



Back to Hogwarts

By Mystwriter

Summary: After Harry leaves the Dursleys for good and returns to Hogwarts, he and Draco must face the rest of the school with their new relationship. Can the students deal with it? But more importantly, will the distraction be just what the Dark Lord needs to get to Harry?

NC-17—of course, for getting up to no good in moist places (Scotland?—heh, heh)

A bit AU with HBP never actually happening. (A bit?) Okay, very AU. Especially after the release of Deathly Hallows.

Best read Correspondence and then What I Did on My Summer Holiday to figure out what's going on here. This one picks up the moment What I Did left off.

Part One: Term of Endearment

Harry looked back at Uncle Vernon still seething in the car park and hurried to catch up to Draco to find some trolleys.

Harry couldn't catch his breath. With Draco in front and Uncle Vernon behind him, he couldn't help but feel that he was entering into new and unmarked territory. He felt very free in that instant. And not a little scared. But Draco had made all those plans for when they left Hogwarts, plans Harry never dared dream before with the threat of Voldemort hanging over his head. How could he even begin to imagine what life could be like without that threat? And here was Draco in love with him. Hell, he even wanted to marry him! Stupid, awkward, Harry Potter, who's only moments of grace were on a broomstick. Or were they? He felt pretty elegant being shagged by Draco. They seemed to move so well together. Maybe it was Draco. Now *he* was graceful. Harry loved watching him do just about anything: shower, undress, wank...small repertoire to be sure, but it still proved Draco was more graceful.

“Hurry it up, Potter. That slag uncle of yours made us late.”

Harry gripped the trolley's handle and ran. They got to the wall between platforms nine and ten and hurtled through. Harry could breathe again once safe on Platform 9 ¾. He was home. In the Wizarding world. Safe. At least it felt that way.

They left their luggage with the porter and he and Draco grabbed their owl cages and walked along the train. Neither spoke. They hadn't discussed what they would do once on the train but now it was looming up in Harry's mind. Would Draco split off and leave him. He really wanted to sit with Draco all the way to Hogwarts. Maybe hold his hand. Maybe snog if no one was in their compartment. But it wasn't likely they would be alone.

They boarded and Draco searched for an empty compartment. He poked his head into one and found a small first year. The tiny wizard looked up at Draco.

Draco sneered. “Get out!”

It was all the boy needed. He was up and out the door before Harry could say a word. Draco set his owl cage on the seat beside him and motioned for Harry to come in.

“You're not sitting with Slytherins?”

“Who would I sit with?”

That was true. Crabbe and Goyle had issues with Draco's sexual orientation and the rest knew he foiled it with Voldemort by taking up with the Boy Who Lived. He had nowhere to go.

Harry slid onto the seat and gazed at his lover. They'd been together for the last two summers and to Harry, it was heaven. To love someone and have them love him back! He'd never felt this happy before.

“You're a Prefect, you know. You shouldn't have done that.”

“Who's he going to complain to?” He gazed back at Harry and smiled. But soon the smile faded as his eyes clouded. “What do you suppose will happen when we get to school?”

Harry shrugged. “I don't know. But whatever happens, we'll face it together, won't we?”

Draco tried a smile again but he wasn't too successful. “Yeah. I guess so.”

“We'll go to our spot as often as you like,” he said, trying to reassure the blond. Their 'spot' was the Shrieking Shack. Harry had fixed it up and Draco called it their love nest. Harry supposed it was. After all, it was the place they could make love. Or at least have a good loud shag.

The door slid open and Hermione and Ron stepped through. “Hi, Harry,” said Ron. He turned toward Draco. “And...er...Malfoy.”

Everyone froze, staring at the other.

“This is perfectly ridiculous,” said Hermione, setting Crookshanks down while Pig whirled about in his cage. She rearranged the cages, grabbed Harry’s hand, and pulled him up. “You sit there next to Draco. And I’ll sit there next to Ron. You’re not the only one to hook up, you know.”

Ron blushed but sat where Hermione directed. When she sat beside him Ron took her hand, rather guiltily Harry thought.

But wait. He was *holding her hand*?

“Hey!” said Harry. “Are you two...?”

“Well, well,” said Draco, leaning back. “So the Weasel and the Mu—M-Muggleborn are finally a couple. I think I’m going to be ill.”

“You’re a fine one to talk,” spat Ron. “The mere thought of Harry soiling his hands with your like...”

“Oh, much more than his hands, Weaselby.”

Harry elbowed Draco hard. “Draco!”

“Ouch! All right, all right.”

“And he’s right,” said Harry. “You are one to talk. Now can’t we all be civil? I mean, we all know where we stand, right?” Harry’s cheeks burned. It was one thing writing it in a letter, but another thing facing his friends again. After all, he pretty much told them what he and Draco got up to.

His friends blushed, too. Everyone but Draco, it seemed. His blond lover looked out the window as the train lurched to a start and pulled slowly away from the station with a belch of billowing steam.

“So!” said Harry. He hoped this wasn’t a precursor of the rest of his year. He couldn’t stand it if everyone began treating him oddly. “Maybe we should just clear the air.”

Draco didn’t turn back but continued to stare through the glass. “Why?”

“Because! I want my best friends and my—my boyfriend to get along.”

Ron made a little choking sound and Harry shot him a withering glance.

“Yes, Harry’s right,” said Hermione. “It’s time. Draco, I think it’s perfectly all right for you and Harry to be together. As long as you’re good to him and treat him fairly. You haven’t got a very good record for that.”

“I’m not the one who told, you know. I was perfectly content to keep it to ourselves.”

“It couldn’t stay that way forever,” muttered Harry.

“No. Not with Big Mouth Potter spreading it around to all his little Veritaserum-swilling friends.”

“Ginny apologized for that, okay? Can we drop it?”

“Merlin’s balls, you both sound just like Ron and Hermione. It’s disgusting!” Ginny let the door slam back and looked around. “Room for one more?”

“Oh God! It’s a Gryffindor reunion.”

“And ‘hi’ to you, too, Malfoy.” She sat, scrunched next to Hedwig’s cage.

Draco said nothing, but folded his arms over his chest. Harry couldn’t believe he was still sulking over Ginny’s accidental slip about them. Harry was fine with it. After all, it allowed Draco to spend the summer with him, and he had had the best summer ever with Draco shagging him every night.

“You’re a free man, aren’t you, Harry?” said Ginny, leaning toward him. “Free of the Muggles, right?”

Harry smiled. Finally. “Yeah. And it feels great!”

“Aren’t you a little worried, though?” said Hermione. Her brow furrowed under her wild hair. “I mean, that was your protection from You-Know-Who. Now all you’ve got is Hogwarts.”

“But I like Hogwarts,” said Harry.

“Yeah,” said Ron, glaring at Malfoy warily, “even though You-Know-Who was able to get to you there twice. Three times if you count that trip to the Ministry.”

Harry shrugged that off. “Those were the odd instance. He’s a fully human Wizard again. He can’t get in the ways he did before and I won’t fall for that dream thing again.”

“Yeah. About that.” Hermione drummed her fingers on her thigh. “How do you suppose he was able to survive all this time?”

“In my Hogwarts letter, Dumbledore said he had some things to tell me this year. I think it’s about bloody time.”

No one said anything. They sat in silence, until Draco crept his hand near Harry’s under the hem of his robe and slowly intertwined their fingers. Ginny noticed and Draco almost snatched his hand away if Harry hadn’t tightened his grip. He wanted to feel Draco right now, wanted to touch him, feel that reassurance. Somehow, he felt that his showdown with Voldemort was looming, that this would be the year. But Draco was still in danger now, too. The both of them were in the same boat. Alone.

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They disembarked the train and walked a ways off the platform to climb into the carriages drawn by Thestrals. Harry saw Draco snatch glances at the other Slytherins studiously ignoring him. Harry held fast to Draco's hand and led him quickly into a carriage, followed by Hermione, Ron, and Ginny.

Draco looked at the surrounding Gryffindors and sneered. "I don't need bodyguards."

"You might," said Ginny. "And because it's my fault, I'll do my best for you."

"I don't need the likes of you—"

"I wouldn't speak so soon, Draco," said Harry. "She's probably the best hexer in the school. Remember the bat boggies?"

Draco scowled. "Intimately."

"And you just might need protection this year."

He crossed his arms sulkily over his chest.

"Draco," said Hermione leaning forward toward him. "It's all right. Really. I know this is going to be a difficult year for you—"

"Do you all mind just shutting up?" He turned toward the window and glared out of it, his face hidden by his almost white hair.

Harry closed his mouth. There was no use trying to reason with him when he was in that kind of mood. He shrugged to his friends, and when they weren't looking, he edged his thigh up against Draco's and just kept it there.

The carriages pulled up to the entrance of the castle and they all climbed out. They ascended the stairs to the Great Hall and walked in but that was where Draco hesitated.

Harry looked at him worriedly but gestured for his friends to go on to their house table. "Draco," he said quietly at his shoulder. "Just go. It will be all right. All the teachers are here. What can they do?"

"You'd be surprised," he muttered. But he moved in jerky steps anyway, knowing there was nothing else he *could* do. Harry watched him go all the way to the Slytherin table where no one made room for him. He finally found a space at the very end of a bench nearest the door. He slouched and had a miserable look on his face.

Harry found his place between Ron and Ginny and couldn't help looking back at Draco.

The first years were paraded in and the Sorting began. Harry barely noticed. He clutched at a fork for something to do and slipped glances over his shoulder.

"There's nothing you can do," whispered Hermione across Ron.

"I want to protect him," said Harry.

Ron winced. "I'm sure the git can take care of himself."

"Against all of Slytherin?"

Ron tried on a sympathetic expression, but Harry knew he was having a hard time containing his pleasure at Draco's plight. After all, Draco had never been very nice to Ron over the years.

The Sorting seemed to go on forever. Not that Harry was hungry for the feast. His hunger had vanished the moment he looked at Draco. He just wanted the whole feast over with.

Dumbledore made his announcements once the first years had all threaded to their new house tables. Harry barely heard them, until he mentioned Voldemort.

"It would be foolish to assume that Voldemort will spare any part of the Wizarding world," he was saying. "Do write to your parents often, and encourage them to be vigilant. We have taken every precaution to make Hogwarts a safe haven for you. It is, perhaps, the safest place of all for all of you."

Everyone was dead quiet. Dumbledore made a few more announcements about Quidditch and finally, the feast began.

Ron dug in right away, but Harry just grabbed the first thing in front of him—a turkey leg—and absently put it on his plate.

"You have to eat something, Harry," said Hermione in that mother hen voice of hers. He had a hard time masking his annoyance at it. He didn't really envy Ron.

"I'm not hungry."

She shrugged, but surprisingly, Ron pursued it. "She's right, mate. You need your strength. What if You-Know-Who makes an appearance?"

Seamus, who was sitting across from them, suddenly stopped eating and looked up. "You don't mean Dark and Scaly might drop into Hogwarts."

"Don't be ridiculous," said Hermione, cutting her meat daintily. "You heard Dumbledore. Hogwarts is the safest place in Britain."

Seamus continued chewing but now he was actively staring at Harry. "So, Harry," he said, between chewing. "Is it still on with you and Malfoy?"

Harry glared at him. "Yes, it's still on."

"Oh. Well. Guess you must know something about him we don't since we've all thought he was a right git since day one."

Harry supposed he did, too, until they both got involved in that quill pal thing and discovered that the other was gay. He pushed the mashed potatoes around on his plate, watching the gravy ooze over the broken dam. "He's...still sort of a git. Sometimes. But he's really nice to me now. We really get on well."

"I'll bet," piped in Dean Thomas.

Harry felt his face flush and tightened his jaw. "Actually, yes. That too."

Dean fell silent and ducked down to his plate. Harry sighed. "Look. Okay. I'm gay. So is Draco. We have a physical relationship. End of discussion, all right?"

"Okay, Harry," said Neville, sitting next to Dean. "It's not an issue with me. I'm just glad he makes you happy. He does, doesn't he?"

Harry gave him a smile. "More than you'll ever know."

"Then that's all that matters, right?" He looked at Dean and Seamus and Ron.

The boys exchanged uncomfortable glances and finally shrugged. Hermione rolled her eyes. "Boys!" she muttered.

Harry decided that he probably should eat something and the turkey leg was starting to look good to him. He picked it up, but just as he brought it to his mouth, a dark shadow suddenly loomed over the table. He didn't need to look up to know who it was.

"Potter," said the disdainful voice of Severus Snape. "The headmaster wishes to see you after the feast. He must have a stronger digestive system than the rest of us to subject himself so." He smiled. His yellow teeth gleamed malevolently. "At any rate, he wished me to also inform you to try the vanilla custard."

With that, Snape swept away with a flourish of robes.

"How does he do that?" said Seamus, shaking his head.

"What's with the dessert recommendation?" asked Dean.

"It's the password to Dumbledore's office," said Hermione quietly.

Oh. Harry hadn't realized. Good thing Hermione was paying attention as usual.

The feast seemed to go on forever, almost as long as the Sorting. Harry managed to eat a little, but he'd lost his appetite again with the message that he would be talking to Dumbledore. He hoped it was about some of those things he'd promised to talk about in his letters.

Harry waved goodnight to his friends and headed up the stairs toward the Headmaster's office. Everyone was heading to their common rooms for the night, and the halls were filled with the sounds of hundreds of feet stomping through corridors and up and down staircases. But as Harry

walked on, the sounds diminished. Laughter, talking, all became muffled and finally silent. He walked along alone, his feet barely making a sound on the long stretches of carpet in the corridors. The stone cressets threw dancing firelight against the walls.

Harry had grown used to odd shadows at Hogwarts, having been going to school with ghosts for the last six years. But something out of the corner of his eye wasn't right. He continued walking but surreptitiously pulled his wand. All at once, he spun and aimed the lighted tip behind him. "Who's there!"

Draco shrank back. "Watch it, Potter! Put that thing away!"

Harry said a quick "Nox," and stuffed the wand back in his robes. "Draco! What are you doing here?" He didn't wait. He walked up to the blond, put his arms around him, and kissed him. "I've been dying to do that all night."

Draco was distracted but he seemed to appreciate the intimate gesture. He rubbed Harry's arm absently. "I was told that Dumbledore wanted to see me. What are you doing here?"

Harry smiled. "Same thing."

"Oh. So we're in trouble already. What's wrong now? Can't hold hands in train or something?"

"I'm sure it's nothing like that." But Harry was now worried. What if Dumbledore told them they couldn't fraternize anymore? What if he told them they couldn't be boyfriends? He suddenly remembered their illegal entry into Diagon Alley that summer and Dumbledore's angry Howler. His stomach felt ill and he walked forward slower than before.

When they got to the gargoyle statue, Harry said—rather reluctantly, "Vanilla custard."

It slid aside revealing the griffin stair.

They both stepped up onto the moving staircase and rode it to the top. Harry looked at Draco once before he knocked on the door.

"Come!" said the familiar voice.

Harry opened the door and led the way into the strange and grand study. Draco followed on his heels and they both sat in the chairs indicated by the old wizard.

"Harry. Draco. How good of you to come at so late an hour. I regret that it is so late, but as you must suspect, the schedule of the first day of term is naturally crowded. So. How was your summer?"

Harry's grin was as wide as could be. "It was brilliant, sir! My best ever!" He looked at Draco to confirm this, but the blonde's face was frowning.

"It was all right," he muttered.

Harry stared at him openmouthed. What the bloody hell was wrong with him this time? Sometimes that man could be so infuriating.

Dumbledore smiled kindly at Draco. "There are difficult times ahead, Mr. Malfoy. I'm sure you can also appreciate that sentiment."

"I'm living it."

"I have heard from your mother."

He jerked upright and slid to the edge of his seat. "How is she?"

"She is very well. She misses you. I'm certain you can receive owls from her here as she was unable to send them to Privet Drive. We certainly didn't want her owls traced."

Once Dumbledore said it, Harry realized for the first time that Draco had never received owls. He already knew his friends had deserted the Slytherin, but he had forgotten about his mother.

"Can I see her?"

Dumbledore's eyes lowered. "I am afraid not. It would be most unsafe for her."

"But you said Hogwarts was the safest place to be."

"Only if she stayed. And I was unable to convince her to do so."

Draco slumped. He obviously missed his mother. Harry suddenly felt extremely selfish. He reached out and stroked the hand that was clutching the chair arm. His grey eyes looked up at Harry. At first they looked glossy, but as he watched they hardened, as they must have had to do many times before.

"At least she can owl me," he said.

"Yes, indeed. But there are other matters we must discuss tonight. As you are also surely aware, it is still unsafe for you in Slytherin House. You are a Prefect and so I have made the unusual move to open up again the old Prefect rooms. The separate bathrooms for Prefects have been open for some time...as you both know," and he sent a knowing look at Harry.

Jeesh. Was there nothing that old man didn't know about?

"The Prefect rooms?" asked Draco.

"Yes, at one time the Prefects also had their own rooms, but many years ago it was thought the privilege was too broad and they were closed up. I have chosen to reopen one...for you."

"Oh." Draco didn't seem to know what to do with this information. To Harry, it opened up a realm of possibilities.

As if he were listening in on Harry's thoughts—and perhaps he was—Dumbledore turned to Harry. “Now Mr. Potter, while Mr. Malfoy must stay in these rooms at night for his protection I have not made this decision lightly. The whole situation is still highly volatile. Do I have your word, Harry, that you will not sneak out of your dorm after curfew to...ah...*visit*...Mr. Malfoy?”

Harry licked his lips. He stared straight into the headmaster's light blue eyes with a lie poised on the tip of his tongue. But he knew it was useless. He really couldn't lie to the man anymore and look him in the eye. “No, sir. I can't promise that.”

“Are you mental!” hissed Draco. “What's the matter with you?”

“I don't like to lie, is all.”

“Crikey, Potter! Get a clue. What's a lie every now and again?”

“Slytherin,” rasped Harry.

“Gryffindork!” said Draco.

“Gentlemen!” Dumbledore sat back. “I appreciate your honesty, Harry. It only convinces me that I must resort to something I wished not to have to do.”

Harry's heart hammered wildly in his chest. That's done it. The headmaster would put some sort of impenetrable charm on Draco's quarters. Or worse! On Draco himself! NO! He couldn't do that to Harry.

Harry canted forward. “Headmaster, please. Draco means so much to me now. We must be able to see one another.” He knew he sounded desperate. He was!

Dumbledore shook his head. “Harry, you misunderstand me. I would never try to get in the way of your happiness. I know that you have had precious little of it. No, it has been a difficult choice to make. It is not something I would ordinarily sanction, you understand, but these are extraordinary circumstances. Both your lives are at stake and I cannot risk either of you. And the two of you are of age. And so. I have decided that Harry will be living in the same quarters with you.”

Dead silence. Even Fawkes made no sound.

Harry was the first to stir. “S-sorry. I don't think I heard you correctly, sir.”

Dumbledore sighed. “I cannot risk that you will be wandering about at Hogwarts at night, Harry. Something you have been wont to do, much to the consternation of our staff. Even as safe as Hogwarts is, there is still the possibility of...well. There are possibilities I do not wish to contemplate. The only solution was to make certain you would not be doing so...by setting you up in Draco's room.”

Draco stood up. “You've got to be kidding. Does my mother know this?”

“I have told her, yes. She was not happy about it, but that is neither here nor there. She has agreed to it.”

Draco slowly sat again as the immensity of Dumbledore’s proposal sunk in. He looked up at the old wizard. “You *do* know that Harry and I have sex together?”

Harry choked. “*Draco!*”

Dumbledore waved him off. “I suspected as much when I sent you to live with Harry this summer. I was convinced it was consensual.” He raised a brow to Harry.

Harry nodded numbly.

“As I said. However, this must be a secret between the two of you.”

“How is that possible, sir?” asked Harry, surprised his voice had come back as swiftly as it did. “My housemates—”

“Yes, yes. Your housemates. This is how it shall be. Any deviation from the plan will result in my rescinding this offer. And there will be stringent rules applied to the two of you. I trust you would not find that an appealing alternative.”

“No, sir,” they echoed.

“Harry, you will go to your common room at night as always. Even repair to your dorm room. But once there, you will Portkey to Draco’s room. No one but your dorm mates will know what you are doing. In the morning, you will Portkey back to the dorm. I trust your Gryffindor housemates can be trusted to keep a secret.”

“Of course, sir. But...er...You see, it already looks as if I have enjoyed special privileges, and I don’t know if they’ll resent me for it.”

“That is something you will have to work out on your own, Harry. Now. The question is, can they truly be trusted?”

“If they thought my life depended on it.”

“Indeed, it might. Everyone will think you are still in your dorm room. Both friends and foes. They won’t suspect that you and Mr. Malfoy are safe in a triple warded room.”

He rose and Harry and Draco automatically followed suit. “The location of the Prefect rooms is next to the bathroom. It is hidden behind a tapestry. The door is invisible, but if you say the password ‘Snickersnee’ it will reveal itself and open for you.” Dumbledore reached into his robes and pulled out a smooth round stone, similar to those found alongside the Black Lake. “Here, Harry. Keep this with you at all times. In an emergency, it will get you out of trouble. Don’t use it until you are in your dorm room. Your trunk is still there and I suggest you leave it there.”

Harry took the stone, rubbed his thumb across it, and slipped it into his pocket.

“And so gentlemen, good night. And...be good.”

Dumbledore sat again and opened his book. They had obviously been dismissed and both boys turned and left the office. Once back in the corridor they looked at each other.

“Is this a dream or something?” asked a dazed Draco.

Harry shook his head. “I don’t know. It might be.”

Harry felt a finger trace a gentle path over his face. “Can you feel that?” Draco asked softly.

“Yes.” His heartbeat sped up. “Definitely.”

Draco dropped his hand away. “Well. I guess I’ll be seeing you in a few minutes.”

“Did you have to tell Dumbledore we were having sex?”

“He isn’t an idiot, Potter. At least about this. I’m sure homosexuality existed even in his day.”

“I know, but—” The memory of it flushed his face with heat. Draco reached over and kissed the embarrassment away.

“And I want to continue with the sex,” said Draco with a wicked grin. “Don’t you?”

Harry’s perplexed face finally changed to a happier one. “Yes. Of course.”

“Then. Let’s go. The sooner you explain it to your dorm mates the better. I am positively dying to shag you.”

Harry flushed again but not with embarrassment this time. He kissed Draco one more time before he ascended the stairs to Gryffindor, while Malfoy headed toward the Prefect’s room.

Harry passed through the portrait hole and most everyone had gone off to bed. Hermione, Ron, and Ginny, however, were waiting for Harry by the fire. He stopped when he noticed them. He hadn’t expected this. He wasn’t certain if he was supposed to tell Hermione and Ginny, but somehow it didn’t seem right that he didn’t.

They jumped up to greet him. “Harry!” said Hermione. “What did he say? Was it something important about You-Know-Who?”

“Actually...” Harry settled into the sofa and watched them gather around him. He glanced once over his shoulder. “It wasn’t about that.” They sat on the sofa and on the hearth, leaning toward him. “This is, of course, confidential.” They nodded vigorously. “The headmaster is putting Draco in one of the Prefect rooms instead of having him go back to Slytherin.”

“Prefect rooms?” Hermione’s face scrunched up in thought. “I remember reading about that in *Hogwarts: A History*. They closed them up because the school resented too many privileges for

the Prefects and Head Boy and Girl. But they left the bathrooms open.” She shrugged. “I guess that’s sensible. He’ll be safe there. But Harry. You really mustn’t be sneaking off at night to meet with him. It isn’t safe.”

“I know. Dumbledore thought so too. He asked me point blank if I intended on sneaking out to stay with Draco.”

Ron cringed. Harry couldn’t tell if it was because of his sexuality, because he was talking about sex with Malfoy, or both. He ignored him.

“And you told him you wouldn’t, of course,” she said sensibly.

“Actually, I told him I would.”

“*What?*” said Ginny a little too loudly so that the others had to shush her.

“I couldn’t lie to him. I would. I want to be him. He’s worth it—Crikey, Ron, give it a rest!”

“Sorry.” Ron sat back, trying not to make more gurgling noises.

“So,” Harry continued. “Dumbledore’s...well, he’s letting me stay with Draco. So I don’t sneak out.”

Silence. The flames crackled merrily in the hearth, but the Gryffindors said nothing. Harry’s hands were clammy and he wiped them down on his trousers.

Finally, Hermione spoke up. “He’s actually allowing you to...I mean he’s all right with...does he know what he’s saying?”

“Does he know what we do, you mean?” he asked, trying not to look at Ron. “Yeah. He’s got a pretty good idea. But he’d rather we were together than risk either of us sneaking about and getting hurt or caught or something.” He took the stone out of his pocket. “This is a Portkey. I’m supposed to go to my dorm as usual and only my dorm mates were to know what I was doing. Then I’d return by morning. Everyone would think I was still in my dorm, you see.”

Hermione’s lips thinned in thought. “It’s clever, really,” she said at last. “It’s a good idea. You’d be safe. No one would know where you really were.”

“But would the rest of that lot go for it?” asked Ginny. They suddenly twisted toward Ron.

He looked back at them in turn. “Don’t look at me!”

“Ron,” said Harry seriously. “How do you think Dean and Seamus would take this? I don’t worry about Neville. He’s all right about it. It’s about keeping me safe. Would they really see it that way? And they’ve got to keep it to themselves.”

“Bloody hell, Harry. It’s Malfoy. That’s the thing. If it were a girl—”

“Malfoy, is it? It’d be okay if it were a girl?” Harry felt his face flushing with anger.

“Well, not a Slytherin girl. It’s a lot of things.”

“Just my life.”

Ginny snorted. “Harry, if you were that concerned with your *life* then you’d be a good boy and stay in your dorm like you were told.”

He smoothed his countenance and glanced back at Ron. He’d been really mad at him, but Ginny was right. This whole issue wouldn’t come up if he could control his hormones and not be so selfish. “You’re right. I’ve got no business being mad at anyone. I’ll see if they want to go along with it. And if they don’t, I’ll just tell Draco it’s off. The Prefect thing, that is.”

They all seemed to agree with that. Ron and Harry trudged up the stairs and said their goodnights to the girls. Now it was time to face his dorm mates.

Harry watched them for a moment. Neville was carefully refolding his clothes in his trunk, putting them in order of how he dressed, y-fronts on top, robe at the bottom. Dean was attaching yet another Muggle football poster to the wall and Seamus was looking through a wizard wanking mag. Harry could just see the white skin of one of the girls waving seductively at Seamus’ wicked smile.

“Hey,” said Harry. “I have something to tell you.” They stopped what they were doing and looked up, a little white-faced. If Harry had an announcement, it usually meant something to do with Voldemort.

Sheepishly, Harry explained it again, trying to keep his face neutral under the gasps and grimacing of Seamus and Dean.

“But if you lot think it’s too much to keep to yourselves, then I won’t do it. I mean, I’ve already gotten away with too much as it is.”

“Too much,” echoed Seamus, throwing down his mag. “Too much, like having your parents killed, or living with those awful Muggles, or having You-Know-Who after your skin year after year. Sorry, mate, but if those are your ‘privileges’, I’ll skip them if that’s all the same to you.”

Harry stared at him, surprised. Seamus had been absolutely stunned by his affair with Draco and had been one of the strongest objectors to it earlier.

Seamus grinned awkwardly. “I’ve been thinking a bit about it, see. Thought you’d gone mental for sure when we found out about you and Malfoy. But hell, Harry. If the bastard makes you happy, who are we to take that away from you? I’m in.”

Dean swallowed hard. He looked at his housemates in turn. Finally, he shrugged. “Hey, if Seamus is in--and he’s the biggest prat there ever was--then I guess I’m in, too.”

Harry grinned from ear to ear. “Thanks, guys. I really appreciate it.”

“At least Harry’s getting some,” said Seamus, flopping down on his bed and flipping through the pages again. “Not that we want to hear the details, mind. But at least one of ours is on the tally board.”

“Yeah,” said Dean. “Most of us aren’t doing too well in that respect. Well, Ron and Hermione, I guess.”

“Hey, watch your mouth,” said Ron, hands curling into fists. “I’m a perfect gentleman around ‘Mione.”

“Won’t let you in her knickers, eh mate?” laughed Seamus.

Ron’s face reddened. “I’m going to bed,” he muttered.

The rest laughed as Ron started disrobing, Harry among them. As they all went to their beds, Harry became more nervous. Especially as they were eyeing him. “Well,” said Harry after a while. He pulled the stone from his pocket. “I guess...I should go. Feels a little strange since...well...”

“Since we all know what you’re going to be doing,” giggled Dean. “Crikey, Harry. If it were a girl we’d be cheering you on. Shows what a bunch of hypocrites we are.”

“Not a bunch of hypocrites,” said Harry quickly. “Not really. Um...I mean, it’s probably hard getting used to my being gay, let alone Draco on top of that...er...I mean—”

“Don’t want to know who’s on top, mate,” said Seamus, rolling his eyes. “Just go, already.”

“Goodnight, Harry,” said Neville. “See you tomorrow.”

“Yeah. Goodnight.” Harry felt a wash of affection for all of them. They were really his mates, all right. He held the stone and looked at it, muttering, “One...two...three!” A string hooked into his navel and grabbed him out of one reality and pulled him suddenly to another. The Gryffindor dorm disappeared around him and an arched room of dark greens and luxurious tapestries solidified around him...before he fell over onto the carpeted floor.

“Graceful, Harry,” said the familiar voice. He looked up and smiled at Draco.

“You *could* help me up.”

Draco rolled his eyes and offered Harry his hand. “Took you long enough to get here. I thought you’d changed your mind, or something.”

“Almost did. I was just being a typical Gryffindor and had to explain it to all of my friends.”

“All of your friends? Dumbledore told you to just tell your dorm mates.”

“Well. I couldn’t very well not tell Hermione and Ginny.”

“Yes, you could have! Who else did you tell?”

“No one. Just Neville, Ron, Seamus, and Dean. That’s it.”

“And Hermione and Ginny. What part of ‘this is a secret’ don’t you get, Potter? Our lives are on the line here.”

“Calm down, Draco. It’s all right. I told you. Don’t you believe me?”

Draco was in full pouting mode. “You lie, you know. When you told Ginny last year—”

“Are you ever going to get over that? Shit, Draco. It’s done with. Over. Get a grip.”

This was getting annoying. He had been looking forward to a romantic evening, and here was Draco, queening out on him.

“Can we just get the theatrics over with and go to bed,” said Harry. “I’m tired.”

“You want to sleep? And what do you mean theatrics?”

Harry pivoted and suddenly grabbed Draco in an embrace. “You’re overdoing it,” he whispered to his lips. “I’m here. Isn’t that what really matters? And I do want to sleep, but only after I’ve gotten a thorough shag by my one true love. Okay?”

Draco glared at him for a moment longer and then his expression softened. “I’m your one true love? Really?”

“I can’t think of anyone else. So what do you say?”

“I say...” He hugged Harry tightly and pressed his lips softly to his. “You’d better *not* think of anyone else.”

Harry looked at Draco’s face and absorbed every smooth plane and dip. His eyes were so perfectly shaded. Sometimes in the right light they would almost seem blue. Right now, in firelight, they were like slate; flat, dark, sharp. His lips were red and Harry watched transfixed as Draco ran his tongue over them and they glistened. Draco was in full lust mode and Harry shivered a bit at it. He suddenly had a hard on to drill metal. “Take me to bed, yeah?” he whispered to Draco’s lips.

A smile curved the blonde’s mouth. He grabbed Harry, dragged him to the bed, and flung him to the duvet. He lifted his wand and with an unfamiliar spell, both he and Harry were suddenly divested of all their clothes. It took Harry’s breath away. “Fuck, Malfoy! What was that?”

“I’ve been wanting to try that for a while. It works, I see.”

“Yeah,” said Harry, flushing with a surge of embarrassment.

“There’s that blush I so adore,” purred Draco. He looked down at his own straining erection and took it in hand, stroking it slowly and watching Harry’s reaction.

Harry's reaction was close to drooling. His own prick was hard as wood, the head dark like a plum. Harry lay on his back propped up on his elbows, eyes glued to what Draco was doing to his own dick.

Still clutching his cock, Draco crawled up on the bed and stayed on his knees, closing the gap between him and Harry. Harry's cock was dripping now. The slit bubbled with a white pearl of precum and when Harry squeezed it, it dribbled over. He rubbed it over the head of his cock, hoping to tempt Draco to take it in his mouth. He loved when Draco gave him head. He had such a talented and limber tongue, not to mention the hot sweetness of his moist mouth.

Harry spread his legs and rolled his balls in his palm. He lifted his hips, displaying his arse hole. *I'm such a slut*, he thought, enjoying the look of utter lust on Draco's face, and knowing that he would soon be the recipient of his ardent attentions.

But Draco didn't move to take Harry's cock in his mouth or to shag him. Instead, he slid right up to Harry's face with his dick in his hand.

"You want me to suck it?" asked Harry hopefully, voice coarse.

"No. Not yet. There's all night, you know. I just want to rub my cock all over you first. Claim you."

Draco's cock touched Harry's cheek and the Gryffindor moaned. It touched his lips and he couldn't help but kiss it and then snake out a tongue and give it a lick. That made Draco chuckle, a sound rumbling from deep within his chest that made Harry shiver again.

The cock rubbed back and forth over Harry's lips. He tasted Draco's spunk leaking from the plump cockhead and he longed to take the whole thing in his mouth. But he rather wanted to see what Draco had in mind just now.

He slid his cock over Harry's chin and stroked down his neck with the velvety head. Harry closed his eyes and melted into the extraordinary sensation of Draco's dick making an excruciatingly slow path down his body. It teased a nipple making the nubbin hard and tight. "How's that, my man?" whispered Draco.

"Brilliant," Harry breathed.

The Slytherin dragged his cock further, leaving a thin trail of moisture behind, until Harry felt it reach his pubic hair. Draco straddled him then and slowly slid his prick up along Harry's.

"Oh Draco," he moaned. "Shag me. Please!"

"You're absolutely dripping aren't you?" He grabbed Harry's cock and gave it a squeeze. Harry wriggled his hips pleadingly. "Roll over. I want to see your arse."

Harry whimpered. That would trap his prick under his body and he so wanted Draco to touch it, wank it, lick it. But he rolled over and lay on his belly. He spread his legs and offered his bum to Draco.

But Draco wasn't done with the cock tour of Harry's body. It slid down his back and Harry felt Draco straddle him and rest it there just at the swell of his bum. Harry wiggled his bottom a little, encouraging Draco to continue. "Patience, sweet Harry," Draco rasped. He rubbed the cock back and forth over both mounds, in no particular hurry to do more. Harry felt the soft pat, pat of Draco's bollocks against his bum and sighed deeply. He was getting the duvet damp from his leaking cock. He spread his legs further, shamelessly exposing himself.

"My, my, Harry. You are a sight, aren't you? Is this what you want?" He took his cock in hand and pushed it against Harry's hole.

"Oh yes!" Harry was almost delirious with passion. He raised his hips into it.

Draco chuckled and tapped Harry's bum with his wand. Harry felt the coolness of lube inside and out. Another neat spell. Where was Draco learning these things?

"I'm not going to be gentle," he warned, and placed the dome of his cock against Harry's entrance.

"Do it," Harry growled. "Do it hard."

Draco didn't hesitate. He shoved forward—not waiting for Harry to get used to him. He forced the tight sphincter open, rammed his cock all the way in and only stopped for a moment to savor the feel of Harry's tightness. He sighed and then Harry could feel the boy's leg muscles tighten as he drew out almost all the way and thrust forward again.

Harry moaned. It was a bit painful, even though he was lubed well. He wasn't ready. But it didn't matter. It was Draco deep inside him, Draco pounding away relentlessly at his arse, Draco loving him.

His lover angled lower and hit Harry's sweet spot. It was all worth it then. He thrust his bottom upward into Draco taking as much as he could. He was going to come, without Draco's ever having touched his dick.

"Oh God!" Harry matched Draco's driving thrusts, moving even faster than his lover, hitting the sweet spot each time and he suddenly let loose with a searing orgasm and a shout. His cum spread over the duvet and his thrusting hips made certain that he creamed his pubic hair and his trapped penis in the mess.

Draco continued to pound into him, gripping his hips hard. Even in a haze, Harry recognized that familiar kind of thrusting which meant Draco was on the verge of coming himself. Sure enough, with a grunt he shot his load high into Harry's backside, giving little milking thrusts as the waves of pleasure subsided. He held Harry's hips for a moment longer and then pulled out.

Lying in his own spunk, Harry felt the irresistible sensation of Draco's cum dribbling from his hole. He was a mess coming and going! But Draco still wasn't through. He pushed up Harry's legs like a frog's, exposing his pulsing anus even further as well as his reddened bollocks. First there was a nose caressing its way over his crack and then that tongue—that moist, warm tongue—laving up the cum trailing from his arse. Harry felt the pad of that tongue lovingly caress his bum, his crack, his hole, his balls, his thighs. It made his cock twitch again, longing for the feel of it there.

And because Draco knew Harry so well, when he was done cleaning him, he gently turned him over and smiled down at Harry's renewed erection. "This needs cleaning, too," he said, voice low and seductive. He leaned over and ran his tongue up Harry's hard shaft, swirling it over the head, cleaning it of the last orgasm to give it yet another.

Harry was writhing now. The sensations were almost too much. Draco's lips closed over the tip of Harry's cock and he sucked it gently. His tongue made a furious path over the glans and down to his sac, swirling over the tightening scrotum.

Harry lost all control. "Suck me! Oh please suck me!" he begged, not caring that it made him sound like the biggest whore. He felt Malfoy chuckle as he swallowed Harry's prick and began sucking it in earnest. Harry came immediately. Draco sucked even harder, drinking down each delicious drop of cum. When Harry had given all he had, Draco licked it all clean again, gave it one last kiss, and nestled beside Harry.

"Just think," he said. "We have all of this year to spend every night, *all* night together. It's a dream come true."

Harry nodded. His brain took its time but it was focusing again. "A dream come true."

Draco snuggled his face into Harry's armpit. "I love you, Harry."

"Oh Draco. I love you so much."

Growing drowsy, Harry never felt safer, more loved, more at peace. Had he been in his right mind and not dazed from two orgasms, he would have realized that this was merely the calm before the storm.

Part Two: Defenseless

The next morning when Harry dressed, his whole body ached. They had had a marathon night. Draco seemed to want to prove something, and he proved it in Harry's arse all night long.

Draco lay in bed, his hands propped behind his head and watched Harry dress. He had a wicked smile on his face.

Harry was slightly annoyed. "Pleased, are you? You do realize I won't be able to sit down for a week?"

Draco shrugged. "That's *your* problem."

"I rather think it's yours, too. When I come back tonight, you won't be getting any Potter arse, I can tell you. That office is closed."

"You mean that orifice."

Harry smiled. "Yeah. That too."

"You've got another, you know. And so do I. I'm not averse to your fucking me, you know."

"I know. And I appreciate it. I prefer to be the shagee, though. I suppose tonight we can branch out to cocksucking and mutual wanking. Give my backside a chance to cool down."

"Take a bath in the Prefect's bathroom tonight. Give it a good long soak. Come a little early...so you can cum a little early." He waggled his brows.

"I thought I was the only one thinking of sex twenty-four hours a day," Harry muttered into his shirt as he buttoned it. Donning his robe, Harry turned to Draco still starkers and lying abed. "Well, it's time for me to go back to my dorm room. See you at breakfast?"

Draco yawned wide. "Yup. I'll be down in a tick."

Harry approached the bed and gazed lovingly at the long, white torso. He leaned over and gave Draco a kiss. "We'll have to slow down the pace a bit. Or we won't last till end of term."

"Gone weak on me, Potter? I thought the hero of the Wizarding world was made of sterner stuff."

"You know exactly what I'm made of. You pounded it into the mattress all night. I'll see you at breakfast."

"Ta, Harry. You're a brilliant shag."

He reddened as he grabbed the Portkey. "Uh...thanks. One...two...three!"

He was pulled back to the dorm room with a pop and his dorm mates all sat up, startled.

"Oi, Harry!" said Seamus, his hand clutching his chest. "Warn a man."

Harry looked at the smooth stone and dropped it on his bed as he began to disrobe again. He definitely needed a shower. "I really don't know how. Don't know much about Portkeys."

"Bet 'Mione could look it up for us," said Ron with a yawn.

"Hey, mate," said Dean, watching Harry waddle to the door with his towel. "Walking a bit funny this morning?"

"You would, too, if you'd just been—" Harry bit down on his words and looked back rather guiltily to his mates. "Er...I mean...."

Dean waved his hands before his face. "Whatever, Harry. No details, remember?"

"Sorry. Almost forgot where I was." He cinched his dressing gown and headed for the boys' showers.

Clean once again, he dressed and went down to breakfast with his friends. He kept an eye peeled for Draco. Relief washed over him when he spied him perched on the very end of a bench with probably barely room for one buttock. That's all the other Slytherins allowed him.

"I don't see why he can't eat with us," Harry muttered.

"Do you really think he'd be any more welcomed here?" asked Hermione, spooning sugar over her breakfast flakes.

"I guess not. But look at him. He's miserable."

"Was he miserable last night?" piped in Ginny, her eyes gleaming with meaning.

"I know, I know. Already too many special privileges." Harry fell silent. His housemates couldn't possibly understand. He barely understood their relationship himself. Why after all he and Malfoy had been to one another did it all seem to work now? Draco was so different from Harry. They neither could agree on the politics of Wizardry, nor of most other things he found in common with his housemates. Isn't that why most housemates hooked up even after school was done with?

If he and Draco set up house after Hogwarts, would it even last? The thought gave Harry a painful stab in his chest. He loved Draco. As amazing as that was. He wanted to be with him, but he had to ask himself why?

After breakfast, he followed the rest of them to Potions. The others talked on merrily but Harry kept his head down in thought. It wasn't until he was sitting in his usual spot with Snape already glaring down at him that he remembered where he was. He straightened but it was too late. Snape's lip curled up in a sneer at him.

But he didn't go for Harry even as Harry braced himself. He turned, his robes spinning out around him. He jabbed his glance at Draco. "Mr. Malfoy," said Snape, his voice oozing.

Draco wasn't prepared and he looked up with puzzlement. He was still taking things out of his book bag when Snape swirled toward him, casting a long shadow. "What's the matter, Mr. Malfoy?" Snape went on. "Didn't you have your servants prepare your place for you?"

Some of the Slytherins snickered behind their hands. Draco was as perplexed as ever. "Sir?"

"I mean, Mr. Malfoy, with so many privileges already—being Prefect and all, and having—" His head swiveled toward Harry and his black eyes roved over him. "--illicit affairs with riff raff, I would have thought the Headmaster would have supplied you with your own house elf to set up your cauldron."

Harry's hands curled into fists. He found himself clutching his wand.

"Harry," hissed Hermione. "Don't!"

Snape *had* to do it, didn't he? He had to be the right git everyone knew he was. He certainly had to know the situation with Draco. Maybe even his house knew. And he had to rub it in. What about Draco's safety? What about Voldemort?

Draco looked mortified. His pale face suddenly flushed a deep red.

“Since you are a Prefect, Mr. Malfoy and obviously have the marks for it, perhaps you can start us on today’s lesson. Tell us, if you will, what potion do the ingredients on the board suggest to you?”

Hermione shot her hand up. Snape ignored her as usual. Hermione must be the only one who had any sort of clue as to what it might be, thought Harry, this being seventh year potions, the hardest year yet.

Draco stared at the board, but he was obviously too ruffled to even think of anything.

“We’re waiting, Mr. Malfoy.”

“I...I...don’t know sir.”

“What was that, Mr. Malfoy?”

“He said he doesn’t know!”

There were gasps, but Harry held his ground. He waited with deep breaths as Snape slowly pivoted toward him. “Mr. Potter.” *Now that’s done it*, thought Harry. *Go ahead. Give me detention. My first day back, my first moment in class.*

“So now you speak for Mr. Malfoy as well? Isn’t it enough that he drools on you, fawns on you as the others do, acts the proper Gryffindor?” The Slytherins laughed outright at that. Draco slumped in his seat. “Now you must speak for him as well. Well it’s to be expected. Malfoy is obviously not right in the head or else he would find some other plaything than an obnoxious, overbearing, arrogant—”

Harry’s cauldron suddenly shattered, sending shards outward until they abruptly stopped dead in mid air.

Everyone froze, staring at the suspended bits of metal. Even Snape was shocked.

“Who did that? Potter, did you shatter that cauldron? Who immobilized it?”

“I did,” said Harry. “Both.”

Snape’s face did not slacken. He took turns between glaring at Harry and at the shards. “How did you—?” He drew himself up. “Detention, Potter. Fix that cauldron now!”

Harry waved his wand and muttered, “*Reparo!*” The shards collapsed into the cauldron shape again and the room fell back to normal. Except Hermione was staring at him. He tried to shake it off, but her expression was getting unnerving.

The class went on fairly normally after that, except that Snape kept getting at Draco. By the time the class was over, Malfoy looked like a train wreck. Harry wanted to talk to him but Snape made him stay after.

Everyone had gone and Snape paced back and forth before the empty classroom.

“What do you have to say for yourself, Potter?” he said without facing him and without stopping.

“The...the first bit...that was accidental magic. Sorry, sir, I didn’t mean to blow it up.”

“Yes. I surmised that for myself. What I can’t figure out....” He stopped in front of Harry and looked down at him. “...is how you did the second bit.”

“Er...stopped it from exploding, you mean?”

He leaned over Harry’s desk and sneered, part of his composure returning. “Yes, Mr. Potter. That bit.”

“Oh. I just...I...” But Harry didn’t know. He shrugged.

“Articulate as ever, Potter. You mean you don’t know?”

“Um...no sir. I just reacted.”

“Without using your wand and without uttering a spell? Did you think a nonverbal?”

“No, sir. It just...happened.”

“Nothing ‘just happens’ in the Wizarding world, Potter! Are you that thick? I want to know how you did it!”

“So would I!” he lashed out. “But I don’t know. One minute you were saying the most awful things to Dra—to Malfoy and the next my cauldron was exploding...and then...it wasn’t.”

Snape studied him, eyes narrowing to slits. In a blink of an eye he was heading toward the door without looking back. “Come along to the headmaster, Potter. Hurry it up, now!”

Harry quickly gathered his things into his book bag and scrambled after the long-limbed professor. Snape said nothing to him as he strode through the corridors and up the stairs. Harry glanced back over his shoulder. He was missing Charms. He hoped this would be worth it.

Once Dumbledore allowed them in, Harry was directed to stand beside the desk while Snape proceeded to explain in detail what happened in class, paying particular attention to paint Harry in a disagreeable light.

Git, he thought, but looking at Dumbledore’s sparkling eyes, he saw that the headmaster saw through Snape’s tactics.

“Harry,” he said, interrupting Snape. The potions master looked none too happy about that. “You say you don’t recall how you stopped the cauldron’s explosion?”

“No, sir. I've never done anything like that before.”

“Hmm. And you performed this accidental magic out of anger—”

“Professor Snape...wasn't being fair to Draco. He was—”

“Now, Harry. We mustn't quibble about how Professor Snape runs his class.”

Snape straightened at that, clasping his hands behind his back triumphantly, but Harry detected the merest of winks from Dumbledore.

Dumbledore sat in thought for a time. He eyed Snape before he raised his chin and said, “Thank you, Professor. I have it well in hand now. I will keep Harry for a bit longer. It seems he will miss his Charms class.”

Snape's triumphant expression fell and his dark eyes darted murderously toward Harry.

Harry frowned at him. *What did I do this time?*

But Snape had already turned with that flourish he was so fond of and the headmaster's door snicked closed behind him.

Dumbledore smiled at Harry and offered him a bowl. “Raspberry sweet?”

Harry wasn't hungry but he took a few anyway. “Sir--?”

“Harry, do you recall my telling you about your greatest gift, the gift that Voldemort doesn't understand?”

“Um...yes, sir. My greatest gift—you said—is love.”

“Not just 'love' in an abstract sense, Harry. But your ability to love. And inspire it in others. Draco, for instance.”

Harry blushed. Why did he have to keep bringing that up?

“I think I know how you were able to perform what you did today.” Harry touched the raspberry sweet to his tongue and stopped, listening. “It was because of love, Harry. Your love of Draco. You have a fierce need to protect him. One doesn't have to be a Legilimens to see that. The love flows through you, through your magic. I expect we will see more of that.”

“We will?” Harry felt a sinking feeling. Wasn't it bad enough that everyone knew Harry's business? Did he have to wear it on his sleeve or wave a magical banner?

“At any rate, I am glad you are here. There are some things I think it time you learn about.”

Harry quickly swallowed the sweet and tucked the others away in his pocket. He scooted to the edge of his seat. “Sir. Is this about Voldemort?”

“Yes, Harry, it is.” Dumbledore wore a faraway expression. “What I am about to tell you must be in the strictest confidence. Which means I fully expect you to share it with Miss Granger and Mr. Weasley. And I suppose with Mr. Malfoy as well.”

Harry swallowed. His mouth had gone dry of a sudden. He’d never heard much about Voldemort except what most other witches and wizards were willing to tell him. But he had a feeling that Dumbledore was about to do them one better.

The old wizard began to talk, his eyes taking in a serious tone. He watched Harry carefully as he explained. He mentioned the word Horcrux and launched into a detailed explanation, talking about Voldemort’s childhood, disturbing episodes from that past and asking Harry from time to time if he understood. Harry nodded, listening, his mind racing. Voldemort grew up like he did, unloved, an orphan, but instead of making the best of it, he turned it inward into nasty acts of evil. At one time Harry thought that most people were redeemable—except for Snape, Bellatrix LeStrange, and Lucius Malfoy—but Voldemort seemed far worse than them.

Dumbledore went on to say that they had found and destroyed all but two of the Horcruxes.

“Sir,” Harry ventured, “are you saying that he has to murder to make a Horcrux?” He felt distinctly uncomfortable now that he knew about Tom Riddle’s diary. He had touched it, wrote in it, been sorry to see it missing. And all this time it possessed a bit of Voldemort’s evil soul. He wondered now who had been murdered to make it.

“Yes, Harry. Because murder is so vile, it already rends the soul. The spells and the Horcrux receptacle merely allow it to truly separate.”

“And he did it to himself *seven* times? That’s...horrible!”

Dumbledore’s smile was not a pleased one. “Yes. Killing is bad enough. It leaves a scar, but it is not irreparable, especially if the killing was regretful.”

Harry studied Dumbledore’s face and the faraway glint in his eye. He remembered the Chocolate Frog card of Dumbledore and how it said he defeated the Dark wizard Grindlewald. Harry hadn’t thought about it much, but he supposed ‘defeated’ was a nice way of saying ‘killed’.

Harry was in the same boat, of course. He had to kill Voldemort or Voldemort would kill him. *Neither can live while the other survives.*

There were two Horcruxes left and one of them was supposed to be Nagini. But what was the last? Dumbledore didn’t know. And if *he* didn’t, then how was Harry to find it?

Harry suddenly noticed that Dumbledore had stopped talking a while ago. He looked up at the old wizard who was smiling kindly at him. “Do you have any questions, Harry?”

“No. Only...Professor. When the time comes, how am I really to...k-kill Voldemort? He’s so much faster and stronger than I am. I just don’t—”

“Harry. How did you feel the first time you played Quidditch?”

“That’s hardly the same, sir.”

“Just tell me.”

Harry sighed, a little petulantly, he realized, and tried to straighten up. “I was terrified. I hadn’t been flying all that long and I wasn’t really sure how the play went and if I’d make a fool of myself. But it wasn’t life or death either.”

“You certainly could have fallen from your broom. Indeed, Voldemort tried to do just that.” Harry remembered poor Professor Quirrell. “You could have been hit by a bludger,” Dumbledore went on. “There were any number of ways you could have met your doom. Why did you do it, then?”

“I..wanted to. I *needed* to. I was never part of anything before. Never wanted.” Saying it out loud made Harry feel funny inside. But it was also about proving himself, to others and to himself, that he wasn’t useless and stupid like the Dursleys told him he was growing up. This opened a bud of understanding inside of him. So maybe he had what it took. Just like the Tri-wizard Tournament, he had found his strengths. And much of it lay in his friendships. And love.

“I see, sir,” he said quietly. He rose. “Are we done here? I’ve got to go to class.”

“Yes, Harry.”

“And I won’t tell anyone. Only Hermione and Ron. And Draco.” He turned to go and felt he should add one more thing. “And sir...thank you for putting me in with him.” He knew he was blushing furiously but he had to say it. “You don’t know what it means to me. To be loved.”

Dumbledore smiled contentedly. “I’m glad, Harry.”

He nodded to the headmaster and then left.

* * *

He was just in time for Defense but when he roared up the stairs and turned the corner, everyone was standing outside the closed door reading a note tacked to it.

“What’s going on?” he asked, trying to make his way forward to read it.

“Defense is postponed,” said Seamus. He was smiling from ear to ear. “Looks like we got a free period, mates!”

Everyone cheered and retreated back the way they had come. Everyone except Hermione, Ron, and Draco who hung back the farthest, staring wistfully at the retreating Slytherins.

Harry stepped up to the door and read:

“Defense Against the Dark Arts is being temporarily postponed until further notice. Have a nice day!”

Headmaster Dumbledore.”

“So why is it canceled?” asked Harry. Defense was his favorite class.

“Didn’t you notice?” Hermione asked them. “I didn’t see any new teachers at the feast. We usually get a new Defense teacher every year. Maybe Dumbledore couldn’t find one.”

“Maybe he’s just late getting here,” offered Ron.

“This is terrible,” lamented Hermione. “Well, I suggest we use this time to go to the library and bone up on our Defense.”

“Oh right, Hermione,” said Ron cheerfully. “Let’s use this free hour to go to the *library.*” But his smile soon faded when he could see she was serious.

“Ronald Weasley, I’m certain you can put this time to good use. You aren’t getting the best of marks in Defense.”

“Yes, I am! It’s one of the few I’m not rubbish at. And I’m *not* going to the library.”

“Lover’s spat?” drawled Draco from the place he was leaning against the wall. “I don’t know, Weaselby. I wouldn’t be so quick to dismiss the lady. It’s not everyone who can put up with that ginger hair.”

“Shut up, Malfoy!” Ron squirmed. He was obviously debating whether to be loyal to his girlfriend or take the reprieve given to him. To break the stalemate, he looked to Harry. “Harry, do *you* want to go to the library?” His brows were so high up his forehead they almost disappeared into his hairline.

“Not really. But I do have some things to tell you. I talked to Dumbledore.”

Hermione and Ron got closer. “Really, Harry?” asked Hermione. “What did he say?”

Harry looked around. “Not here. We need some place private.” He looked at Draco across the corridor. “Can we use your room?”

Draco lurched away from the wall. “*My* room? NO!”

“Look, Draco, it’s private and triple warded. We need a place like that to discuss this.”

“But Harry.” He strode up to Harry and got close, close enough for Harry to feel his body heat, to smell him, and to realize he hadn’t touched the man for two hours. “That’s *our* room,” he whispered.

He couldn’t resist stroking Draco’s arm. “I know. But we really need the privacy. Please, Draco.”

Draco frowned and pulled away from Harry. “All right! So much for a love nest.”

“Gawd, Malfoy!” chuffed Ron. “Did you have to say?”

“Button it, Weasley. Just ‘cause you’re not getting any—”

Hermione blushed furiously, ducked her head down, and followed after Draco.

Harry loved the man but it didn’t mean he didn’t want to pop him one now and again.

They went to the fifth floor and looked around, making certain no one was in the corridor. They all ducked under the tapestry and Draco whispered, “Snickersnee.”

A door appeared and Draco opened it. The others followed and stopped in the doorway. “Blimey, Malfoy,” said Ron looking around. The large fourposter, the desk, the lounge area with its squashy chairs and fireplace. “Isn’t this a little too posh for the likes of you?”

“Probably like a palace to you, Weasel. This is more like my closet at home. My bedroom is *much* larger.”

Ron scowled at him. Hermione moved quickly into the room and got comfortable on one of the chairs.

“Make yourself at home, Granger,” said Draco with a sneer. “Don’t forget to put your feet up.”

“Give it a rest, Draco,” hissed Harry out of the side of his mouth.

Ron made his way to a chair and gingerly sat. Harry took the settee and patted the seat beside him for Draco.

For a moment, the Slytherin hesitated. Sullenly, he dragged himself to the settee and sat just out of reach of Harry.

His Gryffindor friends looked at him expectantly, while Draco crushed his folded arms over his chest and deliberately stared into the fire. Harry launched into everything that Dumbledore said, and at the end of it, Draco was scooted right up against Harry, holding his leg.

“You mean that diary—” Draco swallowed. “My father showed it to me once. I got to hold it. I mean...” He swallowed again. “I thought it was great...once. Not now, of course.” He looked away from Harry guiltily, until Harry grabbed his chin and turned his face toward him.

“I know you don’t want to see any harm come to me now.”

“No, I don’t!” he whispered.

Hermione cleared her throat and Harry let his chin go. “These Horcruxes. Dumbledore said he’s gotten most of them. All but the last two.”

“And one is that great dirty snake,” said Ron with a shiver.

“And the last one—beside the one in Voldemort himself—is still to be found,” said Harry.

“I wonder what it could be?” said Hermione in thought.

“Dumbledore said he likes trophies from the Hogwarts founders.”

“Gryffindor’s sword?” said Ron.

“No, Dumbledore said it wasn’t. There were two things from Slytherin and one from Hufflepuff,” said Hermione. “So it stands to reason that maybe one is from Ravenclaw, assuming he couldn’t get anything from Gryffindor.”

“Which is why he used two things from Slytherin,” said Harry. “Also for the fact that he was the heir of Slytherin.”

“Yes,” she agreed. “Well, we’ll have to research Ravenclaw and see what might be out there.”

“Wait a minute,” said Draco. He stared at all of them. “Do you hear yourselves? This is not a shopping spree. When you find this thing Harry’s got to go *kill* the Dark Lord.”

“Yes, Draco,” said Harry quietly. “I’m well aware of that. I’ve been living with this thing too long. I’m ready to be done with it.”

“But...Harry. Shouldn’t you...I mean, shouldn’t Dumbledore at the very least be teaching you...*things*?”

“Things? What kind of things?”

“Bloody hell, Harry! *Dark* magic, all right! A lovely bat bogie hex just won’t do it, you know! You have to learn Dark things to defeat a Dark wizard.”

“Dumbledore seems to think that all I need is love.”

“That’s mental!”

Hermione shook her head slowly. “I hate to admit this, Harry, but I think Draco’s right.”

“*What?*” cried Ron.

“Look,” she said, leaning toward the redhead. “He’s got to fight fire with fire.”

“I don’t know, Hermione,” said Harry, squirming. “He seemed pretty confident about the love thing.”

“You could make a love *potion*,” said Ron. “Make him fall in love with you.”

Harry screwed up his face. “Eww, Ron.”

Ron sat back sheepishly. “Just an idea.”

“It’s not a bad one,” said Hermione. “Oh, not about him falling in love with Harry. That’s rather sickening, actually. But something similar. Something where he cannot find the will to kill you.”

“And how can I do that?”

“Maybe we could get Snape—”

Harry shook his head. “He’s still spying. They might Legilimize him and he’d give the game away.”

“I could do it.”

They all turned to Draco. He raised a brow. “I’m good at potions. I could do it. Find me the potion, Granger, and I can do it here.”

“That’s an idea. But Malfoy...Draco...I won’t have time. I’ll be researching Ravenclaw. You’ll have to find one yourself. Except all the really good potions books are probably in Snape’s dungeon.”

“That’s not a problem,” said Draco, sitting back. “I’ll just steal them.”

They stared at him again, six sets of Gryffindor eyes. “What?” he said. “Don’t you want me to find the potion?”

They looked at one another and finally shrugged. Gryffindor methods and Slytherin methods. Whatever worked, thought Harry.

* * *

The first day back wasn’t so bad, but it was the night to come that got Harry truly excited. This time he wore his pajamas and dressing gown to Portkey over. Draco was waiting for him. He slowly stripped Harry of everything and slid his arm around him, escorting him naked to the bed. It was a good-sized fourposter, not like the ones in the dorm room. Draco released Harry and dived onto the bed. Harry laughed and followed suit, rolling into Draco’s arms and falling into a kiss. How he loved kissing Draco. His lips were always warm and soft. And they loved to tease Harry’s lips before they opened and slipped a tongue into his mouth. Harry sucked on Draco’s tongue, loving the feel of it and then let Draco explore his mouth. It was a nice long kiss and Harry was breathless when Draco finally pulled away. “Are you still sore, Harry?”

He really wanted Draco to shag him but he knew it would be too painful. He nodded regretfully.

“That’s all right. I have an idea. Top to tail, my man!”

Harry looked at him, uncertain of his meaning, when Draco said, “Put your head down there, Harry.”

“Near your feet?”

“Not my feet, love. Can’t you think of someplace better to put your face?”

Oh. Harry complied and was soon lying on his side staring at Draco's hard dick, while Draco did the same for Harry. "I believe we discussed a little mutual cocksucking last night," said Draco. And suddenly, Harry felt lips surrounding his cock.

Dazed for a moment, he recovered enough to want Draco to experience the same. He leaned forward and drew his tongue up the hard shaft in front of him. Draco made a muffled moan, his mouth being busy at the moment. Harry didn't know what to concentrate on more; Draco's lapping tongue and sucking lips, or the musky smell and taste of the cock on his own mouth.

Harry licked and swirled his tongue over Draco's glans before swallowing all of it. He took as much of it into his mouth as he could, nudging the head to the back of his throat. He put all his suction into it and Draco dropped Harry's penis from his mouth with a gasp. "Oh, Potter! You're amazing!"

He withdrew from Draco and looked up the pale body. "Don't give up now," he panted to Draco. What Draco had been doing was pretty spectacular too. Draco smiled wickedly, licked his lips to moisten then all around, and took Harry's prick in his mouth again.

So it's that way, is it? Harry swallowed Draco's cock and they both began to furiously suck, tongues dancing over the hard flesh while keeping it deep in their mouths. It was a contest now and Harry knew he wasn't going to last much longer. But Draco was beginning to pump into Harry's face. Harry loved that feeling, submitting so utterly to his lover. Draco was making a keening sound and he suddenly stiffened and let loose his release into Harry's mouth. Harry gulped it down, continuing to suck and slurp. Draco thrust into him but the thrusts were slowing, just as his own sucking had slowed. But he seemed to remember what else he was supposed to be doing and he resumed licking at Harry and fiercely sucking. Harry felt the aching pleasure rise up through his balls and he came with a hoarse grunt, his mouth still clamped around Draco's shrinking dick.

Draco sucked and sucked, until the feeling was too much for Harry and his sensitive member. Draco released Harry and crawled up toward him, his mouth strangely configured even though he was smiling. He lay breast to breast with Harry and leaned forward to kiss him. Suddenly Harry's mouth was flooded with his own cum and both he and Draco jostled tongues to slurp it up. They kissed and kissed, even when all the cum was gone, until Harry, too breathless, his heart still beating madly, had to lie back.

"God, Draco!" He lay flat on the bed, staring up at the canopy above. "That was bloody marvelous."

Draco chuckled. "I thought you'd like that."

"Where do you learn these things?"

"Remember those wizard wanking mags? I'm a subscriber."

"Well, you'll have to share, won't you?"

Draco lay beside Harry, both their heads at the foot of the bed. He reached out and stroked Harry's sweaty hip. "I love sex with you, Harry. You're so open to new things."

“You know so much.” He just breathed for a while before his thoughts from earlier started intruding. He rolled over to face the Slytherin again. His finger traced a clavicle. It was dotted with perspiration. “Draco, I’ve been wondering. Why do you love me?”

“What? What kind of question is that?”

“Well...I was just thinking. I love shagging with you. And I love you. But I wonder really what we have in common. Besides our being gay. I mean...that’s not all there is to it, is there? Could it have been anyone as long as they were gay?”

Draco turned toward him and glared. “No. It could not have been anyone. If it had been Longbottom I would have hightailed it in the other direction. I never would have considered him.”

“But why me? We don’t really have anything in common. Our whole life’s philosophies are completely opposed to the other’s. So what is it?”

“Who cares? Why do you want to analyze everything to death? Why can’t you just be happy with what we have?”

“But I don’t know *what* we have. And I wonder if it will sustain us when we leave school.”

“So that’s what this is about. Honestly, Potter. You are a case, aren’t you?” Draco sighed heavily and turned over onto his stomach, propping himself on his elbows. Harry did the same, even though it meant rubbing his sensitive dick on the duvet. “Harry,” Draco began. “Perhaps you may have noticed how obsessed we’ve been with one another, well before we did that quill pal thing.”

Harry nodded. “Yes, I guess so.”

“I’d one-up you and you’d one-up me. Didn’t you think that was a bit—”

“Childish?”

“Odd.”

“Both, maybe.”

Draco agreed with a half shrug. “So we’ve been following the other around or perhaps one could say ‘dancing’ around the other for years. We seem to have a need for one another. Both physical and mental.”

“It sounds more physical than mental.”

“If we had to stop shagging today, would you ever want to see me again?”

Harry looked long and hard at Draco’s face, that pointed face he used to hate so much. Those cold grey eyes, those light brows, that silky blond hair. The very idea of never seeing Draco again broke his heart. “Yes, I would. I need to.”

“Me, too,” he said softly. “You’re a hero, Harry. You’re a champion, a conqueror. You’re powerful, and I’m not ashamed to say that this attracts me. And I like the way you think about things and can express yourself so simply.”

“Are you kidding? I stutter it out all the time.”

“No, you don’t. And even if you do, the meaning is clear. You’re gentle and sweet. I never...well, let’s just say it isn’t something I was used to, but dearly wanted to be. And...I like you. It makes me want to learn to like the same things you do. Isn’t that basis enough for a relationship?”

Harry smiled in spite of himself. “I guess so.”

“So isn’t there anything about me that you like?”

Harry thought deeply. “Well, you just go ahead and rush forward with things, a little like I do, I guess. And you pick things up rather well because you’re always listening while others are talking. Um...you seem really confident most of the time. That’s appealing. And you really want to be loved. I can tell.”

Draco blushed. He lowered his eyes and Harry gazed at the light lashes feathering his cheek.

“And...you’d change for me, wouldn’t you? That takes a lot of bravery, Draco.”

Draco looked up at that. “For you, Harry,” he whispered. He leaned in and lightly touched his lips to Harry’s.

Harry suddenly felt much better about it. “Maybe I was analyzing it to death, like you said.”

Draco took Harry’s hand and intertwined their fingers. “That’s okay. As long as you came to the right conclusion. So are we lovers again?”

“Never stopped.” Harry squeezed Draco’s hand in his.

Draco gazed at Harry’s face and slowly smiled. “If it’s any comfort to you, I sometimes still can’t believe we’re together like this, even after two years.”

“It does strike me at the odd time. But I don’t want to give you up.”

“I won’t let you.”

“Good.”

Draco curled his arm around Harry and hugged him close, planting a kiss to his neck. They lay that way, cuddled together at the wrong end of the bed for most of the night.

But when Harry slept, he dreamed. And his dreams were of him and Draco and horrific laughter and bright green light.

Part Three—Prisoner

Harry noticed it a week later. The staff seemed unusually agitated and Dumbledore seldom came to the feasts or even to breakfast. Even Ron noticed it.

“Maybe they’re drawing straws as to who will teach Defense,” said Ron mouth full of toast. A Defense teacher still hadn’t shown up even after a week of school and Hermione voiced her concerns almost daily, mostly because of lost marks. “And who wants to teach that when you’re certain to be gone in a year?”

“That’s You-Know-Who’s fault,” whispered Hermione. “He cursed the position.”

“It’s a plum job though, you have to admit,” he said, swallowing. “The glamour job.”

“If you don’t get killed,” said Harry, thinking of Quirrell. He thought about him a lot in the last few days.

Owls began arriving, and Harry looked back over his shoulder at Draco as he always did, and finally, an owl dropped before the Slytherin. Draco’s face broke into the most beautiful smile Harry had ever seen. “Finally,” he whispered. Draco took the scroll from the owl’s leg and unrolled it then and there. His eyes tracked, absorbed in reading. He smiled a few times and then rolled it up. He raised his head and smiled at Harry, waving the scroll.

“Draco’s got a letter from his mum,” he said. Hermione glanced back and smiled.

“I’m so pleased. He’s really been worried.”

“Who cares?” said Ron. He pulled up short and winced, looking at Harry. “Sorry, mate. Old habits.”

“Look, Ron. He’s trying for my sake. The least you can do is try, too.”

“I am, but it isn’t easy. He’s been rotten longer than he’s been nice. Come to think of it, he’s still not *nice*. Not to us.”

The Ravenclaw Prefect came up to Harry and he looked up at her curiously. “Dumbledore wants to see you after breakfast, Harry.”

“Thanks,” said Harry. He looked at his friends and shrugged. What could it be this time? He didn’t find another Horcrux, did he? Harry’s heart began a quick tattoo. If he did then that would mean—

He rose. He suddenly wasn’t hungry anymore. Might as well go now. He glanced over his shoulder and spotted the Ravenclaw talking to Malfoy. He was suddenly relieved. So it wasn’t that. Draco was being called to the Headmaster’s office as well.

They walked together, Harry resisting the urge to hold Draco’s hand, not that the Slytherin would let him anyway. “I saw you got a letter from your mum,” said Harry.

Draco smiled and pulled it from his robes. "Want to hear it?"

"Yeah."

"My dearest Draco," he read. "It was so good to hear from you. I am so pleased you are well. I don't know what to say about you and your new 'friend'—" and he looked up sheepishly at Harry—"but if it makes you happy, it can only do the same for me as well.

"I feel as if I am a prisoner here. I cannot leave, I cannot stay alone. I wish I could come to you, but this is our home. I know the moment I leave it, it will be surrendered to the Ministry. Your father wouldn't be pleased by that.

"Yes, I miss him, too. I miss our little family—" Draco stopped. His voice broke. He raised his hands to his eyes and Harry took him in his arms.

"Draco, I'm so sorry."

"Can't be helped, can it? He tried to kill you, didn't he?" He tried to put a brave face on it but his anger overtook it. "It's all the Dark Lord's fault! I hate him!"

"Me, too."

He looked at Harry and suddenly laughed. Mouth in a grimace, face wet, Draco laughed and Harry laughed, at the absurdity that they should both hate Voldemort for two entirely different reasons.

He waved the letter and rolled it up again. "Anyway, the rest is full of mushy stuff."

Harry kissed Draco, took his arm, and proceeded down the corridor.

Dumbledore welcomed them, offered them chairs, sweets, and when there was nothing left to offer them, sat at his desk and looked them over.

"I called the two of you here for a very special reason. We have a new Defense Against the Dark Arts teacher. And I would like to introduce him to the two of you first."

Dumbledore's eyes focused behind the boys, and perplexed, Harry turned around to look. It was just instinct. He didn't know how he got to his feet or how his wand was in his hand and aiming.

He was all too familiar to Harry, though he had never looked so haggard before. His eyes were sunken into dark sockets, his bright hair lay limp against his shoulders, and the fire he had seen in those cold eyes burned only dimly if at all.

But Draco was also on his feet and running; running toward him and clasped his arms about him, murmuring, "Father, Father..."

Harry turned back to Dumbledore, his face red with anger. *How could you do this to me?* he wanted to ask.

“Please, Lucius. Sit. You must be weary from your journey.”

Lucius Malfoy walked slowly to the seat indicated, with Draco still clinging to him, his face buried in his father’s robes.

“Harry. Please sit down.”

“I don’t want to sit down.” All those feelings of anger he had harbored for Dumbledore in his fifth year came tumbling out again. He wanted to thrash the place as he had done before. “What is *he* doing here?”

“That’s not a very healthy attitude, Potter,” said Lucius Malfoy. He may look haggard, but his voice was just as oily as it had been before. He patted Draco’s hand as his son finally withdrew from him and sat down. Draco seemed torn. He kept looking worshipfully at his father but wouldn’t raise his eyes to Harry.

“You tried to kill me! To deliver me to Voldemort.”

“Yes, well. Things...change.”

“You’re an evil git. They don’t change.”

“Now Harry,” said Dumbledore. “This is the reason I brought you here. You must compose yourself.”

“You’re not seriously entertaining the notion of having this Death Eater teach a class. You can’t be saying that!”

“Harry, if you will sit down and listen.”

“NO!” It was all pouring out now. The hurt, the conniving behind his back. “I’m tired of sitting and listening to you. You never tell me anything when I need to know it, only when you want to tell me. And now you want to put this *Death Eater* in charge of teaching us how to *defend* against the Dark arts? That’s mental!”

“HARRY POTTER. SIT DOWN!”

Harry sat hard. Dumbledore’s enhanced voice still rang in his ears. He clutched the chair arm and glared at Malfoy who looked back at him mildly, one brow raised.

“If you will allow me to explain, Harry, you might be better able to accept it. Now, Mr. Malfoy...that is, *Professor Malfoy*—” Harry squirmed at that. *I’ll NEVER call him that!* “—will be taking on the duties of teaching Defense Against the Dark Arts. How this came about is a long story which I will try to shorten here. When Mr. Malfoy was arrested at the Ministry it was indeed to trick you into retrieving the Prophecy and to snatch you for Voldemort. He admits this. This is why he was sent to Azkaban.”

“A horrible place,” said Lucius with a shudder.

“Good!” snarled Harry.

Draco darted a glance at Harry then, his face a mask of anguish. Harry didn’t look at him again. This was between him and Lucius Malfoy.

“I have been visiting Mr. Malfoy over the last year, talking with him.”

“If he’s told you he’s reformed then he’s lying.”

“Yes, I know.”

Lucius stiffened at that and straightened his cravat.

“He’s a very good liar, as I expect most Slytherins...and a few Gryffindors...are.” His eyes gave the merest of twinkles. “And though he is an accomplished Occlumens I am even better at Legilimency. Simply put, Mr. Malfoy was far safer in Azkaban than he would have been back in Voldemort’s clutches. Voldemort was not pleased that Lucius failed at the Ministry. He failed to get the Prophecy that Voldemort so needed to hear, and he failed to capture or kill you. Mr. Malfoy was of the opinion that had he returned to Voldemort he would have most certainly been killed.”

Harry resisted offering another “good!” seeing as how Draco was reacting to all of this.

“Mr. Malfoy had a great deal of time to think matters over in Azkaban. Even without the Dementors it is not a pleasant place. As any Slytherin, he recalculated his odds, weighed the pros and cons, and came to the conclusion that the side of Light had the best advantage. Therefore, he wanted to offer his services to our side.”

“A turncoat when the going gets rough? Oh that’s brave, isn’t it?”

“I never professed to any sort of bravery, Potter,” said Malfoy with a sneer. It was the same sneer Harry had seen Draco wear countless times. “It is as Dumbledore suggests. We Malfoys choose the best side for our purposes. Not the right side or the most courageous side, but the most advantageous side. Just as Draco has surely taken up with you.”

“It’s not like that with me and Draco!” He looked at his lover then, but Draco wouldn’t lift his gaze to Harry. Harry blinked. No. That wasn’t why Draco was his lover. He said he loved Harry. It wasn’t because Harry was on the winning side...was it?

“I may be wrong....” said Lucius, shrugging, but his small smile left the notion so open-ended that Harry could make no other conclusion. His heart suddenly ached terribly.

“Now Lucius,” said Dumbledore. “Let us not bring Harry’s personal life into it. What he and Draco share is surely beyond politics.”

“Of course, Headmaster.”

“And so,” continued Dumbledore, “I concluded that it might be wise to take Mr. Malfoy from Azkaban before Voldemort could get to him. I convinced the Ministry and him that to work for the Light would not only save his life, his home, and his family, but offer him a chance at a new life after the war was ended. Hogwarts is the safest place to be and Mr. Malfoy is very experienced in Dark arts and in Voldemort’s methods that I felt he was the best candidate not only to teach the class but to tutor you, Harry.”

“I refuse to learn a thing from him. I don’t trust him. I don’t know why you do.”

“Because he has a great deal to lose if he does not follow all of my directives.”

“Lose what?”

“Everything.”

Harry clamped his mouth shut. He looked at Malfoy, and for once, his eyes were lowered and Harry sensed something different about him. His shoulders slumped just a little, a posture of surrender. And for someone like Lucius Malfoy, this was a great deal. Everything? He’d already lost that when he went to prison. So what did Dumbledore mean? Did he mean he threatened Narcissa? Draco?

Harry felt numb. What good was a war when both sides resorted to the same tactics? But maybe Harry was wrong. He knew he was naïve about many things. He didn’t always understand the motivation of others, especially wizards. They often had an odd way of thinking about things. Raised as a Muggle, Harry had a different perspective.

He suddenly decided that—at seventeen—it was perhaps time for *him* to weigh his options and recalculate his odds. They weren’t too good if he had to face Voldemort today. Who was really better to help him than someone straight from the devil’s lair?

It was the mature thing to do. But Harry didn’t have to like it.

“All right,” said Harry softly. “It makes sense. But if he steps out of line even once—I don’t care if you call him the Minister for Magic—I’m hexing him with all I’ve got!”

Dumbledore nodded. “I believe that is fair. Lucius?”

“My, my, Headmaster. I would have thought your students here were far more disciplined. But I see that, as usual, *Potters* always get their own way.”

Dumbledore was silent, but Harry recognized the dangerous glint in his eye.

Lucius seemed to as well and ploughed ahead. “I understand that Potter is...*staying*...with Draco in his rooms.”

“Yes, Lucius. It is safer for Harry there.”

And suddenly, Harry felt used again. Safer for him, yes, but Draco also served as his human shield if Lucius felt he could take matters into his own hands. Harry hated this war with renewed passion.

“Very well. Your Defense class is coming up soon. I trust we will all do our best. And just to make certain, I’ve assigned you an assistant, Lucius.”

Malfoy had risen, and he looked back at Dumbledore surprised. “An assistant? But we never discussed—”

“Well, as Headmaster I do tend to make decisions on my own occasionally. Firenze will assist you.”

“Who?”

Harry smiled. Dumbledore wasn't as mental as he sometimes appeared. The centaur would protect Harry and the others in case Lucius got any notions. Brilliant.

“He's a centaur,” said Harry, taking vicious delight in Malfoy’s expression. He knew Lucius had disdain for any creatures other than Pureblood wizards and witches. Having a centaur in the class with him must certainly irk his Pureblood fantasies.

Draco didn’t look too keen on it either.

“Well...That will certainly make things...interesting,” said Malfoy.

* * *

As soon as Harry and Draco were dismissed, Harry fumed down the corridor. He had to talk to Draco but he didn’t know if he could in the state he was in.

“Hey Harry!” Harry turned to face his lover. The blond stood alone in the corridor and he suddenly looked small and vulnerable. Funny, since he was taller than Harry. Thin and lank like his father, with that same pointed face, that same hair, that same sneer. Although he wasn’t wearing a sneer now.

“Harry. We have to talk.”

He stomped up to Draco. “You’re damned right we have to talk.”

“This is awkward. *I’m* ecstatic to see my father, whereas *you*...well. You want to kill him, don’t you?”

“For starters. What did he mean when he said you took up with me for the same reason he changed sides?”

“Maybe that’s what *he* thought. But it isn’t true.”

“Isn’t it? But Slytherins are so good at lying.”

“And so are Gryffindors,” he said, the sneer returning. “And they’re so good at keeping secrets.”

“Will you get over that!”

“Not if you’re going to throw *my* past up in my face.”

“THAT MAN TRIED TO KILL ME!”

“THAT *MAN* IS MY FATHER!”

Stalemate. “Maybe we should just give it a rest for a bit,” said Harry, each syllable tearing a bit out of his heart.

“W-what do you mean?”

“I mean...I’ll stay in my dorm. Where I belong.”

“But...Harry. I love you.”

“Yeah. Well. I don’t know what *I’m* feeling right now.” He turned and walked away. He didn’t notice until he’d gotten to the bottom of the stairs that his face was wet.

* * *

Harry knew he’d catch hell for skipping potions but he couldn’t make himself go. Not with Snape. He’d rather spend the time by the lake. Besides, it was bad enough that the next class was Defense. Should he go? All his friends would be there, wondering what happened to him. And Draco. Why had he done that to Draco? Could he really trust the man? They’d been together for almost two years. Couldn’t he trust him by now? On the other hand, he was a Slytherin and worse; a Malfoy.

But he’d loved him. He *did* love him. But was Harry just being stupid and sentimental? His life depended on his making the right choices right now.

He dragged himself to his feet and shuffled back to the castle, his book bag trailing behind him.

Trudging to the back of the crowd at the Defense classroom, Hermione came up to him. “Harry! Where have you been? We’ve been so worried.”

“In Dumbledore’s office. We’ve got a new Defense teacher.”

“So I gathered,” she said, surveying the agitated crowd. “Did you meet him?”

“Oh yeah. We had a nice chat. It’s Lucius Malfoy.”

“WHAT!”

Everyone fell silent and turned toward Harry.

“But he’s in Azkaban,” said someone.

“Not anymore,” said Harry, voice brightly thick with sarcasm. “Dumbledore’s sprung him. Aren’t we lucky to have someone who knows the Dark arts so intimately?”

“I should think so, Potter,” said Lucius behind him.

“Right on time, *Mr. Malfoy*,” said Harry, glaring at him.

“That’s *Professor Malfoy*, Potter. Or shall I take points?”

“You just go ahead and try.”

He strode up to Harry and looked at him down the length of his aristocratic nose. He smiled. “I suppose one should give you the benefit of the doubt. Being the Chosen One and all. At least on the first day, eh, Potter?”

He cast the doors open and strode in. The others followed cautiously. Hermione and Ron were still staring after him, remaining in the corridor.

“Has Dumbledore lost his mind?” asked Ron.

“Not entirely,” said Harry, waiting for the sound he longed to hear.

Suddenly, the fireplace whooshed and, ducking, Firenze trotted out. Everyone oohed and awed. Firenze swiveled his head and looked about under lowered lids. “Ah, Harry Potter. It is good to see you well.”

“Thanks, Firenze. It’s *very* good to see you here.”

“Yes. Well. Introductions,” said Lucius. “I am Professor Malfoy and this is my *assistant*, Firenze. However, any questions concerning spells and hexes *must* be directed to *me*.”

Everyone seated themselves just as the door squeaked open again. Lucius looked up. “Draco. You were almost late. Wouldn’t do to take points from Slytherin, now would it? Sit down.”

Harry told himself not to look, but he couldn’t help it. Draco looked bad. He’d obviously been crying and he sat by himself in the back.

Hermione nudged Harry. “Harry, what’s going on?”

“Tell you later.”

“Welcome to Defense Against the Dark Arts, seventh years,” Lucius went on. “There’s no need to tip toe here. It’s a dangerous world out there. I ought to know. I caused much of it.” The room fell absolutely silent. But Hermione put up her hand, stiff and tall.

Lucius pivoted his head and glared at her. “Miss Granger. You have something to say?”

“Yes, sir, I do. Why is a convicted Death Eater teaching this class?”

There were a few gasps. But Harry was proud of her. He smiled wide.

“As usual, Gryffindors act before they think. Ten points from Gryffindor. In *defending* against the dark arts, you will have to think before you act. Yes, I am a convicted Death Eater. Who better to teach you all that you need to know in these dark times? Do you think the war will not fall on your doorstep? Do you know people who have died? Families who have fled the country in the mistaken notion that they will be safe?”

“But *you* killed some of them!” said Ron, bristling to stand up. Harry saw his wand tight in his fist.

“I did no such thing. You cannot prove it, in any case, and you are out of turn, Weasley. Another ten points from Gryffindor. Certainly Dumbledore would never have appointed me if that were true.”

“Wizards killing their own kind is bad enough,” said Firenze. “But the killing of defenseless Muggles is another. But there will be no more of that. Your task, Malfoy, is to teach these colts to defend against the evil of Voldemort. It is best to get to it and forget the stupidity of house points. I’ll restore them all at any rate.”

Malfoy’s face reddened in anger. He glared impotently at the centaur. Suddenly, he calmed, brushing his hair back from his face. “My...unusual friend here is correct. The Dark Lord does not care about house points and petty differences. If anything, he will use them against us, forcing us to fight amongst ourselves. We must be better than that. Pair up!”

Everyone found their partners. Only Harry was without anyone...as was Draco. They looked across the room at one another. “Hermione, pair with me,” hissed Harry.

“But I’m with Ron.”

“Hermione, please!”

“Just go over to Draco. Whatever it is, this is bigger than that.”

Harry gritted his teeth. Fisting his wand, he stomped over to him. Draco turned his head, pretending not to look at him. “I guess we’re partners,” said Harry.

“That’s what *you* think,” Draco muttered.

“Are we ready?” asked Lucius. “One of you pick your best curse and the other will defend against it. Ready? Begin.”

The other pairs began dueling, and curses and hexes whizzed across the room amid shouts and scrambling.

Harry and Draco simply stood, looking at one another, their wands pointed downward toward the floor.

Malfoy’s shadow suddenly fell over them. “Well? Have you both forgotten your hexes?”

Harry looked down at his wand. “I...”

“Potter, it may be that you will confront familiar faces on the battleground. Do not let sentimentality undo you. Raise your wand and duel.”

“But that doesn’t make me any better than Voldemort.”

“And now you have understanding.”

He looked up at Lucius, his sneer, his cold eyes so like Draco’s...but vastly different as well.

“I am already too much like him,” said Harry so softly Lucius leaned forward to hear. “I can’t afford to be any more like him.” Harry lowered his wand and put it in his robe. Before he could blink, Malfoy’s was out and aimed at Harry.

But before the curse could hit Harry, a shield surrounded him and the curse bounced off. Lucius ducked to avoid getting hit by it.

“Potter! How did you do that?”

“You son of a bitch! You tried to curse me!”

Malfoy grabbed Harry’s robes and hauled him forward, nose to nose. “Call me a name again and you will know what a *Cruciatus* can really be.”

All at once, and electric shock fired off of Lucius’ hand and he released Harry with a yelp. He stared at his smoldering hands incredulously.

“Leave him alone, Father.”

He turned to his son, the incredulous expression still molding his face. “*You?*”

“Yes, I did the shield and the shock. Now leave him alone.”

Lucius looked from one to the other and suddenly noticed that the room had grown quiet. He glared at all the students and grabbed Harry and Draco by the shoulder. “You two. Outside!”

He shoved them through the door and slammed it shut. He squared on them. “You will not bring your bedroom shenanigans into my classroom, do you hear me? Leave them outside. Gods! You’re worse than a menstrual girl, Potter!”

“I didn’t start it!”

“Do I need to remind you how important this is! Not just your miserable life. I don’t give a damn about you. But you seem to be the hope of the Wizarding world.” He made a humourless laugh. “And don’t we deserve it? Relying on a *boy* to save us all.”

“Father—”

He turned to Draco, two tall men with hair nearly as white as snow. “Does this surprise you, my son? Perhaps when you are on the receiving end of Lord Voldemort’s wrath you might see things differently. I’ve had time to think, Draco. I’m not just scheming here. I’m finding the best options for us all. And believe it or not—” He pointed at Harry. “This is it.”

Draco looked at Harry. His face was so naked and raw that Harry knew at once that he couldn’t possibly be faking it. He was frightened. Frightened for Harry. He wore that expression once before. It was in his room at the Dursleys when Harry told him he didn’t think he’d survive Voldemort again. That was also when Draco said he wanted to marry him, the most romantic and important moment of his life.

Something inside him broke. He wanted so much to take Draco in his arms, tell him it was going to be all right. Before he knew what was happening, he was doing just that, right in front of Lucius Malfoy.

Draco slumped into his shoulder and Harry let him. He looked up at Malfoy whose face was appalled. Maybe he was in a little denial about his son and Harry, but there was no mistaking it now.

Draco pulled himself together quickly. He wiped his face with his hand. “I’m all right!” he said irritably, slapping Harry’s hand away.

Lucius fumed. Harry didn’t care. “You are both dismissed from class,” he said in a quietly controlled voice. “Potter, report here after the feast. We will train for one hour.”

“I’m coming, too,” said Draco.

“No. Only Potter.”

“No!”

He looked down at his son. Mutiny. His face said it all. But then it changed again, the ever changing, ever adapting Slytherin. “I see. Very well. Eight o’clock. Don’t be late.”

* * *

Harry and Draco headed for the Defense classroom after the feast. While everyone was returning to their common rooms for games and conversation, they walked in silence as if they were walking to the gallows. Finally, Draco just stopped and Harry looked back at him.

“I have to know before we get there,” said Draco. “Do you still want me?”

His stomach swooped again. “Did you take up with me because I might beat Voldemort?”

“NO! I told you the truth. It happened exactly as it did. Please believe me. Just read the letters again. That was the truth.”

The letters. Those marvelous letters. Harry had fallen for the boy in those letters even when he hadn’t known it was Malfoy.

Harry studied his face. It was quite a handsome face, at least Harry always thought so. Even when he used to hate him, he had thought he was handsome. He looked down once and then slowly approached Draco. "I can't deny it. I love you. I can't stop. I don't want to stop. But I'm scared, Draco. I've never given my heart like this before. I want to know it's safe with you."

"It is, Harry. Really. I swear."

His face was so full of longing. Harry reached up with both hands, cupped his cheeks, and touched his lips with his own. The Slytherin's mouth was warm and sweet. He kissed Harry back gently but with some urgency.

Harry pulled away and looked into those grey eyes. "I believe you."

"You'll come tonight, won't you? Harry, please. I need you. I don't want to be without you."

He was feeling the same. His throat was thick with emotion. He nodded. "Yes, I'll come tonight."

"We don't have to do anything," said Draco, sinking into his arms. His lips trailed gently against Harry's cheek. "We could just hold each other."

"Not on your life," said Harry with a chuckle. "If I go you'll shag me proper and they'll be no argument about it."

Draco pulled back to look at him. And then his face collapsed into a smile. "Oh. You're toying with me. There's payback for that, my man. You just wait."

He kissed Draco again and then gestured with his head. "Come on, or your father will take points."

Harry didn't particularly want to talk about Lucius Malfoy. With him on staff, the Slytherins were taking a second look at Draco. Harry saw some of them talking to him again at the feast. But Draco seemed troubled by this. He didn't seem at ease with them. Harry realized that he felt better when Draco was estranged from his brethren. That wasn't very nice on Harry's part. Having Draco a little lonely made him more compliant, but was that what Harry really wanted?

Too complicated.

Lucius was drumming his long fingers on the stair baluster when they entered the Defense classroom. He straightened and moved elegantly toward them. "About time," he sneered.

Harry snorted. They weren't late.

"We're going to take at least an hour. Possibly longer," said Malfoy. "I have been instructed by the headmaster to teach you Unforgivables."

"You're joking," said Harry. "*Dumbledore* said that?"

“You can’t believe for one moment that that man doesn’t know every detail that goes on in this school, do you? He has his methods.” His eyes roved about for a moment before settling on Harry again. He rolled his shoulders. “And so, Potter. I am here to continue to teach you what Barty Crouch, Jr. left off doing.”

Did he have to remind Harry of that? Every unpleasant thing that ever happened to him may have involved Voldemort, but it seemed also to involve Lucius Malfoy as well.

Harry pulled out his wand and pushed up his sleeves. He was determined to be mature in front of Malfoy. “All right. What’s first?”

Lucius smiled and raised his wand, transforming a chair into a dog that looked remarkably like Snuffles. Harry glared at him. “Shall we begin with *Imperius*?”

* * *

Harry mastered that one fairly easily. When Draco tried it, it was clear to Harry that he had done it many times before. He stared at his lover, but Draco didn’t look at him. Secrets, eh? It seemed both Malfoys had many secrets. It hurt Harry’s feelings a bit that Draco had never told him about this, but he guessed he couldn’t expect the Slytherin to change everything about himself overnight. Besides, Harry had to admit to himself that part of Draco’s attraction was his sneakiness, his bad boy image. He wouldn’t want him to be a Gryffindor clone.

“Very good, Potter. You took to that rather well. One wonders how you do it. Are you certain you are supposed to be in Gryffindor?”

He knew Lucius meant it as an insult but he took pleasure in saying, “Actually, the Sorting Hat wanted to put me in Slytherin.”

Both Malfoy’s stopped dead and stared. “You’re lying,” said Draco.

But Harry didn’t take his eyes off of Lucius and his horrified expression. “It’s true. It said I’d do well in Slytherin. But after meeting your son I decided I didn’t want to be in Slytherin so I asked to be put anywhere but there.”

Draco made a screechy noise, but Lucius stepped closer to Harry, studying his face as if he had never seen it before. “It wanted to sort you into Slytherin...and you *refused*?”

“Yeah. That’s how much I didn’t want it.”

“And it...sorted you elsewhere...because you *asked*?”

“How about that?”

Lucius suddenly looked mighty disturbed by this. “Does Dumbledore know?”

“Don’t know. The Hat lives in his study. I suppose they have nice chats.” Harry began to get edgy. He had only told him to throw him off guard and wipe that smug look off his face. He hadn’t meant to open a kettle of worms. “W-why? I bet it happens all the time.”

Lucius spun on him. “Like people speaking Parseltongue, eh? Happens all the time? I can’t remember a single incident in living memory or in *Hogwarts: A History* where this has occurred.”

“Oh really? Well...there must be. I mean, maybe no one mentioned it.”

“Are you really that thick, Potter?” He turned to Draco. “Tell me Draco, is it his stupidity that attracted you? I can’t imagine what else it might be.”

“He’s a powerful wizard, Father. I think this proves it. He’s going to win.”

Lucius looked torn. For once, he seemed to realize that this might actually be true. Harry swallowed past a hard lump obstructing his throat. Maybe he *did* have a chance. It had only been a vague hope before. But maybe, just maybe it was actually going to happen.

“Mr. Malfoy, are you saying that I might have special abilities?”

He stared at Harry anew. “Yes, Mr. Potter. I think you do indeed have special abilities. Let us see if we can’t harness them.” He aimed his wand at the dog. “I want to see you perform the *Cruciatus* on this dog.”

Harry glanced at the dog who so resembled his late godfather and paused. “I don’t...”

“Mr. Potter,” said Lucius gently, in the same manner he often talked to Draco. “You must try.”

Yes. Harry knew he had to. And not just try. He had to master it. All the Unforgivables. After all, he had to kill Voldemort. That meant learning the *Avada Kedavra*. No time like the present.

* * *

Later that night back in Draco’s room, Harry lay pensively on the bed. They hadn’t made love, only kissed a lot. But Harry had been a bit too distracted even for that. Lucius Malfoy seemed awfully surprised—almost as much as Harry had himself—that he could perform *all* the Unforgivables. From just one lesson. He’d done it several times. And each time was easier than the last.

Even Draco couldn’t quite do the *Avada Kedavra*, which surprised Harry. He was certain Draco had been taught those a long time ago. He could certainly do the *Cruciatus*.

A gentle hand smoothed down his hair and he rolled over on the pillow to look at his lover in the firelight. “Don’t think about it too much, Harry. It’s just another spell, is all.”

“No, it isn’t. It’s *the* spell. The ultimate spell. And I did it just as easily as a *Lumos*. Why, Draco? What is it about me that makes it easy for me? Am I *that* good a wizard? I wasn’t good at much else before.” But then the awful thought occurred to him and he sat up. “Or is it because I really am a Dark wizard, no better than Voldemort!”

Draco sat up too and clasped Harry in his arms. "You are *not* a Dark wizard. I can't imagine anyone *less* of a Dark wizard except for Dumbledore himself."

"But Draco." His voice broke, betraying his emotions. "I did them all so easily. I just...killed that dog. And it looked just like... I'm sure your father did that on purpose!"

"Just like what?"

He sighed. "Like my godfather."

"Your godfather was a dog?"

"No, you idiot. He was an Animagus!"

"Like Pettigrew?"

"Yes. All because of Remus Lupin." And Harry felt compelled to tell him the whole story, about his stag Patronus and further explained about the Shrieking Shack. Draco looked appalled, until his face changed after a bit of thinking about it.

"So that's the secret behind the Shrieking Shack. And that's why you knew about it. They all did it for Lupin. Can't say that I'd go to the trouble for a werewolf but...Well. I guess I'd do it for you."

Harry smiled a little and leaned his head back against Draco's shoulder. "That's nice of you to say."

"It's true."

They were silent for a time until Harry ventured a tentative, "Draco, why didn't you tell me you knew how to do Unforgivables?"

Draco's breath caught and he said nothing for a long pause before he sighed. "I didn't...I didn't want you to think less of me. I didn't want you to think I was a Death Eater or something. You already had your suspicions of me, doubting my loyalties. I don't know what else I can say to convince you."

Harry squeezed Draco's arm. "I don't think less of you," he said, uncertain if that were entirely true. "And I love you. I thought that was firmly established."

"I don't think anything's firm, do you?"

Harry reached up, took Draco's hand, and directed it to his crotch and his hardening prick. "Well this is."

"I thought you were too upset to..."

"I'm feeling better now. And I do love you. And we haven't yet made love tonight."

Draco smiled against the skin of his neck. "Well then. If you're 'up' for it, so am I." He began a leisurely perusal of Harry's skin with his lips and they went at it for the rest of the night.

But in the earliest hours of the morning, Harry's scar suddenly burst with fiery pain. He cried out and Draco bolted upright beside him. The agony was so prolonged that Harry leaned over the side of the bed and vomited on the floor.

Draco, paler than usual, ministered to him, cleaned the sick with his wand, and fetched him a glass of cold water. "Scar," Harry managed to sputter out, clutching his forehead. If he didn't, he felt his brains would ooze out. He couldn't open his eyes for the pain the meager candle flame caused him. "Must talk to Dumbledore. He knows, Draco. He knows that most of his Horcruxes are gone!"

* * *

In their dressing gowns, Harry and Draco hurried through the gloomy corridors. Draco held Harry up as the pain still pulsated in his head. He clutched the Slytherin and through the terrible throbbing he was grateful for his presence and love. He could tell Draco was terrified. He said very little. Only made encouraging sounds to Harry and squeezed him for reassurance with the arm around his shoulder and the other holding his hand.

Draco tried the password from before but it wasn't working. Dumbledore had changed it. Draco used a string of creative swearwords Harry had never heard before until the blond calmed and began to think. "How can we send a message, Harry?"

"Dobby!"

Immediately, a loud cracking sound awakened the echoes in the corridor. The house elf bowed to Harry. "Harry Potter, sir." But when he turned and spied Draco, he suddenly cringed back. His hands flew protectively over his head. "Master Malfoy!"

Draco turned a pained expression to Harry before averting his face. "Dobby. Just forget all that," said Draco impatiently. "We have to see Dumbledore but we haven't got the password."

Dobby straightened his shoulders and adjusted his jumper that hung below his knees. "Dobby is no longer the Malfoy house elf. Dobby works for Hogwarts and is friend to Harry Potter!"

"Good! Then if you are his friend you will get a message to Dumbledore!"

"Dobby doesn't listen to Master Malfoy any longer. Only Harry Potter."

"Of all the fucking—"

"Dobby," said Harry hoarsely. "Please. Go get Dumbledore!"

"Dobby is pleased to do as Harry Potter says," he said with an elaborate bow.

"Dobby. Now. Please." He sank against Draco and Dobby looked uncertain for the first time, looking from Harry to Draco and back to Harry again, noticing at last that they were clinging to one another.

Dobby was gone in an instant, and another pause after that saw the gargoyle move aside and the griffin stairs revealed. Draco quickly moved Harry forward and helped him to the stair. They rode it together and when they reached the top, the door to Dumbledore's office was already open and the old wizard stood on the threshold. He moved forward to grab Harry and drew them both in. He conjured a mug of hot chocolate and handed it to Harry as he settled him on a squashy chair.

"Tell me," he said, to both of them.

"He knows, Headmaster. Voldemort knows we're after his Horcruxes. I can't...I can't—" He cried out suddenly with a new burst of pain. It felt as if someone had taken an ax to his head. He clutched it and bent forward, dropping the mug and letting it shatter on the floor. Draco knelt before him, kneeling in the shards and holding tight to Harry. Harry saw through the red pain that Draco's knees were bleeding and he tried to say something but he couldn't manage it.

But all at once the pain stopped. He looked up, and Draco was kissing his scar. His face was a mask of worry and he looked at Harry helplessly. Harry breathed a sigh of relief and lifted his hand to stroke Draco's cheek. "Thanks," he whispered. "Now please. Let Dumbledore heal your knees."

The Headmaster looked down at Draco for the first time and waved his wand, instantly cleaning the floor and healing Draco. He lifted the Slytherin easily and deposited him into a chair beside Harry.

"This is an unpleasant development. We had the element of surprise before. But I suppose it was inevitable. We must work tirelessly to discover his last Horcrux. Harry, have you been training with Lucius Malfoy?"

Harry swallowed back the bile in his throat. He was breathing easier but the memory of the pain was still fresh. "Yes. I mastered the Unforgivables."

Dumbledore said nothing and Harry finally looked up at him. Dumbledore's face held shock, and seldom had Harry ever seen him surprised. "You *mastered* them? *All* of them?"

"Yes, sir. All of them."

"In one lesson?"

"Yes, sir."

The headmaster glanced at Draco as if to confirm this. He stood and paced before the fire. The headmasters in the paintings discarded all pretenses at pretending to sleep. They stared at Harry openly. Headmaster Dibbet cocked an eye at him. "He's exceeded you, Dumbledore."

"You may very well be right," he answered and stopped his pacing to turn to Harry. "Harry," he said kindly. Frightened, Harry clutched at Draco tightly. "It seems you have skills that have accelerated. Possibly due to your connection to Voldemort. Or...possibly in spite of them."

"What does it mean, Headmaster?" He didn't want to know what it might mean. He didn't want to think that it was time to face Voldemort. Somehow that time had always seemed far off. But it was

rushing toward him as fast as a curse and he didn't know—even if he could do the Unforgivables—that he could perform them under duress.

“It means, Harry, that you are a very powerful wizard and I believe you completely competent to face Voldemort.”

“And win?” asked Harry.

Dumbledore smiled. “Yes, Harry. And win. And survive. I never doubted it. And in any case, I would never have let you face him if you could not. Not alone, anyway. And I have a feeling,” he looked down at Draco's death grip on Harry's hand, “that you would not be alone.”

A/N: Thanks to HarryxDraco for giving me the getting-Lucius-out-of-Azkaban suggestion. It started a whole new ball rolling for this fic. Now *that's* a community, people!

Part Four: Turncoat

A change seemed to come over Draco in the last few days. He seemed to have decided something. And when the students met in the Great Hall for breakfast, he didn't go to the Slytherin table as he usually did, even though some were beginning to talk to him again. He hovered near Gryffindor until Colin Creevy stood up from his place on the bench and faced him. “W-what do you want, Malfoy?”

Harry hadn't noticed Draco there and he whipped his head around.

Ron stood up next but instead of rounding on Malfoy as Harry expected, he turned to Colin. “You bloody well know why he's here. Cut him a break.”

Colin stared at Ron as if he didn't recognize him. “We have to put up with him and Harry, but we don't have to put up with him here.”

Hermione stood up next. “Yes, we do. It looks to me as if Draco needs to say something. Go ahead, Draco.”

Draco wore an expression as Harry had never seen before. He was bereft of all his snottiness, which was saying something. He looked helplessly from each grim Gryffindor face to another. Finally, some of that old Malfoy sneer returned and he drew up straight and tall again. “I want to sit with Harry,” he said in a strong voice.

“There's no room,” said Colin.

“Then we'll make room,” said the surprisingly clear voice of Neville. Everyone turned to him. He blushed and scooted over. “If everyone scoots this way, they'll be room. Won't there, Harry?”

Harry blinked. His eyes swept the faces of his housemates, each wearing various vexatious expressions. “It would be really appreciated,” he said.

Colin's scowl fell away and he looked at Malfoy with narrowed eyes. Finally, he sat back down next to his brother and scooted over ever so slightly. The others on the bench followed suit and Draco found a spot between Hermione and Harry. He squeezed in and Harry looked at him lovingly. "What made you come over?" he said to him quietly while the others resumed their breakfasts.

He looked back at Slytherin and shrugged. "I don't care what anyone thinks anymore. Besides, they all know we're together. There's no point in denying it. I want to sit meals with you. I want to do homework with you. I want...." He lowered his voice and rumbled, "I want to hold your hand between classes."

Harry's mouth fell open. "You do?"

"Yes. To hell with everyone. Other couples get to do it. I want to. We're a couple."

"Yeah," said Ron. "A couple of gits. Do you realize the backlash if you did that?"

"I thought this was a private conversation, Weasley," he snarled.

Ron looked up and down the table. All eyes were on the Slytherin and the Gryffindor. "Hardly," he said.

Draco glared at them all and he placed his hands firmly on the table. "Look, you," he said, addressing the table. "He's my boyfriend, got it? I'm bloody well going to hold his hand when I bloody well want to. And I'm bloody well going to eat meals with him from now on. Because he's my effing *boyfriend!* So if you've got anything to say—"

"You'll have all of us to answer to," said Hermione with a nod of finality.

"Yeah," said Neville.

"Yeah," said Dean, a little uncertainly.

The Creavy brothers wouldn't stop glaring at Draco, but the others seemed to stand down and murmured amongst themselves over their flakes and eggs.

Harry couldn't stop smiling. He squeezed Draco's thigh under the table and made certain that his leg remained in contact with his for the whole meal. He felt one hundred percent better with Draco beside him. He couldn't seem to get enough of the Slytherin. Draco for his part ate his breakfast silently, rubbing his foot against Harry's ankle from time to time.

When they had finished breakfast Draco was as good as his word and once he'd slid his book bag over his shoulder, he reached down and grasped Harry's hand. Startled, Harry looked at the blond. "Well," said Draco. "I said I wanted to hold your hand and I meant it."

Harry looked around and he noticed many eyes on them. It was accompanied by a lot of whispering but Draco didn't seem to mind it. Slytherin began hissing as they passed and Harry giggled uncontrollably.

“What’s the matter with you?” asked Draco, sneering back at his former housemates.

“They don’t realize it,” said Harry, trying to control his laughter, “but in Parseltongue they’re saying ‘pretzel.’”

Draco stared at him for a moment before he laughed too, looking back at his hissing housemates.

They endured the stares of all the students and a few wandering teachers as they made their way through the corridors. Hermione and Ron walked on either side of them, determined looks on their faces as if daring someone to say something. Once or twice some seventh year looked as if they might, but Ron stared them down, his wand gripped tight in his hand.

What they failed to do was release their hold of each other soon enough in Potions and Snape swiveled toward them and glared, a particular look of glee in his eye.

Harry sat in his usual spot but Draco scooted in next to him, seemingly oblivious to the snickers from the others.

Snape looked as if Christmas had come early.

“Well, well, well.” Harry cringed. Why couldn’t the man just leave them alone and teach for Merlin’s sake? “Changing seats, are you Malfoy? I don’t know that you’d get much done with your—now let me think. What shall we call him? Your ‘special friend’? Your ‘partner’? Your—”

“He’s my lover!” said Draco, rather loudly. Harry blanched. Even that was a bit much for him in the light of day. He dared a look at the rest of the class and they were sitting stock still.

“Indeed!” chortled Snape unpleasantly. “‘Lover’, is it? My, my. Aren’t we *mature*. Isn’t this just the height of *gentility*. ‘Lover’. I daresay, Mr. Malfoy, that is far more information than we all needed so quickly after breakfast.” The Slytherins laughed. The others were horrified. Snape turned to his house to wallow in their glee. “Well, then, Mr. Malfoy, I’m not certain if it is prudent that you and your... *lover*... should work together. Too many distractions. Too many little shared looks and sighs—”

“Why don’t you just get on with the class and let us work... *Sir*.”

Snape smiled. “Detention, Mr. Potter, for insolence.” It seemed to be what he was waiting for, and he turned to the board and flicked his wand toward it. Instantly, potion instructions came up on the dark surface.

Hermione looked witheringly at Harry but he ignored her. He just couldn’t listen to Snape for one more moment. He wrenched open his bag and slammed his utensils to the table. Draco gave him a warning glare, but he ignored that too. ‘Lover.’ What kind of stupid thing was that to say to Snape? It was asking for it, that’s what it was! And between having to put up with Lucius Malfoy’s private lessons, his sneering at Harry, and Harry’s imminent fight with Voldemort, Harry was feeling a bit on edge.

When class was over, Harry took his time returning his things to his bag. Draco looked back regretfully but Harry lifted his chin to Snape instead. He was sitting at his own desk reading over something in a book. He let Harry wait a long time until Harry sighed a bit loudly and he looked up, his eyes narrowing. "Well, Mr. Potter. Here we are again."

"Yes, sir," he said wearily.

"You need to tame that *'lover'* of yours. Using words like that is dangerous in these climes."

"Everyone already knows. Isn't that why he can't be in Slytherin?"

Snape leaned forward. "It's best not to spell it out. You're already in enough danger."

"Yes, I know. So why are you giving me detention on top of it? Sir."

He stood and slowly came around the desk. He swept toward Harry and looked down his large nose at him. "Because it is the only way in which I can talk to you privately, Potter, without arousing suspicion."

That took Harry aback and he slumped in his chair. "Huh?"

Snape huffed a breath. "And here the English language with all its treasury of synonyms, the only thing you can come up with is 'huh'? I am appalled."

"I just...y-you just want to talk to me?"

"Yes, Potter. As much as it pains me to say. Have there been any more incidents of accidental or unexplainable magic?"

"Unexplainable?"

"Inexplicable. Out of the ordinary. Unusual. You see. A veritable treasury of words, Potter."

He kept his anger in check. "No, sir. Not lately." Should he mention about the Unforgivables? He didn't think so.

"And Lucius Malfoy. Has he made any overt overtures of any kind?"

"I don't know what you mean, sir."

"Of course you don't. Perhaps I should use words of only one syllable." Harry glared. "Is he asking questions? Has he asked about your particular situation with Lord Voldemort?"

Harry tried to remember. He frowned thinking of it. "No. He's never asked me about Voldemort. He's the one who knows him."

"But he doesn't know the Prophecy, imbecile! Nor does he know of the...the items you are in search of."

Harry narrowed his eyes at Snape. "And how do *you* know about the...the *items*?"

"Don't be a fool. I know about his Horcruxes. How many times must you be told that Dumbledore trusts me?"

Harry didn't trust him and that's what counted in his book. "Then how does Voldemort know that most of them are destroyed? I thought he couldn't feel it when they were gone."

"I suspect because someone is telling him."

Harry mulled this. "But Mr. Malfoy doesn't know about them, or he wouldn't have given the diary away."

"Malfoy *junior* does."

"What? Draco wouldn't tell Voldemort! That's mental!"

"What is mental, Potter, is your extreme ignorance and naïveté. Of course Draco would not tell the Dark Lord. But he might tell his *father*."

"Shit." Harry slumped. No, Draco wouldn't be that stupid. Would he? "No, I don't think he has."

"Best ask him, eh?"

"Yeah. I...I guess so." Harry worried his bottom lip with his teeth. Draco might have told to impress his father with his knowledge of the inner circle. He was like that. Harry hoped that this was not the case.

Maybe a distraction for Draco. He offered to work on that potion, so... "Sir. I wonder..." But how was he to say without getting Snape involved. "I was wondering about certain potions, but the ones I want aren't in the library. I know you have lots of books here..."

"Restricted books, Potter." But there was a gleam in his black eyes. He looked around the room and stared pointedly at his book shelf. "Take out a quill and parchment, Potter. I want you to write 'I will not be insolent'...ten times. I think that should jar your memory. If you need to spell 'insolent'—" He waved his wand and cast the word on the board. "I don't have time to sit and watch you in your detention. When you are through, leave it on my desk."

"Sir? *Ten* times?"

"Yes, Potter. Do you wish to pen *more* times?"

"No, sir."

"Very well." Snape looked at the book shelf once more before he left the dungeons. Harry watched him go. Ten times? Only ten? Harry supposed it was merely an excuse for him to leave the room and give Harry enough time to rummage through his potions books. He wondered which ones he'd

need. How was he to know? Draco was supposed to be the one stealing the one he needed, but the opportunity was too good to pass up. He supposed Snape could legitimately keep this incident out of his thoughts and away from Voldemort's mind probing.

Harry quickly scribbled his detention, tossed the parchment on Snape's desk, and scoured the book shelf. *Potions for Forcing Love and Friendship*. He supposed that would be good enough. He grabbed it and stuffed it in his book bag. He'd be late for Transfiguration, but he hoped McGonagall would be understanding.

* * *

Harry, Hermione, and Ron sat by the lake doing their homework when a blond figure came striding up.

"What do you want now, Malfoy?" said Ron, barely acknowledging him.

"What do you mean 'what do I want now'? I'm just coming to do homework with my boyfriend, if you don't mind!"

Harry smiled and patted the grass beside him. "Well this is nice," he said, darting a glance at Ron.

"Yes, I thought it would be." He sat next to Harry and placed his bag beside him. "I'm...sorry about Snape today. I didn't mean to say it. It just came out. He was being such a prick."

"I know. It was just a shock, is all."

"Bloody hell," Ron agreed. "Just because you are, doesn't mean you have to parade your business in front of everyone."

"And if it were a girl, Weasel, it would be all right, I suppose."

"No, it would *not!*" said Hermione primly. "Honestly. Can't you all control your emotions and your hormones? It's getting critical."

"How is the Ravenclaw research coming?" asked Harry, happy to change the subject.

"Slowly," she said, lifting the large book in front of her. "Ravenclaw didn't seem to have many possessions and not many survived from the past."

"What about a Timeturner!" said Harry, suddenly sick at the idea that Voldemort might have used one.

"No, they were all destroyed in the department of Mysteries. Don't you remember?"

Harry nodded. They had certainly made a mess of the place when Lucius Malfoy and the other Death Eaters tried to ambush them. Thoughts of it made him cringe and glance quickly at Draco. And then he also remembered what was in his book bag. He drew out the potions book and flopped it in front of Draco's book. "How's this? Will this do?"

Draco looked at it and then looked up at Harry. "How did you get this?"

"Snape was...helpful." There was no other word for it.

"Really?" said Hermione. "That's odd, don't you think?"

"I think everyone's anxious for this war to be over," said Harry thoughtfully. "War makes strange bedfellows after all."

"It certainly does," mumbled Ron.

Draco leafed through the book. "Yeah," he said thoughtfully. "Wouldn't be surprised if something in here did the trick. The only problem is..." He looked up at them, particularly Hermione. "How do we administer it?"

It suddenly struck Harry how Draco had easily accepted Hermione after all those years of calling her the foulest thing a wizard could call another. And Hermione seemed to have let bygones be bygones rather quickly as well. It was just the continued animosity between Draco and Ron that couldn't seem to be put to bed.

Hermione and Draco put their heads together and offered suggestions back and forth, although he did continue to insult her from time to time. She chose to ignore it.

Harry glanced up at a frowning Ron and smiled. "Looks like we're both out in the cold, mate."

Ron looked up at him with a puzzled expression until it dawned on his face. He smiled sheepishly. "Yeah. Well. We're just extraneous boyfriends at the moment."

Harry smiled. He wanted to hug Ron for that bit of acceptance but knew very well how his best friend would take that. Harry returned to his homework instead, thinking that this was perhaps one of the pleasantest bouts of school work he had ever undertaken.

* * *

Harry melted into Draco's arms when he Portkeyed over. They shed their clothes and kissed. Harry's mouth reached for Draco's, his tongue running over those pink lips, over his teeth, over his moist tongue with searing heat. He clamped his opened mouth on Draco's and kissed him with abandon, rubbing his lips against the Slytherin's until they were both breathless and helplessly aroused.

"God, Harry," whispered Draco to his lips just inches away. "That was some kiss."

"Yeah," he gasped. "I've been wanting to do that all day." He leaned forward and caressed Draco's cheek with his own. Both their cheeks were warm from mere proximity. He further rubbed his nose, his open lips, his chin against Draco's face, relishing the hot skin, the smell of sweat, the trembling of the other boy's body as he did so. "Oh Draco. I love you so much."

Draco's arms tightened around Harry and squeezed. The Slytherin's hands ran up and down Harry's slim back, fingers ghosting here and there. It made Harry squirm, made him rub his naked body against Draco's. Their erect cocks slithered over each other.

"Harry, I just want to rub against you," he hissed.

As Draco did so, he juttred his hips into Harry's. Scrotum to scrotum, cock to cock, both groins rubbed harder and harder, up and down, pre-cum their only lubricant. Draco's hands fell to Harry's buttocks and he grabbed each cheek and forced Harry's groin even tighter against him.

Harry was dazed how exquisite it was to feel Draco's length along his own, how the blonde's glans would catch on his and pass over it. His balls were on fire with aching need. He *wanted* to rub his balls against Draco's but it was difficult in this position. He bent his knees and thrust upward. Yes! That was much better. The angle of his penis jabbed over Draco's stiff shaft and caused a groan to billow from his lover's mouth. They were going to come this way, standing up, rubbing against the other, and Harry clutched at his lover tightly, his hands curled around the back of his neck, lifting his silky hair over sweaty skin. "Oh!" cried Harry, the sensations rising from his gut and swooping up from his balls. "Oh Draco!"

"Harry! Gods!"

They pumped faster, flesh rubbing vigorously over flesh. Until—Draco cried out first. His spunk spurted over Harry's stomach, and the feel of that sudden hot release on his skin forced Harry's orgasm over the brink. He shot white sticky strings up as far as Draco's chest and kept pumping his groin up and down against the Slytherin's white blond pubic hair. "Yes! Yes!" It was so good. So good. The enormous feeling gradually lessened, leaving behind a glorious warm glow where they sunk against each other's chests, just holding the other up.

Finally, Harry whispered to Draco's neck, being where his face landed, "Let's go to the bed."

Draco only nodded. He kept an arm wrapped around Harry's naked waist and escorted him to the bed. They flopped down together and immediately rolled to their backs.

Harry wasn't certain if he dozed for a second. It didn't matter. He turned his head fractionally to look at his lover's profile. That sharp nose was almost a silhouette against the hearth flames. "You still alive over there?"

"No," came the soft reply. "I don't know that I've ever come so hard. And I wasn't even inside you."

"I know. Me too. It just felt so good to rub against you."

"I could tell." He turned then and Harry looked into those grey eyes. The firelight changed them constantly, like lightning in a storm cloud. Harry couldn't tear his gaze away. "I am so in love with you, Harry. I hope you know that. *Really* know it."

Harry grinned like a madman. "Yeah. I know it. It's a wonderful feeling. You don't know how long I've wanted to feel it from someone. I'm glad it's you."

“I’m glad you’ll never have to see those Dursleys again. They were positively ghastly.”

“I’m on my own, that’s for sure.”

Draco sat up suddenly and looked down on his lover. “Harry, if you ever need any money...well. I have plenty. I don’t mind sharing with you.”

Harry chuckled and reached up to stroke Draco’s cheek. “That’s really sweet of you.” He knew how much of a sacrifice it was for Draco to offer it. “But I’m okay. My mum and dad left me a vault at Gringott’s and it’s pretty full.”

“*Really?*” This seemed to test his Pureblood sensibilities. After all, what were Halfbloods and Mudbloods doing with money? Harry saw it all play out on his face. Draco hid his distaste artfully. “Oh. Then those awful clothes—”

“I told you. That was because my aunt and uncle would never buy anything for me. They were my cousin’s hand-me-downs.”

“Gawd!” Draco clearly had a picture of Dudley in his mind. “I’d rather have burned them than worn them.”

“Well I didn’t have much choice, now did I?”

“That’s the first thing we’re doing on the next Hogsmeade weekend; we’re shopping!”

Harry grasped Draco’s hand, brought it to his lips, and kissed it. “You’re too good to me. But we’ll probably not be allowed to go, you and I. For our own safety.”

“What? Fuck that! We’ll sneak out. I’m sure you know how to do *that*.”

“Yeah. Did it all the time.” He kept hold of Draco’s hand and squeezed it.

This was news to Draco. “You did? You sneaky son-of-a-Gryffindor.”

“Cloak’s good for that, don’t you know.”

Draco nodded and sighed. “And *you* didn’t think we had anything in *common!*”

They snuggled and kissed a bit, but they were both sleepy. Face pressed against Draco’s neck, Harry briefly thought about Snape’s question. Was Draco telling his father the things they were doing? But if he asked Draco now, the Slytherin would likely get angry and Harry was too weary to fight with him now. The question could wait.

* * *

The weekend arrived and Draco spent his days off in his rooms reading the potions book Harry stole for him. Surprisingly, Snape had not mentioned missing a book though surely he knew it was missing.

Harry snuck into the room when the corridor was clear. Draco sat in the squashy chair absorbed by the large tome in his hands. Harry crept up behind and lightly touched the blond hair with his fingertips.

Draco startled, but a quick glance behind him calmed him down. "Shit, Harry. Don't *do* that."

"I only wanted to run my hands through your hair...and down your shoulders...and maybe across your chest."

"Harry, I'm working here."

Harry frowned and came around to the front of the chair. "But...we have the afternoon free. Don't you want to...you know."

"If you can't say it," he muttered into his book, "then maybe you shouldn't be doing it."

Harry grabbed the book and pulled it down. Draco glared up accusingly at him.

"Hey!" said Harry. "What's gotten into you? You're always up for a shag. There. I said it. Sex. Sex, sex, sex."

Draco dragged the book back in place. "Not funny, Potter. I'm working."

"To hell with that." Harry raised his wand, swished and flicked, and the book rose from Draco's hand.

"That isn't funny, Harry! Give it back!" But the book was floating up toward the ceiling.

"Work later."

"NO! I want to work now!"

Harry was so startled the book came crashing down. Draco had barely enough time to jump back on the chair and snatch his feet out of the way.

"You idiot! You could have killed me!" But something of what the blond said affected Draco and he hid his crimson face under his fringe and picked up the book from the floor.

"Draco!"

"Harry." His voice was suddenly strained and hoarse. "If I can't find this potion and brew it then I will have failed you. And I don't...I can't afford to fail you. Don't you get it? It's your *life* we're talking about!"

So Harry wasn't the only one to be feeling the pressure of an imminent battle. Draco snapped pages aside, reading and rejecting potion after potion. Harry watched him for a moment before he knelt at Draco's feet. He touched his lover's knee. "Hey Draco," he said softly. "The potion was only another tool. I never expected that I would have to rely on it."

Draco did not look up. "I know. But it gives me something to do."

Harry ran his hand higher, squeezing his thigh. "Draco. Put it aside for a bit. Talk to me."

He slammed the book shut and tossed it on the floor. "What good am I? What good am I to you? Ron and Hermione have been your friends and fought at your side far longer. They know what you need and when you need it. What am I? I'm no good to you. I can't help for shite." His eyes glossed.

"That's not true. You give me the love and support I've never had before."

"*They've* loved you. And supported you. And they were there. Usually fighting against *me*."

"That's the past. It's over. We're lovers now, Malfoy. We're never going back to the way it was, are we? And I think this was a brilliant idea you doing this potion. It really could help. You never know."

"But how are we to give it to him? 'Pardon me, Lord Voldemort, but will you drink this bit of potion before you duel Harry? Oh no, it's nothing harmful.' That's really marvelous, isn't it?"

"I've already got an idea about that. But you've got to find the right potion. You know I'm rubbish in potions. I think it's a really good idea that you do that, Draco. I'll leave you alone so you can get back to it. All right?" He rose and touched the Slytherin on his cheek. "I'm sorry I disturbed you."

But before Harry could pull away, Draco had grabbed his hand and pressed it firmly to his cheek. He lifted it away once to kiss it. "No. I can put it aside for now. I'd rather take a moment to cuddle with you anyway."

"You sure? We don't have to..."

Draco pulled him down on his lap and grabbed him around the waist. Harry laughed and tried to right himself by grabbing Draco around the neck. "Hey!"

Draco smiled up at him. He reached up to the back of Harry's neck and pulled him down for a kiss. Harry slid down until he was almost cradled by Draco. "I've never sat on your lap before. It's nice." Harry wriggled his bottom and an answering erection poked him from Draco's lap. "It's very nice, actually."

"Yes it is," said Draco, voice low and seductive. He leaned forward and touched his lips to Harry's, offering small pecking kisses and an occasional swipe of his tongue.

But as much as Harry wanted to sink into this wonderful feeling, Harry knew he couldn't put off asking anymore. "Er...Draco. Hold a minute. I was just wondering. You aren't mentioning any of this stuff to your father, are you?"

Draco's crocodile smile rubbed against Harry's lips. "What...this? I'm sure he'd rather not know."

"Erm...no. About...the other stuff. You know. Horcruxes and stuff."

“Why should you worry about that?” But just as Draco began nuzzling his neck, he suddenly stopped, jerked upright, and stared at Harry. A look of horror crept over his face. “Oh God,” he said softly. Harry got up from his lap and Draco was trembling. “Oh God. Harry. How could I have been so stupid?”

Harry was thinking the same thing. But he tried not to show it on his face. Draco was feeling horrible enough as it is.

“I’ve killed you,” he was saying. “My bloody father! I trusted him. He’s my father. He wouldn’t hurt me. What an IDIOT I am!”

“Wait, Draco. Let’s just calm down. Let’s go to see him and find out what is what. Now before we go, what exactly did you tell him?”

Draco’s face was awash with tears. “I told him about the Horcruxes. I assumed he knew. And I told him...oh God. About the potion I was going to work on!”

“Is that all?”

He swiped at his face, only smearing the tears and snot. “Yes. That was all. I’ll kill him myself. And then I’ll cut my own throat.”

Harry felt a little numb and replied dazedly, “No you won’t. I’m rather fond of that throat. But we’ll go talk to him and see how much damage has been done.”

Draco moved sluggishly. He certainly didn’t want to face this. Harry wasn’t too keen on it either, but it had to be done. Then, of course, they had to see Dumbledore.

The Defense Against the Dark Arts classroom was open but no one was there. But Harry saw a light coming from under the door of the study. On instinct, Harry walked quietly up the stairs and as he approached the door, he heard Lucius talking to someone. Suddenly angry beyond words, Harry threw the door open. Lucius was kneeling before the fire, obviously talking to it. But the flames suddenly erupted in gusts and diminished. Lucius glared at the doorway and slowly rose.

“Telling Voldemort more secrets?” Harry accused. His wand was in his hand before he realized it. Lucius stood immobile looking daggers at Harry.

Draco came in right after and Harry heard the hurt in his voice. “Father. How could you? I trusted you.”

A strange expression passed over Malfoy’s face, but he kept his gaze on Harry when he spoke. “My little dragon. You see how you can trust absolutely no one.”

“I trust Harry! Because he loves me! Something you can’t seem to manage to do!”

“Trust Potter? For a shag, perhaps. But with your life? Do you honestly think if it came down to him or you he would chose you?”

“Yes!” he cried, his voice cracking. “I do!”

“And this is the son I raised.”

Draco pulled his wand, though it caught in his robes and he angrily tossed them aside, tearing the fabric. “I’ve never been good at *Avada Kedavra*,” he said between clenched teeth, “but just let me try it one more time!”

Harry whirled and grabbed Draco’s arm. “Draco, NO!”

He wrenched himself from Harry’s grip. “All right. If not that, then how about a good old-fashioned *Cruciatus*?”

“Draco, I will not allow you to curse your father...much as he may deserve it. *You* don’t deserve the guilt that will surely follow.”

He looked at Harry, his face red and blotchy from tears. “And this is the man you despise, Father. See how he defends you...because of me. You have me to thank that he won’t curse you either. Of course, if I weren’t standing here, it would probably be a whole different situation.”

Lucius did not look as cool as he did before. A trickle of perspiration trailed down his temple. “Well then. Why are the two of you gracing my door?”

“Sit down,” said Harry, urging him to it with a gesture of his wand. “Get his wand, Draco.”

Draco stretched forward, opened his father’s robes, and plucked out his wand.

Lucius never wavered his gaze from Harry, backed to the chair, and sat on the edge.

Harry stood before him, wand at eye height. “Now then. I want to know what Voldemort knows. What did you tell him?”

Lucius eased back a fraction. He licked his lips. Suddenly, he looked old to Harry. His hair looked more white than blond and he realized that this was probably so. The long hair must have changed while he was in Azkaban.

“Was that Voldemort you were talking to?”

His flicked his gaze to Draco for the barest of seconds. “No. It was...Narcissa.”

“Mother,” Draco whispered.

“I had to tell the Dark Lord of the Horcruxes. He would have realized it soon in any case. But I told him nothing else.”

“Why?” Harry gripped his wand. His arm trembled. He didn’t know how he was preventing himself from hexing Lucius like he deserved. “Why, after Dumbledore promised to protect you?”

“Promised. Ha!” The sneer was back, but the dark circles under his eyes were more pronounced. “I told him nothing more than he already would have soon known.”

“The potion, Father. Did you tell him about the potion?”

He turned anxious eyes to his son. “No, Draco. I did not. I told you before, Harry Potter is the best hope we have of defeating him.”

“*Then why are you helping that evil creature?*”

And then, Harry saw something in Lucius Malfoy’s eyes he never expected to see. Tears.

“Because the Death Eaters have taken over Malfoy Manor...and have taken your mother prisoner.”

Part Five—Horcrux

“No!” cried Draco and took a halting step forward.

Lucius Malfoy might very well be an accomplished actor. But Harry didn’t think anyone could really be that good. He was trembling all over and his red eyes were brimming with unshed tears. He looked at his son so plaintively that Draco rushed to him and fell into his arms.

Lucius didn’t seize back his wand as soon as he was surrounded by a weeping Draco. He didn’t jump up and grab Harry. Instead, he sat in his chair like an old man and rocked his son in his arms as any good father would do, and Harry suddenly felt very lost and very alone.

They stayed that way for a long time until Lucius raised his eyes to Harry. There was a lot in those eyes. A mixture of protectiveness, confusion, loss...and not a little hatred toward Harry himself.

“We should go to Dumbledore,” said Harry quietly, lowering his wand.

Draco turned a tear-streaked face to him. He sniffed. “Yes. Yes, Father. Dumbledore will know what to do.”

“Don’t you see?” hissed Lucius. “There is nothing to do! She’s at the hands of the Death Eaters. I *must* do what he says!”

“This is your great leader, Mr. Malfoy,” said Harry. He couldn’t keep the disdain from his voice. “This is the *creature* you risked it all for.”

“He was my lord. And I was faithful. But *I* turned from *him*—”

“Tell me you aren’t defending him, Father. Tell me that isn’t true.” Draco seethed at his father, his words flecking off his lips.

Lucius seemed uncertain again. A whole lifetime of belief was going up in smoke before his face and he didn't seem to know at all how to handle it.

"Let's go to Dumbledore," Harry repeated.

They both looked at him. Lucius nodded while Draco drew away. They stood and Harry led them out of the classroom and down the corridor to Dumbledore's tower.

* * *

Dumbledore listened to Harry's explanation without uttering a word. His eyes flicked toward a penitent Lucius from time to time, but his focus was on Harry. Finally, Harry finished and Dumbledore had paced all the way to his arched window. He stared down across the valley where the sun streaked the surrounding hills with late afternoon light. He said nothing and Harry, desperate for some kind of action stepped toward him. He could not resist adding a, "Well? What are we going to do?"

"Do, Harry?" Dumbledore sighed deeply. "What would you suggest?"

"Well...we have to rescue Narcissa, I guess."

Draco rose and edged toward Harry at that.

But Dumbledore was shaking his head. "Tell him why, Lucius," he said.

"There is no possible way of rescuing her and coming out of it alive, Potter. Don't you think I've thought of that!"

"But the Aurors. The Order. Couldn't we send—"

"Harry," Dumbledore said sternly. "Did you learn nothing from your trip to the Ministry?"

"It's a trap," he said, shoulders slumping.

"I should have insisted," murmured the old wizard. "I should have made certain she came to Hogwarts."

Harry realized that the wizard was taking the blame for this. It made him angry. After all, it wasn't Dumbledore who dabbled in the Dark Arts but the Malfoys. One could almost say that she deserved this...but he couldn't actually think that with Draco looking as forlorn as he did. It was his *mother* after all.

Harry spun away from the headmaster and slammed his fist into his palm. There must be *something* he could do! He couldn't just let his lover's mother be tortured or die. Something had to be done.

A surge of...something...made Harry stand a little straighter; made his shoulders just a little wider. The Horcruxes. He absolutely had to find and destroy them. There wasn't a moment to lose. And even if it was Voldemort's plan to call him out, Harry had to do it anyway. Win or lose. This was it.

“Mr. Malfoy, I am going to get you your wife back. We’ve got to destroy the Horcruxes.”

Lucius raised his eyes to Harry and stared at him. “Mr. Potter, you can’t even imagine where the next one will be—”

“We know that one of them is Nagini. We can at least eliminate that one.”

“But Nagini is with the Dark Lord himself. It will be impossible—”

“But I’ve got to try, haven’t I? He’s got to be stopped.”

“No.” Lucius approached Harry and looked down at him. Harry felt very short under that glare but he didn’t feel intimidated any more. Not by Malfoy.

“No, Mr. Potter. If any one can get into the Dark Lord’s lair...it is I.”

“No, Father! You can’t go back there!”

“The time has come for the Malfoys to decide. Are we for the Dark Lord, or are we for ourselves?”

“But if you die, too—” Draco choked on the last and tried to hold in his sob.

“If Nagini dies, we will force the Dark Lord out into the open. He will be forced to protect the last Horcrux, and then, Potter, you will be able to follow and find it.”

“Yes,” said Dumbledore. “An admirable plan. But I am afraid, Lucius, that it is too dangerous. I cannot allow it—”

“I don’t care what you say, Dumbledore,” he sneered. He shook his head and rustled his mane of white hair down his back. “This is Malfoy business now.”

“You didn’t let me finish, Lucius. What I meant to say was, it is too dangerous for you to go alone. I shall accompany you.”

Lucius looked truly taken aback by this. “*You...would risk yourself* for Narcissa? A Malfoy?”

“Clearly, you have misunderstood the side of the Light for some time, Lucius. We do not hate or condemn *individuals*. Only their *actions*. I think you will find that most of us—Harry here particularly—possesses enough love to overcome the obstacles of hard feelings.”

Lucius darted a glance at Harry. He ground his teeth. Harry could tell that he was warring within himself, wondering if he could believe it. Harry would find it hard to believe if he were in his shoes...and then he wondered why he thought about it in that way.

Finally, Malfoy nodded slowly. “If you wish to risk your neck, Headmaster, I certainly am not prepared to stop you. But...if I can have my wand returned...?” He turned to Draco. Draco handed it back in silence.

“Harry, my boy,” said Dumbledore, turning to him. “This—” and a parchment landed in his hand— “will excuse you, Draco, Miss Granger and Mr. Weasley from your classes for as long as necessary. I expect the four of you to work hard to find that final Horcrux while we are gone.”

“But sir--!”

“Harry.” He laid his hand on Harry’s shoulder. “We have made a long journey together, you and I. I only wish we could have spent more quality time together. This is my fault, of course. There always seemed to be time. But you are a young man now, a young man I would have been proud to call my son...or I suppose, grandson.”

Harry’s throat felt hot and thick. His eyes stung with tears.

“But the time has come for all of us to do our part. The play is not yet over. Not yet. And there is much to do before the final curtain falls. Make good use of that time. All at your disposal. You have many friends, Harry. Many advantages. *Think* before you *do*. And good luck.”

Without waiting further, he took Lucius’ arm, and they Disapparated together with a monstrous *crack!*

* * *

Harry rushed to Gryffindor tower with Draco in tow. But when the portrait swung open, Draco hung back. Harry looked over his shoulder at him. “Come on, Draco.”

“You want me to go...in *there*?”

“Yeah. We’ve got to get Ron and Hermione.”

Draco’s brows drew down in worry.

“Come *on*, Draco!”

“All right! I’m coming.” He stomped forward, his old self coming to the fore. But when he entered the common room after Harry, there were gasps all around. Someone pulled a wand and yelled, “*Stupify!*” But Harry anticipated and grabbed Draco’s robe, pulling him to the floor. The hex sizzled on the tapestry behind them. “Wait, everyone! It’s okay. I let him in!”

“This is really it, Harry!” said Lavender Brown stomping her foot. “Now you’re letting him in our common room?”

“Look, everyone.” Harry rose slowly. Draco was more wary and stood behind Harry, looking around with his wand out and ready. “Something has come up and now more than ever we’ve got to stick together. *All* of Hogwarts.”

“What’s happening?” asked Seamus. “Is it You-Know-Who?”

“Yes.” Everyone gasped. “Really, we’ve got to pull together. I can’t really say what me and Hermione and Ron are doing, but please give us the space to do it. Here.” He handed the parchment from Dumbledore to someone in the crowd. “See that McGonagall gets this. We may have to leave Hogwarts for a bit.”

Harry!” Ginny ran forward. “What can we do? Should we go with you?”

“No. I can’t risk it. But anyone who was involved in Dumbledore’s Army—well, you’d best alert them to be on the lookout. And those of you who weren’t in it—pair up with those who were.”

“Right, Harry,” said Seamus, and Harry thought he might salute. He didn’t mean to bark orders at them but someone had to do it.

“So, could someone get Hermione? Is she in her dorm? And where’s Ron?”

“Here, mate. What’s going—Blimey! What is Draco-effing-Malfoy doing in here! Is nothing sacred!”

Someone fetched Hermione and Harry grabbed both their arms and urged them out into the corridor. Draco looked relieved to be out of there. “Let’s go to your room, Draco. We’ve got a lot to discuss.”

He filled in Ron and Hermione about Lucius and Dumbledore on their way to Draco’s Prefect room and once they were safely inside he sat them down. They all leaned forward watching Harry intently. It was strange, suddenly being in charge like this. He never really thought about it. All he knew is that he was supposed to kill Voldemort. And never since the end of fifth year had he wanted to do so as much as he did now. Maybe it really wasn’t any stupid Prophecy, but Voldemort had done it to himself when he chose Harry over Neville. When he killed his parents and doomed him to a wretched life with the Dursleys, Voldemort had decided. He decided too much about Harry’s life and enough was enough. Too many people were dying; Muggles and wizards and witches and God-knows-what other kind of creatures. It was up to Harry, up to him all along and there was no way he was going to shirk this. Even though he was scared out of his wits.

“Hermione, what have you discovered about Ravenclaw?”

“I’ve seen several references to Ravenclaw’s cloak. Something about it seemed very important.”

“Hey,” said Ron, perking up. “Could it have been an Invisibility Cloak?”

Hermione nodded. “That is certainly possible. The indications in the books seem to say that it might still be somewhere in the castle.”

“*This* castle?” asked Harry.

“Yes. Each founder had their own secret rooms. Slytherin had the Chamber of Secrets and others had rooms as well, but nothing so dangerous as to house a dangerous monster.”

“Have the other rooms been found?”

“Godric Gryffindor’s. But none of the others.”

“Where’s Gryffindor’s?”

Hermione smiled briefly. “You’ve been there many times. It’s the Headmaster’s office.”

“Oh. That isn’t so secret.”

“It isn’t now. But according to *Hogwarts: A History*, that wasn’t always the case.”

“Any clues in there that might help?” asked Draco.

“I’ve tried to figure it out but there isn’t enough information.”

Ron pushed his ginger hair off his face. “Is there any spell we can use to find them?”

“I’ve tried that, too.”

“Merlin, Granger! Is there *any* good news?”

“I’ve been thinking. I wonder if any of the ghosts were here when the founders were.”

“I’ve met most of them,” said Harry, recalling Nearly Headless Nick’s deathday party. “I don’t think any of them are old enough.”

Draco toyed with his wand, thinking. “What about the Sorting Hat?”

They all looked at him. He threw his shoulders back and scowled at them. “I was just asking!”

“Draco,” said Hermione getting to her feet. “That’s brilliant!”

Her stance got Harry excited and he stood, too. “We could ask the Hat!”

“Blimey!” said Ron, getting up because everyone else had. “But if Dumbledore’s gone, how do we get into his office?”

Draco stood. “McGonagall. She can get in, I bet.”

“Let’s go!” said Harry, suddenly feeling better. He hated feeling useless. He wanted to do *something*, and this was better than nothing.

McGonagall was already teaching and they crept into her Transfigurations class. They stood at the back, not quite knowing what to do. She was waving her wand instructing the first years when she looked up and noticed them with a start. She blustered in her lesson for a minute more before distractedly instructing them to practice the spell. She hitched up the hem of her robe and hurried down the centre aisle toward them. In a rasping whisper she demanded, “What are you doing

here?” But the fact that it was the Golden Trio...plus one...must have given her a moment’s pause. Her face looked more concerned than angry at the intrusion.

“Sorry to barge in, Professor,” said Harry. “But did the Headmaster tell you...?”

“Yes, Potter, I received a note. But what are you four doing here?”

“We need to get into the Headmaster’s office.”

“I’m afraid you can’t. The Headmaster puts all sorts of wards on his offices when he is away. No one can get in.”

Harry’s heart sank. Why were there always so many damned obstacles!

Hermione thanked McGonagall and ushered them out of the classroom. Harry scowled at her. Why was she pushing them around? They needed McGonagall’s help, didn’t they?

“Nothing can go *in*,” she said with a gamine smile. “But what about getting *out*?” She raised her wand in the air. “*Accio* Sorting Hat!”

They waited. It seemed like a long time. Harry stared at Hermione, at first dumbstruck at how clear-headed she could be, and then angry that she had raised their hopes up.

But sure enough, they heard something odd in the air in the distance and bolting around the corner, was the sullen-looking Sorting Hat who suddenly slammed into Hermione’s hand.

“Got you!” she said, much as Harry always thought in his head when grabbing the Snitch.

“This is most outrageous!” fumed the Hat. “Never, in all my years at Hogwarts, has a student presumed to *Accio* me. You must return me at once!”

“We apologize,” said Hermione in her best mollifying tone. “We really do. But it’s very important that we talk to you and the Headmaster’s office was shut up tight.”

“Yes, and there is a very good reason for that. Those are *his* things in there! Oh these modern students! They think they know better. Yes, yes I see. There’s Harry Potter. Thinks he knows better than the Hat, doesn’t he? Telling *me* which house to put him in. Presumptuous brats!”

Draco darted a glance at Harry that seemed to say, “So you *were* telling the truth!”

“Please...er...Hat,” said Harry, not quite sure how to address an animated inanimate object. “We need some information on the Founders.”

“Everything a student needs to know can be found in *Hogwarts: A History*. I suggest you do the unthinkable and *READ!*”

“What we want isn’t in that book,” he said, getting a bit testy. After all, he was arguing with a *hat*. “You were here. You have something of all the Founders within you. We were looking for the secret rooms they each had.”

“Ah!” said the Hat doing its best to smile. “You want to know that, do you? Don’t you think every Headmaster since then has asked me that question? And do you think I told them?”

Harry sighed and looked at Hermione. “I guess Dumbledore probably asked where the Chamber of Secrets was.”

“Yes, he did,” said the Hat triumphantly. “But I did not tell him!”

“Why? That was a terrible place with a hideous beast. It killed a girl once and nearly killed one of my best friends.”

“Because,” said the Hat. “Because...I don’t know where it is. There!”

“Bloody hat,” muttered Ron.

“Oh this is no help,” sighed Hermione.

“Give it here,” said Draco and snatched it from Hermione’s grasp. He tightened his grip on it. “Look here, Hat. I won’t play games with you. Either you tell us what we need to know or I’ll cast an *Incendio* on you, and don’t think I won’t!”

“Draco!” hissed Harry.

But the Hat merely looked at Draco. At least Harry thought it did. “A Slytherin to the last,” said the Hat. “I didn’t even need to look into your mind, Malfoy. I knew. Every Malfoy that ever was ended up in Slytherin. But strangely...hmm. If today I were to sort you, I’d have a difficult time. Slytherin, certainly, but there are now essences of Gryffindor I might consider.”

Draco nearly dropped the hat. “*What?* You’re mental! I’d never go to Gryffindor. I’d die first!”

“Thanks,” said Harry.

“No offense,” he said offhandedly. “And don’t try to distract me,” he said to the Hat. “We need something from Ravenclaw. We need to find where she left the cloak.”

The Hat seemed to look from one to the other. “Don’t be fools. You’ve all seen it before, many times.”

“We have?” asked Hermione, drawing closer.

“Of course, you silly girl. He has it!” And it turned toward Harry.

“My father’s cloak? That’s it?”

“Of course. Didn’t you know you were a descendant of Ravenclaw? Through your maternal grandparent’s side.”

“No. I didn’t. So my Invisibility Cloak is Ravenclaw’s cloak?”

“Yes, yes. Didn’t I say that already?”

“No need to get shirty,” he muttered, thinking. “Well. We’d best get my cloak, then.”

“Seems a shame to destroy it,” said Ron. “You’ve gotten some good use out of it.”

“That’s for sure.” But when he looked at Draco he was scowling.

“So it’s true. You have an Invisibility Cloak. Figures. I knew you weren’t that clever, Potter.”

“Do we really have time for this?”

Draco glared at the Hat. “What do we do with *this*?”

Harry shrugged. “Dunno. I suppose we could leave it in McGonagall’s office.”

Hermione took it gently from Draco’s hand. “It’s been awfully useful. I say we hold on to it.”

“Look a little odd, won’t it?” said Draco. “Carrying that thing about?”

“True. We’ll shrink it.” Hermione waved her wand and it shrunk to the size of an Ice Mice packet. She stuffed it in the pocket of her robe. “Let’s get your cloak, Harry.”

“Yeah. Okay.” Harry moved his legs but his mind wasn’t on it. First of all, that had belonged to his father. It was really the only thing he had from his Dad. And it had served him well for the last few years. He really hated to destroy it. But the awful thought that he had engulfed himself in one of Voldemort’s soul pieces made him a bit ill.

They reached Gryffindor tower and Harry went in alone to retrieve it. What if it wasn’t the Horcrux, he thought as he ascended the dorm stairs. What if it was just a coincidence? And how did Voldemort manage to get a hold of it to make it into a Horcrux anyway? And how was something so valuable left in Dumbledore’s hands? Surely his Dad could still have used it when they were hiding out from Voldemort. There were so many things he still needed to know and Dumbledore was never anywhere near him when he had all these questions that needed answering.

His anger at Dumbledore quickly turned to guilt. He and Lucius Malfoy were on a dangerous mission, after all. If they succeeded then there would be only the one Horcrux left and with any luck that was within their reach. But would Lucius Malfoy and Dumbledore survive their mission?

Harry opened his trunk and took out the shimmery cloak. He stared at it, trying to discern merely by looking at it if it was the owner of an evil slice of soul. It looked the same as it always had. What a terrible loss to destroy it. He put it on, again, trying to feel if it possessed any evil and made his way

invisibly out of the dorm and out of the common room. He whipped it off when he met the others outside the Fat Lady portrait.

"I *knew* it!" said Draco. "That time in Hogsmeade. Your disembodied head. That was it, wasn't it?"

"Give it a rest, Draco," he breathed. The three old friends looked at the cloak. "Shame, really," said Harry. "And I was thinking. How do you suppose Voldemort got a hold of it?"

"Must have been when he went to your house at Godric's Hollow," said Ron.

"No," said Harry. "He couldn't have. He killed my dad first and then he went after my mum. When he tried to kill me that was it. The bugger became incorporeal. Poof."

"But you received it, you said, from Dumbledore," said Hermione. "Perhaps he managed to steal it back from Voldemort at some point."

"I don't know. All I know is that this is one of the only things I have of my parents and I don't want to destroy it if I don't have to."

"Is there a way to test it?" asked Draco.

They stood in silence for a time. "Maybe we should ask someone," said Harry.

"But who?" asked Ron.

"Someone very good at spells and Charms. How about Professor Flitwick?"

Hermione shook her shaggy head. "But then we'd have to explain about Horcruxes, and I'm sure Dumbledore wouldn't want everyone to know."

"Snape," said Draco. "He already knows and he's good at hexes and things."

Harry certainly didn't want to ask for the Potions Master's help, but he didn't see any way around it. He nodded once, and led the way to the dungeons.

* * *

They waited until his class was finished, thinking that he'd be less helpful if they barged in as they did for McGonagall. He was still scowling when they entered and looked up, his beetle black eyes narrowing as he took in the four figures.

"Professor," Harry began, but Snape cut him off.

"Mr. Potter. And...entourage. To what do I owe the pleasure? I was just given this very interesting missive from the Headmaster explaining that you would be missing classes today and...." He raised the parchment and squinted at it. "'For however long is necessary.' Dear me. This must be important indeed."

“It *is*, sir!” Stupid prat, thought Harry. What did he *think* it was about? “It’s about Voldemort, sir, and the...uh...items.”

Snape sat up straighter. He lifted his wand and the dungeon door slammed and locked. “Can’t you take the least little precaution by closing the door when you enter?” he snapped.

“Sorry. But we think we may have one here and I don’t want to destroy it if I can help it.”

“Sentimentality, Potter? Over the fate of the Wizarding world? Let me see. Which is more important?”

Words were useless with Snape. Harry wrestled the cloak from his book bag and showed it. “Ah. I see,” said Snape. “That infernal cloak of your father’s. You think it is a Horcrux?”

“It’s Ravenclaw’s cloak.”

Snape shut his lips at that and fingered the lithe fabric. “Extraordinary,” he whispered.

“The thing of it is, sir, we can’t be sure it *is* a Horcrux and I don’t want to destroy it if I don’t have to. So are there any spells we can use on it to determine if it *is* a Horcrux?”

Snape drew back and scowled at the cloak. “Yes. There might be.” He turned his back on them and went to his book shelf, running his finger over the spines. He pulled a book from its shelf and opened it on his desk, flipping pages and stopping to read occasionally. Finally, he seemed to find something and settled in for a nice long read.

Harry looked at Draco who gave him a concentrated and reassuring gaze. He knew that Ron and Hermione’s love and support could easily sustain him, but with the added emotions Draco offered him, he was often filled with an overwhelming glut of feelings that not only sustained him, but made him feel as if he was hovering amongst the clouds. He supposed being in love did that. Kind of girly, really.

Snape continued reading but held out his hand to Harry, presumably for the cloak. He began incanting a spell while pointing his wand at the garment laid out on his desk. A gathering mist lifted from the fabric; a purple mist that swirled with a life of its own. Harry took an unconscious step back.

Finally, Snape stopped speaking and the fabric trembled and was still. “This spell does not detect Horcruxes per se, as indeed, none of the books at Hogwarts are Dark enough to contain information on them. But it is designed to detect the properties of an object. You will be pleased to note, that your father’s cloak does *not* appear to be a Horcrux.”

Harry was overjoyed, but his companions did not share his sentiments. He realized it meant that their search continued, but he hadn’t wanted it to be his father’s cloak. They had been such good companions and it would have felt as if some beloved pet had suddenly turned vicious.

They thanked Snape who did not acknowledge their thanks, and left the dungeons with sloped shoulders. “Now what?” asked Ron.

“I think Draco should continue with his potion,” said Harry.

“It’s done, actually,” he said, grey eyes unreadable under a long blond fringe.

“It is?”

“A delivery system. You said you had an idea.”

“Yeah. I’ve got to take a little trip to Muggle London and then we’ve got to sit down and really put our heads together on this. We absolutely must find the other Horcrux.”

“Muggle London?” asked Draco, a worried tinge to his voice. “You’re not going alone, are you?”

“It’s just a quick trip. Be back quick as a wink.”

“Are you going to try to Apparate? You haven’t had lessons yet.”

Harry studied Draco. “I suppose *you* know how.”

Draco reddened and looked from Ron, to Hermione, to Harry. “Well...Yes. My father...” But there was no need to finish that statement.

Harry took Draco’s arm. “Why don’t you take me, then?”

“Harry,” cautioned Hermione as they escorted him and Draco to an Apparation point outside the Hogwarts grounds. “Don’t you think this is a little dangerous?”

“You think Voldemort’s just waiting for me to Apparate to Muggle London? I think I’ll be fine.”

They reached the point and Harry squeezed Draco’s arm tighter. “We’ll be all right,” he reassured. “Okay,” he told his boyfriend.

Draco Disapparated with Harry beside him and it was a distinctly uncomfortable feeling. They arrived in an alley and Harry directed Draco to a shop. Draco stayed close to Harry, not being familiar or comfortable with Muggles and Muggle things. Harry showed Draco what he wanted. Draco looked at him dubiously, but he assured the blond that it would work. They made their purchase and quickly left the shop, Apparating back outside Hogwarts’ gates. They found Ron and Hermione loitering outside Draco’s rooms.

“That was fast,” said Hermione.

Draco rubbed his arms as if washing them from some filth. “Didn’t want to linger.”

“Why didn’t you guys go in?” asked Harry.

“Door wouldn’t open for us,” said Ron. “Even with the password. Must be spelled to only let the Ferret—er...Malfoy in.”

“What did you call me, Weasley?”

“Uh...well. Sorry. Just habit.”

Draco *never* talked about the episode where Barty Crouch, Jr. in the guise of Mad-Eye Moody transfigured him into a ferret. Harry suspected he never would.

“Shall we go in?” urged Harry, changing the subject.

Draco spoke the password and the door appeared, allowing them in at last.

“Found out anything?” asked Harry to Hermione.

“No. I was just about to head to the Library. How about this potion, Draco? What exactly does it do?”

“Makes the victim want to be your absolute best friend. But decidedly closer than that.”

“So he won’t be in love with me, right?” It made Harry’s stomach turn to imagine it.

“No. I can’t think of anything more disgusting than that, can you?”

Harry just shivered in answer. Draco took Harry in his arms, ignoring the sound Ron was making.

“There’s no way I want that scaly bugger to have any of those thoughts for you, Harry.” It was clear to Harry that Draco was leaning forward to kiss him. But for some reason, he was reluctant to do that in front of his friends. He squirmed out of Draco’s arms instead.

“Er...Draco. I think we should work on the...uh...Horcrux problem.”

Draco looked at him oddly but let it go.

Hermione left for the library, and Ron looking like a third wheel decided to join her.

Harry turned to Draco. “I don’t think we should do that in front of them.”

Draco popped up from his place on the settee. It looked as if he was ready for this argument. “Why not? Other couples do it.”

“But we’re not like other couples. Face it, Draco. This is different. Not everyone is accepting of it, you know.”

“Oh, you think I don’t know? Me, who has to hide out in a Prefect’s room away from his own *house*?”

“Draco...”

“No. You think that I don’t know what other people are thinking. But the point of it is I don’t care. That’s their problem as far as I’m concerned. My concern is my lover. But if he doesn’t want to snog in front of his homophobic friends, then I guess I have no choice but to go along. Again.”

“My friends are not homophobic. If anything they are...well...Malfoy-phobic.”

“It amounts to the same thing. You are going to let others decide for you what is or is not allowed. You know, I’m not sorry for telling Snape and the whole class that we are lovers. I wanted them to know. I wanted an end to speculation. I wanted them to know that Harry Potter chose *me* above everyone else. And that makes me special too. That’s why I said it and I’d do it again.”

Harry stared at him. Stupid wanker. He knew Draco had done it on purpose. The show off. Except that it was pretty sweet, his wanting to prove that Harry chose him. He tried to stay angry but couldn’t. He shook his head and grinned instead. “What am I going to do with you, Malfoy?”

“I can think of a thing or two, Potter.” And he took a step closer.

“Draco, we’re supposed to be working on the Horcrux problem.”

“All work and no play makes Potter a dull boy. And you don’t want to be dull, do you?” He kept creeping closer until he stood no more than a foot apart. Harry felt his body heat and he longed to press his lips to Draco’s so tantalizingly close.

“We can take a break, can’t we?” He leaned in and touched his lips very lightly to Harry’s. That was it. Harry had no desire to put him off. He stepped forward and pressed himself chest to chest with Malfoy and opened his mouth into the kiss. God, how he needed this man! Draco’s hands clasped around him and Harry snaked his own arms up to the back of Draco’s head. They clung together in an engulfing kiss, until Draco’s hand fell to Harry’s bottom and squeezed a pliant cheek. Draco’s lips drew back just enough to mouth Harry’s. “I want to fuck you, Harry,” he breathed. “Will you let me? I want to be deep inside you.”

The crude words sent Harry’s senses reeling. Yes, he wanted to be *fucked* by Draco. Not fawned over or even made love to. He wanted it as crude as Malfoy was making it seem. Harry threw back his head and Malfoy nuzzled the soft skin of his neck. “Please,” Harry gasped, lost.

Draco tucked a finger into his lover’s tie and pulled the knot loose. He unbuttoned the shirt quickly and pushed it over Harry’s shoulders. The shirt hung loosely still tucked into his trousers, but those were next as Draco busily worked the belt buckle opened. Down came the zip and then the trousers. Harry quickly toed off shoes and then his socks before stepping out of his trousers. Draco took a moment to savor Harry in his Y-fronts, running the flat of his hand over Harry’s erection and reaching lower to cup his scrotum. He squeezed it tenderly and sighed against his neck. “Oh Harry. I love this package of yours.”

Harry groaned in reply. He wanted to be naked just then; naked to Draco’s eyes, his hands, his lips. And just as Harry thought this with a whimper, the Slytherin hooked his fingers into the elastic waistband and eased them down. Once they past his hips, they slipped to his ankles and Harry kicked them off to land somewhere.

Draco was working his own tie and shirt now. Harry helped him, panting into Draco's throat. "Must see your skin," he murmured.

Draco chuckled softly. "Patience, love. You don't want to tear my shirt, do you?"

"Yes!" Harry hissed, yanking it off of him.

Draco dived for Harry's ear and pulled at it gently with his teeth. "Ooh. Aren't you the animal. Grrr!"

Harry slapped Draco's hands away and tore at his trousers and belt, yanking them down and the underwear with it. He knelt to pull them over Draco's feet, but the sight of that pink, stiff cock right before his eyes stopped him. He leaned forward and gave the shaft a good hard lick up to the head, where his tongue swirled over the glans. Draco inhaled a shuddering breath. "Merlin, Harry!"

But Harry wasn't done. He licked his lips to moisten them and took the head into his mouth, sucking gently. Draco's body arched and Harry held him still by reaching up and clasping the cheeks of his smooth, pale buttocks. His tongue was busy moving over the shaft and the head, swirling up and lapping downward. He planted open-mouthed kisses at the base of his prick, nosing his way into the musky pubic hair. Draco's hands found Harry's messy hair and his fingers grabbed bunches of it.

Harry pulled back. "As much as I want to make you come this way," said Harry breathlessly, "I want you to be inside me. I really do." He rose and took Draco by the hand, leading him to the bed. "I'm going to lie face down on that bed, Malfoy," he whispered into the shell of his ear, making the blond man tremble. "And I'm going to raise my arse in the air just for you. So you can spear me proper. And you're going to ride me hard and deep, aren't you?"

"Oh yes!"

"Good. Because that's the way I want it, my love. Fuck me hard, Draco." Harry had never spoken to him like this before but he could tell that it was having an effect on the Slytherin. His lips had parted with his shortened breaths and his grey eyes were glazed and wide with lust.

Harry released Draco's hand and got onto the bed on all fours. He laid his head down but he kept his arse raised and even swayed it from side to side, enticing his lover. He spread his knees apart and couldn't believe he was exposing himself like this. But Draco certainly wasn't complaining.

He heard Draco fumbling at the bedside table for the lube and heard a cork pop. All at once, and gentle finger full of an oily substance started at the base of his spine and dragged slowly down his crack, stopping at the furred flesh of his exposed anus. That same finger pushed inside and pulled a moan from Harry's lips. He buried his face in the pillow. "Fuck me, Draco!" he said, voice muffled, but Draco heard him. He made a squeaking noise and then Harry heard him sloppily lubing his cock. The dome of his prick was suddenly poised at his arse and Draco pushed, opening the moist heat of his entrance and sliding in. Harry moaned again and exhaled a, "Draco!"

His blond lover took a pause, letting Harry get used to the presence of his thick cock imbedded deeply. And then he pulled back almost to the head. Harry waited for it. He knew it was coming and almost screamed in delight when Draco slammed in deeper than before.

“Oh yes!” cried Harry. “Harder!”

Draco whimpered again and drew out of Harry, thrusting in even harder. Harry rocked forward.
“Mmmm.”

Draco laid into him with hard thrusts and suddenly reached around to grasp Harry’s cock in oil-slickened fingers. He pumped Harry with his fingers tight around his prick and rammed into him in the same fierce rhythm. Harry pushed back, skewering his arse on Draco and then thrust his hips to take the incredible hand job from the other side. He didn’t know which was better...until Draco’s cock brushed his prostate. Then everything shimmered. The aching need in his balls shot upward into his cock and he spurt his load into Draco’s moving hand. He thrust, *thrust* his hips into the last vestiges of his orgasm while squeezing down on his anal muscles.

Draco cried out and pumped in deeply. A few little thrusts and he was coming too. Draco paused above him, holding that wet cock with one hand and Harry’s hip with the other. He swayed a little before he collapsed onto Harry’s sweaty back. Harry fell to the bed in a heap with Draco on top and he was never so content in his life.

He reached back to touch Draco’s arse. “That was incredible,” he sighed.

He felt Draco nod against the back of his head. “Too right,” he gasped and slowly rolled off to one side, his prick popping from Harry’s arse.

Harry lay with his face in the pillow. He felt the trickle of Draco’s juices leaking from his crack and he wriggled at the wonderful, warm feeling. “Oh God. You are so good at this.”

Draco kissed his flank, the only thing he could reach at the moment. “And you, with that naughty bit of repartee. Just where did you learn such naughty language, Mr. Potter?”

“From you. Who else?”

Draco chuckled and trailed his hands over Harry, bringing him in tight to spoon, running his fingertips lightly over Harry’s chest and nipples. He kissed the nape of Harry’s neck and down to his shoulders. “You are so incredibly irresistible.”

“Mmmm. I love you.”

“And I love you, my Harry.”

Harry snuggled against Draco and sighed. “This is so much better than dueling, don’t you think?”

Draco snorted a laugh. “That used to be our only form of communication.”

“Did you really hate me that much?”

“Yes, actually. You had brushed me off when I tried to make friends with you and you didn’t even know me.”

Harry sat up and turned to him. "But...that's precisely why I did! You insulted Hagrid, the first person ever to be a friend to me *and* Ron. And you didn't know them at all."

"But I *was* right about them, wasn't I?"

Harry lay back with a hard exhale. "What *am* I going to do with you?"

"I suppose we could duel again."

Harry got a wicked grin on his face and rolled over to face him. "With *these* wands, Malfoy?"

"You *are* naughty, aren't you, Potter?"

Harry chuckled. "Course, you wouldn't chicken out like you did for second year. Or was it first?"

"What? I never chickened out."

"Yes you did. Remember, you said to meet you in the trophy room and you never showed."

"That's because it was my plan to get you caught by Filch. It was a clever ruse, you idiot."

"Oh, sure it was."

Draco rolled over this time. "I was *not* a coward! I was being clever."

"Whatever, Malfoy."

"No you don't. You're not getting away with that. You are going to admit that I was laying a careful plot. Admit it."

"Nope."

Draco's face was a study in shock. "What...you...I...."

"Oh lord, he's speechless. What *have* I done?"

Draco's shocked expression gave way to a sly one and he immediately set to tickling Harry. Harry curled in like a hedgehog and squirmed away from his playful lover. "No! Stop!"

But Draco wouldn't until he could tell Harry couldn't breathe. "That will teach you a proper lesson, Potter."

Harry breathed and laughed in between. "All right, I give! It was very clever of you. Horrible place to do detention, too, that trophy room. Too many trophies to polish."

"Never had to myself," said Draco with a self-satisfied grin.

“Of course not. You were always getting away with things, especially with Snape.”

“Look who’s calling the cauldron black. You’ve always gotten away with things, being Dumbledore’s pet and all.”

But the sound of the headmaster’s name gave Harry pause and he lay back with his hands behind his head. “I wonder how he and your father are doing?”

Draco scooted closer and lay his head on Harry’s chest. “I’m sure they’re fine.”

He clutched Draco and caressed the smooth skin of his back. What could he say? They both knew they were on a suicide mission all so Harry could succeed. And what were they doing in return while the headmaster and his lover’s father were sacrificing themselves? Having a shag. Harry felt like getting up but Draco was clinging to him. He supposed they both needed the outlet. At least to forget for a bit.

In spite of his worry, Harry began to drift off. He thought of the trophy room of all places, and recalled how Ron had complained about having to do detention there. His friend had had to polish without magic all the shiny trophies. Quidditch trophies, music trophies, special citation trophies. Harry had one there now, too. He had won a special citation from the school when he killed the basilisk and closed the Chamber of Secrets. How ironic since Voldemort...that is, Tom Riddle had also received a similar citation fifty years earlier for telling everyone it was Hagrid who opened the chamber, when it in fact had been *him!* *What a prat*, thought Harry, reliving the horrible visit to the chamber. Ginny’s body, the basilisk chasing after him, Tom Riddle taking his wand—

Harry sat up suddenly, startling Draco from slumber. “Oh my God! We’ve been so stupid! It’s been right here all along! Draco, get up!”

Harry was already scrambling out of bed and pulling on his clothes backwards and wrong side out.

“Potter! What’s the matter with—”

“We had it here right in front of our eyes all this time,” he said pulling his tie on over his collar. “Voldemort likes trophies, right? But not just of the Founders. He had his own trophy as well. He got a special citation from the school. Oh why didn’t I see that before!”

“What are you on about?”

Harry explained as he dressed and soon Draco was pulling on his clothes as quickly as possible. Once they were dressed, they ran from the room and careered down the corridors. Finally, they made it to the trophy room and pushed opened the doors.

Gleaming from every corner and shelf were an endless array of all kinds of trophies; loving cups, tall statuettes, plaques, Quidditch players. But where was Tom Riddle’s.

They began to search the shelves. Draco turned to Harry. “What are we doing? Are we wizards or what?” He lifted his wand. “*Accio* Tom Riddle’s trophy!”

Something trembled from a high shelf, popped out of its place, and soared into the air directly toward Draco. He caught it and brought it down to look at. It was a smallish loving cup, polished clean with the name “Tom Riddle” etched on the surface.

“That has to be it!” said Harry breathlessly. But all at once, the most searing pain cut deeply into his scar. Harry fell to the ground, clutching his forehead and screaming. It was worse than the *Cruciatus*, he was sure of it. He rolled, trying to relieve himself of the terrible agony. *Make him stop!* he kept screaming in his head. Or was he screaming it aloud? He couldn’t tell.

Draco was clutching him. At least he thought so. And suddenly, the pain stopped. Draco had kissed him again on the forehead and the pain had stopped as suddenly as it had begun. He looked up into Draco’s eyes. “It’s done,” Harry said, still seeing the vision in his mind that Voldemort could not shield in his anger. “Nagini is dead.” He held up the trophy he still had clutched in his hand. “This is the last Horcrux.”

“Yes, and I’ll take that, Harry.”

That voice. And it wasn’t coming from his head. Both he and Draco slowly turned, and they both stopped breathing.

Standing behind them, furious and terrible, was Voldemort himself.

Part Six—Voldemort

Several emotions swirled inside Harry at once, tightening his chest. The first was terror. It was the graveyard all over again, with Voldemort standing over him, promising to torture Harry until he begged for death. He remembered the *Cruciatus* all too well. In his mind he *had* begged to die, *anything* to stop the pain radiating throughout his body. He remembered *hating* his own body that it could be so traitorous as to feel something like that, endure it. It wouldn’t have taken him long to beg Lord Voldemort.

But thinking of that brought another emotion to the fore. Anger. Anger that Voldemort could so easily use another human being for his games, his goals. It was unthinkable to Harry. And so the rage bubbled up, pushing the terror aside.

Harry slowly rose, clutching the Horcrux tightly in his hand. He non-verbally cast a sticking charm, making dead sure that Voldemort couldn’t *Accio* it. His wand was in his free hand. He moved protectively in front of a terrified Draco and stared at Voldemort. No, there was nothing left of the human in him. His eyes were red, his face snakelike with its tiny pinched nostrils and a mouth with serrated teeth. There was nothing of the handsome Tom Riddle he had once seen in the Chamber of Secrets.

Voldemort smiled or seemed to, but Harry could tell he was seething.

“How did you get into Hogwarts? No one can Apparate.”

“No. I didn’t Apparate. I walked in the front doors.”

“How--!”

“Simple, my Harry. I lured the Squib Filch to the gate and *Imperioed* him to let me in. I *Confounded* him and *Obliviated* him and strolled the grounds as if I belonged. So simple.”

“So...why didn’t you just do that before?”

“Storm the gates with my Death Eaters? I have since discovered how much easier it is simply working alone. As loyal as they are, they are foolish little beings compared to me.”

“Doesn’t anyone mean anything to you? Oh. Except maybe Nagini. Lost your little pet, did you?” said Harry, unable to restrain himself from taunting him.

Voldemort lost all pretense of smiling and lunged forward, looking for all the world as if he would grab Harry with his bare hands. But then he stopped himself and drew up again. “My, my but you have become a nuisance, Harry Potter. I had no idea how much of a nuisance you would actually be.”

“Well, *Tom*,” he pronounced clearly, watching Voldemort’s reaction to the mention of his hated Muggle name. “It’s your fault, actually. If you hadn’t chosen my family as part of this stupid Prophecy, if you hadn’t killed my parents and pissed me off so royally, I wouldn’t have been here annoying you. So you’ve only yourself to blame.”

The ridges on his forehead rose. Harry supposed those used to be his eyebrows but he had long since lost those along with the rest of his humanity. “The Prophecy?” he hissed. Harry wasn’t certain if he said it in Parseltongue or not. His red eyes narrowed. “You *know* it?”

“Yep. One other thing you’re behind on, I’m afraid. Want to hear the whole thing? I suppose it would do no harm now. Let’s see. It goes like this: *The one with the power to vanquish the Dark Lord approaches...born to those who have thrice defied him, born as the seventh month dies...and the Dark Lord will mark him as his equal, but he will have power the Dark Lord knows not...and either must die at the hand of the other for neither can live while the other survives...the one with the power to vanquish the Dark Lord will be born as the seventh month dies...*”

Voldemort froze. His eyes glared at Harry but his gaze seemed far away. *Yeah*, thought Harry. *That’s it. You’ve just realized your mistake, Mr. Scaly.* “You did it. You decided. I never would have decided to do you in, you stupid prat! It’s all *your* fault!”

But at last, Voldemort turned his face to Harry and he seemed pleased. Harry swallowed nervously. *Shit. What now?*

“And so,” said Voldemort in an oily tone reminiscent of Snape. “I have marked you as my equal.” He smiled. The weird teeth made it even more reptilian. “Let us see just how equal you can be, Harry.” He flicked his wand upward and cast a nonverbal.

But Harry had been ready for this for some time and dived out the way, grabbing Draco by the robe and taking him down too. He brought up his own wand. "*Petrificus Totalus!*"

But like a master swordsman, Voldemort flicked his wand and parried the curse aside. Harry scrambled to his feet and dragged Draco with him behind a trophy case.

"Ah, Draco Malfoy! My little deserter. I had great plans for you, Little Dragon. But you chose Harry Potter instead. In a filthy sodomizing relationship, I might add. And you call yourself a Pureblood. I'm certain your dear father is ashamed. But I will deal with him soon enough."

That meant at least that Lucius was alive. Did it also mean that Dumbledore had survived as well? Harry was sure Voldemort would have bragged about killing them if he actually had. It gave Harry hope.

"Pureblood? Ha! That's funny coming from you, *Tom!*"

"I am *Lord* Voldemort, whelp!"

"No you're not," taunted Harry, stalling for time while he furious thought of something to do. "You're just Tom Riddle, son of a Muggle. You're a Half-blood. You're not any better than I am. So hey, *Tom*. I guess that makes you *my* equal, doesn't it?"

The trophy case suddenly exploded and Harry had enough time for a split-second shield charm covering himself and Draco.

Draco was white as a sheet. He had to get Draco out of here but he couldn't think of a ruse. He also had to destroy this Horcrux. He felt the tug of an *Accio* more than once, and he didn't want Voldemort to figure out to *Accio* him as well. Harry removed the sticking charm, aimed his wand at the trophy, and nonverbally incanted, *Incendio!* The trophy caught fire and began to quickly melt.

"*NO!!*" Voldemort aimed his wand, and Harry rolled out of the way with Draco, but he lost his grip of the Slytherin and Draco fell backwards. Harry panicked as Draco fell within Voldemort's line of fire. He cast a shield charm on him and it gave Draco enough time to scramble behind another trophy case and cower. But now he was at the opposite side of the room from Harry.

The Horcrux melted completely and suddenly, it blew up a black plume of smoke which Harry was certain looked like a skull before it dissipated into nothing.

Voldemort screamed something incomprehensible. Maybe it wasn't words at all. But Harry knew that this was it. Voldemort was just as vulnerable as Harry was. They truly were equals now.

He glanced at Draco again. Draco was a liability to him. He knew that now. As long as he worried about him and tried to protect him, he would remain on the defensive and he simply couldn't afford to do that.

Something lumpy in his pocket gave him pause. Of course! He reached in and grabbed the object. "Draco!" he hissed.

While Draco looked up at Harry, Harry counted, “One...two—” and tossed the stone to his lover, praying that he would catch it. “Three!”

As soon as Draco caught the stone he instantly vanished. Harry breathed easier. Not only would Draco be safe but he could alert the rest of the school. Hopefully, everyone would have the sense to stay out of this room.

Harry clutched his wand in his hand. So much was going through his head. What would be the best way to dispatch the Dark Lord? How could he get a shot in without Voldemort putting up a shield? And how could he employ that *power the Dark Lord knows not*?

“I made a promise to you once, Harry Potter.” His voice was chilling and suddenly a bit of that terror crept back into Harry's heart, clutching it with a cold hand. Lucius Malfoy had only taught Harry a few new hexes and shields He was really no match for Voldemort. With a surge of panic he worried all over again that he couldn't possibly defeat him.

“Do you remember?” asked the Dark Lord, coming closer, taking his time. “In the graveyard? Do you remember my telling you that I would make you beg for death? I haven't forgotten.”

“Yeah. That was nice your threatening a fourteen year old boy. Big of you.”

“But you are my *equal*, remember? You said so yourself. My equal. And so you must know as many spells and hexes and curses as I do. Correct?”

“B-but I have the *power the Dark Lord knows not*.”

“Indeed. And just what is that power...*Harry*?”

Harry scooted backwards, searching for a way out. But the exit was behind Voldemort. There was another way out of this room. He knew it. He couldn't remember. “Well...if I told you, then you'd know, wouldn't you?”

“I'm going to enjoy toying with you. I have seen how my Death Eaters have tortured to insanity those who opposed me. But I have never actually tortured anyone to *death*. I think in your case I should enjoy that immensely.”

Bugger. “That's...that's kind of insane, don't you think?”

“No. Not really.” Voldemort was coming closer. He really did want to draw this out. “What is sanity, in any case? It is only perception. Much like truth, or right and wrong. Perception, Harry. These are all valuable lessons I am imparting to you. Pity that you will not be able to use them.”

“Lessons from you? No thanks.” Then Harry remembered something. Hermione had taught him this one. A Mirror Charm. He could never quite get it right in Transfigurations, but perhaps now might be the time to try it. Make a mirror image of yourself. If he could distract Voldemort in the other direction, Harry could bolt for the door. It was worth a try.

“*Specchio!*” he whispered. He prayed, then got up and ran for the door. At the same time, another “Harry” got up and ran in the opposite direction, almost in front of Voldemort. Voldemort took the bait and aimed his wand.

“*Avada Kedavra!*”

So much for tortured to death. The spectral Harry vanished, but the real Harry had already made it out the door. He ran hell for leather, not knowing just where he was going. Curses hissed over his head and sizzled against the wall, causing paintings to catch fire. The portraits screamed and many of the burnt painting’s inhabitants fled to other paintings.

That’s done it! If Draco hadn’t told everyone by now, then the paintings surely would.

All at once, Harry caught sight of all the ghosts of Hogwarts threading through the walls. He looked back as he passed them, and they made a beeline for Voldemort. Harry hadn’t seen that many ghosts since Nearly Headless Nick’s party, but there was Nick in the lead. Moaning Myrtle, the Bloody Baron, even Peeves was there. Voldemort swiped at them with his wand and then a spell blasted from it and scattered the ghosts. What spell could do that? Harry instantly felt out of his league. Shit!

He kept running, furiously trying to think of a plan. He ran down the corridor filled with suits of armor and as soon as he made it passed them, they began to clank off of their platforms. Wielding swords, maces, and halberds, the formless knights faced Voldemort. Harry slowed to watch, amazed that the castle itself was coming to his rescue.

Voldemort stopped, seeming momentarily confused. A knight swung his axe and Voldemort leaped out of the way. Mortal at last, he well knew he couldn’t afford to get hurt. He aimed his wand and the suit exploded. But another knight stepped up behind him with a sword. Meanwhile, the scattered and exploded suit was slowly reassembling itself. Voldemort dispatched the next knight and noticed the first suit’s transformation. He actually looked troubled by this. Harry was gaining more hope by the second. Could it be that Hogwarts itself would defeat him?

Voldemort cast a wider spell, and all at once all the knights were laid low. They weren’t moving and Harry suddenly realized that neither was he. He sped off again, cursing Voldemort’s abilities.

He reached the staircases and suddenly curses whizzed passed his head, aiming for his pursuer. He looked up and saw his fellow students, all shielding themselves behind the stone balusters, and shooting hexes at Voldemort, even as some of the staircases moved. Dumbledore’s Army!

Harry wasted no time to watch it. He ran toward the Great Hall. There was still no plan but he knew that something would come to him. It was as if the Founders were coming to his aid, giving him chances to get away, to stall.

There was a lot of yelling behind him in the stairwell. He knew Voldemort was shooting hexes at his friends and he only hoped that they would all be safe.

Someone came around the corner and Harry's wand was ready with an *Avada Kedavra* on his lips. But when he saw that it was Draco he lifted his wand to the ceiling, redirecting the curse. It burnt a hole in one of the beams.

"Draco! What are you doing here? Get out quick before he comes!"

"I'm ready for him," he said unsteadily. "I have the potion, Harry." And he ducked behind the huge doors.

But Harry didn't want Draco anywhere near him. There was nothing he could do when Voldemort screeched around the corner and spotted Harry in the Hall. He smiled and stepped forward triumphantly. And just as he cleared the door, Draco pulled out a bright green water pistol and aimed it in an unsteady hand toward Voldemort's face. He squeezed the trigger and let loose a long stream of potion. It hit Voldemort square in the cheek and he whipped his head around, getting a full dose in his face. He glared daggers at Draco and Draco lowered his arm. The pistol was empty and the potion didn't look as if it was taking any kind of effect.

Give it a moment, Harry admonished himself.

"Do you think you're paltry potions can effect me?" He waved his wand and Draco flew up and smacked hard against the stone wall.

"DRACO!" Harry took a step toward him, but reined himself in. He seethed. "You shouldn't have done that."

"Oh really? Just wait. You can watch helplessly as I torture your dear Draco and then you can watch him die in a most painful way. Before you suffer the same fate."

"Funny how you keep saying that. And yet, here I am, seventeen years later from when you first tried to kill me. Not a very good track record, is it?"

Voldemort was done playing games. He screamed his curse and the fiery red light snapped from his upraised wand. Harry raised his and was surprised when his block actually worked.

"Harry!"

Harry glanced toward the door and saw Ron and Hermione running toward him. "Stay back!" he yelled. Hermione was taking something from her pocket and she flung it at Harry. It grew as it sailed toward him and he caught it deftly in his left hand as if it were a Snitch. It grew to its natural proportions and Harry realized it was the Sorting Hat.

The Hat sized up the situation. "You're going to need help, boy."

"No kidding!"

He was about to toss it aside when something occurred to him. It had helped him in the Chamber of Secrets. Perhaps, if the Founders had put a bit of themselves *into* the Hat maybe he could get something *out* of it. After all, the Hat was able to read thoughts to sort students into their proper

house. Maybe it went both ways and there was enough of the Founders to give back a little thought or two. Harry felt a little foolish, but he put the Hat on his head.

“Now that’s using your head,” said the Hat, gratified.

Suddenly, Harry felt very strange. Spells began to occur to him which he was certain he had never learned. He didn’t question it. He didn’t speak the spells. He just threw his wand arm forward and coloured light jetted out of it and chains wrapped themselves about Voldemort. Voldemort looked at the chains around him and tried a few spells, but the chains held him fast. Harry almost laughed out loud in relief.

But then the chains melted off of the Dark Lord as if they were only painted on. “Interesting, Harry,” he said as the last of the chains dissolved from him. “Can you counter *this*?”

And a spell sped toward Harry. Before he could raise a shield, something else occurred to him and he incanted an unknown spell. The light froze in place right in front of Harry but didn’t touch him. He found that he could walk around it, in fact, studying the frozen spell for a moment before it collapsed and dispersed.

Voldemort was furious. “*Accio* Sorting Hat!”

It whipped off Harry’s head and sailed toward Voldemort. Harry’s heart sank. It hadn’t occurred to him to put a sticking charm on it. That Hat had been a good weapon. But before Voldemort could grasp it, a red streak flew by and snatched it first.

“Fawkes!” Harry was never so happy to see the Phoenix as he was now. Well, perhaps he was just as happy to see it in the Chamber of Secrets. Fawkes flew out a high window and Harry was certain Voldemort wasn’t going to get hold of him or the Hat.

Voldemort cast about for weapons or something and his eye fell on Draco recovering in the corner. He smiled that horrible inhuman grin, and ran over to Draco, grabbed his arm, and yanked him to his feet. He pressed his wand to Draco’s head. “And now, my dear Harry. You will drop your wand or you will see your lover die horribly.”

Harry's breath caught. No! Draco looked up at Voldemort, terror grimacing his features. But he turned to Harry and his face changed. Imperceptively, Harry saw him shake his head.

“What will it be, Harry? Your death? Or his? I will make yours swift. I promise. Drop the wand.”

Everything seemed to decelerate. It was as if a TimeTurner had slowed Time itself. Voldemort had a death grip on Draco’s wrist, and Draco was looking at Harry, terrified but resigned. He didn’t want Harry to drop his guard. But how could Harry let Draco die? How could he drop his wand? If he did then maybe no one could stop Voldemort. It was up to him, wasn’t it? He looked at the face of his lover—perhaps for the last time and knew he had to decide.

He walked slowly forward his wand still in his hand. Voldemort pressed his painfully to Draco’s temple. Draco winced. “Don’t do it, Harry,” Draco cried out. “It...it doesn’t matter what happens to me. You *know* that! Don’t—”

“*Silencio*,” said Voldemort and Draco was struck dumb.

Harry moved closer, his trainers, squeaking along the stone floor.

“You can’t hope to win, Harry. I am more powerful than you. I have years and years training over you. You’re just a boy with nothing but a stick of wood. Drop it. Your death will be quick. Won’t it be a relief at last? No cares, no troubles. Isn’t this what was meant for you all along?”

“You are more powerful than me,” said Harry, voice choking. He stood no more than a few feet away now. But his eyes were only on Draco. “Why then, if you have all this power, do you use it for hate and death? What good is all of it if all you have is yourself?”

“You don’t understand true power, Harry. You never have.”

“No. I don’t,” he said quietly. He was aware of all the people standing in the entry. He saw a shimmer of power for the first time blocking the archway preventing the others from acting. Voldemort was doing that at the same time he was calmly talking to Harry. True power. Yes, Voldemort had it in abundance. What made Harry think he could ever win over that?

“I don’t understand,” he said, eyes now filling with tears. It was almost a relief that it would be over soon. He could not make himself drop his wand but he felt it lowering. He was going to die. He knew it. It was finally going to be over. And he would never know, or maybe wouldn’t even care who won in the end. Maybe the war would keep raging, or maybe Voldemort would kill all those who meant anything at all to him. But at least it would be over for Harry.

His one regret was Draco. He loved him. He really did. He looked at the tearstained face of his lover, recalling their whispered words of passion, their touches, their shared embraces. He loved Draco as he had never loved anything, and suddenly the feeling rose up in him and caused a warm lump to close his throat. He loved him. And Draco loved him just as much. That feeling was the most wonderful imaginable. Better than all the orgasms combined. Better than cold water to a thirsty throat. Better than food to a starving man. Better than air to breathe. Better than...than...*anything* he could possibly imagine.

He looked at Draco and Draco looked back at him with perfect understanding. And then Draco did something that Harry would never forget. Despite the blood from his impact with the stone wall, despite the tears marring his face, despite Voldemort’s wand tip pressed painfully to his temple...Draco smiled.

Harry raised his wand. He didn’t even really know why, but as he did, Voldemort, instead of hurting Draco, lifted his wand toward Harry. Harry didn’t even know what spell he himself was incanting but he recognized that flash of green from Voldemort’s wand speeding toward him. But just like in the graveyard, their wands’ magic joined. The air sizzled with power and the streams of magic flared brightly. Harry felt the power heaving through Voldemort’s wand and his own wand began to tremble. Beads of power surged toward him through the beams and like before, Harry concentrated hard on them, trying to push them back toward Voldemort.

But unlike the last time, it wasn’t working.

Desperately, Harry held to his wand with both hands, watching helplessly as the beads approached his wand's tip. *I can't lose. I can't!*

But he was. Voldemort's killing curse was thrumming toward him and there didn't seem to be a damned thing he could do about.

He lifted his eyes to Draco one last time. Draco's eyes were fixed on Harry. Harry knew the curse would reach him at any moment and he held it off with all his might. "I love you, Draco," he whispered.

"I love you, Harry," he saw him mouth, for he could not hear him over the crackling of magic all around them.

But suddenly, something enormous burst from Harry's chest. It was brighter than the sun but he could still look into it. The same burst from Draco and both sets of light met in the middle of both wand's magic and glowed even brighter. The beads of power stopped right before Harry's wand tip and with an abrupt burst of speed, reversed direction and shot into Voldemort's wand. The Dark Lord had only a moment to look at his glowing wand before there was a cry such as Harry had never heard. It might have been the dying howl of a Basilisk, or the braying of a werewolf, or even the Parseltongue call of a dying serpent. But the light—already burning like the sun—brightened even further until it exploded into a thousand lighted shards—and with it exploded one Dark Lord, who could not stand the brightness of Love: the power the Dark Lord knows not—and the last of his soul was shattered and released into the ether. There remained nothing of him. Nothing except a charred wand and a dark, smoking stain on the stone floor.

Draco fell to his knees as did Harry and suddenly, Harry was surrounded by people. Harry looked at his wand. It was charred and smoldering.

All the voices sounded so far away. He could see the people were touching him but he could not seem to feel them. He tried to crawl toward Draco but he was swallowed by blackness instead.

Part Seven—Epilogue

Harry dreamed of soft, golden fields and blue, blue skies. Two figures approached him and he knew instantly who they were. He wanted to run to them but he knew he must wait for them to come to him.

"I'm so proud of you," said the bespectacled man.

"We knew you could," said the woman with red hair.

“I didn’t think I really could,” Harry told them, a catch in his voice. They looked so happy, as if they had been waiting for this moment.

“We’re sorry you had to do it alone,” said the man.

“But I wasn’t alone. Draco was with me. I couldn’t have done it without him. That’s...that’s all right isn’t it?”

The woman smiled. “Of course, Harry. Love is always all right.”

They faded and so did the field and Harry found himself awakening in the hospital wing, with Ron and Hermione standing over him.

“He’s coming round!” said Ron. He was pretty sure it was Ron, though someone had taken off his glasses.

“Is this a dream?” he asked, voice hoarse.

“No, mate. It’s for real. You-Know-Who is dead and gone for good. You did it! You really did it.”

Harry thought so. Hermione handed him his glasses. He felt a little lighter, a little less put upon. He reached up to his forehead.

“Yes,” said Hermione. “It’s gone.”

He tried to feel the raised scar, so familiar to him all his life, but all he felt at his fingertips was smooth skin. “Blimey,” he muttered.

But then he thought of Draco. “Where’s Draco?”

Hermione gestured to the bed beside him. Draco was still asleep. That familiar white-blond hair lay across his pillow. “Everything’s all right then?” he asked, hoping.

“No one was hurt, Harry,” she said. “And Dumbledore and Mr. Malfoy are back.”

“Oh good.” He really couldn’t stay awake and decided that it would be all right to sleep now.

He awoke for good a few hours later. The first thing he noticed were the piles and piles of Honeydukes sweets, flowers, packages, scrolls and envelopes from well-wishers. It took up most of the wing in fact. Then he noticed Draco lying in bed beside him over the covers, stroking his hair. He smiled up at the Slytherin. “I understand that this is a Voldemort-free world now.”

Draco bent over and kissed him. “Too bloody right,” he said. “You bloody well did it, Potter.”

“We did, as I recall.”

“But it was your magic that grabbed mine. Weird feeling.”

“Yeah. Funny. I had just given up.”

“Really?” Draco looked concerned. “But how did you--?”

Harry shrugged. “More of that inexplicable magic, I guess. Just protecting my lover.”

“Yeah. I guess I’ll have to stay with you now. There’s no one likely to top that.”

Harry turned toward the doorway where many voices gathered, among them Dumbledore’s. Harry sat up and Draco discreetly stepped aside.

“Harry my boy!” said Dumbledore, and surprised Harry by taking him into his arms and hugging him tight.

“Professor!” He smiled at him breathlessly. “How did you manage it?”

“I could ask you the same thing, but I know how *you* managed it.”

Harry found himself blushing. *Just a little power the Dark Lord knows not. As you knew all along.* “But tell me, sir. How did you manage to kill Nagini and get away? Is Mrs. Malfoy okay? What happened to the other Death Eaters?”

“Many questions, Harry. It is indeed a thrilling and exciting tale.” He pulled up a chair and brushed the piles of sweets off of it as he sat. “You have many admirers, Harry. The whole of the Wizarding world is celebrating. Word travels fast. Especially good news.”

“You’re a hero, Harry,” said Draco. “But I knew it all along.”

“Indeed.”

“But Nagini. How did you--?”

“Of course, of course. Well, when Lucius and I Disappeared, we went first to Professor Snape’s dungeon to collect Polyjuice potion.” Harry raised his brows in question, but Dumbledore went on. “We needed it in order to get into the lair of the devil...er...that is, Malfoy Manor. Pardon, Mr. Malfoy,” he said to a stiff Draco. “At any rate, we were able to subdue two Death Eaters, and by obtaining their hairs, disguised ourselves as them and moved into the inner circle. When an opportunity presented itself, we dispatched the snake and still had time to rescue the damsel in distress. I must say, it was the most challenging bit of business I have done in a long time.” He smiled. “I understand you had some challenging moments yourself.”

“Found the Horcrux,” said Harry proudly.

“Yes, and good thinking, too. I must say, it never occurred to me. Foolish. One always tends to overcomplicate things. Including Voldemort. He was too single-minded on his goal and neglected the greatest power of all: Love. His undoing, of course. So it is true for all tyrants. Love has saved the day again. It saved you, Harry, the first time, and I had no doubt it would save you at the last.”

“I certainly had *my* doubts, Headmaster. I had all but given up. And then I just realized how much I love Draco. Really love him.” He blushed furiously at this admission, but he looked up to the blond man standing beside him. Draco dropped his hand to Harry’s shoulder and squeezed. “And when our wands joined all that love just...overwhelmed him, I guess.”

“Yes. So many underestimate the power of love. Well, I see that you are well, and I shall talk to Madam Pomfrey to see if you may be discharged. I am afraid the school is in chaos. I do not believe we will be able to settle down and finish our courses this year. But I suppose I cannot blame them. This is after all a fine end to your years at Hogwarts, Harry.”

“You mean term is over?”

“We have one month left, but I do not think anyone is of a mind to go back to classes. Everyone except your Miss Granger, of course.”

Harry laughed. “Of course!”

Dumbledore patted his hand, rose, and left to talk to the mediwitch.

Harry looked at Draco who sat on the bed again. He hugged Harry and kissed his cheek. “So that’s it,” he said. “I guess we are fully fledged wizards now. You especially.”

“But you helped me!”

Draco shook his head. “I wasn’t the one training my wand on the Dark Lord. There’s only room for one hero in this saga and it’s you, Potter. But I get to live happily ever after with you.”

“Yeah.” Harry put his arm around Draco and held him close. “I think it’s about bloody time I had a happily ever after to this nasty fairy tale.” He turned Draco’s face and took his lips in a searing kiss. When they pulled away, Draco sighed and laid his head against Harry’s neck.

“Well, it’s a *fairy* tale for sure.”

Harry laughed. It was good to laugh. It was good to feel free. Free of the Durselys and free of Voldemort. He didn’t know what he was going to do with his life in the next few days let alone the next few years, but he knew one thing: Draco was going to be a part of it.

The End

A/N: One more sequel to this coming up called “After Hogwarts.”
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