the curve of her thigh, her toned bum. Gods, he couldn't believe that this was his life. Minus the horrifying threat of death by cannibalism, he felt...lucky. Lucky to have stumbled across his muggles (minus the Scor), lucky to have crossed paths with the Gryffindors, lucky to have his best mates survive. And lucky he had won the affections of the most

handed it to her wordlessly as he too peered over the edge, his eyes narrowing behind his glasses.

Draco, also curious, stepped over the edge and surveyed the scene.

His eyesight, obviously better than Potter's, noted a horde of hundreds pouring through the streets of Hogsmeade.

Granger sucked in a gasp as she held the omnioculars to her eyes, "There are people down there! They—they're fighting them off."

She handed the scope to Charlie, who surveyed the village before shaking his head as he handed Draco the device. "They're not any of ours, we stopped going into Hogsmeade weeks ago, way too dangerous."

Draco pressed them quickly to his eyes as the scene came into focus. Three hooded figures, masks up to their eyes, were sprinting through the streets, being chased by swaths of ravenous Rotters, slashing what looked to be large swords or...staffs with blades? At first, he thought they must be soldiers or aurors, definitely fighters, but then his eyes furrowed as his gaze zeroed in on one of the trio, the smallest one and his stomach dropped.

"There's—there's a child down there."

"Right," Granger said, pulling her gun from its holster on her thigh, "we need to go help them." "Wha—Gran—Hermione, no, absolutely not. Even with our help, they are wildly outnumbered,"

Draco said.

"Fine, then stay here, but I'm going."

"Potter, back me up here," Draco urged the boy wonder.

Potter sucked in a breath through his nose before pushing it out sharply, "You know once Hermione decides to do something, there's no talking her out of it. Ron," he sighed, "we're going down to Hogsmeade."

"Like I'd miss the fun. I'm going too!" Sirius chimed, twirling his wand between his fingers lazily.

Theo sighed wearily, "Well, I guess if Potter's going..."

Sonny unsheathed her machete, pulling her hood up as she dipped her chin, "Me too."

Granger flashed Draco a smug smile before her expression fell to one of determination, "Imagine if we decided not to help *you* that day in Diagon."

Draco groaned, "Fucking Gryffindors. Fuck."

She patted him on the shoulder sympathetically and leaned in to whisper in his ear, "Come on, my pretty boy."

His stomach swooped involuntarily and he felt his face flush, "If I die down there, at least I'll have fucked that glorious, brave little cunt."

He heard her laugh and Weasley's retching carry on the wind as he retrieved Archie's axe from the Threstrals' saddle bag.

"You good to take the group back to the castle, Gin, Charlie?" Potter asked.

Ginny nodded as Charlie gnawed on his lip and shook his head in disbelief, "Course, but I worry about you lot getting in from down there. We've directed most of the wards' magic to that area of Hogsmeade, I—I don't know of any weak points of entry down there."

"Maybe—" Sirius said, looking thoughtful, "What about the Shrieking Shack entrance?"

Charlie nodded, "We could potentially drop the wards at that location, but it'd put the entirety

of Hogwarts at risk if it were open too long."

The group fell into silent contemplation for several moments until Potter finally cleared his throat. "How long would it take you to get to the ward in that part of the castle and bring it down, Charlie?"

The redhead looked thoughtful. "Fifteen minutes."

Potter set a tempus alarm on his wand and nodded, pulling out the black radio. "I've got an idea."

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Ragnar soared through the air as the group flew in formation down to the small village. Draco's mouth went dry and his left hand tightened around the handle of his axe as they grew closer, the mass of snarling Rotters looked like a stream flowing through the streets.

"There!" Sirius shouted as Buckbeak tucked his wings in and began a nosedive. Granger leaned forward and Ragnar did the same, his wings folding in as they sliced downwards through the air. If Draco wasn't both parts thrilled and terrified, he would have had the thought that Granger would make an excellent Seeker.

The trio was surrounded in the town square, but they dropped every Rorter that advanced with expert precision, but even Draco could see that they were on the back foot. Buckbeak let out a loud shriek as he and Sirius reached the fray, his talons ripping through limbs and slicing through Rotters as the trio struggled to stave off the horde.

Ragnar and the others landed between the fighters and the circle of Rotters, trampling the crowd of undead under their hooves. Granger flicked her wand and cast a blinding *Lumos Solare* spell with one hand and aimed her gun with her other as she fired off shot after shot into the skulls of the undead. Weasley sent bombardas and combustion curses flying as Potter and Theo did the same, doing an effective job of starving off the horde.

"Come on, two of you here!" Sirius bellowed to the fighters as he shot off slicing curses.

"Go, loves! I'm right behind you." One of the fighters, the largest of the three, yelled to the other two as he sliced his weapon straight through the torso of an incoming Rorter. Sirius hauled the child onto Buckbeak and held his hand out for the other.

"You! Get on!" Draco yelled to the remaining fighter, his arm outstretched as the man took hold. Draco hauled him onto Ragnar's back and the man wasted no time in wrapping his arms around Draco's waist.

"Come on!" Sirius yelled frantically as Granger dug her heels into Ragnar's skeletal ribs and he began to take flight. Draco's brows furrowed as his gaze caught on the other fighter staring wide-eyed directly at him as Sirius tugged them bodily onto the back of Buckbeak.

Draco glanced behind them as they flew toward the Shrieking Shack, relieved to see the rest of the Thestrals and their riders on Ragnar's heels. Buckbeak streaked past them, Sirius' fist pumping in the air as he whooped. Draco's brows furrowed again as that same fighter craned their neck to stare at him, and the small child was... waving at him and clapping excitedly.

The Shrieking Shack came into view, Buckbeak landing first just outside of the gate as Sirius and the two fighters jumped off. Sirius slapped the creature on his hindquarters and Buckbeak pushed off the ground and took flight. Ragnar landed next with a heavy huff, the others dismounting quickly as Rotters darted out behind the copse of trees. Granger reloaded her weapon with

# CHAPTER 19

# A THOUSAND MILES

**R**

eady to make like a bludger and beat it?" Theo chirped, as he strode into the parlor looking bright eyed and bushy tailed.

"Nott, the sun isn't even up. It's far too early for your loud mouth." Pansy grumbled. Prada sunglasses perched on her nose as she sipped a steaming cup of tea.

Blaise sat ridgebacked in a leather chair, twirling his wand idly through his fingers. "I don't even think that makes sense, Theo."

"Yeah, maybe 'Make like a beater bat and beat it,' or a quaffle perhaps," Ginny quipped from where she laid on a chaise, her boot-clad feet perched on the arm of the lounger.

"Okay," Theo said slowly, rolling his eyes, "but that doesn't have as good a ring to it. Plus, Draco got beat by a bludger, so it does work actually."

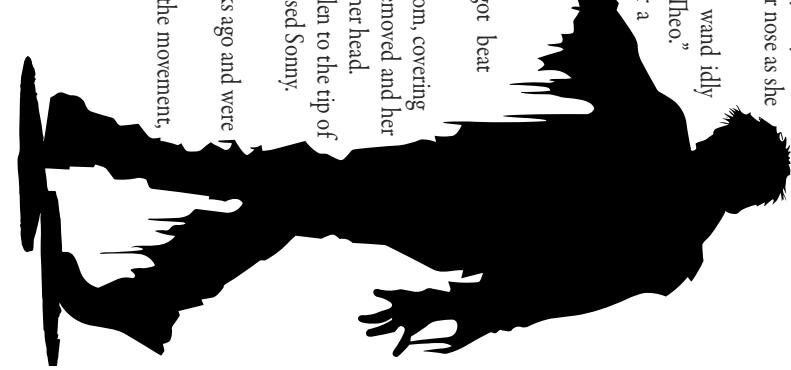
Draco scowled at the dig as Sonny ambled into the room, covering a large yawn with her hand. Her small plaits had been removed and her natural hair now sat in two larger braids on either side of her head.

Draco's gaze flicked to Pansy, whose sunglasses had fallen to the tip of her nose, her head cocked minutely to the side as she assessed Sonny.

"You changed your hair," Pansy stated, not a question.

Sonny shrugged. "Yeah, the braids had grown out weeks ago and were looking a little worse for wear."

"Like it." Pansy nodded, her short hair bobbing with the movement,



"Milk serum? The—the main ingredient in our vaccine? The Strix milk serum?!" Draco stammered incredulously.

"Is it? Well, I'm almost out, can you get more?"

He guffawed, "You brought the Strix milk serum with you to France, but didn't bother to bring your sapphire ring?"

She gasped, "Wait, you saw my ring at the manor?! I was in such a hurry to leave that I forgot to even look for it!"

"Yes," he laughed, "I saw it. And I brought it with me. Here."

His mother gasped again, her hands flying to her lips as she shook her head. He rummaged through his satchel, pulling the ring free and held it out to her.

Her fingers wrapped reverently around the ring as she slipped it on and held her hand out to admire it.

Her expression was thoughtful before she straightened and huffed a small laugh, lips twitching.

"What's funny?" He asked.

"You remember the story about this ring, don't you?"

"Uh, something about your great-grandmother gave it to you?"

"Yes, Wilhelmina Black. On my seventeenth birthday, she said that sapphires offer protection to the wearer and, most importantly, divine guidance. She called the sapphire in this ring 'the stone of destiny'."

She gave him a poignant look, "Fate, Draco."

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Draco stared numbly at the canopy of his four-poster, listening to the crackling embers of the nearly extinguished fire as his thoughts swirled.

He tried to sleep. For hours now, he tried, but his brain refused to shut off. Thoughts continuously tumbling back to the webs of fate that had brought him here, had brought his mother to *him*. All of it, impossible. It was maddening.

He huffed irritably, shoving a pillow over his eyes, hoping to block out the noise, but after an insufferable recounting of his life's worst deeds (See: Calling Hermione slurs for years, watching her be tortured, almost killing Weasley with a potion meant for his Headmaster etc) and embarrassing moments (See: Getting his cock mashed into the dirt and having Hermione tend to it, throwing up near her head, crying an indecent amount), he growled and ripped his blankets off.

Shucking on his hoodie, he crammed his feet in a pair of slippers and checked the time, groaning at the late hour.

He had to see her. If only to rip the spell-o-tape off and force her hand in putting him out of his misery.

He pried open the door to his room. The corridors were silent and far too dark to navigate without the light from a wand. Begudgingly, he picked up a candelabra and lit the half-fused candles with a matchstick after several infuriating attempts and a few singed finger tips before slipping out into the castle.

Hermione's room was down a treacherous flight of moving stairs, but gratefully at the start of the hall.

He held his breath, heart beating wildly against his rib cage as he knocked quietly on her door. Nothing.

He knocked louder this time, worried that he'd wake the others on her floor, but after a few moments of silence, he pressed his forehead to the wood and sighed.

She's likely in the Weasley twins' room, he thought as bile bubbled in his throat. He was stupid to ever think this could last, that she would actually want to pursue a relationship with him now that they were here.

Candle wax dripped down his fingers and he relished the sting of it as he walked aimlessly through the abandoned halls. He didn't want to go back to his rooms and ruminate on what she was doing—or who she was doing it with. His hand balled into a tight fist as he shook his head, attempting to dislodge the unwanted images.

He didn't even realize how numb his feet were from the frigid October night, nor did he realize that he had walked nearly the entirety of the castle until he stood in front of the library doors. He rolled his eyes.

"As if I needed more reminders of *her*. Stupid bloody fate." He mumbled angrily, pushing the doors open as he slipped inside and headed for the section he had formerly only used to snog in. As he approached, his eyes squinted curiously at the soft glow that emanated from an alcove. Madam Pince would be hunting down the poor bastard who had forgotten to extinguish the torches near their workstation at first light, Draco was sure.

He strode into the aisle and stopped dead in his tracks as Hermione's head whipped up from behind a gargantuan, leather-bound book. Her hair was neatly standing on end, the curls reminiscent of Medusa's snakes as they coiled around her and he could see the whites of her eyes as she slowly dropped the book on the work table.

"I was looking for you," he blurted with a wince. "You weren't in your room."

She straightened, trying unsuccessfully to tuck her bushy tresses behind her ears, "I couldn't sleep. I figured it was a better use of my time to research rather than lie in bed."

He nodded, setting down the candelabra that he now felt was far too ostentatious.

She cleared her throat, "Why were you looking for me in the dead of night?"

He fidgeted awkwardly with the pocket of his hoodie before taking a fortifying breath, "Well, I think you've been avoiding me and I think you should just get on with it. I can't take it anymore."

She scoffed, crossing her arms, "Oh no. If you want to break things off with me, then you'll have to grow up and do it yourself."

His head reared back, mouth opening and closing, but he couldn't formulate words as his brain tried to function.

Hermione's jaw worked, her tongue smoothing down the inside of her cheek. She let out a humorless laugh, "I knew it. I knew as soon as your mother showed up that you would go right back to your pureblood ways."

His eyebrows bunched as he opened his mouth, but she silenced him with a hand, "You'd think after I saved the Wizarding world...twice now, and saved *you*, that she'd have changed her blood purity views. And *you*. I really believed that you—that you—"

"—Hermione—" "No! You *said* that I could trust you. But you're a liar! A damn good one! And here I am

looking at bloody Divination books to try and get some answers for how to fix this between us and I know that's mad because Divination is woolly drivel and you don't want me anymore and that should mean that I shouldn't want you, but I still do and I hate that! Fuck, I can't believe I let you—”

“HERMIONE!”

“WHAT?!”

“My mother doesn't give a pignypuff's arse about your blood status. I know you don't know her well yet, so I won't hold that against you. But, you—you really think that I still...that I would still think less of you? Because you're a muggleborn?!”

“Well, it seemed obvious.” She shot back, crossing her arms. “Your mother was practically seething when she learned we'd been working together.”

He ran a hand down his face. “First of all, my mother doesn't *seethe*, she thinks anger is unbecoming. Annoyed, perhaps and not at *you*, at me for not telling her that we created a bloody cure! She hates being the last to know things!”

“It's a *vacine*!” She growled and he could've sworn her hair grew in circumference. He waved an impatient hand. “Whatever! My mother is aware of my feelings for you and she just wants me to be happy. But what about *you*! I—I thought that everyone had reminded you what I was, what side I'd fought on.”

“Utter rubbish!” She threw her hands up. “Firstly, you're so dramatic, no one thinks that and if they do I'll hex them. And secondly, as if I'd ever care what anyone thinks.”

“You avoided me like the Black Cat Flu and practically sprinted from every room you saw me in!”

She stood from her seat, bracing her hands on the edge of the table as she leaned forward. “It's called self-preservation. I thought Slytherins were well-versed in the subject.” She gritted out.

He placed his own hands on the other side of the desk, mirroring her stance. Their faces were inches from each other as they both breathed heavily, the tension crackling around them.

“And here I thought Gryffindors were *bnuie*. ” His lip curled and her eyes flicked to them before cutting back to his. He was goading her, he knew, but he loved getting that fiery reaction from her.

Her eyes narrowed as she ran her tongue along her front teeth. “You're right. I guess I'll be brave for us both then. I am not giving you up. Even if your mother hates me, even if this whole castle thinks I'm mad for being with you. You'll have to hex, curse, *Avada* to get rid of me. You're *mine*. ” Draco Malfoy. Her fingers curled into the fabric of his jumper as she wrenched him forward, “Don't ever make me open a Divination book again and don't *ever* assume my feelings for you have changed. When I say something, I mean it. Understand?”

He nodded slowly as heat pooled low in his belly and he shot her a roguish grin. “Remind me what those feelings are again? I had a terrible head injury a few months ago, you see, and I'm having trouble recall—”

Her lips pressed against his in a searing kiss, effectively shutting him up. He melted into it, his hands curling into her wild curls as their mouths opened, their tongues twirling against each other. She pulled back suddenly and he nearly lost his balance as his lips attempted to chase hers.

Draco's eyes flicked to his mother before snapping back to the hearth. “Fine, I should think. ”

“Do you not converse? I thought you were partners.”

Draco bit the inside of his cheek. “Out with it, mum.”

Narcissa huffed. “You and Ms. Granger are romantically involved, yes?”

“Were. Past-tense.” He rolled his eyes. “Who told you?”

“You just did.” She said with a sly smile. “Anyone with eyes could see that you two stare longingly at the other when one of you isn't looking. Why past-tense? Did something happen? Did you...do something?”

He threw his hands up. “Why does everyone think *I'm* the one who would do something?! Maybe she's the heartbreaker!”

His mother held her palms up as if not to scare a skittish animal. “Okay, okay. Then, what happened?”

Draco slumped in his chair, his hands coming to cover his face. “—I—I don't know. I think—” He let out a weary sigh. “I think she enjoyed my company when there weren't so many prying or judging eyes. You know, out there...in the world. And now that we're back at Hogwarts, surrounded by...well, everyone. The Weasleys, her friends, the remainder of the British Wizarding community. I think she remembered who I am. And who she is.”

“And who's that?”

He shot her a flat look. “I'm a failed Death Eater. A useless, cowardly excuse of a wizard and *she* is brilliant and revered and loved.”

Narcissa's jaw clenched, sucking on her teeth as she straightened in her chair and turned her body toward his.

“Draco Lucius Malfoy, that's exactly right. You are a *failed* Death Eater because that isn't who you are. I was there. I remember. I held you after you were *tortured* by my sister for not being able to—to kill those muggles. I was there when the dark lo—” she took a calming breath, “—when Voldemort told you he'd kill *me* if you did not find a way to kill Dumbledore.”

She grasped his hand tightly, tears springing in her eyes. “I was there when that girl was tortured on our drawing room floor. I was the one who had to spell your feet to the ground. So, don't tell me that you were a useless coward. Because your bravery that day would have been the end of us all.”

He hadn't realized he'd been crying until his mother dragged her thumb along his damp cheek.

“I love her.” He whispered.

“And she's very lucky to have your love. If she doesn't accept it, then she doesn't deserve it.”

His lips twitched in an attempt at a smile. His mother's thumb was still rubbing soothingly across his cheek as her eyebrows creased.

“Darling?” She asked.

“Hm?”

“You're developing some deep wrinkles. Just here.” Her finger caressed the corner of his eye and he snorted, batting her hand away.

“Thanks, mum.” He grumbled.

“No, I'm serious, Draco. You're far too young for wrinkles. Let me run to my room and grab that milk serum you got me.”

to the secured area where we are holding the species for further testing.”

“Oh, right.” Draco’s mouth went dry. “Sure.”

The man tossed him a pleasant smile before waddling away. Draco’s shoulders slumped when he turned back and Hermione was long gone.

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With Samhain approaching, Draco spent the following four days preparing the team of potions assistants in prepping several cauldrons worth of their vaccine.

He had seen Hermione running around with Francis here and there, but she was delegated to the highly-warded lab that housed the three Strix-bat species they had procured in order to conduct more extensive research on the magical creatures.

He and Hermione were like ships passing in the night. Anytime they were in the same vicinity, she would toss him an awkward smile that was more like a wince before making some excuse and bolting for the exit. His stomach lurched each time he watched her hair whip around a corner and out of sight. He missed her.

He had just peeled out of his clothes and settled himself at his small desk against the window, staring out at the storm that had blown through. Lightning illuminated the spires of the castle and he contemplated the current testing proposal he had suggested to the research team. Astoria and Ruby had both taken a dose of the potion just over two weeks ago, the day they had left the manor. And while the symptoms of Astoria’s bloodcurse had begun to show, Ruby seemed in tip-top health.

He picked up a quill and pulled out his journal, uncapping the ink pot as he began to scribble his thoughts.

The vaccine could be less effective for Astoria due to her already-weakened magical core, thanks to her bloodcurse. But call it a hunch, Draco thought.

The Rotter-Centaur they had seen had him wanting to research exactly why Wizard-Rotter and Centaur-Rotter alike were much harder to kill. His *hunch*, if proven correct, was that the virus attacked a magical being’s magical core *and* their healthy cells, but—without magical cores—the virus was only able to attack a non-magical being’s healthy cells.

“Maybe those with a magical core essentially have a dual response to the virus, making its effects and symptoms more severe...” he mumbled, lost in thought.

A knock sounded on his door, startling him from his rumination. He pushed off the ledge and opened the squeaky hinged door to see his mother. She gave him a bright smile, which he returned halfheartedly.

“Mother, to what do I owe the pleasure? I thought you were having dinner with Wolfe tonight.”

“Mm, yes, but he got to talking with Sirius and Remus and I thought I’d like to give them some time to reminisce. Plus, I missed you, my Dragon. You’ve been busy these last few days.”

He pushed the door open, ushering her inside as they settled in two rickety chairs by the fireplace.

“Yes, the potion is ready to finish brewing this weekend on Samhain and we’ve been double-checking everything is up to standard for this next batch.”

“And how is Ms. Granger?”

“I love you.”

He grinned again, “Still can’t believe it. Can you say it one more time?”

She rolled her eyes, her lips twitching, “I love you, you knob.”

He hummed, well pleased, “And, it’s no surprise because you’re brilliant and so much better than me in every way, but I love you too. And, because it’s the only thing I’ll probably ever do better than you, I definitely love you more.”

She cocked her head to the side, thinking, “Yes, I’ll allow it.”

“You know, I always had this fantasy of y—er—someone, ravishing me in the Hogwarts library.” He said casually.

Her eyes narrowed, “*Someone?*”

His shoulders slumped, “Fine. It was you. I had a fantasy—”

“A fantasy? Singular?”

“Fine!” He pouted, “I had *several* fantasies over the course of my time at Hogwarts...and some after, about you ravishing me—” she shot him a doubtful look, “—Fine! About me ravishing *you* in the library. Fuck sake, witch.” He grumbled.

She flashed a satisfied grin, “I knew it. Get on your knees.”

He gratefully obeyed, both knees connecting with the hard ground as she rounded the table and peeled her flimsy pajama bottoms off her hips and let them pool at her feet.

“You’ve been a bad boy, haven’t you?” She asked, her hand gripping his chin harshly as he stared up at her and nodded.

“But you want to be a good pureblood for me, don’t you?”

His mouth watered as he nodded again.

“Don’t move.”

She let go of his chin and perched on the desk’s edge directly in front of him and widened her legs, giving him a view of her black knickers.

Her fingers ghosted along her fabric-covered sex and he watched awestruck as her mouth popped open on an intake of breath.

“Gods, I love when you look at me like that.” She moaned, her other hand tweaking a nipple through the fabric of her top. He had to clutch his trousers to keep from reaching out and touching her.

He swallowed before he rasped, “Like what?”

“Like you’d do anything I’d say.”

Her fingers dipped into the elastic of her knickers and pulled the fabric to the side, baring her glistening cunt to him.

A small whimper escaped his throat, “Oh, I would. Gods, I would.” He breathed. “I love when you boss me around and tell me I’m good.”

She let out a hearty laugh, and he smiled at having the honor. Hating that he had ever made her frown before.

She extended her hand, her two middle fingers tapping at his lips, “Suck them.”

But he was willing to make his childhood foolishness up to her, in whatever way he could, he thought.

His mouth opened, tongue lapping at her fingers greedily, tasting the salt from her skin before

she pulled them free with a pop and brought them to her sex, now coated in his saliva. He groaned as her fingers disappeared into her and she let out a contented sigh as she worked herself.

His cock was now straining painfully against the seam of his trousers, his nails digging into his thighs as she moaned softly. She pulled her fingers free, both glossy with her arousal as she brought the wetness to her clit, then down again, gathering more slick. The wet sounds of her fingers swirling around her sex, the flush of her cheeks had him slack-jawed, chest heaving as he watched her pleasure herself.

"Please." He whimpered. "Let me. Fuck."

"Ye-yes, you've been so good. S-such a good boy." She shuddered and his hands darted out, lifting her knees as he shouldered his way between her thighs. His fingers curled in the waistband of her knickers and pulled them down her legs in one swift motion.

His head dipped to her sex and she moaned as his tongue licked a long strip up her cunt. He groaned as the taste of her arousal hit his tongue, sucking and licking mercilessly. Her thighs squeezed around his ears as he suckled at her clit, muffling her moans. Her body shook, the muscles of her abdomen tightening as her fingers twisted in his hair, pulling his face into her harder. Her body bowed as her orgasm crested and then broke, her cunt spasming around nothing before her body went slack.

He hummed a contented sigh and placed an open-mouthed kiss to her apex before pulling back to stare at her. Her eyes half-lidded with pleasure, hair more riotous than he'd ever seen it.

His fingers worked the buttons of her top as she caught her breath and pulled open the material, revealing her pert breasts, nipples already tight from arousal. His hands smoothed up her hips, thumbs caressing the underside of her breasts before softly stroking the hard peaks. Her back arched into his touch as her own hands wound around his neck, pulling him between her open thighs. Her lips found his in a deep kiss, her tongue delving into his mouth, tasting herself before her hand wandered beneath the waistband of his trousers.

He grunted into her mouth as her fingers danced along the underside of his aching erection. Suddenly, she pushed him away and stood before dropping slowly to her knees.

Her fingers curled into the elastic of his trousers and he jolted. "Wait! I've been practicing my wandless."

She sat back on her heels with an amused grin. "Alright, let's see it then."

He shot her a smug smirk as he snapped his fingers, then squeaked when his trousers instead of vanishing, tightened abruptly around his lower half, his cock nearly suctioned to his pelvis. "Fuck." He rasped, snapping his fingers again. This time, the trousers inflated, the fabric ballooning around him and falling in a pile around his ankles.

He rolled his eyes and dared a glance at her. Her lips were sucked into her mouth and he could see the mirthful brightness of her eyes as she attempted to hold in her amusement.

"That—" she cleared her throat, "Well done."

His eyes narrowed as he pursed his lips, "I'm still working on it."

She smiled brightly, "We'll practice."

His snort cut off with a hiss as her hands wrapped around his length and her tongue connected with his tip, licking off the pearl of moisture that had gathered at the slit.

His hands raked into her curls as he bit his lip, "Spit on it."

failing to make sense of it.

Lupin sighed, "She—*we* lost everything. Marlene and her family were murdered, then Fabian and Gideon." At this, Mrs. Weasley made a little pained whimpert, "Lily and James. And Peter, well, so we thought. The betrayal—" Lupin shot Sirius an apologetic grimace, "the loss, it was too much. If I'd known self-Obliviation was an option, I can't say I wouldn't have done the same."

"But what about her magic?" Narcissa asked wide-eyed. "She would have lost her memories, but she would still *be* a witch."

"Yes, unless she suppressed it somehow, like...sealed it away along with her memories. If someone suppresses their magic, it'll still be there, just locked up. But it *will* find a way out through magical bursts, like muggleborns before they learn to control it." Hermione looked to Wolfe. "You said you thought she had superpowers, what would happen?"

"Loads of things. The channel would change from the footie game to Mary's favorite soap opera even if the remote was in my hand or Sonny's toys would go missing and I'd look everywhere for the damn thing, but the second Mary looked, it'd pop up out of thin air."

"Or remember that time that neighbor boy used to bully me?" Sonny asked as Wolfe nodded, "I told her the things he would say to me and she said 'He should shut his mouth before I shut it for him.' The next day he came down with mono and couldn't speak for months."

Wolfe laughed heartily, "Do I remember? I told her that I never wanted to get on her bad side after that!"

Sonny chuckled, "And she said it had nothing to do with her and everything to do with karma."

"So, if Mary was a witch, does that mean Sonny..." Wolfe's sentence tapered off. "I suspect you're likely a squib. Sorry, Sonny." Hermione grimaced. "If Mary had no memory of being a witch, she wouldn't have been able to suppress your magic if you'd had any."

Sonny sighed, pursing her lips, "I suppose it doesn't matter now."

The table went quiet once more before Lupin cleared his throat and flicked his gaze to Wolfe, "Maybe—if you're willing—you can tell us more about her life after..."

Wolfe gave a sad smile, "Only if you'll tell me and Sonny about her life before."

As the mindbending dinner came to a close, Hermione pushed up from her seat and gave Pотter a tight hug before excusing herself from the table.

Draco stood abruptly, "Hermione—"

"Mr. Malfoy?"

Draco turned to see a small wizard with long, wispy white hair and an even longer beard waddle over to him.

"Er, yes?"

"My name is Francis Crapstone." The ancient wizard announced as Draco tried to ignore the sniggering coming from Weasley and his brother. "I am the Chief Warlock in charge of maladies at the Ministry. Well, there were about six predecessors that were infected before I came upon the position, but I assure you I am quite qualified and have been leading the charge in the research labs we've created."

"Right," Draco said slowly.

"Minister Shacklebolt has suggested that I show you the research facilities tomorrow so we can get brewing as soon as possible. The new head of Magical Creatures will be showing Ms. Granger

"We looked, Remus. But after everything. There were so many that had gone missing or went into hiding, afraid that it wasn't actually over." Mrs. Weasley said. "We assumed that she didn't want to be found or—or the worst. I can't believe she was in London the whole time."

Sonny let out an indelicate snort before slapping her hand across her mouth. Draco could hear the squeaks of laughter she tried to contain behind her palm as her shoulders shook.

"She was actually—" Sonny snorted again, barely containing her laughter, "a bloody witch."

The table looked on worriedly until Wolfe let out a boisterous belly laugh, wiping tears from his cheeks. Then Sirius started laughing, an unhinged, crazed sort of laugh as tears fell from his lashes. Lupin ran a hand down his face as he too began chuckling lowly and his own shoulders started to shake. Then Draco's mother giggled, followed by Mrs. Weasley.

"And I ended up in the same group as my mother's best friend's son!" Sonny wheezed, laughter crinkling her eyes.

The table devolved into a true laughing fit, Draco trying and failing to keep the smile off his face at the utter ridiculousness of the continued revelations. That invisible little string tugging them all together.

"Sorry, but, I can't help but wonder," Granger said carefully, "you said that she would go catatonic when you brought up her past?"

Wolfe nodded, his laughter dwindling.

Hermione looked pensive as she bit her lip and that adorable little divot between her brows made an appearance, "I only ask because, well, I Obliviated my parents—er, magically erased their memories during the second Wizarding War to keep them safe. When I was able to safely reach them again, I brought them to a renowned mindhealer to restore their memories. My parents shared similar symptoms to what you describe. They—in the beginning, when the healer would ask them about their daughter, they would become rather panicked and...disressed. We would have to completely abandon the session until the mindhealer could restore the neural pathways and we could start again. It—well, it took nearly a year to recover less than 60% of their memories."

"Are you saying you think Mary may have been Obliviated?" Narcissa asked, aghast.

Hermione shook her head. "After working with the healer on my parents' memories, I dedicated my healer dissertation on the effects of Obliviation. I've done extensive research on the subject and it's typical for a person who's suffered from memory removal to become agitated when those memories are brought to the surface. But self-Obliviation is much more unpredictable and highly volatile. Research indicates that it's rare, but it's been done a handful of times over the centuries. In those cases of self-Obliviation, individuals are often described as becoming unresponsive and borderline comatose when faced with memories they'd removed. I'd read about one wizard Obliviating himself and years later, his mind began deteriorating rapidly. He lost cognitive function so quickly that healers had never seen anything like it. He couldn't even remember his own name."

"The doctors diagnosed Mary with frontotemporal dementia and within a year..." Wolfe swallowed, "The disease is progressive in nature, but the doctors were at a loss as to how quickly she deteriorated. You—you're saying that these were likely symptoms of this—Obliviation?"

"It sounds like that's a probable explanation for your wife's condition, yes."

"Why would she self-Obliviate her memories of being a witch?" Draco asked, brain trying and

Her eyes flicked up to meet his and she arched a brow before he amended, "Please, fuck, please spit on it."

Her tongue licked a long strip from his base to his frenulum, swirling along his head before she gathered her saliva and spit it audibly onto his swollen tip. He watched hungrily as her saliva dripped down his shaft and onto her fingers still wrapped around him before she began working the moisture along his length.

Her lips parted around his gleaming cock and he sucked in a breath as she brought his tip to the back of her throat. Her head bobbed, tears streaking from her eyes as her mouth fucked him. His fingers curled involuntarily into her hair, gripping the roots tightly before he muttered an apology and relaxed his hold.

She mumbled something around his cock that he couldn't understand before pulling her mouth off him with a pop, "Pull it, my hair, I like it."

Her mouth descended on him once again and his head fell back on a groan, his hands twining through her curls and yanking harshly. She hummed and the vibrations had his balls tightening and his vision blurring as the sounds of her mouth on his cock filled the air.

"Fuck, Hermione, gunna—ah—don't wanna cum yet—"

Her hands gripped his arse, her mouth doubling their efforts as he felt his spine tingle and his muscles tense. His orgasm exploded through him, his knees buckling as his cum poured down her throat.

He swayed dazedly as he felt his cock begin to deflate and she stood, a smug grin on her face. A small drop of him dribbled down her chin and he choked on air as her tongue darted out and swiped it clean before her throat worked on a swallow.

He wasn't sure how it was possible, but his cock found renewed vigor and twitched, both of their gazes flicking to it.

"Little Malfoy would like to fuck you, I think." He said, impressed as it twitched again.

"His refractory period is rather commendable." She agreed, settling herself once again on the edge of the work table and beckoning him forward.

His knees, still shaking slightly, wobbled between her thighs as he bent down and kissed her cheek softly then the other. Her hands smoothed up his arms, her legs wrapping around his waist and his head dipped to her chest as he sucked a nipple into his mouth, tongue swirling around the stiff peak.

His cock twitched again, blood pumping to it as it slowly stiffened between their bodies, pressed snugly into the warmth of her sex.

His hips tilted as he slid his length slowly through her heat, coating himself in her slick. His tip brushed against the apex of her cunt on each languid pass. His mouth found hers—lips, teeth, tongues dancing and nipping as her hand wrapped around his base and positioned his tip at her opening.

Her cunt enveloped his head as it pushed into her and they both groaned at the stretch. "So—" he shuddered, fingers gripping the flesh of her hips as he pushed in another half inch, "—so fucking tight."

"You feel so—" her cunt rippled, "so fucking perfect."

She rolled her hips as her cunt swallowed more of him, his mouth popping open as she licked

her over his lower lip.

He gave a slow, experimental thrust and she mewled as his cock hit a spot that had her fingernails digging into the skin of his shoulders before he slid out to the tip and thrust back in. Her cunt swallowed his length as he pushed into the hilt and he growled at the feel of her walls clenching around him.

Her mouth left hot trails along his jaw, his neck before her teeth nipped at his earlobe and she whispered, "Fuck me. Hard."

"Fuck." His hands gripped her meaty thighs, fingers splaying along the curve of her arse as he pulled out to the tip. His fingertips dug into her plump flesh as he pulled her towards him, impaling her on his cock. She let out a guttural moan as he pistoned his hips, sliding in and out of her punishingly, his arms straining. His hand gripped the base of her neck as he slammed into her, holding her to him as her arousal coated her thighs and his stomach. The sounds of sex echoing along the bookshelves as he panted against her mouth.

He tugged her hair, pulling her to lie on her back as he hooked his elbows beneath her knees. He watched entranced as his glistening cock disappeared inside her. The new angle had his jaw clenching.

"Gods, I can see my cock filling you." He growled, his hand splaying along her stomach to feel each of his thrusts.

"Ughn! Fuck yes, fill me, Draco! Fuck, yes, harder, fuck! I'm gunna c—"

His hands gripped her waist as his hips began to stutter, her tits bouncing on each thrust. Her back arched as her walls fluttered around him, her eyes rolling back. Her body spasmed, mouth open on a soundless scream as she rode out her orgasm.

He stilled, muscles tensing as his cock swelled and he began spilling into her, pulse after pulse until he collapsed over her. His head fell against her heaving chest, his body shaking with the last of this release.

Her limp arm came to rest on his back, rubbing soothing circles along his shoulders as they caught their breath.

"Move in with me?" He mumbled into her skin.

"What?"

"I hate being away from you, even if you're just one floor down. Move into my room." He mumbled again as he lifted his head, resting his chin on her breastbone. "It's got a good view."

A small smile lifted the corner of her mouth. "You just want to follow me around like a puppy."

He grinned sleepily and hummed in confirmation as he nodded. "So, will you?"

She bit the inside of her cheek contemplatively. "Your rooms are quite close to your mother's... and Ruby's. And Sonny's."

He winced.

"Once I get my wand, we can double up on silencing charms?" He offered hopefully.

"I was told that some people are building small cottages on the edge of the Forbidden Forest."

She said, "McGonagall offered me a fairly large plot."

He pushed himself up to his elbows. "Even better views of the castle from there, I'd bet."

"A lot more private." She agreed with a nod.

They exchanged a slow grin.

## CHAPTER 25 STUPID BODY EAT

Several gasps sounded from the table; his mother included as her cutlery clattered to her plate. Draco watched as the color drained from Sirius and Lupin's faces; Mrs. Weasley's hands flew to her lips, and Mr. Weasley's jaw unhinged.

"You—*your* Mary was Mary MacDonald?" His mother asked shakily, expression dumbstruck.

Wolfe nodded slowly and the silence that followed was so loud,

Draco swore he could hear the blood thumping through his veins.

"You did know her," Wolfe said quietly to Lupin, eyes wide. "She—she was a witch then?"

Lupin nodded, eyes glassy. "She—yes, she went to Hogwarts with us. She was a dear friend."

"Wait," Potter cut in, "Mary Asin, my mother's best friend Mary Asin. Mary who was part of the Order. That Mary?"

Lupin nodded again. "Yes. She—when your parents were murdered, Harry, and Sirius was framed and sent to Azkaban, we—her and I were all that was left, but—neither of us could—we couldn't—we were both so broken and we couldn't fix each other. I—I tried to drown myself at the bottom of firewhisky bottles for weeks. By the time I came out of my stupor, she'd left, just disappeared, and I couldn't find her. No one could find her. I sent her so many owls, not sure if they'd even reach her, but—she never—" Lupin's words cut off as Sirius' arm encircled his shoulders.

Draco was sure, if he had a wand, that he could have conjured a patronus in that moment with the way she was looking at him.

*Maybe fate wasn't bloody stupid after all,* he thought.

He snorted, shaking his head. "Never thought in a million years I'd be living on the Hogwarts grounds with the Brightest Witch of Her Age. Minus the devastating virus and not being able to fly a broom, I can't say I miss my life before."

the town I grew up in, just outside of London. It was love at first sight, you could say. She never talked about her upbringing. She would go practically catatonic when I tried to pry and I was no stranger to childhood trauma, so I finally stopped asking. All I knew is she didn't have any family anymore, so I became hers—was happy to do it. We were inseparable. Moved in together in London proper, eloped and soon after got pregnant. We lived a fulfilled life for twelve years, until she was diagnosed with dementia.

"A few years after she passed, Sonny here turned eighteen and moved out. I couldn't stay in that house for another second, with all its memories, the ones my wife didn't get to keep. They—they terrorized me. So I packed up our home to sell it, bought a boat and planned to sail around the world like we'd always wanted to do once we retired. And as I was packing up my wife's belongings...do you know what I found?"

Lupin's brows creased as Wolfe continued. "I came across a stack of letters addressed to her from someone named Remus Lupin, begging her to write him back or to *owl* him. I thought it was an old obsessive lover that she had left, or perhaps an estranged family member. The last letter was dated '83 I think, so it was before we met, but I nearly went insane thinking of how I'd probably never know the truth, but now..." Wolfe trailed off, a faraway look in his eyes.

"Sorry...what?" Sirius asked, eyes bouncing between Lupin and Wolfe.

"And now that I think about it, she would always say magic was real. Strange things would always happen where I was convinced that we had a ghost, but we would rationalize those things away. Sometimes I would joke that she had superpowers, but she—she would just laugh and say *Wolfe, don't you know I'm a witch?*" He let out a long sigh, "She always talked of—of cosmic destiny or some *invisible string of fate* that brought us together, didn't she, Sonny? Remember? And some of the things she said in her last days when her mind really declined, mumbling about rats and werewolves and dark lords, I chalked up to her disease. Just nonsense. But—" Wolfe chuckled, "it wasn't nonsense, was it? My wife was a witch, wasn't she? And she knew you?"

"Dad, what are you on about?" Sonny asked, worry etched in her expression.

Lupin looked at Sonny then and it was like the breath was knocked out of him before he swallowed audibly, "What—what was your wife's name?"

"I suppose you may have known her maiden name. Macdonald. Mary Macdonald."

Weasley seemed to accept him.

He dared a glance to Granger, who still seemed to be doing her damnedest to avoid his gaze. She was probably thinking the same. How Blaise never took the mark. How the Zabini's managed to stay out of the war. Unlike him.

"Ms. Granger," Draco's head snapped to his mother as she spoke, "Congratulations on creating a cure. That is an incredible feat for someone so young."

Hermione slowly lowered her fork as she gave his mother a genial smile. "Mrs. Malfoy," she greeted, "I'm glad to see you again." The last word hung awkwardly in the air. "And thank you. Though it's not a cure. More of a temporary vaccine."

"Yes, well, still it's an accomplishment that I doubt is quite shocking to anyone given your talents. Though, what is shocking is how it must've slipped your mind to tell me that you and Ms. Granger created it together, dear." His mother shot him a deadly glare.

Draco grimaced, "Yes, well—apologies Mother, but there's been quite a lot going on. Forgot to mention."

His mother hummed blandly, turning back to Hermione with a faint smile. "Well, I was lucky enough to overhear when you were shouting in the greenhouse."

Draco watched Hermione's eye twitch as his mother forked a petite bite of roast into her mouth.

"Budge up!" Sirius materialized beside Ruby and Wolfe and squeezed onto the bench, patting the space next to him as Professor Lupin shimmied in.

Sonny's father cleared his throat.

"I'm afraid, what with all of the chaos today, that I haven't formally introduced myself to any of you." He announced to the table, "My name is Wolfe Racques, father of the lovely Sonny Racques."

Sirius outstretched his hand, "Absolutely love the name, Wolfe." The Black heir tossed Lupin an exaggerated wink and Draco had to bite back a laugh at the lycanthropy joke, "Sirius Black.

You're quite an impressive fighter."

Wolfe nodded, "I served in the Royal Marines for four years just out of secondary school."

"Ah, the good ol' Crown." Sirius nodded sagely, "Well, Wolfe, it's a pleasure. This handsome devil with the scars here is my best friend and lover, Remus Lupin."

Wolfe seemed to suck in air down the wrong pipe as he devolved into a coughing fit, a large fist thumping at his chest as his mother slapped his back.

Sirius' eyes narrowed as he ran his tongue along the front of his teeth, "What? You've never met gay wizards before?"

"No, no, it's not that." Wolfe wheezed. "Sorry, d—did you say Remus Lupin?"

Lupin looked around uncomfortably, "Yes...?"

Wolfe's brows bunched together as he stared at the professor, seemingly working out a mental equation before he began laughing maniacally.

"I'd be hard pressed to learn of any other person with the name Remus Lupin." Wolfe said, still chuckling as he wiped tears from the corners of his eyes.

"I could say the same for you, Wolfe Racques." Lupin said coldly.

"You know," Wolfe laughed again, "Me and my wife met when she just showed up one day in

# CHAPTER 26

## EPLOGUE? WHAT EPLOGUE?

**A**s Draco slowly rose to consciousness, he noticed his mouth felt like it was filled with floo powder and he struggled to peel his eyes open.

An agonizing pain throbbed from his ribs and he groaned as he wrenched his tongue from the roof of his mouth with great difficulty.

"Water?" he croaked.

"Mmph," the sharp thing that was stuck in his ribs gave a violent jab, "can't move. You get me water."

He forced one eye open, fingers coming to rub at the crust that had formed in the corners, squinting blearily at the sunlight shining through the windows to their cottage.

He rolled his head and was met with the fizzy mass of Hermione's hair tumbling onto his pillow.

"I think I'm gunna be sick." He whined.

Her elbow gratefully disconnected with his ribs as she turned to face him, "I told you not to drink Hagrid's hooch." She rasped, "The stuff is pure petrol."

He nodded, "And I should've listened, but Sirius kept pouring me shots."

She hummed, patting his cheek gently, "Did you have a good birthday?"

"Mhmm." He nudged his face into her neck, "Please, darling, I'm dying. I need to be hydrated."

"Ugh, you're such a spoiled brat. Your wand's closer." She grumbled.

He squeezed her waist, nose burrowing further into her, "Yes, but I like when you take care of me."

She made a small noise of discontent as felt her fumble for her wand on the bedside table. “*Accio* cup. *Agamenti*. Here, you lazy bugger.”

He lifted his head and clutched the glass, guzzling the cool liquid. “You’re an angel. Dunno what I’d do without you.”

“You’d have been Rottter dinner ten times over.”

“Mm, indeed.”

“Oh Godric.” Hermione slapped a palm to her forehead. “I meant to grab some pepper-up in Hogsmeade yesterday morning when me and Mipsy were there, but then we ran into Pansy and Sonny and they invited us to tea and then Molly showed up and tried to get me to go with her to pick up Narcissa’s flowers and then I had to drop by the lab to confirm that the shipment of the new vaccine was sent out and it just totally slipped my mind.”

“I’m sure Sirius has some, the lush.” He groaned, draping an arm over his eyes. “I’ll walk over there in a bit when the room stops spinning.”

“Die.”

They both started at the demonic voice. Hermione’s hand coming to clutch at her racing heart as Draco scowled at the demon fury perched on the dresser in the corner.

“Fuck, Buckbeak. You bastard.” He growled. “Who put you there?!”

“It was probably Theo and Harry.” Hermione said through gritted teeth. “They know you hate the toy.”

“Shhh!” Draco whispered furiously, clapping a hand over her mouth. “Don’t call it a toy, it’ll curse you.”

A sharp knock sounded at their door as they both sighed loudly. Draco forced himself to sit upright as he hauled his legs over the side of the bed and whimpered as the knocking persisted, louder and more insistent this time. Hermione fared better, standing shakily and shucking on a robe before grabbing his and tossing it over his head.

After a few minutes of moaning and griping, they stumbled to the door, pulling it open with a huff. Sirius stood on their stoop with Harry and Ron flanking him on either side, each of them wearing an elated smile. Harry, the git, was practically bouncing on his heels.

“You both look like shit.” Sirius said with a bright grin, hands tucked behind his back and far too chipper for someone who had had double the amount of Hagrid’s petrol the night prior. “We come bearing gifts!”

He pulled one hand from behind him to showcase two vials of pepper-up, dropping one each into their eager palms.

“Oh, bless you.” Hermione whispered as she downed hers in one go. Draco following suit as she addressed Ron and Harry, “I thought you two were supposed to be heading on a mission today?”

Ron shook his head, “Got pushed to tomorrow. Some bureaucracy bollocks.”

“Mission, what mission?” Draco asked as the potion worked its way through his bloodstream, his head becoming clearer; nausea abating.

“We’re going out with a team to clear another Southern town and expand the wards around it. We got some confirmation that there’s a small group of survivors that have fortified a school down there already.” Harry said.

unmoored at not having the tables split by house. The Slytherin table was filled with people of all ages, all chattering happily as they filled their plates. He kept his eyes straight ahead, chin up and pretended not to notice as heads swiveled toward him and the whispers began.

He was used to it and he certainly couldn’t blame them. Although he had gained favor and positive notoriety during his time with the Wyverns, it was never without a fair share of judgement and public criticism for his actions during the war. International Quidditch star or not, he had still had to burn at least ten howlers a month from family members of those who died during the Battle of Hogwarts. And now he was here, in the same place with the same people his family had ignorantly fought against.

Draco plopped down heavily beside Theo and began loading his plate, though his appetite had long since abandoned him. He listened idly, pushing food around with his cutlery as the Greengrasses chattered quietly with a pair of brothers who Draco vaguely recalled had graduated a year or two before them. Sonny listened intently, a moon-eyed expression on her face as Pansy complained about the second-hand clothes they were provided.

“Hello, darling.”

He looked up to see his mother, Mipsy and Wolfe squeeze in beside him, and shot her a grin that he thought was fairly believable but his mother’s eyes narrowed slightly as she leaned in so only he could hear. “You’re not eating.” Not a question.

He shrugged. “Not that hungry.”

Wolfe began piling his mother’s plate with her favorites, careful to not let the food touch each other before handing Mipsy a generous serving of mash and gravy. Curious.

“Oi! Over here!” Weasley shouted.

The few bites of roast Draco had managed to choke down threatened to make a reappearance as Hermione entered the Great Hall with the remaining Weasleys in tow. The surviving twins’ arm was slung over her shoulders as he let out a belly laugh. She responded with a hearty chuckle and slapped him playfully on the chest as they approached.

“Oh, boy,” he heard Sonny mutter before her foot connected with his shin beneath the table. “Ow!” Draco scowled. “What?!”

“You’re clutching that knife so hard I worry your knuckles are going to break through the skin.” She mumbled out of the corner of her mouth.

Draco released the innocent cutlery and attempted to portray nonchalance as Hermione squeezed in between Potter and Ginny, but his throat went dry when she didn’t spare him a glance.

*This was it, he thought, she’s come to her senses. Of course, it would always be a Weasley.*

Blaise snorted indelicately into her pumpkin juice. Blaise stood abruptly and bowed at the waist, “Mr. and Mrs. Weasley, Blaise Zabini. A pleasure to officially meet you.”

Pansy snorted into her pumpkin juice.

“Ah, Ginny told us about you. Slytherin, is that right?” Mr. Weasley said, not unkindly.

“That’s right, sir, but don’t let that fact dissuade you. I was almost put in Ravenclaw.”

“Pish, posh. A Ravenclaw could never keep her in check, which Merlin knows she needs from time to time.” Mrs. Weasley replied with a wave of her hand as they all began to chatter amongst themselves. Draco was happy for his friend, if not a bit jealous at the easy way in which the

"Oh, Headmistress?"

She arched a brow, "Yes, Mr Malfoy?"

"Do you know where I might find Gran-Hermione?"

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Draco stood gnawing uncouthly at his lower lip outside of Hermione's room. He didn't know why he was nervous. Perhaps because even though he was ecstatic to be back at Hogwarts, a place that felt more like home than even the Manor, it was filled with people who would cast aspersions on his character. They would remind her that although his dark mark had long since faded, he was still a former Death Eater. They would remind her that he had been a vile, intolerant little shit.

She would remember, with every sneer and look of contempt thrown his way each time they'd walk hand-in-hand, that she could do better. Maybe Potter and Weasley had warmed up to him, but they clearly shared the same sentiment if their talk was anything to go by.

Perhaps now that they were here, at Hogwarts, everything would change and she'd come to her senses and wouldn't want him.

He hung his head, heart aching at the thought before mustering up the courage and knocking tentatively on her door.

He waited with bated breath, but the door didn't open. He strained his ears as he knocked again, but heard no shuffling on the other side to indicate she was in fact in there.

"Fuck."

She left to say hi to Ron's family about an hour ago."

Draco turned to see Sonny and Ruby exiting a room across the hall.

"We were just going down to dinner, but have no idea where we're going." Sonny said, "Mind being our escort?"

Draco smiled and nodded, "Right. Of course, remind me to give you a tour at some point."

"Oh, Pansy already offered actually. Kind of a date I think." Sonny said, wagging her eyebrows.

"Sonny says I can't come." Ruby pouted.

Draco laughed, "I'll take you."

The walk down to the Great Hall took twice as long as Draco answered the various rapid fire questions from the teen.

"*Was that a ghost?*!"

"Yes, his name's Nearly Headless Nick. Do not ask him why he has that nickname and avoid Peeves at all costs."

"Who's Peeves?"

"A bloody menace."

"Why do the staircases move? That seems very inconvenient."

"You have no idea. No! Don't step on that one!"

"Ew! A rat!"

"That's someone's familiar. Don't kill the rats, they aren't pests."

"When can we see the merpeople?"

"I dunno. Maybe on our tour. They like to swim by the observation window in the dungeons."

When they finally reached the Great Hall, Porter waved them over. Draco felt slightly

"That'll be nearly all of Scotland Rotter-free then, hey?" Hermione asked, pulling her hair into a bun.

"Yep, nearly. And a few bordering English villages." Ron confirmed.

Draco's eyes narrowed. "But you'll be back before my mother's wedding, right?"

Harry scoffed, "Obviously. Narcissa would castrate us if we missed it."

"No, she'd never do something so crass." Draco snorted. "She'd have Wolfe do it."

"Right," Sirius clapped, "now that color has officially returned to your faces, we have good news!"

He pulled his other hand forward and Draco gasped, "No! Bill figured it out!"

Sirius nodded enthusiastically as he held out the Firebolt, "Yup, was able to take down the atmospheric enchantment a few days ago! He said something about floo not being ready yet, or- it is, but each floo has to be activated separately," he waved an impatient hand, "I dunno, he said a lot of curse breaker tagon that went right over my head."

"BUT what we do know is that broom travel is back in business! Ginny is already down at the pitch and says she's ready to wipe the floor with you." Harry said excitedly, rubbing his palms together. "As am I."

"Ginny can give me a run for my galleons, but *you*?" Draco scoffed, "I'd like to see you try."

"You know I *did* almost kill you once. I would be nicer to me if I were you." Harry said, eyes narrowed.

"*Almost* being the operative word, Harry." Draco quipped, turning to Sirius, "Is Ruby coming?" Sirius scowled, "She said she'd consider it if her little boyfriend, Teddy, can go flying too."

"Sirius, Hermione sighed, "you know his name is Tommy."

Sirius' hand flew to his hip, "What I know is he is a handsy little fuck. Caught them snogging in one of the greenhouses the other day! His parents got an earful from me and Remus--well, mostly me."

"As if you never snogged in one of the greenhouses when you were a teen, Padfoot?" Harry asked flatly.

"That's not the point, Harry!" Sirius hissed, "She should be focusing on--on schooling, not--not chasing boys around the corridors."

Draco rolled his eyes, "Tommy is nice and she likes him, you just don't like that she doesn't hang out with *you* as much now. And, I'll remind you that it's summer, the kids aren't supposed to be in school!"

"Oh fuck off." Sirius shot him a rude gesture before he tossed the broom at him. "Meet you down there."

"You comin', Miione?" Ron asked.

"As if I'd miss watching Draco whoop you." She winked.

Draco stood tall, chin lifting at the praise as Ron mumbled something under his breath.

Domino some old Quidditch gear, Draco felt almost giddy as he and Hermione walked the path towards the pitch. The sun was beating, the birds were chirping and his fingertips buzzed as they curled along the handle of the well-worn broom.

Striding onto the field, he heard the unmistakable screeching of Ruby as Sirius took a series of

barrel rolls through the hoops with the teen holding fast to the front of the broom. Ginny was hovering near the sidelines cheering them on to go faster as Ron and Harry began opening up the Quidditch trunk and handing out beater's bats to Blaise and Theo.

Hermione leaned up and gave him a quick peck on the cheek, "I see Pansy and the Greengrasses up in the stands, so I'll be cheering you on from there." She leaned in further to whisper, "If you catch the snitch before Harry, I'll do that thing that you've been begging me to do to you."

He gulped and nodded vigorously as she sauntered off, watching her hips sway as she went.

"Alright, come on, Draco," Harry shouted, "stop staring at Hermione's arse. It's not going to help you spot the snitch!"

"Says you!" Draco shot back as Sonny materialized behind him and kicked the back of his knees, causing him to collapse.

"Break a leg!" She cackled.

"Ow, fuck, Sonny, you're worse than Theo." He groused, pushing himself to stand and rubbing the back of his knees with a scowl.

"Well, I *am* your soon-to-be-sister. I have to terrorize you. It's how I show my love."

He rolled his eyes as Sirius and Ruby landed beside him. The teen dismounted, her cheeks flushed from either adrenaline or the wind whipping at her face.

"That was fucking brilliant!" She beamed, "Can we go again?"

Sirius laughed, "Maybe after the game, hm? I see your little boyfriend up in the stands."

She gave a salute as she slapped Draco on the shoulder, "Knock 'em dead, pretty boy."

"Blegh, gods, no!" Weasley exclaimed, holding up a freckled hand, "We mean an 'if you hurt Hermione, they'll never find your body' kind of talk, you git."

Draco rolled his eyes, "I've no intention of hurting her, you melonheads."

"Hey!" Weasley scowled, a hand coming up to pat his overly large skull. "It's not that big."

Draco shot him a look that begged to differ before he went on, "Look, she's the one who could hurt me, physically, mentally and emotionally. So, nice chat and buzz off."

Porter looked at Weasley and shrugged, "He's got a point."

Draco sneered, swiveling on his heel and began walking down the hall.

"Dinner in the Great Hall in half an hour, we'll save you a seat." Porter said.

Draco gave the boy wonder a thumbs up as he turned a corner and ran face first into Sirius and Professor Lupin.

"Malfoy, we were just going to your room. Do you have a moment?" Lupin asked.

Draco let out a longsuffering sigh, "I suppose."

Sirius' eyes narrowed, "We were told that you and Hermione are—" his jaw clenched.

"That you and Hermione are *involved*. Romantically." Lupin cut in. "And we just want to make it known that she means a great deal to us and should you mistreat her in anyway—"

"I'll make Azkaban seem like a tropical holiday and the Dementor's kiss seem like a gift." Sirius threatened, clapping Draco on the shoulder roughly before the two men sauntered away. Draco was left standing disoriented in the hall for several moments before he rolled his tongue along the inside of his cheek and continued his search for—

"Mr. Malfoy." McGonagall's voice rang out from the other end of the hall.

"Son of a bogart." He muttered, dropping his head back and looking skyward, "Muggle god, if you are real, kill me now."

"Mr. Malfoy, it is good to see you, I was hoping to have a word. I have heard of your assistance during the difficult months you've all been on the road and your combined efforts with Ms. Granger in creating a promising vaccine for this virus."

He nodded, "And if I hurt Hermione and put a toe out of line with her, you'll lay me alive, yes, I get it. But I don't *intend* to hurt her, I *love* her, which I know you lot didn't think me capable of, I'm sure, but I do and if anything, she'll realize that she's too good for me and she'll break *my* heart."

Her brows furrowed, "Well, I—what? You and Ms. Granger are...?"

"Bollocks." He grumbled, pinching the bridge of his nose, "Sorry, I thought—nevermind."

"What I came to say is that I had a lengthy discussion with Ollivander and while he expressed some...concerns about your previous actions, he now understands your contribution to the wellbeing of not only the wizarding world, but the muggle world as well. He is in the process of creating you a new wand. He said it should be ready in two weeks time and he will inform you when it is available for testing."

Draco blinked, "Oh. Thank you."

McGonagall's lips twitched, "You are welcome. And thank *you*."

She began to walk down the hall when Draco blurted, "Professor—Headmistress? My mother's wand was also broken during her time getting to Hogwarts. Is—would Ollivander..."

McGonagall dipped her chin, "Consider it done."

Draco's heart raced as he considered Ruby and Astoria until he heard Granger's swoty voice carry, "I'm sure Kingsley informed you all of two members of our group who were bit, but have been administered the vaccine which me and Mr. Malfoy created."

"Yes, Ms. Granger; we are aware. It's just protocol." He heard a mediwitch reply.

"Good because they are not at risk of turning and if anything happens to them, I will personally hex each of you into the earth." Granger replied slowly and, to Draco's amusement, menacingly.

"No need for that, Ms. Granger."

"Madam Pomphrey." Granger sighed, "Thank goodness Is this really necessary?"

"Yes, dear. You all have been through a great deal, I'm sure. We'd just like to make sure you're all in tip-top health before we show you to your rooms to rest."

Draco smiled as he heard Granger grumble something under her breath.

It was nearly nightfall by the time they were all cleared with a clean bill of health and allowed to leave the sterile ward and were escorted to the east wing of the castle. Draco lost sight of his companions during the bustle and reluctantly parted ways with his mother and Mipsy, but only because their rooms were just down the hall from his and she insisted on a long shower. A sentiment he shared after the opinion was presented.

Once in the quiet of the steaming shower, his thoughts swirled and the improbability of the last 24 hours caught up to him. He stayed under the spray for what must've been over an hour if his pruned fingers were anything to go by. But his most pressing thought kept returning to Granger.

Was her room close by? He had barely seen her since his reunion with his Mother. Too caught up in shock and disbelief to check in. He mentally berated himself for letting his pureblood manners slip and not introducing her to his mother and then berated himself for forgetting that they were already acquainted. Then beatred himself more for remembering the circumstances in which they were acquainted. Where was she? Perhaps he would be able to slip out and check that she was alright.

Once he was towed off and crammed into a pair of clean trousers and a jumper that were two sizes too large, he made to dry his hair and realized belatedly and not for the first time, that he had no wand. He attempted to dry his locks wandlessly, but it always left his hair looking wavy and much too devil-may-care for his liking.

He huffed as he dragged a hand down his face and groaned. He desperately needed a wand again, this muggle living was inconvenient at best and torturous at worst. He was, unfortunately, shite at wandless magic as he was never without his wand and made a mental note to practice more.

Pushing open the door of his threadbare room, he startled at Potter and Weasley blocking his path, the former's fist was outstretched and hung in front of the doorway on a knock.

Draco's eyes narrowed, "What?" Then he straightened, his heartbeat sped up, mind imagining the worst. Had something happened? Is everything alright? What is it? Is it Hermione?"

Potter cleared his throat, "Oh, no, everything is fine. We—well, Ron and I figured that now we

aren't fighting for our lives every day that we ought to have the talk with you."

"I'm afraid *the talk* would be a few years too late as I lost my virginity to some Belgian witch after—"

man—Wolfe. “What the fuck, what the fuck, what the fuck.” She chanted.

Draco’s mother gasped, her hand that had been in his pulled free and she cupped her mouth as she turned, and he saw his awestruck expression mirrored in her own.

“How—you’ve been with Wolfe’s daughter? How?” His mother muttered as Sonny and her father wept.

Draco shook his head dazedly, “I don’t know what’s—what’s happening.”

“That’s Sonny’s dad. Wolfe.”

“Yes, thank you, Ruby. We’ve deduced that bit.” Draco replied numbly. As far as names went, Draco really wasn’t one to talk, but *Wolfe* was rather...eccentric.

Then the pair began speaking rapidly.

“How are you here??”

“I thought you’d be dead or on your boat somewhere in the Atlantic!”

“We went to your flat and it was crawling with zombies, but I knew my girl could take care of herself!”

“How are you with Draco’s mum??”

“How did you end up with Cissa’s son?”

“Ackem!” A voice boomed, echoing through the hall. “Apologies for the interruption.”

Kingsley stood tall and regal in his formal robes, intricately embroidered with traditional African patterns as he addressed the audience stoically, but Draco could see the amusement that crinkled the corners of his eyes.

“It’s wonderful to see you all alive and well. However, given your time on the outside, we do have an extensive protocol that each of you must follow now that you are under these wards. Some of your traveling companions have already begun the process.” The minister turned and McGonagall siddled up next to him, “Please, if you could all follow Headmistress McGonagall to the quarantine zone.”

He must’ve seen the way Draco’s companions shuffled closer to one another before he amended, “You can stay together for this process, if you so choose. Healers, both muggle and magical, are awaiting your arrival.”

McGonagall ushered them down to the greenhouses and Draco had to tamp down the grief that bubbled up his throat at the thought of Neville. He should be here with them, not in a pine box.

Draco’s eyes flicked about the group before they locked on Granger’s. She gave him a tight, forced smile before turning away and looping her arm through Ginny’s.

One of the largest greenhouses was outfitted with cots, much like the hospital wing and mediwitches and wizards stood at each station as the group filed in.

“Mrs. Malfoy!!” Blaise removed a series of tubes connected to his arms, much to the chagrin of the healer stood at his side, as he marched up to them. “I guess you got my patronus.”

His mother gave him a watery smile and planted a small kiss to his cheek, “Indeed.”

A healer, likely muggle based on the strange contraption that hung from her neck, gave them a warm smile and not unkindly ushered them all to a few cots at the end of the building.

Draco’s hands remained firmly in the grip of Mippy and his mother until they were each asked to remove their clothing behind partitions for a “bite inspection.”

## JOB PRETTY DRY

"And are you and Wolfe...?"

"We are." She confirmed with a demure smile. "He's lovely. I hope you'll give him a chance, my Dragon. I couldn't have made it without him. Your father and I—were more like roommates or colleagues than husband and wife since, well, since the Battle of Hogwarts really. I held onto a lot of resentment for what he put us through. Put you through."

Draco nodded robotically as he processed. He knew his mother and father barely spoke; didn't even sleep in the same room most nights. But he never thought she'd actually leave his father, no matter how big of a prick he was. Draco was oddly proud of her.

"I know you were at the manor for a time. Did he—is he—"

"Dead, yes," Draco said, not bothering to detail that *he* was the one who finally did it.

They fell into silence as Draco contemplated everything his mother had endured to get to him and every puzzle piece that had to fall into place for them to have found each other again. He was never one to believe in the drivel of Divination, but he was not too cynical to admit now that it seemed fate must've played its hand in their reunion. It was almost dizzying to think about how implausible all of this was.

The group walked on for what seemed like several kilometers until they reached the end of the narrow passageway.

Sirius led the charge and muttered something under his breath before the stone cracked open. The dark corridor was suddenly bathed in a soft glow of torchlight as they each slipped through one by one.

Draco squinted as his eyes adjusted and swallowed the dragon egg that had formed in his throat at the sight of the Hogwarts corridor as it came into view. He let out the weary breath that he felt like he had been holding for months, his perpetually tense muscles relaxing as his brain finally caught up with the fact that they had made it.

"Oh, thank Merlin!"

"Pretty boy!!"

Draco whipped his head towards the voices. Ruby and her demon fury were barreling down the hall, some of his companions and some new—er—old faces on her heels. Professor Lupin scanned their beleaguered faces until his stony gaze landed on Sirius. Draco noticed his shoulders drop in relief as he wrapped the Black heir into a tight hug. *Ab, so that's the Quidditch team he's playing for;* Draco thought.

Ruby reached Draco a moment later, her expression taught as she looked around anxiously,

"Where's Sonny?"

"Here, Rubes!" Sonny pushed past the crowd and removed her hood.

"Sunshine?"

Sonny straightened sharply and snapped her head towards the voice. The mystery man that had been silently stalking behind his mother removed his mask, his expression one of astonishment. The man's skin, Draco noted, was a rich ebony, a densely coiled beard decorated his chin, peppered with silver, and his eyes—nearly the exact same as—

"No." Sonny whispered, disbelief coating the word as she shook her head.

"Oh my god." The man muttered, his weapon clattering to the stone floor.

"Dad!?" Sonny shouted as she launched herself forward and wrapped her arms around the

The group was silent, save for intermittent sniffing and the shuffling of boots as they all crammed into the Shrieking Shack. Were Draco not already reeling from the shock of seeing his mother and Mipsy alive, he would have been bug-eyed at seeing the opening of a damp stone corridor in the basement of the creepy house. It seemed to be carved straight into the stone of the earth as they all descended and began their march.

Water trickled steadily from the jutting stones of the walls, their steps kicking errant pebbles which bounced and echoed through the tunnel. The Golden Trio and Sirius began chattering quietly to one another at the head of the procession as his mother squeezed his hand and cast him an affectionate smile, then slid a critical eye down his form.

"Draco, my darling, what on Morgan's green earth are you wearing?" His mother whispered. Draco let out an amused huff as he rolled his eyes. "A hoodie and cargo pants. They're hideous, I know, but very practical. I could ask you the same," he jutted his chin at her attire, "I thought you were muggle soldiers or something. And what's that weapon? Where's your wand? Why didn't you respond to the patronus?"

She lifted the weapon. "Oh, it's a Burgundian Poleaxe. Found it at some medieval muggle museum. I don't know, that's what the placard said." She shrugged. "And my wand was...snapped in France during the early chaos of the outbreak, I—" she swallowed thickly.

Draco sighed. "I guess we're both wandless then."

"I didn't think I'd ever make it back to you without it, but I had help." She glanced behind them towards the man, face still obscured, who gave Draco a stoic nod.

Draco faced his mother with an arched eyebrow, "He called you both 'loves.' What in Salazar's name happened out there?"

His mother blushed and cleared her throat, "When you—had your accident, I was told that there were some world-renowned magi-neurologists in France, so I told your father that we needed to go and meet with them. Lucius, he was infuriatingly nonplussed about your condition. Told me that I was being over-emotional—the bastard. So, I made the decision to leave him. For good. I packed up a few things and took Mipsy with me. I don't think Lucius really believed I meant what I said this time. I—had threatened to leave him many times, but..."

She sighed heavily, casting a sidelong glance at him, "When floo travel was grounded and this outbreak hit France, it was bedlam. Me and Mipsy barely survived the chaos. I figured, if I couldn't get to you via magical means, then I had to try muggle, so we went to the closest harbor hoping to find a boat and maybe I could *influence* a muggle into sailing back to Britain. But the dock was blocked by French military." Her voice lowered, "I was able to Imperious one of them to let me pass, but there was a scuffle when others saw them let me through and that's when my wand was snapped. Next thing I know Wolfe was there and throwing his fists in my defense until the military gained control of the crowd. I begged him to take us aboard. Told him I needed to get to my son in London and he didn't take much convincing, considering he was doing the same."

Draco stared in astonishment, whispering furiously, "You—you Imperious'd someone?!"

She lifted her chin, "And I'd do it again if it meant that I found you. I imagined you waking up alone and terrified in St. Mungo's. I just had to get to you." She swiped a rogue tear from her cheek and squeezed his hand, "But yes, it—it was horrible and I hope to never use an unforgivable ever again."

smile as she held out an arm to his friend.

Theo wiped at his eyes as he drew in for an embrace, his arm tightening around Draco and his mother, "Hello, Narcissa."

Static crackled somewhere in the vicinity and they turned to see Potter holding the black radio, his eyes red-rimmed as a voice echoed from the device, "How—" Beep! "Blo-hell," Beep! "How do I work—"

Ginny's exasperated voice came through clearer, "Harry says you just have to hold this button down as you speak, Professor."

"CAN YOU HEAR ME? ARE YOU ALL ALRIGHT??" The first voice boomed again, "SIRIUS, IS HE—"

Sirius snorted and snatched up the radio before turning back to Potter and holding it up questioningly. Potter pointed to the button on the side and Sirius bellowed back, "Moony! My love! We're all alright! We'll see you in two shakes of a rup's tail!"

"THANK MERLIN!" The first voice boomed once more.

"Cousin." She said coolly. "You're alive." Not a question.

"Cousin." Sirius gave her a tight smile as he twirled his wand, "It seems us Blacks are rather resilient."

"Mm, indeed."

A high-pitched throat cleared and Draco's gaze landed to the figure near his shins and his newfound composure was once again dashed as Mipsy's fishbowl eyes stared up at him, large droplets of tears spilled out over her cheeks as her chin wobbled.

"Master Draco is alive. Mipsy *knew* he would be alright, didn't she Cissa?" The elf squeaked as he dropped to his knees and pulled her in for an embrace.

"Yes, you certainly did, Mipsy." His mother sniffled.

Great blubbering sobs wracked Draco's body. He couldn't contain them as his shoulders shook with the intensity of the reunion, one arm still clasped at his mother's cloak and the other consoling his childhood elf. Distantly Draco could hear the growling and snarling of the horde just on the other side of the fence growing louder.

"Bloody hell, is—is that a Centaur?" He heard Weasley wheeze. "A—a Rotter-Centaur?!"

Draco looked up to see there was indeed a Rotter-Centaur, its hind leg mangled and dangling grotesquely by a tendon, its torso so mutilated that he could see the bones and sinew of its hollowed out rib cage. He shuddered.

"Yes," Sirius answered with a heavy sigh, "some herds deeper in the Forbidden Forest would not leave their territories for the safety of the Hogwarts wards. We didn't know then that the virus would affect them too, since elves and goblins never turned, but—"

"—but they're halfhuman. Of course." Granger finished quietly.

Sirius hummed in confirmation, "And bloody impossible to kill."

Potter mumbled tentatively, "Perhaps, we could—er—continue this back at the castle. I worry that we are attracting more Rotters to this part of the ward."

Draco nodded, taking a deep, jagged breath and straightened as he patted Mipsy on the shoulder and grabbed hold of her hand, then his mother's.

# CHAPTER 24

“Mum?” Draco choked out, his face crumpling. She pulled him into her chest as he began to sob, gut-wrenching, involuntary walks. He could hear her murmuring soft assurances as he wept, his fingers digging into the fabric of her cloak as if they were afraid that if they eased up, she would slip right through them.

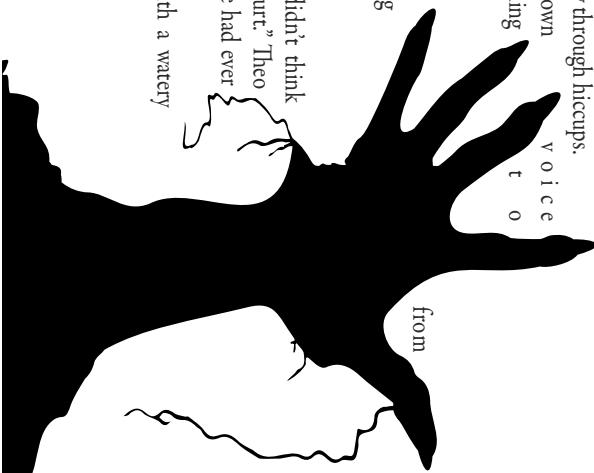
After several moments, her hands pressed to either side of his face and gently peeled him away to press a kiss to his cheeks, both wet with insistent tears. His breathing shattered as he attempted to compose his blubbering, his eyes trying and failing to focus through the onslaught of fresh waves of tears.

“How—what—I thought—” He attempted to say through hiccups.  
“I got your patronus.” She said, her own voice cracking, “Blaise’s last one said you all were heading to Hogwarts weeks ago, so that’s where we headed.”  
Heran the fabric of his hoodie beneath his nose, wiping the deluge of snot that had begun flowing from his nostrils and straightened, fingers still holding tightly to his mother’s cloak.

“He—what?” Draco asked, bewildered.

“You said not to bother, but Blaise and I didn’t think sending one last message before we left would hurt.” Theo said softly through sniffles. Draco wasn’t sure he had ever seen Theo cry.

“Theodore, darling.” His mother greeted with a watery





practiced ease and fired off more shots into the frenzy as Sonny hacked off heads, the herd of Thestrals kicking off into the sky.

"Harry, did you call?!" Granger yelled.

Potter shot off a bombarda before he bellowed a reply, "Yes, in the air! Wards should be down! Go!!"

That same strange fighter stood dazedly in the middle of the fray and Draco watched in horror as they began walking towards him, weapon held loosely at their side and seemingly unaware of the Rotters with skinless arms outstretched just behind them.

Draco didn't think, he just ran full sprint at the fighter and screamed, "Duck!"

Archie's axe flew from his fingertips as he threw it at the same moment the fighters' eyes widened and they dropped to the ground, the blade landing with a squelch in the face of the growling Rotters.

"Run!" Draco lifted the fighter by the arms and pulled the axe free from its target as they sprinted towards the gate, at least two dozen Rotters closing in.

The moment they passed through, Potter pulled out the radio, holding it to his mouth as he shouted "NOW, NOW, NOW!!"

The wards shimmered and locked into place just as the horde reached them. The ward shook from the force as the first wave of Rotters crashed against its shields, some instantly bursting into flames while others sizzled like eggs in a frying pan, letting out deafening screeches as they burned up and fell to the ground in a smoking heap, allowing the next round of undead to do the same.

"Holy fucking fuck!" Theo shouted as he collapsed onto all fours and kissed the earth, "Haha! We fucking did it!"

Draco braced his hands on his knees, trying to suck air into his burning lungs, when he felt a tentative hand land on his shoulder.

"Missed you, my Dragon."

Draco's heart plummeted into his arse, his head slowly turning towards the fighter beside him as she pulled down her mask, her eyes glittering with unshed tears.

Draco's face crumpled as he choked out a gasp, "Mum?"