



12-Step

by Mystwriter

Summary: Draco gets help for a dark problem by apologizing to all he has wronged. Is Harry Potter more than willing to forgive him?

Humor, denial!Draco (that seems to be a favorite theme of mine of late), NC-17, a little angsty, mostly fluff, fun. Set sometime at the end of Deathly Hallows before the epilogue that doesn't exist. :)

"Um...Hello. My name is Draco and I'm a Dark Arts-aholic."

"Hi, Draco."

"Yeah, so I've been raised with dark magic and told at an early age that it was okay. Not that it makes it all right or anything. But especially in school, I had a problem with performing dark magic and I'm trying to stop. It's been three months since my last hex."

"Good for you, Draco."

"Thanks."

Draco sat gratefully. He *hated* these things. But the Ministry said it was either this or Azkaban. He looked around at all the dull faces of other dark witches and wizards. After Voldemort fell there were many who easily slipped to the Light side. But for others, it was damned hard giving up that power. Funny how his father reformed right away. Got himself a job at the Ministry again. Most people would seem to have short attention spans.

He listened disinterestedly as a witch with shocking green hair told her weepy tale about hexing her boyfriend for kicks. "He liked it. He begged me to do it," she whined.

Excuses, excuses. He looked at his watch. In ten minutes he'd have to meet with his sponsor. He hoped the report sent to the Ministry would be satisfactory this time. Draco didn't want to be caught backsliding again. One more time and his parents would kick him out of the house. And he didn't fancy shacking up in the gazebo.

Over. Finally. He rose and ignored the others who tried to talk to him. Shouldering his way through, he went down the hall to his sponsor's office, a grizzled wizard named Quiggley. He pattered at his desk while Draco tapped his wand impatiently against his thigh.

At last he looked up. His white, bushy brows arched over the many wrinkles of his eyes. "There now. Mr. Malfoy. How are we doing?"

"We're doing fine." Tap, tap, tap.

Quiggley watched his wand beat a tattoo against his leg until Draco realized he was doing it. "May I?" asked Quiggley, extending his hand.

Draco sighed and placed the wand in the old wizard's hand.

*"Prio*ri* Incantatem,"* he murmured over and over again, shaking spell after spell out of Draco's wand. No dark magic.

Satisfied he handed it back. "Very good. Now. I believe you are ready for your next step."

Draco eased forward on his seat. "And that is?"

"You must reconcile with those you have wronged through dark magic. I suggest making a list—"

A horrible sick feeling roiled in his gut. "Whoa. Wait. No one said I had to do that."

"It is part of the program, Mr. Malfoy. I suggest you read the fine print."

"Damned, stupid Ministry pricks—"

"What was that, Mr. Malfoy?"

"Nothing. So what do I have to do? Send them a card or gift or...money?"

The man laughed. It served to shake the many folds of fat layering under his waistcoat. "Oh no. I am afraid you must visit each one personally."

"You've got to be kidding! What makes you think they won't hex me!"

"Well, that is the chance you take."

"The chance / take? I don't fancy getting my bits hexed off, you know. Isn't there any other way?"

"I am afraid not. Make that list, Mr. Malfoy. I expect progress by the next month's meeting." And with that, the man set about writing on a parchment, effectively dismissing Draco.

Draco stormed out of the meeting hall, almost forgetting to hide his wand in his pocket as he left the building and stood on the pavement huffing a breath. Fucking Ministry prats! What did they know what he had to endure? Wasn't it enough he was shunned by polite society now? Dark magic was all he had. No dating, no fun, no anything! Dammit!

Oh he was sorely tempted. One hex. Just one hex just to take the edge off. But no. He'd be back to square one with squirrels and peacocks as flatmates.

As soon as it was safe, Draco Apparated home back to his room and took out a parchment and quill. A list. It wasn't that he couldn't think of anyone. The problem was, who to leave *off* the list!

1. *Pansy Parkinson for leading her on and then hexing her when she got clingy.*
2. *Hagrid for getting Buckbeak executed.*
3. *Katie Bell for the necklace...*

Draco stopped. It would get pretty bad from here. It was all Dark Lord stuff. And he wasn't sure if anyone would forgive that. What if they didn't? Was it merely the exercise that was important or some such rubbish? Probably. It's the effort that counts. Yeah. Made a little sense amongst all this nonsense.

4. *Madam Rosemerta for that Imperius thing.*
5. *Ron Weasley for almost poisoning him*
6. *Dumbledore for trying to kill him*—This one was no good. The man was dead.
7. *Severus Snape for making him kill Dumbledore*—Ditto. Also dead.
8. *Bill Weasley for letting Fenrir Greyback into Hogwarts*
9. ...

Oh God! This will never work! They all hate him. *Hate* him! Of course, not as much as he hated himself.

The quill trembled in his hand but he dipped it in the ink again.

10. *Luna Lovegood for imprisonment.*

11. *Mr. Ollivander for all those Crucios.*

12. *Harry Potter for....for...everything*

Draco took a deep breath and looked at the names. He didn't think there would be one blessed person on this list who would forgive him. Maybe Looney Lovegood. But the others...

He was a goner.

* * *

Draco had a bouquet of flowers clutched in his hand when he knocked on the Parkinson door. He waited, hoping it would be the house-elves. But when the door swung wide, it was Pansy herself.

Her pug-faced glare fell on Draco, looked him up and down. "Well, well, well," she said. "Look what the Kneazle dragged in."

"Hi, Pans. Long time no see."

"Yeah. Since the day I was dumped. That was six months ago."

"And I'm here to apologize for that very thing."

"Came crawling back, did you?"

"Um...all right. Yeah."

She smirked. "That ship has sailed, Draco. I'm dating someone else."

"Oh. I'm not here for that."

"Surprise, surprise," she muttered.

"I've given up dark magic, see. And I'm here to make recompense or something. Looking for forgiveness and all that."

"For dumping me or hexing me?"

"Er...both, actually. I'm sorry on both counts. But you see, it wouldn't have worked between us. I knew you could do better."

She stared at him for a long time before her lip trembled and she burst into hysterical laughter.

Laughter. "That's not fucking funny, Pans. I'm pouring my heart out here."

She got a hold of herself and sighed, wiping her eyes. "Oh that's funny. Of *course* I could bloody well do better! You think I'm that blind!" She shook her head, chuckling, before gesturing at the flowers. "Those for me?"

"Yeah." He offered them to her and she took them.

"Thanks."

"So...you forgive me?" He couldn't believe it was that easy.

"Of course, you idiot. I knew you were gay."

"Erm...what?"

She smiled a not-too-unpleasant smile. For Pansy, that is. "Draco! You're gay. It's all right."

"Pansy dear. What the fuck are you talking about? I'm not a poufter."

She started laughing again. "Of course you are! I've seen the way you carry on when good-looking blokes are around. Just look at Potter. You were absolutely gormless when he was present. Can't blame you, really. I mean, if I weren't dating Clive I might give it a go...except rumour has it he swings your way. Shame, really. Well, thanks for the flowers. Ta!"

And she shut the door in his face.

He stood blinking at the closed door. That bitch thought he was *gay*! What the fuck? Now she was going to tell everyone that? Well that was just peachy. Not that his love life was all that great of late. It was the absolute Sahara, truth be told. But still.

"I'm not gay!" he yelled at the door.

Silence.

"Fuck." He kicked at the door plate and rumbled down the stairs.

Well, at least that was one off his list.

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He Apparated into an alley in Hogsmeade and stood looking at the Three Broomsticks a long time. He definitely didn't want to go in there. No flowers this time. Just a humble demeanor and a *Protego* ready on his lips.

With his hood up, he pushed open the door and wandered in. And there she was behind the bar, serving up drinks in that jolly way of hers. Everyone seemed jollier since Voldemort was killed. Even his parents. It seemed that only Draco was eating shit at all.

He sat at a table in the corner for a long time before he felt someone hovering over his table. When he looked up, it was her. He slowly pushed his hood off his head. Her eyes widened.

"Before you hex me," he said quickly, hand up in surrender, "could I just say something first."

Her wand was out. "*Expelliarmus!*" she whispered.

Draco's wand flung from his pocket to her hand.

Rosemerta smirked unpleasantly. "Now you can speak."

He gulped. "I came here to apologize to you. I could give you an excuse about the Dark Lord making me do it and all but the fact of the matter is, *I* still did it to you. And I'm sorry."

She glared at him. "What's your angle, Malfoy?"

"No angle. I just came to apologize. That's it. Maybe—someday—you can f-forgive me."

He felt it, too. He wanted her forgiveness. It wasn't nice being *Imperioed*, made to do dastardly things. Voldemort had never *Imperioed* him. He almost wished he had. Then at least he could feel a little more blameless.

Her stagnant gaze began to thaw. She clucked her tongue. "Well, I wouldn't have believed it unless I saw it with me own eyes."

Draco swallowed again. Maybe it was better they hex him. Recompense and all.

She studied him for a while and then thrust something forward. He winced and closed his eyes. But when nothing happened he slowly lifted his lids. She was holding out his wand.

He looked from wand to her face and back again. "You mean it?" he asked in a small voice.

She nodded curtly. "Go on. Take it."

"But—"

"Just take it, Malfoy. I'm not going to hex you." She slid into the seat opposite him.

Draco reached forward with a trembling hand and closed his fingers over the hawthorn wand. It reminded him of the last time he saw Harry Potter: at his doorstep, saying nothing but shoving his wand into Draco's hand. A thrown-off comment as he retreated down the steps, "Thanks for letting me borrow it," before he Apparated away into history.

He clutched the wand but he couldn't look up at her.

She leaned on the table. "Never thought I'd see you here, that's for certain."

He shrugged.

"Not apologizing at any rate. But I know, young man, what You-Know-Who made you do. He made you do a lot. More than most of us realize, I'm sure."

Draco inwardly winced at that. She was being nice. Too nice.

"It's not fair to you to say that," he said, just now noticing the tears leaking from his eyes.

Remarkably, her hand closed over his. "It was all terrible for everyone. You were under-aged."

"It doesn't matter! None of that matters!"

She pressed firmly on his hand. "It does. I forgive you, Draco. Work hard to make sure a madman like him never rises to power again."

"Okay," he answered automatically. Her gaze held his even as she slid from the seat and returned to the bar.

He wiped his eyes and put his hood up over his head again, hiding his face. Shit. This hurt. Remorse washed over him. At the time, he remembered thinking that this was the easy part. *Imperio* the woman and get her to do his dirty work. But it didn't feel that way now. She actually *forgave* him. He had used an Unforgivable on her. And she forgave him.

He wondered which house she belonged to at Hogwarts.

He left the Three Broomsticks feeling a bit lighter. But now he had to go to Hogwarts itself. Even though it was summer he was sure the groundskeeper was there in his hut. After all, where else was he to go?

Draco stood at the gates and looked in. Hogwarts. He had loved it once. But the memory of it was forever ruined for him. He hurt so many people with his actions. He supposed that was the thrust behind this exercise. But really, he sometimes wondered if Azkaban wouldn't have been better.

Pushing open the gate, he walked down the long path and headed for the distant threads of smoke that wisped up from the place he knew Hagrid's hut to be.

It was all so familiar. A lump formed in his throat and lodged there. He missed those carefree days of Quidditch and Potions. Of taunting...well. He had liked palming about with Crabbe and Goyle. But thoughts of them now—especially Vincent Crabbe—only made him shudder. Who knew the man was capable of such viciousness? Of course that was Draco's fault too, ultimately. Crabbe hung around him, seeing firsthand the things Draco was doing. The man was a brute. But he didn't deserve to die the way he had.

Hagrid's hut came into view and Draco sucked up his courage. He had never liked Hagrid. Truth was he was afraid of him. Always had been. Wasn't it just like Potter to make friends with beasts like him and Centaurs and house-elves? How did the man do it, anyway? How could he look these *things* in the eye and not be frightened? Was it really only Gryffindor courage?

As soon as Draco was near enough to reach the stone porch a dog began to howl. Fang. Oh God.

Before he could knock, the great oaken door swung wide and there he was, that terrifying half-giant. He filled the entire doorway and frowned down on Draco, those beetle black eyes squinting out of that wide, hairy face.

Hagrid stared for a moment before his considerable brows rose. "Malfoy?"

"Y-yeah. H-hi, Hagrid."

Hagrid fumbled with his hands and blinked a few times. "Malfoy?" The great brute couldn't seem to fathom why Draco was on his doorstep.

Draco looked up at him determinedly. "Yes, it's me. Draco Malfoy. I guess...you never expected to see me at your door."

"No." His lips disappeared behind his frazzled beard.

"I won't keep you," said Draco, wondering if he needed to speak slowly so the man could understand him. "I just came to apologize to you. It was my fault they executed that Hippogriff of yours. Buckbeak. And I'm sorry."

"Who executed Buckbeak?" He swivelled his great head behind him as if the beast were standing right there.

Uh oh. Had the man gone off his rocker?

"Y-you know. Years ago? When Buckbeak struck me? It was flatly my fault. I was being a prat, as usual. And well...I'm sorry I got your...your *pet* executed."

Hagrid stared at Malfoy with wide, mad eyes. Draco's knees began to quake.

All at once, a sound came out of the man to chill Draco's bones. It took him a moment to realize that the giant was laughing.

"Buckbeak never got executed!"

Now he knew the man had lost it. He tried to speak in a calming voice. "I know it was hard for you. But try to remember—"

"Malfoy you right git. He was never killed. Harry Potter rescued him."

Draco's jaw fell. "*WHAT!*" Potter! Again!

"Aye. I don't rightly know how he done it, but he had Buckbeak fly Sirius Black to freedom. They took to each other like a man and his dog. Har! Man and his dog!" He slapped Draco on the back and Draco went flying.

He must have blacked out, because he was lying on Hagrid's enormous and smelly cot with the man sprinkling water at his face and looking down with concern. "You awright there, Malfoy?"

"I...I think so." He got up carefully and swung his legs over the edge of the cot. His feet didn't touch the floor. "I was apologizing—"

"Tha's right. But Buckbeak is fine. He's out back. Want to see him?"

"But...isn't that Hippogriff named Witherwings?"

Hagrid laughed again, a booming rockslide of a sound. "Tha's just what we called him to throw you lot off the scent. Tha's Buckbeak, awright."

"Oh." Draco rubbed the back of his neck. "I'm glad then." And strangely, he was.

Hagrid patted Malfoy carefully on the shoulder. "Tha' was a right nice thing you done coming here to apologize to the likes of me. I won't forget it."

Draco somehow got to his feet and made it to the door. "Then...you aren't angry with me anymore?" he asked the giant. Another weight lifted.

"Naw. Life's too good to waste on such. You should get on with yer life, too, Malfoy. Find yerself a nice lad and settle down."

"Do...what? A nice—what?"

Hagrid reddened. "Well now. I don't know about such things, but I reckon boys like you can find other...well...boys like you. I got nothing against it, understand'."

"Boys like—Hagrid! I am *not* gay!"

"Oh. I thought—seeings that you're...well." And made some sort of gesture with his body that insinuated much that, frankly, Draco *never* wanted to see again.

"I. Am. Not. GAY!"

"Right then," he said dubiously. "I'm sure you know what yer doin'."

Draco slipped down the threshold and stood on the top step. Hagrid waggled his fingers at him before closing the door.

Draco panted. What was *with* everyone? Did he have "Ponce" tattooed across his forehead or something? What the hell was going on?

He contemplated it for a time, before a breeze blew his cloak and reminded him that the day was drawing on. He had to get to the castle and get permission to get into the Headmistress' office.

He trudged up the long incline to the castle, to Hogwarts. The place he both loved and loathed.

Unbelievably, the great entry doors were standing open and cautiously, Draco entered. No one was in the entry hall, and as he peered around the corner into the Great Hall, he saw no one there either. It was eerie to see the school so empty. But then, after all, it was summer.

"So." He spoke aloud, looking up at the arched ceilings and the long corridors ahead of him. "I suppose I should apologize to you, too, Hogwarts. If you can hear me. I'm sorry I did the things I did here. I'm glad you're back the way you should be. I'll only be here for a bit and then I'll leave. Promise."

He half-expected the walls to answer him. Hogwarts itself always seemed alive to him somehow. He wouldn't be surprised if it *had* heard him.

He walked in measured steps all the way to the gargoyle statue guarding the headmistress' office. It was repaired and eyed him sourly.

"Um...hi. I don't know the password. I don't suppose you'll let me up, would you?"

The gargoyle shrugged and slid aside. Draco stared at it, amazed. He took a careful step forward and gingerly put his foot on the moving stair. It took him upward and, to his surprise, the door was open.

"P-professor?" He peered in. "P-professor McGonagall?" But she wasn't there. All that he saw was the office and the many paintings on the walls. Some of the occupants were missing out of their paintings, including Dumbledore. It was almost a relief.

But there was one remaining: the scowling countenance of Severus Snape.

"Well, well, well. Mr. Malfoy. I must say, I am quite surprised to see you here."

"Professor!" Draco hurried to the portrait that was hung in a lonely corner, away from the others. Harry Potter had lobbied long and hard to get his portrait ensconced in the headmaster's office, but McGonagall was allowed to choose where it hung.

"I'm so glad to see you, sir." And he was. He choked up a bit, in fact, and worked at controlling his emotions before he spoke again.

"To what do I owe the honour?" he asked, voice just as silky as it had been in life. A black brow rose over a dark eye.

"Well..." Draco sighed. "I'm sort of on a mission. I'm going to all the people I wronged with dark magic and telling them I'm sorry."

"Looking for forgiveness?" He said the last word with a grimace.

"I don't know. So far, everyone's been kind of nice. But I don't expect it to last."

"As well you should. Do you come to me, then?" He seemed amused at this prospect.

"Well...yeah. I mean, it was my fault you had to kill Dumbledore."

"You're such a little fool, Draco. You've always been a little fool. Your father did you no favours spoiling you rotten."

"Don't talk about my father like that," he said, but there was no fire behind the comment. He had long since given up blaming his father for his own misdeeds of defending his father for his.

Snape sneered. "Could it be? Have you learned a little humility at last?"

Draco shrugged. "I don't know, sir. I'm not sure I know what that really is. I don't think I could recognize it in myself."

Snape looked at him thoughtfully. "You are asking for my forgiveness, then?"

"Yes. I don't expect you'll—"

"Silence! And listen for once, you twit. I killed Dumbledore on *his* orders, not yours."

"I know, but I—"

"If I could still take points, Malfoy, I would! Now be quiet! As I was saying, the Dark Lord forced you to do this. It was not your own idea. He *forced* you to do it. He threatened your parents to *make* you do it. And he *never, ever* expected you to succeed."

Draco had known all that, but it never felt as if he wasn't somehow complicit.

"You obviously couldn't do it."

"Which made *you* have to, sir! Don't you see!"

Snape pinched the bridge of his considerable nose and squeezed his eyes shut. "I thought you were at least a hairsbreadth smarter than Potter, but I am seeing no evidence of that."

"All right, all right. I get it!" Draco leaned against the wall, feeling the cold stone permeate through his robes. "So you *do* forgive me, then?"

"If there was ought to forgive, I would."

"Okay." Draco was feeling better and better. He couldn't actually believe everyone was being so nice to him. He began to wonder if there was something he was missing from all this.

"I suppose you would like also to speak to Dumbledore?"

Draco glanced back to the portrait that hung behind the headmistress' chair. "It's empty," he said.

"I can persuade him to return." And he, too, disappeared into his frame.

Draco was about to tell him not to. He didn't want to face Dumbledore just yet. It terrified him, in fact. He decided that the best course of action was to turn tail and run, and he pivoted to do just that when an all too familiar voice said, "Draco, my boy! What a pleasant surprise!"

The voice stabbed at his heart. He didn't know, he hadn't realized how much he had really liked the old coot. And then when the whole sordid story came to light, he felt even worse about it. He felt almost as manipulated as Harry Potter probably felt. Though, admittedly, the Boy Who Lived Yet Again was most likely feeling a bit more put upon.

Slowly, Draco turned back. And there he was. A smile curved his moustache and his blue eyes twinkled behind his half-moon spectacles. "Don't be shy, my boy. Come closer."

But Draco didn't want to come closer. His knees had started to buckle as it was. Maybe this hadn't been the best of ideas.

But he bowed his head to it. He was here. He might as well get it over with. He trudged forward, each step heavy and slow as if dragging a load of chains behind him. When he came to rest below Dumbledore's portrait, the old wizard made a satisfied sound. "My, you've grown, haven't you. You look to be a fine young man, Draco."

"But I'm not a fine young man," he said with despair. "I'm nothing like a fine young man."

"Now, now. You mustn't say that. You mustn't think it. After all, why have you come? To make amends, eh? Anyone else without a sliver of character would never take the time."

"The Ministry is making me do it."

"Make *you*? A *Malfoy*? Do what he doesn't desire to do? I hardly think so."

Draco shrugged in reply. He didn't seem to know anything anymore.

"Severus told me that you apologized to him and seem to have every intention of doing so to me as well. Let me just say, that there is no reason whatsoever for you to offer me such a boon. I have not been offended in the least with your actions; actions that were forced upon you by Voldemort. But Draco, as I told you before that night on the Astronomy Tower, the ultimate decision was up to you. I saw you lower your wand. I knew you could not kill me. I knew you could not kill anyone. And you have proven me correct."

Draco was going to say he was a failure. But failing to kill was in fact a victory, he supposed. It hadn't seemed like it at the time, however.

His face was wet and he tasted saltiness at the corners of his mouth where the tears tracked. "I didn't want to," he whispered.

"Of course you didn't. And your soul is perfectly in tact. I'm very proud of you."

"But you don't know—you don't know what happened later—"

"Of course I know, Draco. I know about the Room of Requirement and I know about what you had to endure at Malfoy Manor. And I am still proud of you."

Something inside him snapped. "*HOW CAN YOU BE PROUD OF ME!* I...I schemed! I *Crucioed* people! I—I—"

"By your own choice?"

"The scheming. I chose to do that. I've been doing it since first year."

"Scheming might be one thing, Draco, but carrying out one's schemes is quite another. But so this meeting of ours won't be an entirely wasted effort, allow me to say—quite unnecessarily—that I forgive you."

"No! You can't! What's *wrong* with everyone!" Some of the headmasters had returned to their portraits and they were looking down at him curiously. "Everyone is forgiving me! They're all completely barking mad! I do not deserve to be forgiven!"

"Forgive *me*, Draco. For I am at a loss as to why you are seeking forgiveness if you do not expect to receive it."

"Because! It's penance. It's recompense. It's...*something*. To say that I'm sorry to the Wizarding world, at least a small part of it."

"Who is left on your list?"

Never mind how Dumbledore even knew there was a list. Draco dragged it out of the pocket in his robes and unfolded the parchment. "There's...um...Katie Bell, Ron Weasley, Mr. Ollivander, Luna Lovegood, Bill Weasley, and...and...H-harry Potter." He lowered the parchment. He just realized his wish was going to come true. There were very few left on this list who would forgive him.

Unless they, too, were utterly insane.

"I see," said Dumbledore, identifying the problem at the same time. "Well. You have your work cut out for you. But I applaud you your attempting it at all. I think you will have trouble particularly with Katie Bell and Ron Weasley. Mr. Ollivander is a very forgiving soul as is Miss Lovegood. Bill Weasley may very well empathize with your past predicament. And as for Harry Potter...well. I happen to know he has harboured a secret crush for you for a number of years. I might suggest this as a perfect opportunity for the two of you to bury your differences and finally come together as you should have done years ago."

Draco blinked. "How's that again?"

Dumbledore chuckled. "Come now, Draco. It is surely no secret, your homosexuality. It is nothing to fear in the Wizarding world today. Back in my day, it was still a thing to be silenced. I was fearful myself of 'coming out', I believe the term is."

There was a strange ringing in his ears. Draco wasn't certain if he could hear anything correctly. Especially when his legs were feeling as if they were hit with a Jelly-legs Curse. He sat on the nearest thing...which ended up being the floor.

"Y-you're...you're...g-gay?"

"Yes, dear boy. Though I did not have the opportunities of this generation. A pity. I loved only once. And I regret to this day never having sought another. Don't make that same mistake. Seek out Harry Potter."

"I'm not gay," he said feebly.

Dumbledore's brows rose. "Oh?" He smiled. "Well, I wouldn't worry about it. Some of us are late bloomers."

Barking mad. The lot of them. Draco picked himself up. "I'm...going to go now."

"Well, good-bye, dear boy. Come visit me anytime you like."

Oh yes. That was big in Draco's future plans. "G-good-bye, Headmaster. And...thank you."

"Not at all, not at all. But remember what I said about Harry Potter. The two of you have been spoiling for each other for years. I think it about time one of you made a move."

No use in telling the old geezer again that he wasn't gay. He wondered if it was his cologne or perhaps the way he wore his hair or the cut of his robes.

"Barking mad," he muttered, and wandered out of the office.

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It wasn't so easy locating Katie Bell. He found her in the West Country and located the small cottage that she and her parents inhabited. But instead of walking up to the front door, he hid in the shrubbery across the lane and watched the house, hoping to catch her alone. He waited there for two bloody days before she emerged by herself with a basket on her arm, obviously heading for the village market.

Draco waited until she was halfway there to reveal himself. Her wand was out before he had a chance to speak and aimed it at his chest. "Malfoy?" She seemed surprised.

Draco was amazed at her reflexes. He raised his empty hands to show he meant no harm.

"Yeah, it's me. Um...hi."

"What the hell are you doing stalking me? Haven't you hurt me enough?"

Much better. Here was someone being completely honest about their feelings. "I know. That's why I'm here. To make amends. To apologize."

She cocked her head. Her wand stayed steady. "You are *Draco* Malfoy, right?"

He nodded. "The same. Well, not quite the same these days. I'm really trying to make amends to everyone I've offended. Really. I mean, I know I can't ever really make up for it but I'm trying. Saying I'm sorry. I mean it, too."

She continued staring at him, eyes squinting. "That's...so unlike you."

"Isn't it, though. Look, I was a right prat. I know that. And using the *Imperius* on you was...well...as they say, unforgivable, but—"

"I heard that Voldemort threatened your family."

Not her too! "Yes. It's true."

"I wonder what I would have done." Her wand lowered and with a thoughtful expression, she tucked it away in her robe sleeve.

"It's different for you, though. You're a Gryffindor. You probably would have done something noble."

"Let my family die? No one's that noble, Malfoy."

Funny. He never thought about it that way. "Still," he said. "It doesn't change the fact that I nearly killed you."

"But under the same circumstances. I guess...given that...you *could* be forgiven."

"Are you mental? Are you actually saying—"

"Aren't you asking for forgiveness? Then I wouldn't start calling me mental if you want that absolution, you great prat."

Draco shut his mouth and stared at her.

She sighed. "It seems like forever ago now. That was sixth year. I missed a lot of Quidditch that year. That did piss me off." She fell into her own reverie while Draco waited. Her gaze fell on him again, seeming to remember he was there. "You know, Malfoy, maybe if you hadn't been in the closet you wouldn't have been such a prick."

"I AM *NOT*—" Oh fuck it. He lifted his arms in surrender. Fine. If they all wanted to think he was gay he'd let them. He couldn't seem to disabuse any of them anyway.

She patted his arm. "Yeah. I guess I forgive you. Mission accomplished. Now, if you don't mind, I really don't feel like paling about with you. So—and I mean this in the nicest of ways—shove off, would you?"

She left Draco in the middle of the road as she continued on her way.

* * *

Draco was staying in a Wizarding inn not too far from the Lovegoods. He stuck his head in the fireplace and called for Quiggley. "I don't know if I can do this, Quiggley. I really don't."

"Nonsense. You're doing far better than I thought you would. And you seem to be connecting with these individuals in unexpected ways."

"But I so want to curse something. I really do. And everyone thinks I'm gay and I want to hex them all for it."

"Now steady on, Draco. You're doing fine. I'm glad you contacted me. You did the right thing. Remember those breathing exercises we talked about? I think this might be the perfect time to try them out."

Breathing exercises? What the hell? Oh yeah. Right. Those stupid, idiotic breathing exercises.

"I think you should get right to it, Draco. And as for the other thing, well. There is absolutely nothing wrong with being gay."

"But—" Draco took one of those deep, cleansing breaths and let it out real slow. "Yeah," he snipped. "Got it." And he ended the Firecall.

* * *

Luna answered the door and blinked at Draco. "Oh. Hello, Draco," she said in that dreamy way of hers, as if Draco knocked on her door everyday.

She stepped back to let him in or maybe she just forgot to close the door. He peered in and then stepped through, wondering what to expect.

"It's all right," she said in that slow voice. "You can come in. My father isn't here right now. Would you like a cup of tea?"

"Er...no thank you. I'll just be brief. I came to apologize to you for...you know. Imprisoning you at Malfoy Manor."

"Oh that's all right." She turned on her heel and headed for what appeared to be a kitchen. He waited, but it didn't appear that she was coming back. He followed her and she was sitting at her table setting out biscuits and waiting for the kettle to boil.

"Lovegood, I don't think you heard me. I said I was apologizing for imprisoning you and...and for the *Cruciatus*...thing."

She looked up at him with her strange, bugged-out eyes. "I heard you. And I forgive you. It couldn't have been easy being on Voldemort's bad side, could it? I heard him threaten you. I understand. Perfectly."

He had expected it from her but it was still strange hearing it firsthand. And when he had Apparated not long after to Diagon Alley and crept over to Ollivander's, he wondered how *he* would take it. He had heard that the man had to be kept in St. Mungo's a long time to get over his torture.

It was the end of the day and Ollivander was set to close up any minute. Draco hid under his hood and slipped into the shop.

No one was behind the counter, but Draco heard a voice coming from the backroom. "Hawthorn, unicorn hair, ten inches, springy. That could only mean one person."

He parted the curtain and shuffled out, lifting rheumy eyes toward Draco. "Mr. Malfoy? What brings you to my humble shop?"

His face was unreadable. Draco remembered Ollivander as somewhat cheerful, especially where wands were concerned. But perhaps the man had changed since his encounter with Voldemort.

"Mr. Ollivander..." Draco couldn't help it. All the memories of the man's screams, Voldemort's constant and unremitting questioning, forcing Draco to send the *Cruciatus* on him, and Draco's bringing down meagre food to the prisoners Ollivander and Luna, sneaking scraps onto a tray. He burst into tears and buried his face in his hands. "I'm so sorry!" he sobbed between his fingers. "I'm so, so sorry!" He had to get out. Blindly, Draco made his way to the door and pushed it open, trying to escape. But a surprisingly strong hand grasped his wrist and halted his retreat.

"Mr. Malfoy," he said in a kindly tone. "My dear Mr. Malfoy." He let Draco cry until, exhausted, Draco leaned back against the wall of the shop, snorting through a nose dammed with snot. He wiped his robe inelegantly under his reddened nose.

"Is that why you've come, young man? To tell me you're sorry? Dear, dear. Such troubled times. I do not understand the whole sad history of the Malfoys—indeed, I find such information tedious at best. But I do know the evidence of my own eyes. What I saw at Malfoy Manor was nothing but fear. You and your parents attempted to shield yourselves. And who could blame you. Caught in a web with no release in sight. Death at every turn. I must admit, I expected to be killed each day, each hour. But you yourself brought us food. I do not recall hearing an order from Voldemort to do so. Perhaps you did this of your own accord?" When Draco merely lowered his eyes, Ollivander sighed. "Ah. I thought as much." He settled his gaze on Draco. "You know, I doubt Harry Potter would have been able to use your wand so successfully had you been as dark a wizard as you perceived yourself to be. The wand knows, my boy. The wand chooses the wizard. And I knew that when I placed that hawthorn wand into your hands eighteen years ago that it would not be used for ill. Bad deeds you may have done. I do not know what you did in your Hogwarts career. But that wand was destined for greatness and greatness it performed. The wand knows, young man. It always knows."

Draco left the shop with a complementary bottle of wand polish which he clutched against his chest as if it were diamonds.

* * *

Draco crept up to Shell Cottage to the sound of the roaring surf in his ears. The wind was cold and salty off the sea, and when he finally saw the cottage ahead, he nearly stumbled over a large white stone set before a mound of flowers. Etched on the weathered stone was the inscription:

HERE LIES DOBBY, A FREE ELF

Draco stepped back aghast. Dobby? His Dobby? He was dead? And buried here? Draco sank to his knees on the little grave, for this is what it surely was. A sick feeling rumbled in his belly. Dobby. The Malfoy house-elf. He practically raised Draco and Draco had been...Draco had been..."Really rotten to you. Oh God. And there's nothing I can do about it now." He ran his hand over the stone. "Harry Potter freed you, didn't he? And I bet he did this." He touched the etching in the stone and knew in the core of his being that this was Potter's doing. Who else could it be? Why was Harry Potter present in counterpoint to all the important events in Draco's life? Was there something to this connection thing? Not just the wand like Ollivander said. But what about this crush Potter was supposed to have? That couldn't possibly be true, could it? The idea of it sparked a warm glow in his gut, relieving a bit of the ache there for his old house-elf.

A shadow fell over the stone and Draco looked up through tear-blurred eyes.

A tall ginger-haired man with horrific scarring on his face was staring down at him and beside him was another ginger-haired boy that was none other than Ron Weasley.

"Draco effing Malfoy?" cried Ron. "What the hell?"

Bill—or so Draco supposed the older, taller man to be—put his hand on Ron’s chest, preventing him from approaching Draco and probably from throttling him. Draco was certainly at their mercy. He was on the ground already and wandless. He looked up at them and said nothing.

“So this is Draco Malfoy,” said Bill. “And why are you here trespassing on my property?”

Draco looked down once more to Dobby’s grave before dusting off his hands and slowly getting to his feet.

“I came here looking for you, Mr. Weasley. And you too, Ron. I’m here to apologize to you both for my past misdeeds.”

“Past misdeeds’?” cried Ron. “Like trying to kill me with poisoned wine and nearly getting my brother killed? You call those ‘misdeeds’? I say we hex the prat.”

Bill looked speculatively from one to the other. “Maybe we should discuss this inside.”

“Don’t be daft, Bill. Don’t let him in your house. He’s probably up to something.”

“Oh yes, Weasley, because it is my every desire to foul up your life at every turn,” sneered Draco. Dammit. He knew Weasley would be a prat. Well, he finally found someone unwilling to forgive. Except for the fact that it was a Weasley and it pissed him off royally! “Do you think I spend my time scheming things about *you*?”

“Yes.” He raised his chin and his freckled face wore a satisfied sneer.

Draco shook his head. “You know bloody well I am in no position to do anything to anyone. I’m here for a specific reason.”

“And what is that?” asked the younger Weasley, arms crossed tightly over his puffed out chest.

Draco almost yelled it but held back. After all, it wouldn’t do to start yelling. “I told you. I’m...I’m here to...apologize. Nothing more than that. I’m trying to tell you that I’m sorry for all that. For almost getting you killed.”

"Three times, isn't it?"

"Three?"

"Yeah. The poisoned wine," said Ron, ticking them off on his fingers. "Being captured and taken to Malfoy Manor to be skewered by Moldymort, and the Room of Requirement."

"I was trying to stop Crabbe—!"

"And a good job you did, too."

"What about you?" he cried, leaning menacingly forward. "'If we die for them, I'll kill you Harry.' That was awfully nice, wasn't it?"

"All's fair in war, Malfoy."

Draco grumbled. That wasn't even his fault. Stupid Crabbe.

Bill looked from one to the other. "Can I say something here?"

"Go on," said Ron, still glaring murderously at Draco.

"What happened to me...well. It could have been anyone. Maybe it was best it did happen to me and not some student, you know. I was better able to take it. And it was war. And as I understand it, Malfoy here was coerced into letting the Death Eaters into Hogwarts. So I don't see that it was really too much his fault. A lot of people probably had to do a lot of things they didn't want to because of fear. Look at Xenophilius Lovegood. Almost packed the lot of you off to the Death Eaters because of his daughter. And he isn't exactly the type."

"But this git is," said Ron, gesturing toward Draco. "He's been wreaking havoc on us since first year. Mr. Dark Magic himself."

"But I'm trying to change!" he cried. He shut his lips. He hadn't wanted to blurt that out. Fisting his hands at his sides he turned toward Bill. "Thank you for understanding. It doesn't make what happened any less horrific. I...I didn't know they were bringing Greyback. He was horrible. I'm sorry."

"Well, I'm not as beautiful as I once was," said Bill with a smirk. At least Draco thought it was a smirk under the scarring and horrible loose flesh. "But I still got my girl and we have a good life here. It's better than the alternative, isn't it?" He nudged his brother with his elbow. "Isn't it time you two get over your schoolboy squabbles? Looks like Draco is trying to make a clean breast of it."

"What's in it for me?" whined Ron.

"The satisfaction that he knows he's a prat," said Bill with a smile. "That you're famous and he's infamous. That you've got your Order of Merlin and your girl, and he's got...what is it you've got, Malfoy?"

"Nothing," he answered sullenly.

"There, you see. Seems like you got a lot out of the deal, Ron."

Ron began to smile. "Yeah. I guess so. Having all that money really didn't make life better for you, did it, Ferret?"

"Not much," he said quietly.

"So you admit you're a prat, then. And a git."

He sighed. When would the misery end? When could he just crawl home and hide himself under the covers? "Yes, Weasley. I'm the biggest prat and the lowliest git you've ever met. And believe me, I ought to know."

"Well now!" Ron smiled in glee and rubbed his hands together. "This is turning out to be quite a good day, isn't it? Wish Harry was here to see this. I suppose you're off to him next, eh?"

He lowered his face again. Butterflies were battering against his belly. "I guess."

With a satisfied nod, Ron said, "Then I guess I forgive you."

"*What?*" Draco whipped his head up. "You're fucking mental, Weasley! You know that?"

"Heroes get to be magnanimous," he said loftily. "It's the villains who grovel." He saluted Draco and turned. "See you round, Malfoy."

Bill didn't turn right away. He kept looking at Draco quizzically. "You know," he said softly, "Harry's had a thing for you. I hope you're nicer to him. Play your cards right and you two could end up being an item."

There was little point in the I'm-not-gay tennis match, so Draco kept silent.

"He's at Number 12 Grimmauld Place, in case you're wondering. Should I owl him to expect you?"

"N-no! I'm not going right away. I...no."

Bill nodded. "Fair enough. Take care, Malfoy. I think you've turned a corner. Best to keep on the straight and narrow from now on, eh?"

He watched Bill walk back to the house, wondering what it was about these people of the Light.

* * *

He couldn't face it. He didn't want to go. He was the last one on the list and he didn't think he could really do it. Potter. He owed him so much. Maybe even a life debt. He didn't want to look him in the eye, see him scowl. Of all the people on his list, Potter was the one who had the most right to hex him into oblivion and Draco was terrified he might just do it.

He talked to his sponsor four times in the last two days and each time the man kept encouraging him to contact Potter. But Draco was scared. What about this "crush" the man was supposed to have? Where did that come from? Draco had never noticed that at school. Wasn't he with that Weasley girl? They snogged enough at school. Wasn't Potter straight? Not according to all his friends and that poufter Headmaster. Who knew? Was everyone gay all of a sudden? And why the hell did everyone think Draco was gay?

Draco looked at himself in the mirror. He looked the same as he always had. Maybe he was thinner and his eyes a little more sunken and maybe his hair wasn't as lustrous as it used to be, but he didn't see that he *looked* gay. He liked girls. Plenty of them. There was Parkinson. Well, he didn't really *like* her. She was just convenient. But there were plenty more he found attractive. There was...was...

Okay, just because he couldn't think of any didn't mean anything. He'd been busy, right? Being terrified by the Dark Lord and then this Dark Arts-aholic association. He just hadn't been into the relationship thing. What about that buxom witch in the Dark Arts-aholic meeting? She was all right. Big breasts. Blokes were supposed to like that. Draco didn't particularly care for them but maybe that just wasn't his type. Whatever his type was.

He was getting himself worked up over nothing. First things first. He had to see Potter and get it over with. He might not even survive it, so the rest might all be moot.

Two days later, he finally got up the courage to Apparate outside Grimmauld Place. His mouth was dry and he felt a little sick. Terror tended to do that to him. He walked slowly up to the door. Taking a deep breath and saying one last farewell to the world, he raised his hand and knocked.

Nothing happened at first and he was about to knock a second time when the door opened and the ugliest house-elf he ever saw stood there. "Well?" the little beast croaked.

"I...er...I've come to see H-harry Potter."

"You is that Malfoy boy." And a wicked glint of glee sparkled in the creature's bulbous eye. He Disapparated with a loud pop and it wasn't long until someone was coming down the stairs at double time. Potter landed on the bottom step out of breath and stared at Draco. "I'll be damned," he said. "Ron was right. Well, I guess you'd best come in."

Do I have to? But it seemed appropriate. If Potter wanted to hex him apart he couldn't very well do it where Muggles could see him. Draco dragged his feet forward and stepped into the foyer and then followed Potter into a sunny sitting room that looked to be decorated by a teenager. Well, he supposed it was.

There were empty take-away cartons strewn about, Quidditch posters on the walls covering what looked-like curse marks, and strange knick-knacks that appeared to be gifts by fans. Harry gathered dirty laundry from a chair and gestured Draco to sit.

Draco did as told and waited. Harry similarly emptied another chair and sat opposite. "So I heard you were on this journey to apologize to everyone you've ever met," said Harry.

The old fury came back, stifling his initial terror. "As usual, Scarhead, you've got it wrong." Oops. He hadn't meant to call him that. He winced, waiting for the hex.

Harry chuckled. "Then maybe you're just hitting the highlights. Am I the last on your list?"

Draco slumped again. "Yeah."

"Oh." Harry sat back, folding his hands on his stomach. "I'm ready then."

This wasn't what Draco expected. He launched from the chair and paced. "Look, why don't we just cut to the chase. Why don't you just hex me and get it over with. I'll go quietly. Honest. I know I deserve it."

"Whoa, there." Harry had a funny look on his face. "What makes you think I want to hex you?"

"Because!" He sat again, wringing his hands between his spread knees. "I was miserable to you for years. You hated me, and I was a perfect prat to you. I got you into trouble. I...I...did all sorts of dastardly things—" *No! Don't choke up! For Merlin's sake don't cry!* But he couldn't help it. The tears came and he was blubbing in front of Potter. His humiliation was complete.

He made horrible choking sobs for a few moments before a gentle hand stroked his back and a voice above him—one he'd never heard from the boy before—whispered softly to his ear. "It's all right, Draco. I know. I do. We were different people then. I know what Voldemort was capable of. Believe me."

Draco wiped his face and tried to control himself. So Potter was going to do it, too. He was bloody well going to forgive him. The whole of the Wizarding world had gone insane. It was official. And Draco was the only one left with any sense at all. How ironic.

Harry called for his house-elf—which seemed really rude to just yell “Creature!” like that, even for Potter—and the beast brought Draco a cup of tea.

“How do you take it, Malfoy?” asked Harry, proffering sugar and a milk jug.

Draco sat with the saucer in his hand, staring at Harry Potter. “Sh-sugar and milk.” Harry did the honours and then vanished both sugar bowl and milk. He sat and scooted his chair closer to Draco. The cup shook in Draco’s hand. He took a sip and the hot liquid served to calm him a bit. “I don’t even know where to begin.”

“Well let me be the first,” said Potter. “I’m sorry for snubbing you on the train.”

Draco nearly dropped the cup. “*What?* You’re joking.”

“No. It was rude, I know, but you just didn’t seem like the type of bloke I wanted to get to know. I didn’t realize how much trouble it would start between us.”

Draco marshalled his memories and tried to recall if that indeed was the beginning of the trouble. It might have been. And his father certainly encouraged this animosity later, although he had warned Draco not to appear to be Potter’s enemy at the beginning. That was Draco’s own doing. He just couldn’t help himself. It was that Dark Arts addiction again.

He sighed. “I guess. It hurt my feelings, I suppose.”

Harry shrugged. “That was a long time ago, wasn’t it? I’ve since changed my mind about you.” And he blushed.

Oh God. Was Potter really gay? “Look, Potter. There’s this rumour about you. Everyone’s saying that you’re...um...you know. Bent.”

Harry laughed uncomfortably. “Everyone, eh? Well, that’s the cat out of the bag.” He rubbed the back of his neck.

Draco's eyes widened. He didn't deny it! "So...you are?"

He grinned at Draco. It seemed to make his whole face glow. Draco was hard-pressed to recall a time when he saw Potter smile. Except when he'd caught the Snitch. Yes, it looked just like that on his face. "Yeah. I prefer 'gay' to 'bent', though, just so you know."

"Right." Draco watched the many emotions changing Harry's features.

"You know," said Potter, "I always thought *you* were, long before I knew about myself."

"But I'm not!" said Draco vehemently.

"Really?" Harry's face fell. "Oh. I always thought *you* were."

"No." Why did Harry's disappointment cause such an ache in Draco's chest?

"Well damn," said Harry. He ran his hand through his hair and stood up. He yelled "Creature!" again and the elf brought him some tea. Harry sipped his silently, leaning on the mantle.

"Everyone's been saying," said Draco cautiously, putting his tea aside, "that you've had a crush on me."

Harry turned a bright scarlet colour. "They have? Well, that's a lot of people I have to hex, isn't it."

"So...you don't."

He took a sip and tucked the saucer and cup on the mantle beside a plastic Muggle clock that was in the shape of a cartoon mouse in red shorts and yellow shoes. "Beside the point, isn't it?" He turned around and faced Draco. His cheeks were still tinged pink. "Look, I forgive you. I guess you're free to go, then."

That was it? Draco got to his feet. "But I have so much to say—"

"You don't need to." He looked as if he was desperately in need of escape. He backed toward the archway.

"But I want to make it up to you."

He chuckled half-heartedly. "Don't see how."

"I'll let you kiss me!"

Draco slammed his hand over his mouth. Why had he said that?

Harry was looking at him with sudden longing. "Yeah?"

"Er...."

Harry bobbed his head. "I can see you don't mean that."

"No," he said hurriedly, not knowing where the hell this courage was coming from. He could barely speak from gasping. "I do mean it. It's the least I can do."

"A pity kiss? That's just sad."

"No. I...don't know. Listen, Potter. It would make you happy, right? And I don't know any other way. You d-deserve something. I can do this. I *want* to do this."

Harry's eyes widened. Draco saw his chest heave. He really did have it bad for Draco. The thought made Draco's stomach squirm and not in a bad way.

"Come on," said Draco, voice unsteady. "Where's that Gryffindor courage?"

Harry straightened his shoulders. "You sure?" He took a step closer.

NO. "Yes."

Harry took another step closer. "I didn't know Slytherins had bollocks."

"When necessary," he squeaked.

Harry was standing right in front of him now. "Since it's the only one I'll likely get from you, I'd like to make it a good one."

"O-okay." Draco began to tremble.

Harry took one more step forward into Draco's personal space. He felt heat from the man's body and the warmth of his hands slide up Draco's face. When he cupped Draco's jaw, he knew there was no escaping now. Harry's breath was on Draco's face. Draco didn't know where to look: either those amazing eyes or those lips, parted and wet.

Harry leaned in, and Draco closed his eyes. It would be over soon. How bad could it be?

Lips touched his and they were soft and warm. He jerked back at the suddenness of it, but then made himself stand there. Harry's lips were gentle and they explored Draco's almost tentatively at first. Draco never imagined a man's lips would be soft, but really, if he had thought about it, why would they be anything else? A kiss was just a kiss, wasn't it?

But the idea that this was Harry Potter kissing him sort of took it to new realms. For one, it wasn't disgusting as he thought it might be. In fact, it was a bit exciting. That a wizard of his power and stature actually *wanted* to kiss him, was kissing him, seemed to be a bit of a turn on. Which was strange because he never imagined anything about a boy was a turn on.

Harry's mouth opened and covered Draco's. His tongue, warm and wet, poked in, just touching Draco's as if asking permission. Draco didn't know what to do. He'd never actually been kissed like this. So he just allowed it, wondering what Harry might do next.

Harry's tongue slowly explored his mouth, slithering over his tongue and taking control. It travelled over the roof of his mouth and withdrew so that he could suck on Draco's lips and chew them a bit. Then that warm muscle resumed its tour of Draco's mouth. Draco hadn't realized he had opened his mouth wider to let it in. He also couldn't quite understand why this was turning him on so much. *It was just the kiss*, he told himself. Could have just as easily been a girl. But that thought brought him no pleasure. The only pleasure he got was concentrating on the kiss itself, and knowing it was Harry Potter.

Draco raised his hands and wrapped them around Harry's waist. For some reason, he pulled him forward, wanting to feel his body against the other wizard's. And what he felt was a shock, though it shouldn't have been. A hardness in Harry's trousers could only be one thing, and it was crushed against Draco's thigh, not too far from his own erection.

Erection? Wait—

He tore himself away from the kiss and panted on Harry's shoulder.

"Too much?" panted Harry.

"No. It was...fine."

Harry withdrew, but still kept Draco's face in his hands. "The truth? I did have a crush. Do, actually. But I won't bother you anymore. Thanks for coming." With that, he released Draco and stepped back.

It seemed to be all that was holding Draco on his feet. He swayed and almost fell until he marshalled himself again and stared open-mouthed at the Gryffindor who was grinning back at him.

"All is forgiven, Draco. Creature will show you out."

The ugly house-elf appeared, diluting the strange warm suspension Draco had been drifting in.

* * *

When Draco got home, he lay in bed, staring up at the canopy. He Firecalled Quiggley to tell him he'd done it, completed his list, and the sponsor was most impressed with him. He said he would definitely shoot off a letter to the Ministry and that Draco's obligations to the association were now only once every few months. That was a relief. Draco didn't feel the need to perform any dark magic at the moment. He just wanted to be left alone.

His fingers reached up to his lips again, still feeling a tingle where Harry Potter kissed him. And just why wasn't that disgusting him, he wondered for the umpteenth time. Blimey. What was wrong with him? He was finally free. Everyone—astonishingly—had forgiven him, even Weasley! So why was he feeling bereft?

It was Potter. Potter forgave him far too quickly. There was so much to be forgiven for. He just felt dissatisfied with it. "Stupid Potter!" he growled. Damn him. What good revenge that was, leaving Draco in the lurch like that, just forgiving him everything without Draco even getting to say anything. Well, this was not to be borne! He'd just have to go over there tomorrow and apologize again. Yeah! That would teach the prat!

* * *

Draco rang the bell and pushed past the house-elf. "Potter! Potter, I want to talk to you."

Harry scrambled in from the other room, amazement on his face. "Malfoy? What are you doing here?"

"You can't just bloody well forgive wholesale everything I've ever done to you. It isn't right. I want to go over a few things and get the air cleared."

Harry had that gormless look on his face he used to wear in school. It annoyed Draco. "Maybe some tea would be nice," Draco hinted so the git would wake up.

"Oh. Right. Um...Creature!"

"You know, Potter, the *thing* probably has a name. I'm surprised at you, really."

He stared at Draco before he burst out laughing. "But that *is* his name. Kreacher. K-R-E-A-C-H-E-R. Kreacher. Get it?"

Draco felt his face redden. "Well you could have told me that before. Stupid elf name!"

Tea was laid and Draco sat opposite Harry. Harry poured and handed over the saucer. Draco didn't even know why he suggested it. He didn't want tea at the moment.

"So...um...Malfoy. Why are you here again?"

"It was a piss poor apology I made yesterday. I think you jumped the hex a bit on forgiving me. I mean, there's a long list."

Harry frowned and sipped his tea. He grabbed a handful of small, chocolate biscuits and threw a few into his mouth at once. He chewed thoughtfully before raising his eyes to Draco's. There was a sprinkling of crumbs now on his shirt.

Draco didn't know why he never really noticed Harry's eyes before. Most people had remarked on them over the years but he supposed he was blinded by jealousy and unwarranted hatred for the boy. But they were truly beautiful eyes. The green was surreal in its intensity, even behind his spectacles.

"Malfoy!"

"What?" Had Harry been talking to him while he was mooning over the man's eyes? Oh God.

"I was asking you how you wanted to proceed. Oh! You know, I forgot to apologize to you about getting your father sent to Azkaban."

"You're missing the point of this exercise, Potter. *You* aren't supposed to apologize to *me*. *I'm* supposed to apologize to *you*. It's a simple concept if you can tie your tiny brain around it." Gah! He did it again! He couldn't seem to stop insulting him. It was an addiction as bad as dark magic had been.

Potter seemed more amused than offended. "I know. I just thought I'd start the ball rolling."

"Okay. Then I'm apologizing for the whole Buckbeak thing. Though when I talked to Hagrid I discovered that—"

"You talked to Hagrid?"

"Yes. I apologized to him for—"

"You talked to Hagrid? *And* apologized?"

"I said I did. What's the problem?"

Harry smiled and shook his head. "I'm surprised, is all." He laughed giddily and stood up. He dragged Draco to his feet and before Draco could say anything, Harry grabbed him and kissed him soundly again. His warm lips stayed only a moment, but they covered his and sucked nicely on them before he released him completely. "Thanks for that," he said. "I'm sure Hagrid appreciated it. And so do I. You don't know how much."

Draco swayed. His heart was beating madly against his chest. That tingle again made him lift his hand and touch his mouth.

"Oh," said Harry. He blushed. "Sorry about that. I didn't think."

"So I owe you more," said Draco dazedly. "I owe you." Without thinking further about it, he reached up and with arms locking behind Harry's neck, he kissed the Gryffindor, inexpertly opening his mouth over the other's.

Harry moaned and kissed back, and they were embracing and kissing deeply, tongues mingling, lips pressed hard against the other.

Draco gasped for breath and drew back, his mouth only inches from Harry's. Harry's eyes were very close and Draco gazed warmly at them. "You have beautiful eyes," he blurted.

"So do you," Harry whispered.

"I do?"

"Yeah. They're soft, like a cloud. Always hiding something. I always wanted to know what was behind them."

He tasted Harry's breath. That was a strange sensation. He could feel his lips so close. So close. "I don't think I'm done kissing you."

"Good. I'm not done kissing you." They both closed the space between them, and their lips clasped again.

The sensation shot right down Draco's body to his groin, where it pooled into an aching sense of longing. His bollocks throbbed and his cock rose. All from kissing Potter? What the hell?

He pushed Harry away from him, staring at the man whose mouth was wet from Draco's mouth and tongue. Merlin's bollocks! What the hell was he doing?

"I have to go," he muttered and stumbled out the door.

* * *

No way. No way! He couldn't be gay. There was no chance in hell that he was gay. He was a Malfoy, for Merlin's sake. And Malfoys simply were not gay. That was all there was to it.

He paced in his room, going over the scene in his mind. Of course, the problem with going over the scene was that it made him incredibly hard. And it simply *couldn't* be making him hard because he wasn't gay, dammit!

So they're kissing was just some sort of manipulation of Potter again. God, and Draco did it without even having a plot! He was hopeless, that's what he was. He had to apologize all over again for that behaviour.

* * *

Waiting outside Potter's house, Draco couldn't stop fidgeting. His body seemed to be buzzing in anticipation. He went over it again in his mind. Apologize to Potter and then get the hell out and it would all be over. Simple.

This time Harry opened the door. And his face looked so forlorn that Draco's heart cried out to it. He lunged at Potter, throwing his arms around him and kissing him madly, almost sending the both of them crashing to the floor.

"I don't know what's the matter with me," gasped Draco, lips still skimming Harry's. "I've never been attracted to men before. But your kisses. My God—" He lost himself in Harry's mouth, submerging into the warmth, the taste.

"I've never kissed a boy before I kissed you," said Harry in a husky voice.

"Really?" said Draco between kisses. "Because—" *Kiss*. "It was absolutely—" *Kiss*. "The best I've ever—" *Kiss*. "Mmph—"

"Draco," Harry groaned. "You don't know how long I've wanted this."

"Oh my God, I'm so hard."

Harry slipped a hand down and to Draco's surprise, squeezed his erection through his trousers. Draco made a very loud squeak.

Harry pulled back to look at him. "Did you make that sound?"

"What?" He had no idea what Harry was talking about. All he knew, was that if Harry did that again, he'd come in his trousers. "Harry, can we...can we move this to the bedroom?"

Harry's face grew sober. "Are you sure about that?"

"No. I'm not sure about anything anymore. But all I know is, I want more of whatever it is you seem to be giving me."

Harry thrust his hips, grinding his groin into Malfoy's. Draco bit his lip and moaned. "I want to make you come, Draco," he growled into his ear and then sucked on his earlobe. Draco squeaked again. "I want to keep making you make that sound. I want to shag you senseless."

Draco kept sinking in and out of consciousness. Or at least it felt that way. His vision was blurry and his whole body was buzzing in tense anticipation of...*something*. But Harry's words did give him pause. "When you say 'shag' do you mean *shag*? Up the arse sort of thing?"

"Yup."

"With me being the recipient of said shagging?"

Harry nuzzled his neck. "Mmmm mmm."

"Oh." He began to get a little nervous. Kissing a bloke didn't quite seem as gay as getting shagged—what the hell was he thinking. *Kissing* a bloke didn't seem gay? So okay. Gay it is. But a shag?"

"Have you ever done this before?"

Those lips and teeth were finding a particularly sensitive spot at the nape of Draco's neck. "Nope."

"So...I'll be your first."

"And I'll be your first, Malfoy." He reached down again and squeezed Draco's bits. "Want to?"

"I guess." It was all a haze the stumbling up the stairs, the pulling off of clothes, the falling on the bed. Harry was persistent in his giving of pleasure with both hands and lips. Currently, he was sucking on one of Draco's nipples which, frankly, Draco never particularly knew was an erogenous zone. But the sensation was shooting straight to his balls. He didn't know if the sucking or the flicking of Harry's tongue was more exciting, but he just tucked it away as part of the whole sensual experience category and would peruse it later.

Harry's travelling hands were skimming down his torso and Draco writhed beneath him, taking everything the man was doling out. Why the hell hadn't they been doing this at school? This was *way* better than dark magic.

The hands continued to descend and while they did, Draco's hands began to touch, first at Harry's shoulders and then down his broad chest. It felt good to touch him, to feel his own palms skim over those hardened nipples.

But everything seemed to come to a standstill when Harry's hand wrapped around Draco's cock. His other drifted down to his sac and fondled it.

"Oh!" Draco seized up. No one had touched him there before. Far better than wanking. Harry had only to give it two strokes and he was coming hard. His balls seemed to want to empty years worth of pent up orgasms and he twitched and writhed, spurting long strings of it all over Harry Potter's hands.

When Draco could open his eyes again, Harry was looking at him, his glasses slightly askew. "Wow, Draco. That was brilliant!"

Draco was still trying to catch his breath. "Yeah. Bloody brilliant. Why didn't you let on before, Potter?"

"Never seemed the right time. And you didn't seem much as if you liked me."

"I didn't."

"So there you are."

"Why now?"

"May I remind you that it was you who came to my door kissing me."

"Oh yeah. To make amends."

"And you're doing a smashing job." He pushed his hand against his own dark erection. Draco looked at it for the first time. Well, blimey. He *did* like the way Potter's cock looked. Gay, gay, gay.

"So I suppose you want to shag me now."

"Uh huh."

So...what do we do?"

"I've got some oil here. To slick things up."

Draco tensed a bit. "Should I turn over—"

"No. I want to look at you."

"But how—"

"I'll show you."

"If you haven't done this before then how—"

"Ever hear of gay wanking mags, Malfoy?"

"Never thought much about it."

"You will from now on."

Harry wiped his hand on the sheets and grabbed a small potions bottle, tearing off the cork with his teeth and spitting it across the bed. He dumped a good dollop of the oily substance into his hand, rubbing some on his cock until it was shiny and slick. "Open your legs, Draco, and hold them up."

Embarrassed now, Draco opened his thighs and pulled them close to his chest. He got the picture, right enough. His whole package was on display, including his arse, now as wide open as his legs. Harry was looking down at it with a feral expression. "I've been wanting to get at this for ages," he muttered, seemingly to himself.

Draco felt his face get even warmer.

"I'm going to prepare you, okay?"

"How are you going to—" But that question was soon answered when Draco felt a finger prod him in a most unusual location.

"Merlin's pants!" Slowly, the wet finger circled the tight pucker of his arsehole. In a dreamy sort of way, it felt pretty good, if not a little strange. "Potter, that feels incredibly good."

"You know what would feel even better?"

"What?"

"If you called me 'Harry'."

Draco blushed again. Darn it. Yes, that might have been nice of him. "I'm sorry...Harry. I seem to apologize to you a lot."

"You'll make up for it." The tip of Harry's finger slid inside Draco down to his knuckle and Draco let out a gasp. "Are you all right?"

"Yes," he said tightly. Wow. That was odd. Felt just a bit clinical—no. Wait. Not when that finger was making those motions, going in circles and pushing in and out and gliding over just the edge of someth— "Oh *fuck!*"

Harry stopped. "Okay?"

"Fucking Merlin! Do that again!"

Harry slid his finger in. "You mean...this?"

"God! Yes!"

Harry did it a few more times and Draco watched his limp cock grow and rise. And then Harry slid in two fingers at once.

Draco choked a bit.

"Gosh, you're tight," said Harry in a voice that could just as easily have said, "I *love* chocolate."

"Feels weird," said Draco. "But good."

"Can I try three fingers?"

"Do you think it will fit?"

"It had better. I'm a little bigger than three fingers."

Draco looked down past his own erection at Harry's. Definitely thicker than three fingers. Harry began caressing Draco's sac, rolling the testicles in his fingers. "Yes, Harry," he purred. "Do it."

A third finger was inserted and it felt as if Harry was swirling them around. It was sort of uncomfortable but when he looked down at that bobbing cock of Potter's he didn't care what it felt like. "I think I'd like to go for it."

Harry stopped. "Go for it'?"

"Time to fuck me, Potter, okay? *Ca pice?*"

"Go for it. Got it." All the fingers slipped out and Draco felt a little inside out. But then he watched Harry get into position—that slickened, red cock aiming at him—and he held his breath. He pulled his sac out of the way and watched, thinking to himself that this was possibly the strangest thing he had ever done. Good thing only Potter wanted this as recompense. He'd damn well not give it up to the likes of Hagrid.

He felt the large dome of Harry's erection strain forward, stretching him impossibly wide. Draco grunted in pain, trying to open himself. Harry sunk forward and pushed.

"Wait, wait!" cried Draco. He panted, trying to breath. It was so thick, so full and it hurt like a sonofabitch.

Harry looked as if he could do little about waiting. "D-draco? C-can I go on?"

He began to feel a little used to it and nodded, holding tighter to his wide open thighs.

Harry fell forward, pushing all the way in with a deep groan. "Omigod, it feels fantastic!" he gasped.

Draco wasn't sure about that quite yet. But it was pretty amazing having Harry Potter hovering over him, Harry Potter deep inside him, Harry Potter leaning over to kiss *him*, Draco Malfoy. Light and dark, yin and yang, shagger and shaggee.

"I've got to move!" Harry declared. He pulled back a bit and thrust forward, his face contorting with lust.

Draco's nose was suddenly filled with the heady scent of arousal pouring off of Harry and the smell of his own spunk on himself and tangling in his pubic hair. He felt Harry's balls pat against his arse. He wished he could see it.

It didn't feel like it did before but he liked it nonetheless. It was very intimate. Something unexpected. Amazed with himself, he decided he liked looking up at Harry above him, making those faces as he pounded into Draco. Liked the soft grunts and groans the man uttered. Liked...*Harry*.

His lover suddenly grabbed his protruding cock and stroked it. "Oh!" Draco thrashed his head from side to side. Harry hit that spot inside him every now and then. But the stroking and the fullness and the feeling of power above him was overwhelming. "I love this!" he cried.

And Harry thrust deep into Draco and shouted, "I love *you!*" and came, jabbing his cock in and in and shuddering with eyes tightly clenched and mouth strained open in ecstasy.

It wasn't until Harry loosened and slithered down beside Draco, pulling out of him with a wave of sticky cum, that Draco turned to him with wide-eyed wonder. That was by far the most wonderful thing to have ever happened to Draco. And here it was Harry Potter giving it to him, in every sense.

Harry panted, licked his lips, and turned to Draco.

"Did you mean it?" asked Draco quietly.

"Did I mean wh—oh." Harry blushed crimson and turned away, ostensibly to push up his glasses. "Well." He turned back to Draco with a sheepish expression. Draco thought it was adorable. "Yeah. I did. But you have to understand, I've wanted you for a long time."

"I don't know, Potter. You seem a little needy to me."

Harry frowned for a moment until he caught on and narrowed his eyes. "Needy? What about you? Didn't you say you had a lot of apologizing to me to do?"

"Ye-e-e-s."

He grabbed Draco and straddled him. He wrestled his wrists above his head and arched down to kiss him on the mouth. "It seems to me that you will be doing this a lot, then. And maybe, just maybe, you might get to like it *and* me."

Draco smiled and looked up at his lover through his lashes. "I think there's an awfully good possibility of that. You are last on my list, anyway."

"I'm the last anything for you. This is where the Malfoy reign of terror stops."

"Have I been reigning terror on you?"

"You've been driving me mad for years."

"Not quite the same thing, Potter."

Harry slid down to rest his torso along Draco's. The Slytherin was damned if his cock wasn't stirring again, and after coming twice in a row already. Harry still clamped down on his wrists. His lips touched Draco's. "I'll make you fall in love with me. I can, you know."

"It's not going to be hard," Draco admitted softly.

Harry smiled. Draco felt it on his mouth. He reached up and kissed Harry. Harry sighed and released Draco, lying his head on the Slytherin's pale chest. "Well, that's the first step, anyway."

The End

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