

*(& fade to silver)*

*(& the cold light of morning)*

One damp November morning, King's Cross woke in the usual way.

Inside the station, the first trickle of commuters scuttled between the drowsing shops, clutching briefcases, glued to their mobiles, faces schooled into bleak disinterest. The rancid smells of cheap coffee and tabloid ink clung to the frosty air. A tabby cat sat atop a railing, unblinking hazel eyes watching an arriving train splattered with grey-brown muck. The train lurched into the station, the sounds of its engine like the soft cries of a wounded animal. The tabby leaped down from the railing and vanished into the station's dissipating gloom.

A white blob loomed in one of the train's windows: a young man of about twenty slept inside a compartment, his blond head resting against the cool pane. Blood matted the fine white-gold strands at one temple, and one of his eyes bloomed purple and black, swollen shut. Another blood smear dried at the corner of his mouth, and his thin white hands, clasped in his lap, clenched and relaxed with whatever he was dreaming.

The train coasted to a stop at platform eight, and a shrill whistle upset the station's sleepy murmur. The young man jerked awake, his one good eye filled with terror in pale grey. As he looked around, his shoulders relaxed slightly and he struggled to his feet, balancing against the window. After steadying himself, he shuffled to the nearest exit. He moved with the rolling gait of a drunk, pausing occasionally to blink and shake his head, as though trying to remember if he'd turned off the lights before leaving home.

Out on the platform, the young man stopped, arms falling to his sides with a helpless flutter. A woman in a bright yellow jacket and a black hat with a checked stripe emerged from a nearby office and approached him, hand resting just above her right hip.

"Are you well, sir?"

He jumped. "I-- Can you help me? My... My name is Draco Malfoy. I'm not sure who I am."

*MAN WITH SEVERE AMNESIA ADMITTED TO LOCAL HOSPITAL*

*He's got an impressive black eye, a careful smile, and no memory of his past. He says his name is Draco Malfoy, but concedes that he isn't sure if the name is really his. It*

*came to mind when he approached a Transport Police officer in King's Cross, he says, and he used it. That was two days ago.*

*He is well-spoken, certainly educated, but he has no knowledge of science or history, and his maths are basic at the very best. He knows how to use lavatory facilities and kitchen utensils, but he has no recollection of learning these things. The psychiatrists will subject him to a barrage of examinations, and some hold out hope that the amnesia is temporary, caused by the injuries he'd sustained -- aside from the black eye, he had internal bleeding and a fractured wrist. MRI results have not been processed yet, but the doctors are not ruling out brain injury.*

*There are no records of a Draco Malfoy being born in the United Kingdom in the past thirty years -- either he is a foreigner, or the name he remembers belongs to someone else. The police say no one of his description has been reported missing in the last seventy-two hours, and there are plans to display his photograph during the evening news...*

The Ministry of Magic's Muggle Liaison Office was short-staffed, and no one had read the Muggle newspapers all that week. Eventually, the papers migrated into an overflowing drawer and, later, burned. The story slid off the front page and eventually disappeared from print. There were more interesting topics than a man nobody seemed to miss.

*(& four years later)*

"The Gay Times," said Lucas. He was Portuguese, though Draco didn't know if that was a sufficient explanation for his incessant non-sequiturs.

"The Gay Times," repeated Draco, eyebrow raised. "I await the conclusion to your gripping tale with bated breath."

Lucas shrugged. "Could do a piece on this place." His dark eyes were in constant motion; it was dizzying to watch him for too long.

Draco pursed his lips and glanced at the small stage, where the band was taking a break. "I can see the opening paragraph now. 'The 909 is a jazz lounge like any other. Or is it?' Then I'd run out of material, unless I chose to describe the decor."

"Okay," said Lucas peaceably.

He never argued with Draco, which was gratifying and annoying at the same time. Draco didn't like it when people disagreed with him, but he also enjoyed a good

debate. He suspected that one of these mutually exclusive preferences came from Before, from the life Draco had had prior to arriving at King's Cross station four years ago.

The musicians started up again, and Draco returned to his White Russian. "I could do a piece on the band," he said to Lucas. "Rees from Q was looking for something about the evolution of jazz."

Lucas eyed him with a doubtful expression. "Jazz?"

Draco sighed. "You're right. Too much research." He knew nothing about jazz and only frequented the 909 because it had been the first club he'd visited. Draco was afraid of new things in his personal life. Routine and order, that was the way of it. Eat, sleep, write, research, hound editors, end up at the 909 with Lucas and a White Russian, and maybe take someone home. Predictable. Safe.

The door opened and a stranger entered -- a tall, lean man with dark hair and eyes so green they seemed to shine behind his stylish round glasses. The saxophone chose that moment to emit a long, soul-baring note, and Draco's pulse quickened as the stranger walked towards the bar. A dusting of snow melted in his hair and on his broad shoulders, and Draco could practically feel the damp wool of the stranger's coat beneath his fingertips.

"I saw him first," said Draco to Lucas, who was also watching the man. Lucas grunted.

The stranger stopped a few feet away and scanned the crowd. He had the eyes of a cop, and Draco's heart sank: he had no use for cops, even gorgeous ones. The eyes stopped on Draco, widening, and Draco quickly assumed a *laissez-faire* slouch, drumming his fingers on the side of his glass. He didn't look away from the stranger, who was now striding with purpose towards the two friends.

"I thought I recognised you," he said, stopping a foot away from Draco. Hostility tinged his voice, and his shoulders were stiff.

"I don't believe we've met," said Draco politely. "I *know* you haven't been here before." He would never have forgotten those eyes.

"Come off it, Malfoy," said the man, and gestured at the band, then at the bar. "This is where you've been hiding all these years?"

Years. Four years. Memories. "You're from--" stammered Draco, understanding. "You knew me? From Before?"

The stranger blinked slowly. "Are you on drugs?"

Draco barely heard him. "Who am I?" he demanded, leaping off the stool. "You can tell me, can't you? Jesus, I can't believe this -- four years and now. You know. You really know. I thought I was a foreigner, but -- what's your name?" He was out of breath, and the only real things were Lucas's steadying hand on his shoulder and the stranger's green eyes.

"Potter," said the stranger. "Harry Potter. Malfoy, are you-- don't you remember?"

"I don't remember anything," said Draco. "Four years ago I woke up on a train with only my name for a legacy. I was in hospital for a year, and then in a special charity house, until I'd earned enough to rent a--" He frowned. "They appealed on television, but no one came forward. Why didn't you come forward? Do I have a family?"

Harry looked terrified. "Excuse me a moment," he said. "I'll be right back." He left as though pursued by *Sun* journalists, and Draco ran after him. Maybe he had perpetrated some heinous crime, Before. Was that why no one had claimed him? No, that made no sense. The police would have come for him. This Harry *did* have the look of a cop...

Outside the club, the street was empty except for Alice lumbering merrily by in her wheelchair. She'd been a veteran whore before her accident and still spent most of her time around her old haunts. "Alice," called Draco. "A man just left here a moment ago; did you see which way he went?"

"There's always a man, isn't there? I haven't seen anyone, dear, but I was at Pino's. Nothing but women there." Alice cackled and rolled on down the street, wheels whisking through the thin layer of slush.

Draco stared at a streetlamp, dejected. It was as though Harry Potter had been a figment of his imagination.

*(& now we're stuck on rewind)*

*It's not my problem,* Harry told himself for the eighth time, striding through level two's darkened corridor towards the Muggle Liaison Office. He'd been investigating an unregistered vampire sighting, and instead he'd found Malfoy. Malfoy, who had disappeared four years ago and whose parents still tried to make every Auror, Hit Wizard, and random desk jockey in the Department look for their son. Of course, no

one had bothered to entertain the possibility that precious little Draco could be with the Muggles. *And he doesn't remember anything. I reckon Lucius Malfoy will love that.*

Harry's mouth twisted in disgust. When it had counted, Narcissa Malfoy had known what was good for her family, and Harry would never forget what she'd done for him. As for father and son, they should've both been put in prison after the war. Then Harry wouldn't be having to sacrifice the rest of his evening on bringing Draco Malfoy back to his mummy and daddy. The door to the Muggle Liaison Office banged open as he walked through.

There was no one inside the well-lit office, but a Singing Kettle murmured on a low table near the bulletin board. The night duty people were probably on break, no doubt harassing the girls in Records. Nothing to do but wait. He couldn't bring Malfoy back alone under the circumstances; a Muggle Liaison official needed to be present if Malfoy truly had no knowledge of the wizarding world. Harry only hoped that Malfoy would hang around the club long enough for one of these jokers to come back to work.

*Who am I? What's your name?* It had been the first time Draco Malfoy had ever spoken to Harry as though he were a normal person and not a bit of road dirt. Harry shook the thought off. Malfoy would be brought back soon, his memory restored, and it wouldn't matter.

Zacharias Smith walked inside, swinging a mug by its ear as the face painted on the mug grimaced. "If it isn't the Auror Department's best and brightest," said Smith with disinterest. "What are you doing here?"

"I've found Draco Malfoy," said Harry. "I need you to come with me so we can bring him in."

"Let me guess," said Smith, sneering. "You've found him working the Muggle streets, earning a living on his back."

"I have no idea how he earns a living, but he's currently at a Muggle jazz club in Camden and if you don't stop yapping, he might leave. Let's go." Smith rolled his eyes and set his mug down by the kettle. "Lead the way, brave Auror," he said. "What were you doing at a Muggle jazz club, anyway?"

"Vampire sighting." Harry held out his arm. Smith took it, and they Apparated into the cramped yard behind the club.

When they walked inside, Malfoy wasn't there. "Fuck," muttered Harry.

"I see no Malfoys here, only Muggles," remarked Smith, looking around with interest.

"That's because he's gone," said Harry, and turned to the barman. "Excuse me? There was a young man here not a half hour ago -- tall, blond--"

"Quentin? He left ten minutes ago." The barman looked Harry up and down. "He didn't think you were coming back, see. Had he known, he would've stayed." Why was the man grinning like that?

"Which way did he go?" asked Harry. If Malfoy lived as a Muggle, it stood to reason he didn't make a habit of Apparition. They might still catch up to him.

The barman shrugged. "Same way he goes every night. This is a one-way street."

Muggles. Cars. "Damn it," said Harry, and turned to Smith, who was sniggering.

"Did the big bad Auror lose his trail?"

Harry gave him a disgusted look and jerked his head towards the door. Just before they Disapparated, Harry stopped Smith with a hand on his arm. "You have to tell his parents," he said. He wanted to be done with this -- Malfoy'd been sighted; now it was just a matter of bringing him back.

"I don't have to do anything," said Smith coldly, pushing Harry's hand off. "Next time you want Muggle Liaison help, put in a request like the rest of the civilised world. My paperwork will be a mess tomorrow morning."

"It'd be less of a mess if you actually did it instead of flirting with Monique from Records," Harry shot back, but Smith had already Disapparated.

*(& you never get caught in the rain)*

Google was failing Draco.

He had spent three hours at the kitchen table, staring at personal pages, blogs, employee profiles. Nothing. There were hundreds of Harry Potters, most of them abroad in the States and Australia. Next to Draco's long-cold tea lay a list of Harry Potters living in the UK, some already with numbers copied out of the telephone book. Of course, for all he knew, *his* Harry Potter wasn't even in the phone book. Page fourteen of search results, and Draco's eyes were glazing over.

*...a cousin named **Harry Potter** who works...*

The feeling was like a freight train with faulty brakes. It was what had once helped him make his first sale -- a gut-level feeling of rightness, a feeling that this was it, he'd hit the jackpot. At this time last year, Draco had had eight articles to sell, but no one cared about a no-name freelancer with no writing credits. He had been staring at a page of results in Publishers' Marketplace exactly like this, and Joel Rees's name had tugged at him just in this way. Draco was looking for this cousin; he was sure of it.

The link led to the personal web site of an amateur boxer named Dudley Dursley, a Four Nations middleweight whose star had briefly flared five years ago, but then he had dropped off the radar and was just now getting back into boxing. On the page creatively titled "about me", amid descriptions of Dursley's unremarkable school career and even more boring work history, Draco found the sentence: *I have a cousin named Harry Potter who works for the government.*

The government. Draco sat up a little straighter. He and Lucas had just watched *The Bourne Identity* at Draco's flat a few weeks ago -- what if he was like Jason Bourne? A spy. He'd been badly injured when he'd come off the train at King's Cross. Maybe no one had claimed him because he was too dangerous. Odd things certainly tended to happen around him -- people who annoyed him suddenly tripping over bits of lint, cabinets flying open before he even reached for them. At first he had thought he had telekinetic powers, but he never seemed to be able to do anything like that on purpose. Maybe he'd been a part of some government paranormal research project, and now they were afraid to approach him for fear of being discovered. Draco sighed. A spy? Telekinesis, again? He really needed to stop watching so many films.

The feeling that this cousin was the man Draco sought did not abate, however. He clicked on Dursley's e-mail address.

*Dear Mr Dursley,*

*I am a freelance writer gathering material for a panoramic of current Four Nations fighters, and I found your Web site whilst researching. I wonder if you could spare some of your time (an hour, let's say) for an informal interview.*

*Sincerely, Quentin Drake*

He didn't like using a pen name, but he was well aware that "Draco Malfoy" was a ridiculous name. At least now he knew it really *was* his name -- Harry Potter had addressed him as "Malfoy". Not "Draco", which meant they hadn't been on friendly terms. Had they gone to school together? Draco gritted his teeth. He must have gone

to school somewhere, maybe even university, but no amount of Internet research ever jogged his memory.

And now here was this Harry Potter, who had walked into the 909 for reasons unknown and was now costing Draco precious sleep. He glanced at the microwave's digital clock. Three in the morning. Draco saved his browser tabs and shut the laptop down.

On the following morning, there was an enthusiastic e-mail from Dudley Dursley in Draco's inbox. He would be happy to meet with Draco, and any time after five was fine by him. Dursley hoped Draco wasn't a reporter. Draco was glad he wasn't; pissing off middleweight boxers, amateur or not, was not high on his list of life goals.

They met at a pub down the street from Grunnings, where Dursley worked as a manager of some sort. A thickset man with piggish eyes and sparse blond hair, he looked nothing like Harry Potter. Now that he'd had a night's sleep, Draco wondered if perhaps his gut feeling had led him astray. He let Dursley wax rhapsodic about his various accomplishments, taking occasional notes whilst his Dictaphone ran. Draco asked the odd clarifying question, but mostly he was looking for an in to ask about the cousin, and finally, when Dursley mentioned his wife in connection with some fight he'd had to hide from her, Draco interjected.

"So your family doesn't support your hobby?"

"My wife hates it," said Dursley with a guilty look. "My daughter thinks it's great." Pride shone in his eyes. "She threatens all the kids in kindergarten that I'll box them into next Tuesday."

*What a charming little tyke she must be.* Draco didn't say that, of course. "You've got no other family?"

"Well, my parents, but they've moved to New Zealand. I think Mum couldn't stand me being married."

"What about this cousin you mentioned on your site -- Barry?"

"Harry," said Dursley, and frowned. "You aren't one of *them*, are you?"

"A reporter?" asked Draco blandly. "No." So whatever Harry Potter was, he had a *them*. Either he belonged to *them* or the mysterious *they* were somehow after Harry Potter. "I simply like to get as much information as I can -- since your wife doesn't



like your boxing, I thought perhaps your cousin might be a better choice for an outsider's perspective."

Dursley's face slackened. "Oh," he said. "Well, I only mentioned him for completeness, you understand. I do go on a bit. We're not really in touch -- Christmas cards, but that's about it. He'd not be of any use to you."

"I see," said Draco. He knew he couldn't press now, in case he needed to use Dursley later, so he let it go. It was frustrating: Harry Potter's whereabouts were in this man's mind. Would that Draco could reach in and pluck the information out. An odd feeling came over him -- he was almost confident that he *could* get at the information, but he was missing a link, some crucial object. Or maybe he was finally going mad. "Well, thank you for your time, Mr Dursley. If the story sells, I'll make sure you receive a complimentary copy of the magazine."

*(& there is no running that can hide you)*

They had been at the 909 for a half an hour, but still there was no sign of Malfoy.

"I hope this isn't a joke," said Narcissa. "If it is, you go too far." There was a drink in front of her, but she had not touched it.

"It's not a joke," said Harry patiently. "The barman said he's here every evening without fail, but it would have been suspicious if I asked what time."

*Then again*, thought Harry, looking around once more, *maybe not*. He hadn't noticed the clientele the previous times he'd been here, but now he saw that the 909 was very much a gay-friendly establishment. If Harry had asked the barman what time Draco -- or Quentin, as he apparently called himself now -- arrived, the man would've probably assumed Harry was interested in *that* way. What a thought.

Narcissa didn't seem to notice anything was amiss; she simply stared at the doorway, her white hands clasped in her lap. She made a small sound in her throat, eyes widening, and Harry turned around to see Draco Malfoy walking in, with that same wiry, quick-eyed bloke he'd been with three days ago. Probably his boyfriend.

Malfoy looked happy to see Harry, which was not something Harry ever thought he'd witness. Not that it mattered; he was only here to accompany Narcissa. Malfoy said something to his boyfriend, who nodded and walked towards the bar. Malfoy approached Harry and Narcissa's table, still smiling. "I was hoping you'd come back," he said, and turned to Narcissa, who had gone incredibly pale. "Your wife?"

Tears spilled from Narcissa's eyes, but she just went on looking at her son, unblinking, silent.

"I'm sure it's not that bad, madam," said Malfoy, frowning despite the remnants of a smile on his lips. "He doesn't look like the wrong sort to marry--"

"She's your mother, you idiot," gritted Harry.

Malfoy's eyes went very wide as the rest of his grin faded.

*(& find a brand new way of seeing)*

Draco sat in a large armchair and watched a garden gnome pour tea. Or, at least, he thought it was a garden gnome -- no one had bothered to introduce him. He watched the creature mostly to avoid looking up at the man across from him. Meeting Lucius Malfoy had been like looking into a mirror from the future, and Draco couldn't possibly deny the face of his father. But if he accepted that, he would need to accept the teleportation, the flowing robes, the wands, and the talking garden gnome.

He would need to accept that all those strange things that had happened around him, the ones that often made him doubt his sanity, were manifestations of his magic. A hospital orderly shoved out the door when Draco had wanted to be alone. InfoTex had chosen him over the single mother for that first data entry job. His mobile sometimes flew into his hand before Draco reached it in his pocket. These things didn't happen often enough for a pattern, but now that Draco had heard about magic, they all made a peaceful, satisfying sort of sense in his mind.

The teleportation had been nice; he had barely noticed the sensation of being squished into jelly because he'd been holding Harry's hand, and he could still feel its warmth. Draco glanced at Harry, and his stomach flipped and twisted. Harry was a wizard. So was Draco, if these people were to be believed. It had occurred to Draco that something very dark might've been buried in his past, but he hadn't expected this. Harry had refused to sit down, had refused tea, and stood off to the side, staring at the wall, his jaw set.

Draco had this crazy idea that Harry and his father didn't care for each other much. Why? Perhaps Draco and Harry had had an affair as teenagers. Maybe that was why Harry seemed so uncomfortable every time Draco looked at him. Story of many a queer boy's life: fall in love at school only to watch the object of your affection grow up straight whilst you stayed gay. Added to the mix was the complication of money, no doubt -- judging from the manor's opulence, Draco's parents were incredibly rich, whilst Harry behaved like a meat-and-two-veg kind of man. Wizard. Jesus.

There was a loud *crack* and another garden gnome appeared. "Zacharias Smith," it announced in grave tones. Wizards and albino peacocks and talking garden gnomes.

"Well, send him in, then," said Draco's father.

Zacharias Smith was a stodgy young man reminiscent of Dudley Dursley. He shook Draco's hand and introduced himself as a representative of the Muggle Liaison Office.

"I'm sorry," said Draco, "I didn't catch that. The Office of the what now?"

Smith made such a face at Harry that Draco wanted to punch him. Harry spread his arms in a helpless gesture, but his voice was mocking as he spoke. "You *told* me I wasn't to tell him anything beyond the absolutely necessary."

"I would say basic terminology qualifies as absolutely necessary," said Smith, his tone icy.

"Gentlemen," said Narcissa. That was all she said, but her tone and the look on her face were such that both Harry and Smith looked abashed.

Smith turned to Draco. "Muggle is the word we use to describe people who are not magical. The Ministry of Magic's Muggle Liaison Office is responsible for our limited relations with the Muggles and for cases like yours, of which there have been only three in recorded history: when a wizard loses his memories and believes he is a Muggle."

"But I am a Muggle," said Draco. "I can't do magic." His mother gasped, but Draco pressed on. "I think I've finally gone crazy. You're all figments of my imagination and I am going to wake up in a padded room with only a straitjacket for company."

"I assure you we're quite real," said Smith. "So are you. With few exceptions for parents of Muggle-born children and government officials, Muggles do not know of our existence, thus my presence here. We understand that you might want to settle your Muggle affairs before you return to the wizarding world, but it is imperative that you do not speak of your origins to any Muggles."

"If I breathed a word of this to anyone, I would be sectioned," Draco pointed out, annoyed. Did these people not know how the world worked?

Smith let his remark pass and continued. "While your memory loss is unfortunate, the Healers at St. Mungo's Hospital for Magical Maladies and Injuries will be informed of your situation, and you'll receive treatment--"

"Another hospital? No, thanks," interrupted Draco. "I spent one-fourth of the life I remember in a hospital. I'm not going back."

Narcissa wrung her hands. "Then we'll bring the Healers here, Draco--"

The Imperial March began to play from Draco's jacket pocket, and he snatched his mobile out, glancing at the display. Rose Jefferson from Parchment Craft. Draco flipped the mobile open with an apologetic gesture that was more habit than courtesy. "Quentin Drake," he said.

"Do you still have that story about the rival stencillers from Surrey?" asked Jefferson.

"Uh. Yeah. It's on my laptop, but I don't have it with me. Can I call you back when I've got it?"

"Make it tonight, sport," said Jefferson and hung up.

Draco pocketed the phone. "I've got to go home," he told no one in particular. "I've got--"

"But this is your home," said Narcissa. Such a pretty name.

Reluctantly, Draco glanced at his father, who wore an expression of utter misery. It was not something anyone else would have noticed, but Draco did. His face didn't change, but there was a gleam in Lucius's grey eyes that Draco knew all too well. It was the same way he looked when he was upset but couldn't show it. *My father.*

Harry and Smith looked uncomfortable. They'd had their heads together, arguing in muted voices about something, and Draco felt a flash of jealousy. It was silly, really. He didn't belong here, magic or no magic, parents or no parents. He didn't understand the words they used, didn't know how to talk to them without drawing astonished glances. He'd had enough of being a public spectacle for a lifetime.

"Why did none of you come forward when my face was all over television?" he demanded, glaring around at them all, even the garden gnome, who seemed to shrink under his gaze. "All over the papers."

"We-- we don't use this... this telly vision or read the Muggle papers," said Narcissa. "We never thought you might have--"

"That's just what I mean," interrupted Draco. "I can't imagine a world where nobody watches television, where no one reads the news. Magic! If it's really magic, why haven't you lot taken over the world?"

"We have laws--" began Smith, but Draco shook his head.

"This is too much," he said. "I need... time." He looked at his mother. "Please."

*(& in your regret that sounds absurd)*

Harry sat in his dark office, wondering why he couldn't get Malfoy off his mind. His part in the retrieval was finished; he'd written his report. It was done. He couldn't help being curious, though. When he'd found out he was a wizard, at eleven, it had only taken Hagrid's words -- he'd still believed in magic then, as a child does. The rest had been easy to accept. But Draco was twenty-two, and he'd only known four of those years, and that had by no means been a normal Muggle life, like Harry's had been until Hagrid's arrival. Harry couldn't really blame him for thinking he was going insane.

Mostly, Harry was struck by how *different* Malfoy was. His physical appearance had not changed, and he still had a sharp tongue, but he was free of the prejudices that had defined him. His mind had been wiped clean of Muggle hating, of his own perceived superiority. Harry had never thought he'd hear Malfoy criticise wizardkind for anything.

He wasn't really Draco Malfoy anymore; he was Quentin Drake. None of that absolved him of responsibility for the things he'd done in his previous life, except in a way it did, because Quentin Drake had no idea what he'd done or why. Harry expected that would change. Narcissa would find a way to convince her son to come back; if she lacked anything, it wasn't perseverance.

The Healers would do their work and he would become Draco Malfoy again, and Harry could go on disliking him in peace. He supposed what bothered him most about the current situation was that he couldn't dislike Quentin Drake, who actually seemed like a nice bloke. Harry knew he was being completely ridiculous; it's not like he would ever see Malfoy or talk to him. Hogwarts was over, and England was big enough that two wizards could avoid each other their whole lives.

What if the Healers couldn't help him, though? Gilderoy Lockhart probably still inhabited the closed ward at St. Mungo's, a testament to Mediwizardry's fallibility. What if Draco Malfoy forever remained Quentin Drake? Would he need to re-learn

magic? Would he learn to hate Muggles again, despite his only known origins? One way to find out.

Harry Apparated to St. Mungo's.

"Gilderoy Lockhart? Goodness; he's been gone years," said the Healer on night duty. The Janus Thickey ward was gloomy and silent; everyone slept. "Released into the care of Gladys Gudgeon; I believe they were married a year after that."

"So he got better?"

"No," said the Healer. "The memory loss was permanent, but we'd taught him enough to get by in the world, and I'd say he is. Getting by, that is. He's famous for more than just fighting the Dark Arts, now -- his case is in every textbook on Memory Charms."

Harry didn't know how it hadn't come to him sooner. Malfoy's memory loss -- what if someone had Obliviated him? And if so, why?

*(& in a race and it's killing time)*

Draco stared into his bathroom mirror, holding up the mangled floppy disk his mother had given him. A Portkey. His mind whirled. Stuart Redwing had called right on the heels of Rose Jefferson, wanting him to go to ground at a rave, and Draco had said sure, no problem, but he hadn't been able to focus on anything since returning from the wizarding world. Portkey. He had to grip it tightly and concentrate on the drawing room, and, after a vicious jerk behind his navel, he would be there. Home.

Draco laughed. In the mirror, his eyes remained haunted. All the children's tales about fairy godmothers were coming to mind at once. He had a witch and a wizard for parents, people who could make all this disappear, who were barely aware of the world outside theirs, just as people in Draco's world had no idea about the magic. He could abandon all this, leave it behind with impunity. How many people did he know who could say that about themselves? None.

He set the Portkey on his bedside cabinet and climbed into bed, shivering despite the flat's warmth. How would he sleep? How could he ever sleep? He didn't know what to do. His parents in that sprawling mansion with the strange servant creatures. Zacharias Smith with his haughty stare and officious manner. Harry. Draco shivered again, imagining Harry's green eyes staring at him from above, Harry's warm hands stroking his inner thighs lazily. Straight men were either too rough or too gentle, never quite right, and he couldn't tell which type Harry would be. If he was straight. Sleep stole his thoughts.

*The fire was alive, a creature born of pain, bent on destroying all that lived. Draco could feel its evil, feel the scorching heat getting closer, singeing the hair on his forearms. His friend was dead. Another friend lay unconscious, walled off by the flames. A hand reached for him from above, a warm hand so familiar and welcome. Draco was lifted, flying into the ceiling that had just seemed out of reach, but now everything was blue.*

*Just before the blue ended, Draco heard a harsh whisper in his mind. Obliviate.*

Draco jerked awake, a phantom pain lacing through his ribs. Warmth trickled down his face, and he touched his cheek, expecting his fingers to come away red. They weren't. Tears. *Obliviate*. It sounded Latin. Fire and oblivion. He'd be writing fiction soon enough.

*(& see you right back here tomorrow)*

Harry had spent most of the day poring over the paperwork from the Malfoy file, but he was no closer to an answer. There had been no signs of blackmail or anything else untoward. Malfoy had simply vanished one day. According to Malfoy himself, there had been media appeals for his relatives to come forward when he'd turned up in the Muggle world, but no one had even thought about looking for him in the Muggle world, it seemed from the paperwork. There was a thick sheaf of reports from wizarding communities around the world, but not a word about the Muggles. Of course not -- complete memory loss was so rare that no one had even considered it a possibility.

Maybe someone had known that Malfoy had ended up in the Muggle world. Maybe that someone had steered the investigation away in full knowledge of Malfoy's whereabouts. It was a long shot, but at least it narrowed the list of likely suspects from "everyone in the wizarding world" to "everyone connected to the investigation". Harry removed his glasses and rubbed his eyes. He was chasing shadows. This wasn't even important. Malfoy had been found, and his memory would be restored, hopefully. It would all come out eventually -- why was he spending so much time on it?

*The dream. You had a sex dream about Draco Malfoy last night and now you're avoiding thinking about what it means by trying to solve his case.*

"It wasn't a sex dream," muttered Harry. It had been hazy and pink, that was all he remembered. Malfoy had been a part of it, but that didn't mean anything. Harry had never been interested in men; that wasn't going to change just because he found out that an old school-mate was gay.

*It made you come, whatever it was. I'd say that's pretty gay.*

Harry scowled and shoved everything back into the Malfoy file. He was not going to deal with this any longer. The case was bloody well closed.

Later that evening, he sat in an Internet cafe, feeling like the world's biggest pillock as he typed "Quentin Drake" into a search box. He found a few by-lines attributed to that name, articles on topics ranging from cricket to wine. Malfoy's personal blog, last updated two months ago, was on the second page of search results.

*Thanks for the comment on my last post, HotPantsUK! You asked for advice on breaking into publishing as a freelancer -- well, I'll tell you a secret. Stories are boring unless they're about people. Most people who read mass media don't want to know about the density of syrup or national GDP averages. They want to know what others are doing with the syrup and how the GDP average affects real people (actually, I have no idea if it does. I think maybe GDP is one of those things we invented just to complicate our lives). No story stands up without a cast of characters, without people to drive it.*

*To sell a story, you must write about people. It doesn't matter what your subject matter is -- if you don't know anything about a particular topic, there are libraries with books and trade publications, there is the Internet. You can be the world's biggest expert on ballistics but you won't be able to write about your passion engagingly unless you frame your story around a protagonist. This doesn't mean you have to invent characters and write fiction. The most interesting people are those you see every day.*

Harry had no idea who this Quentin Drake character was, but he liked him. He wondered if Draco Malfoy would've been this person were he not raised by Lucius Malfoy. He also wondered why it mattered at all.

*(& before our innocence was lost)*

For a week, Draco worked on his stories and thought about what he was going to do. He had a life to go back to, now, but what waited on the other side of this "Muggle" world? He had built a life for himself here, built a personality from a blank slate, accomplished more in four years than many people did in their lifetimes. Perhaps magic had helped with that -- the data entry job "stolen" from the single mother had paid the bills for two years until Draco's stories began to sell.

A thought stole into his mind: what if his success had to do with magic, too? Perhaps the high rate of reader response was not due to his talent, but rather to his ability to



infuse the stories with his magic and draw people's interest and attention even against their will. After all, sometimes he wrote about the duller things -- stencillers, highly specialised minutiae of cricket equipment, semiconductors. He had thought his attention to personality was responsible, but--

"Ridiculous." Draco struck the tabletop with his palm. He had achieved success because he knew what he was doing, not because he was magical, and that was that.

Now he was forced to consider giving it up -- for what? A lavish manor house, two living parents, but no friends he knew of, no vocation, no future. If they couldn't restore his memory, he would need to re-learn magic, to re-establish himself once again. It was too much of a gamble, and Draco was not a gambler. He liked order and routine, and he was happy right here in his Camden flat.

On Friday of the following week, Draco activated the Portkey his mother had given him. The drawing room was empty, twilight shadows just beginning to creep into the corners. "Hello?"

A garden gnome popped out of thin air. "Master Draco has returned," it said, and disappeared.

Master Draco? What a joke. He would never be used to this.

His mother came hurrying into the drawing room, her face anxious. "You're here," she said. "Your father was worried you wouldn't come."

"Is he here?" asked Draco.

Narcissa shook her head. "He's at Gringotts."

"That's too bad," said Draco, deciding he didn't want to know what Gringotts was. "I'm not coming back... Mother." Not Mum. He wasn't sure why, but 'Mum' sounded wrong in his head. He explained his reasons to her; he owed her that much.

To his surprise, Narcissa, after listening with her head bowed, nodded. "I understand," she said. "I am proud of you," she added, a fierce glow kindling in her eyes. "Keep the Portkey. Even if you do not return to our world, you are welcome here any time." She sounded on the verge of tears, but that defiant light still shone in her gaze. *She loves me. She wants what's best for me.*

"Did I have my own room?" he blurted, and coloured. Of course he would have, in a house this huge.

Narcissa led him up a wide spiral staircase to the third floor. "These are all yours. Your bedroom," -- she pointed to a door on her left -- "your study," -- she pointed to the right -- "your play room" -- left again, a bit further up the corridor. "Maybe if you looked around--"

Draco nodded. "I will, thank you."

It was the study he went to, wondering if he'd been a writer in his past life, too. Books cluttered a wide writing table, along with notebooks and loose-leaf parchment straight out of the Middle Ages. Quills and inkpots in all colours of the rainbow. Draco picked up a heavy textbook titled *Advanced Potion-Making* by Libatius Borage. Across the inside front cover, a furious black scrawl: *I HATE HARRY POTTER*. Draco stood and stared at it, wondering what it meant. He'd hated Harry as a child? Hated him enough to deface books with it? Why?

He looked up to see Narcissa standing in the doorway, gazing at the book in his hands. "There was a war," she said. Draco waited.

Narcissa told him about an evil wizard named Lord Voldemort, about the Death Eaters, about the war of Dark magic against light. It was a bog-standard Hero's Journey, with Harry in the leading role. Apparently, he and Harry had disliked each other from day one.

"I used to dread coming to Platform Nine and Three Quarters when the school year was over," said Narcissa. "You would always come back so beaten, so dejected that you couldn't win against him. But you always went back. Always tried again. Give me your left hand." Draco did, and she inexpertly rolled up his shirtsleeve, exposing the faded tattoo on his left forearm. "That was Lord Voldemort's mark. The Dark Mark."

Draco's mouth was dry. "Oh. I thought I might've been a biker."

Narcissa didn't smile, and Draco realised that she didn't know what bikers were. She didn't know anything about his world, just as he knew nothing of hers. There was a chasm between him and his mother that, wish as he might, Draco would not be able to bridge. So he had been one of the bad guys. No wonder Harry didn't like him. That one had "good guy" practically written across his forehead. Draco didn't *want* to leave the life he'd made behind. It was a better life than being the token bad guy.

He would never be welcome in this world, not to anyone but his family -- and his parents would be more hurt by his blank memories than they would be pleased by his presence. He had made the right decision.

Once back in his flat, Draco threw his mother's Portkey out into the street.

*(& alone, staring over the ledge)*

"Mrs Malfoy, I was wondering if I could speak to your son."

"Draco isn't here," said Narcissa. "He has chosen to stay in the Muggle world." Her mouth tightened, but that was all.

"...Oh." Harry frowned. "Will he visit?"

She shrugged slightly. "He's got a Portkey."

"Oh." Harry didn't know what to say. "I'm sorry."

"Don't be. He knows about the war, now. He's better off there. No one will treat him like dirt just because of the name he bears."

Any other time, Harry would have pointed out to her that Draco Malfoy was not a hapless victim of circumstance. He had chosen his way and walked it; no one had done that for him. But she was a mother who had lost her son after just having found him. Harry held his tongue and bid her a respectful farewell. It wasn't right that she should suffer as though her child were dead.

The 909 was quieter than Harry remembered; the band wasn't playing yet. Malfoy sat alone at the bar, peering into a milky-white drink. A woman was working the bar tonight. As Harry approached, he heard Malfoy speak, addressing the woman, but he was too far to make out any words.

The woman patted Malfoy's arm. "It's not his fault that you haven't made a move."

Malfoy sighed. "I have never intended to make any moves on Lucas, Vicki. He's my best mate."

"Well, why the long face, then?" asked Vicki, and spotted Harry. "Hiya. What'll it be?"

Malfoy glanced up, and Harry registered -- with an odd surge of regret -- that Malfoy didn't look happy to see him anymore. "I'll have what he's having," said Harry, and took a seat next to Malfoy.

"One White Russian coming up," said Vicki, and danced to the wall of bottles, giving Malfoy a saucy wink.

"What do you want?" spat Malfoy. "Where's your friend tonight?" asked Harry.

"On a date with the barman," said Malfoy. "Not that it's any of your concern."

"Why are you being rude?"

"Because I can be? Because it doesn't make a difference? I don't want anything to do with you people."

"So you're hoping that rudeness will make me cry and run away?"

"No, that's okay. You may cry later," said Malfoy. He reached into his pocket and slapped a few banknotes on the bar. "Thanks, Vicki. I'm going to call it an early night."

"Bye, Quentin," called Vicki. "If Lucas doesn't tell you everything, I will. Promise!"

Malfoy gave her a fond smile and brushed past Harry without another word.

Harry had to wait to find out how much his untouched drink had cost, but he caught up to Malfoy in the street. "Malfoy, wait!"

Malfoy turned around and shoved his hands into his pockets. "The only reason I haven't gone mad from all this is that I knew I had a past life. I just didn't know how fucking bizarre it was. Magic. Evil wizards. War. Jesus fucking Christ on toast. I don't want it. Any of it." He began to walk away again.

"But what about your family?" called Harry. "Malfoy, I want to *help* you."

Malfoy turned around. "I don't *need* your help." He lifted his chin and studied Harry with naked interest. "Unless you *really* want to help me." He stared pointedly at Harry's crotch, and then lifted his eyes to Harry's face again. "What do you think? Can we help each other?"

Harry's tongue was glued to the roof of his mouth. It shouldn't have happened, but he felt a thrill at Malfoy's words. His mouth was suddenly dry. This couldn't be happening.

Malfoy stepped closer, leaned in. "You can wear your robe and wizard hat," he whispered.

Harry stepped back, shaking his head to clear it. Watching Malfoy watch him had made him feel like a mouse hypnotised by a snake. "Quit it," he said. "This is serious. I think someone may have Obliviated you. That's why you don't remember."

Malfoy's eyes widened. "What did you just say?"

"Memory charms," said Harry. "They erase your memories. I think someone did one on you illegally." Malfoy said nothing; he stared at a point past Harry's shoulder. Harry pressed on. "If you would come back for at least a little while, maybe we can smoke them out. Whoever did it to you. Especially if you pretend that you remember everything."

"You use incantations," said Malfoy in a flat, emotionless voice. "What's the incantation for a Memory Charm?"

"Obliviate," said Harry. "But--"

"Obliviate," whispered Malfoy, but there was nothing sexy about the expression on his face this time. He looked up. "I had a dream a few weeks ago," he said.

*So did I*, Harry almost replied. *Several times*. He waited.

"I was in a large room filled with strange objects," said Malfoy. "It was burning. I was in the fire. My friend was dead, and another was unconscious somewhere. Then a hand pulled me out and I flew up until the world turned blue. Then someone whispered, *Obliviate*."

"It was my hand," said Harry. "At the end of the war, you and your friends chased me into the Room of Requirement at Hogwarts. Your friend Crabbe unleashed a spell -- Fiendfyre -- but we got away. Crabbe died, but you and Goyle made it out. You insisted I go back for Goyle."

Malfoy's grey eyes were full of pain. "It was my voice, whispering in the end. Mine. I did this to myself."

"What?"

"I put this... this Memory Charm on myself. I must have had a good reason," said Malfoy, still in that flat tone. "I did it to myself," he repeated. "I *chose* to leave. I'm making the same choice once more."

He turned to go, but Harry grabbed his arm. "It doesn't matter if you did it to yourself. Even if you did-- don't you care about your parents?"

Malfoy's face changed, and this sneer was one Harry remembered well. Malfoy bent close to him, so close his mouth was almost on Harry's. "I think I understand why I used to hate you, Harry Potter," said Malfoy. He tore his arm from Harry's grip and walked away into the night.

Harry did not follow him.

*(& because I want you too)*

*There were whispers in the fire, single-minded voices chanting about pain, oblivion, the destruction of all that lived. Draco wandered through the fire, waiting for help to come, but there was no help for him, not any more, not since he had made his choices. The Dark Mark burned on his arm, and Crabbe was dead next to him, dead and gone like Draco would be soon -- soon now--"*

Draco woke drenched in sweat. The clock on his bedside flashed midnight. Outside, dawn broke pink and golden over the smog. The dream came every night, now. Sometimes Harry saved him from the fire, and sometimes he did not, but always Draco woke up just before he either died or reached the end to the blue. Had it been blue? The sky above London was never that blue.

He put his forearm over his eyes and tried to sleep again, but Morpheus was done with him for now. All he accomplished by closing his eyes was a memory more recent and concrete than the dreams. Harry's face inches away from his, his lips parted, the look of honest indignation still fresh on his face. *Don't you care about your parents?* Draco had felt a confused mixture of awe, jealousy, and bone-deep desire. It had made him *ache* inside, and he whispered the words that had become a litany since that night outside the 909.

*I think I understand why I used to hate you, Harry Potter*

The daydreams were no better. Harry Potter figured in every one of them, and Draco didn't know where to run. He had written his first fictional story last week, about a man with no past who went insane in the end. Draco was sure he knew what madness felt like, now. Everywhere he turned, he saw Harry's face. Everywhere he went, he hoped against hope to run into him, Harry's voice touching places long buried. Draco wanted to see him again so badly he was willing to risk going back to that other world, the one he'd been busy convincing himself didn't exist after all.

It made no sense to him, that he would be so taken with this Harry Potter. He didn't know what he felt; didn't think it was love, though he wouldn't know. He'd never been in love before, but he had a vague idea that it went deeper than a few stolen glances. It was all they'd ever had, but Draco was damned if he didn't want something else. Something more. He had tried to write it down, visualise what he wanted, but for once words had failed him. He wanted to find Harry again. Beyond that, he knew nothing at all.

But he had thrown out his mother's Portkey and he didn't know any magic. He could never go back.

Going back. Back. Backtrack. Harry had a cousin in this world. Dudley Dursley. Hadn't he mentioned Christmas cards? Surely one of them would have Harry's address.

*And then what? You'll find out his address, and what will you do? Show up on his doorstep and...what?*

Draco didn't know. All he knew was that he needed this.

*Dear Mr Dursley,*

*I'm researching a story and your cousin's name has come up. I was wondering if you'd be willing to answer a few questions about him.*

*Sincerely, Quentin Drake*

Dursley didn't write back this time, but Draco knew where he worked.

"I've got nothing to tell you," said Dursley gruffly upon seeing Draco.

"I know what he is, your cousin," said Draco, and Dursley stared at him in shock. "I won't tell anyone, don't worry. You must not want anyone to know you're related to someone... someone like that."

Defiance replaced Dursley's shock. It was as slow and deliberate as the rest of him: a bull, head bowed, waiting. "He saved my life," he said. "We haven't got much to do with each other, but I won't help you if you mean to hurt him."

"He saved your life too?" asked Draco, flabbergasted. "Is that his hobby, then?"

Dursley frowned. "What do you mean?"

"Nothing. I don't mean him any harm. I promise you that. I just need to find him." Draco had never said anything more truthful in his life. Even "the sky is blue" was a lie. The sky was not always blue.

With a sigh, Dursley shook his head. "I'm sorry," he said. "I don't know where he lives or anything. His Christmas cards come by owl, and I send mine with the same owls. As I said, we haven't got much to do with each other." He sounded almost regretful.

Deflated and beaten, Draco sat in his kitchen and stared at his laptop's blank screen. Beaten.

*I used to dread coming to Platform Nine and Three Quarters when the school year was over. You would always come back so beaten...*

Platform Nine and Three Quarters. Where the train departed for the wizard school. That was a way into the magical world, wasn't it? Which station? Which? But Draco already knew. The life he had known had begun at King's Cross, and it was only fitting that it would end there. It would end, because the minute he went into the other world, he would have made another choice. He might not return to live in that world, but he wanted it to be a part of life if it meant he could have Harry.

Harry. Not his forgotten family. What did that say about him? Draco found he didn't care. As long as he'd known himself, he had not done anything by halves. He wanted everything or nothing.

School began on the first of September, and Draco was at King's Cross when it did.

Predictably, there was no Platform Nine and Three Quarters; only a barrier made of solid brick. Soon, though, Draco saw several children with trolleys approaching the barrier, their parents strolling behind them. The trolleys bore heavy trunks and caged animals, including owls. He watched as the children ran at the barrier and vanished behind it as though they'd never been. There were people -- Muggles -- all over the station, but they seemed to stare right through the children vanishing into a brick wall. That was the way Draco needed to go.

Without another moment's pause, he went through.

Pain filled his mind, pinpricks of light stabbing his eyes from within and fading, fading to silver.

When he woke, his first thought was that it would be nice to see the sky again. He was obviously in a hospital room, but it held no electronic equipment. Must be St.



Mungo's. Draco wondered if his mother was here somewhere, and whether he'd remembered to e-mail McLory about the football article.

He sat up, blinking rapidly. It was like having two people inside his head. People who didn't like each other at all.

*Obliviate*, he whispered to the empty room. What had he done? King's Cross. He'd passed through the magical barrier, and now he remembered everything. He'd been lost, wandering through Salisbury when the Muggle thugs had accosted him and tried to relieve him of his nonexistent possessions. They had been making a good job of it, but Draco's magic had gone wild and he'd Disapparated, straight onto a London-bound train. Ran like a girl from a few filthy Muggles.

*I am a Muggle*. The thought echoed. The hospital, the charity, the data entry job, the writing. Lucas. His best friend was a Muggle. A Portuguese Muggle of many non-sequiturs.

"Jesus save me," mumbled Draco, and fell back onto the bed.

*(& raising the temperature one hundred degrees)*

Harry stood outside the door to Malfoy's hospital room, wavering between going in and turning back. Malfoy's appearance at Platform Nine and Three Quarters last week was all over the *Daily Prophet*. He'd come through the magical barrier and collapsed, unconscious, to be rushed to St. Mungo's. He had since been given a private room on a little-used ward, thanks to Narcissa's efforts. She was probably inside now; word on the street was that she did not leave her son for longer than a few minutes.

Harry had no idea what he was doing here. Well, sort of. Malfoy had asked for him upon regaining consciousness, and he refused to speak to anyone else, even his parents. The *Prophet* insinuated that it was a wonder he hadn't declared a hunger strike. Sighing, Harry pushed the door open.

Malfoy looked insignificant in the hospital bed, large enough to fit four of him. Narcissa dozed in a chair next to him, a book in her lap. She sat up when Harry entered. "I didn't think you would ever grace us with your presence," she said.

Harry scowled. Narcissa opened her mouth to say something else, but Malfoy put a hand on her wrist. "Mother, I need to speak to Potter alone. Please see that we are not disturbed."

Tears shone in Narcissa's eyes as she hurried out. Small wonder, if those were the first words her darling son had spoken to her since returning to the wizarding world. Malfoy was back, all right.

"Sit down," said Malfoy after his mother shut the door.

Harry shook his head. "I'll stand, thanks. What do you want from me?"

"Sit down, Potter. I've had enough of people standing over me like I'm some kind of eighth wonder of the world." Malfoy sounded tired. He sounded like Quentin Drake.

Harry sat down in Narcissa's chair and turned it slightly towards the bed. He looked at Malfoy. "You've got your memory back."

"Even better," said Malfoy, his eyes locked on Harry's. "I've got two sets for the price of one."

"Two sets... you remember both worlds?"

"Yeah," said Malfoy. He looked unhappy. "I remember being a wizard who hated Muggles, and I remember being a Muggle. I'm sure you can see how this might prove a bit of a predicament in the years to come."

"I'm sure you'll manage," said Harry. "Did you do it yourself? The Memory Charm."

Malfoy nodded. His eyes were half-closed, just like they always were in Harry's dreams.

"Why?" Harry asked, chasing the dream images away. Those had been about Quentin Drake.

"I was finished," said Malfoy. "With your victory, my life in the wizarding world was over. I knew I would never accomplish half the things I'd wanted to do, not with you as everyone's golden child. Our *saviour*." His mouth twisted.

"For what it's worth, I wasn't interested in settling any scores," said Harry. A strange sense of loss settled over him. With Draco Malfoy back where he belonged, the writer inside stood no chance. Eighteen years was more than four no matter what. "You can still go on with your life."

"Which life?" asked Malfoy. For a moment, Harry thought the question had been rhetorical, but Malfoy stared at him expectantly, as though Harry was supposed to know the answer.

"Haven't you decided? I thought you came through the barrier because you wanted to come back..." Harry trailed off. That made no sense. Why would Malfoy randomly decide to come back to the wizarding world, when his reasons against it had been so compelling? "Why did you come back?"

Malfoy opened his mouth to speak, then seemed to think better of it. He looked down at the blankets covering him, then back at Harry.

"I *hate* you," he said, his tone weary, but his eyes told a different story. He looked at Harry the way he had in the Muggle world, before their last meeting.

Harry held his gaze. "Feeling's mutual," he said slowly. "What are we going to do about it?"

"This," said Malfoy, taking hold of Harry's front and pulling him down, "is all your fault." He kissed Harry, and it was the first time in years that someone wanted to kiss him. Not Harry Potter. Him. The stubble on Malfoy's face was unexpected, but Harry filed it away for later. This. Now. Harry slid an arm round Malfoy's waist, pulling him closer, and the chattering voice in the back of Harry's head, the one that insisted he couldn't possibly be kissing another man, and certainly not in a hospital bed, quieted.

Malfoy was pulling him *onto* the bed, and Harry broke away, half regretting the loss of contact, half terrified at what he'd just done. "Mungo's," he managed. "Someone might--"

"Are you a wizard or not?" demanded Malfoy, and gave Harry's shirt a tug much too powerful for someone in a sickbed. "Not waiting another week for this. Not another minute." There was raw, heady need in his eyes, in his voice. Harry was reaching for his wand before he knew it, blocking the door from the inside as Malfoy continued to wrestle with his shirt.

Everything after that was a slow-motion haze for Harry, with a few vivid images standing out like wizarding photographs. He was on his back, his shirt finally off, his jeans halfway down his legs, and Malfoy's parted lips hovered just above his cock. He was arching up into Malfoy's mouth, his mind a confused jumble of sensation. The chattering voice was back, more frantic than ever, but the force of Harry's release washed it away. Malfoy was sliding up him to swallow Harry's gasps. He was kissing Malfoy again, his entire body buzzing with the aftershocks of his orgasm. He was holding Malfoy down, pinning his wrists to the bed, tongue tracing the faint outline of the Dark Mark on Malfoy's left forearm. Oh, it was sick and so twisted, and Harry had waited for this all his life: his mouth claiming Malfoy's again and again, his hand on

Malfoy's cock sure and steady, his own cock stiffening again as he felt Malfoy's come slide down his knuckles, heard every stifled moan.

Afterwards, Harry couldn't stop staring at Malfoy's lips, the memory of what that mouth had done to him stark in his mind. It had been better than the dreams, and Harry tried to tell him that, tried to explain that he had no idea what he was doing, really, but Malfoy kissed him again, and it was all Harry knew until someone pounded on the door outside. Harry scrambled off the bed and back to the chair. The air was heavy with the scent of the two of them, and Harry felt a pang as he cast a spell to clear it. Another spell got rid of the door-blocking charm, and Harry just looked at Malfoy for their last long minute together.

A Healer walked in, frowning. "The door wouldn't open."

"Strange," said Harry and Malfoy at the same time.

*(& it's between you and me)*

On the third floor of a Camden building, a window was open despite the chill air. A young man stood in front of it, clad only in faded blue jeans, leaning on the windowsill with both arms. Another pair of arms appeared behind him, circling his waist. "Come back to bed."

"In a minute," said Draco. As he arched back into the embrace, his pale hair fell forward, obscuring his features.

"Come on," said Harry. "It's winter, in case you haven't noticed. You'll catch a cold standing here."

Draco shrugged. "That's what Pepper-Up Potion is for."

One of the arms around his waist slid down below the loose belt on his jeans. "I've got something better than that to warm you up."

"What's your hurry? We've still got all night," murmured Draco.

"We can't take all night. I promised Ron we'd be at the Burrow by early afternoon."

"I told you, I'm not going."

"Don't be silly. How many times do I have to tell you that Ginny won't mind? She's bringing her new boyfriend, anyway--"

"As if I'd care if a Weasley minded anything I did."

"Draco."

"Oh, fine. But you're coming to the Manor in the evening."

"Are you serious?"

Without looking at him, Draco nodded.

"I'm sure your dad will be thrilled," said Harry after a pause.

"Just like your Weasleys will be thrilled, I'm sure. Anyway, leave Father to me." Draco turned his back to the street and wound his arms round Harry's neck. They kissed, and the momentum of it grew more urgent until Harry was trying to rid Draco of his jeans, heedless now of the cold air streaming through the window.

Draco broke away and leaned back a bit. "Promise me something," he panted.

"Anything," replied Harry, resting his forehead against Draco's.

Draco grinned. "We'll spend New Year's with Lucas and the boys."

Harry laughed and dragged Draco away from the window. "Just for that," he said, but the rest of his sentence could not be heard out in the street.

A few hours later, the light in the third-floor flat winked out, and someone shut the window against the cold. A tabby cat leapt onto the windowsill and curled up to sleep. Fat snowflakes drifted past the window, and Christmas came to Camden town.

*(& end)*

[REVIEW](#)