



Quidditch It's No Game

by Mystwriter

Rated PG-13

Quidditch may be the only way Harry can be close to Draco. And suddenly, it becomes more important than ever as they near the end of their tenure at Hogwarts and have to face each other on opposing sides in the Wizarding world. Does love have a chance anywhere but the Quidditch pitch? Warning: It's slash Harry/Draco fiction.

Chapter One—Winners and Losers

Harry leaned slightly forward over his broom. The Firebolt roamed in lazy zigzags over the Quidditch pitch. The snitch was certainly taking its time showing up. Harry had a long opportunity to simply amuse himself with wayward thoughts. Watching Draco Malfoy make his own languid circles at the opposite side of the pitch, his thoughts naturally fell to the Slytherin.

For six years there had been nothing but enmity between Harry and Draco. Six years of school at Hogwarts, six years of words, insults, duels, and hexes. But there was certainly one thing that would have set the Slytherin off like nothing else. If he suspected, if he had one iota of an inkling that Harry Potter, hero of the Wizarding world, had a crush on Draco Malfoy, Harry's life would be even more miserable than Voldemort was making it.

Harry knew that he was interested in boys. His disastrous liaison with Cho Chang solidified that once and for all. But he didn't understand why he should be so intrigued, so enamored of the one person he supposedly hated. Was it Malfoy's care-nothing attitude? (There was certainly freedom in that, a freedom Harry could well envy.) Was it Draco's unmistakable charm? (Harry had to face it. Even when Draco was insulting Hermione, he had a command of himself when he did it. Every time Harry challenged him, Malfoy would stride fearlessly up to him, all alone and ready. There was something quite electric in the way Malfoy held himself.) Maybe it was his face, so devastatingly handsome to Harry. Those blue eyes, the sneer that lifted his nostrils, his lips? Maybe it was all of it wrapped up in

that bad boy persona. Harry envied that, too. How Malfoy wasn't afraid to be who he was, even if who he was cruel and conniving. A foul loathsome little cockroach, as Hermione had once called him.

Yeah, but a really good-looking one.

Harry's eyes followed Malfoy. He was a good flyer. Almost as good as Harry. Of course he had had years to learn, well before Harry had even heard of the Wizarding world. Malfoy wore his Quidditch uniform well, too. Those tight white breeches, the boots and pads, how his chest filled that green Slytherin tunic. Harry's heart thumped wildly merely looking at him.

He turned away, trying to fool himself that he was searching the skies for the snitch. He really had to stop fantasizing about Malfoy, but he found it difficult to stop. Here he was in his last year at Hogwarts and dreading it because he would never likely see Malfoy again—except on the opposite side of war.

“Stupid. Crazy,” he muttered. Only Hermione knew of his obsession. It had become so obvious she had asked him what was wrong. Of course she couldn't have really guessed what was behind it. No one would have guessed that of the Great Harry Potter. But she had approached him one day in the Gryffindor common room when no one else was around.

“Harry, I wonder if I could have a word with you.”

He put aside his book. He hadn't really been reading it anyway. “Sure. What's up?”

“Well...I'm wondering what's up with you, actually.”

“What do you mean?”

Hermione bit her lip. “I don't know quite how to put this. But you seem to be obsessing about Draco Malfoy for some reason.”

His heart stopped. He was sure of it. Breathlessly, he asked, “Ob-obsessing?”

“Well... yes. In every class he’s with us, I notice that you...well, you stare at him nearly the whole class. And when he walks along the corridor, and when he’s in the great hall. Do you expect him to do something, Harry? Is there something we should know?”

“Is it that obvious?” he whispered.

Hermione put her hand on his. “You can tell us, Harry. If there is something we should be looking out for, it would be good for us to know it.”

Harry dropped his head in his hands. “Oh Hermione.” He shook his head. No, she hadn't guessed, but he couldn't keep it bottled up anymore. He had to tell someone. “No, no. It's nothing like that.” He raised his head—knowing his face was flushed—and looked into her eyes. Hermione's eyes were a soft shade of brown and as sympathetic as that of a deer. “I...I...need to tell you something but...I don't...know how.”

She squeezed his hand. The doe eyes blinked sympathetically at him. “Go on.”

“Okay.” He blew out a breath and straightened his shoulders. “Okay. Actually, you're not too far wrong. I am obsessed with...Draco Malfoy.” Even though they were alone he whispered the last. “But not because I'm worried he's going to do something. It's because...because...I...like him.”

Her brows rose quizzically. “You...like him. I thought you hated him.”

“I do. Sometimes I really do. But mostly...I...like him. Rather a lot.”

She blinked. “Hang on.” Hermione shook her head as if to clear it. “Are you saying what I think you're saying? You're not talking about a simple change of heart about your enemy, are you?”

Harry shook his head miserably. “No. When I say I like him, I mean I have a...a c-crush on him. As in...wanting him. You know. Wanting.”

“You're gay?”

“Yeah. Have been a long time.”

“I never knew. Gosh!” She shook her head again, but this time musing on it. “Does Ron know?”

“No! What do you think he’d say?”

“Well he wouldn’t take it very well. Not at first. But he’s your best friend. You really should tell him.”

“Yeah, I know. And I will. Someday.”

“So you like Draco,” she said slowly. “That is rotten luck.”

“Understatement.” He folded his arms roughly over his chest. “And I really don’t know what to do about it.”

“Have you thought of talking—”

“No! Absolutely not!”

“But he might also be gay.”

“Have you seen any indication of that?”

“Well I didn’t see it in my own best friend, so why would I have seen it in my own worst enemy?”

“True.” He shook his head. “I can’t risk it, Hermione. Can you imagine what hell my life would be like if I approached him and—?” He shivered at the thought.

She nodded vigorously. “I see your point.”

And so it remained their secret. At least he had someone to confide in when on those days it was overwhelming. He felt so stupid about it. Surely he could find someone else at Hogwarts. There were a few boys he was pretty sure about. But no one interested him like Malfoy. Perhaps it was the forbiddance of it, that bad boy thing. Harry shook his head and raised his eyes again, looking for the snitch. Whatever it was, he knew it was hopeless and it left him feeling hollow and dazed.

He heard it. A flutter of wings. He snapped his head up and a flash of gold touched his peripheral vision. And almost as quickly, a rider in green on a broom whizzed past him. Malfoy!

Harry tilted down and zoomed after the snitch. His shoulders tingled and he dropped a few feet just as a bludger came right at his head. He watched it whiz past and then he leaned forward and let the Firebolt make a bee-line for the dashing snitch. Malfoy was on its tail, his right arm outstretched for it. Harry came up along side him slowly gaining. Malfoy snatched a glance at Harry and sneered. He leaned to the side and slammed his shoulder into Harry's, trying to knock him aside, but Harry held on, trying to coax more speed out of his Firebolt. They flew in close formation now, dipping and rising to follow the snitch's path. Twigs from both brooms brushed each other.

"Back off, Potter! The snitch is mine!"

"You wish, Malfoy!" And then Harry slammed into him. The Slytherin only laughed. Draco's white blond hair flew back out of his face. He wore it even longer now in his seventh year, gaining length to match his father's. It was striking as always, swishing out from his face like white flames.

They flew elbow to elbow and slowly gained on the snitch. The wind roared in Harry's ears, or was it the fierce cheering of the crowds as they closed on the little golden ball? Harry's hand stretched forward but so did Malfoy's, so close they were almost touching one another. Suddenly, they both lunged and each had a grip of the snitch at the exact same moment.

Malfoy glared at Harry. "Let go! It's mine!"

"Shove it, Malfoy. I have it!"

Still both gripping the snitch, they were unaware as their brooms plummeted toward the ground.

“Give it up, Potter!”

“Never!”

Down they spiraled and when Harry’s vision filled with green, it was only then he noticed it.

“Malfoy!” he said, alarmed.

Draco looked too, but he wouldn’t let go. Malfoy reached out and grabbed Harry's tunic and suddenly they flew off their brooms. They clutched each other—still holding the snitch—and spun, sailing a long way on momentum before they plowed into the sandy ground, rolling and coughing up dust.

When they came to a halt, Draco was lying on top of Harry. They had their free arms wound tightly around each other, their snitch arms still above their heads. Draco’s face was inches from Harry’s. He looked stunned as he stared into Harry's eyes, stunned mostly that they were still alive and unharmed.

“You okay?” asked Harry, breathless.

Draco nodded, blowing his hot breath into Harry’s face.

Even though every muscle ached, Harry wanted the moment to go on forever. He’d never been this close to Malfoy, never touched him like this. It was accidental, he knew, but it was still a fantasy come true. He was so close to his face, it wouldn’t have taken much to tilt his head to kiss him, but of course that was out of the question.

“You can get off me now, Malfoy,” he strained to say. He certainly had no desire to say it.

“Not on your life, Potter. I have the snitch and I’m not letting it go.”

“Well I’m not letting it go either.”

People were running toward them. He could hear Justin's amplified voice saying in a very surprised tone, "Well this is a first at Hogwarts, I believe. According to my sources—" Harry thought he must be looking at Dumbledore—"this has never occurred in a game before. Both seekers appeared to have caught the snitch at the same time. We are still awaiting the judgment of Madam Hooch."

The crowd quieted as Hooch approached Harry and Draco. Draco stared furiously into Harry's face, threatening with his eyes.

Hooch, along with a crowd of others, leaned over the two seekers and ticked her head. "Never saw anything like it," she muttered. She aimed her wand at the snitch, incanted a spell, and gold light shot out from the wand's tip, hit the snitch, and bounced back into her eyes—the Wizarding version of instant replay, Harry imagined.

Hooch shook her head again and seemed satisfied. She turned to the stands, raised the wand to her throat and said, "Sonorous. It is my judgment," she announced, her voice amplified, "that the match between Gryffindor and Slytherin is...a draw!"

There was a strange mixture of cheers and boos rising from the stands, but Harry dropped a disappointed look on Malfoy. Hooch leaned over them again. "You can let the snitch go now, boys."

Harry released it first, his only concession to Malfoy. Draco immediately rose off him and hurled the snitch into the sand before he stalked off.

Hermione was running forward even as Ron helped Harry to his feet. "That was spectacular!" she shouted, her eyes bright.

"It means we've got to play them again," said Ron. "But it was still bloody brilliant!"

Harry dusted himself off, trying to hide his furious blush while thinking of Draco sprawled on top of him. "It certainly was," he said quietly.

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Harry brooded in front of the fire in the common room, his unread book lying open on his lap. After a time he felt the cushion beside him compress and he looked up to see Hermione's anxious face looking back at him. "Problems, Harry?"

He nodded.

"Is it about You-Know-Who?"

"Which one?"

"The blond one," she said softly.

Harry nodded again. "I don't know what to do, Hermione. Mostly, I feel so stupid."

"Don't. We're all a little stupid when it comes to love. For instance, I haven't had the courage to go to Ron. I'm still waiting for the idiot to come to me."

Harry smiled a little. "You may be waiting a long time. Ron's my best mate but he's just a bit dense, you know. At least when it comes to stuff like this."

"I know." They sat in silence for a while. "Maybe we should both do something about it."

"I already told you, Hermione. I can't go to Malfoy—"

"I'm not saying to go declare your love to him. But at least you can try to make friends. I'm thinking more about when we leave Hogwarts."

Harry shrunk down. "I know. That's what I've been thinking of. If Malfoy becomes a Death Eater like his father and I have to face him someday—"

“It could be disaster!” she said dramatically.

“Yeah.”

“So you don’t have much time.”

“You expect me to turn Draco Malfoy from Death Eater to Muggle-lover in a few months when he’s had a lifetime of indoctrination? It’s not going to happen, Hermione.”

“Well, it will never happen if you don’t at least give it a try.”

Harry thought about it, watching the red glow ripple over the ash-gray logs. “No, I don’t suppose it will.”

The next day, Harry decided. He was going to talk to Malfoy. He was going to do his best to make him see reason. He didn’t want to end up facing him in a real duel someday. If it came down to killing him, he didn’t know if he would be capable of doing it.

Malfoy was never hard to find. There was always a glut of Slytherins nearby. Pansy Parkinson’s back was to the castle walls and he was leaning into her, talking quietly. Everybody knew they were an item, at least Pansy did her best to insinuate they were. And by the way they were talking, it certainly looked it.

Harry's spirits fell. Well, he knew he didn’t have a chance in that department. Might as well make sure he could accomplish something while he was here.

“Oi, Malfoy!”

Draco looked over his shoulder still leaning his arm against the wall. “What do you want, Potter?”

“I’d like to talk to you a moment, if I could.”

He straightened and sauntered forward. Pansy crossed her arms over her chest in annoyance and Crabbe and Goyle strode forward. "What about? You going to lecture me on Mudbloods or something?"

Harry eyed the other approaching Slytherins. "No. I just want to talk to you. Alone. If you're not afraid to be alone with me."

Malfoy's smile fell slightly. He didn't look up at Crabbe and Goyle. Just made a quick hand signal and they dropped back. Harry turned on his heel and began walking toward the lake. He could hear Malfoy following.

Just keep your mind on it, Harry admonished himself, feeling a distinct heat in Malfoy's general direction. To be walking with him like this was another fantasy, though to be true to the fantasy, they would have been holding hands, not one scowling at the other.

They got down to the lake and Harry stopped.

"So what is this about, Potter? Going to feed me to the squid?"

Harry sat but Malfoy remained stubbornly standing. "Sit down, Malfoy."

"I don't want to sit. You have exactly two seconds to tell me what the hell you want."

"I just wanted to talk to you about us. Clear the air."

"Us? What do you mean 'us'?"

It was not the 'us' Harry really wanted to talk about. That idea tied a tight knot in his gut. "Us. This enmity we've lived with for the last six years. There's no reason for it."

"No reason? I can think of a thousand reasons."

“That first day on the train,” said Harry quietly. “I didn’t mean to reject you out of hand. It was just that I had met Ron and he was really friendly to me. The first time anyone had been friendly to me, and I didn’t like your attitude about it.”

Draco seemed to muse this for a moment, his fists going to his hips. “Do you mean when we first met?” Harry nodded. “You’ve been worrying over me all this time? What an imbecile, Potter. I barely remember the incident.”

“Draco, don’t lie. You don’t need to. I could tell I hurt your feelings. And I’m apologizing for it.”

“My feelings? As if you could hurt my <i.>feelings. Why don’t you go to your girlfriends and talk it over with them while knitting one of those Weasley jumpers.”

This should have been the moment an angry Malfoy stalked off, hurling a curse or two over his shoulder. But strangely he did neither of those things. He merely stood there, glowering down at Harry. Harry sighed. “Sit down, Malfoy.”

But Malfoy remained standing. “What is this really about, Potter?”

“It’s about friendship. I just thought instead of being enemies we really should be friends. Or close to it.”

“I know what this is about.” Malfoy laughed suddenly. The deep sound mixed still with a hint of the little boy he was fast shedding. “We’re all leaving Hogwarts soon, and you’re worried about facing me in the outside world. Scared, Potter?”

“Yeah, actually.”

Malfoy hooted.

“But not the way you think,” Harry added. “What I’m scared of is having to kill you.” Malfoy’s laughter abruptly died. “And I don’t want to have to do that.”

“Kill me, Potter? As if you would ever get the chance.”

“I’m worried you’ll become a Death Eater and I’ll have to. I don’t want that to happen. That’s the truth, Malfoy.”

Malfoy’s face darkened. “I’ll tell you what, Potter. Why don’t you just surrender to the Dark Lord now and you won’t have to worry about facing me.”

Harry jumped to his feet. “Why do I bother? What an idiot you are! How can you stand there and defend Voldemort? Don’t you realize what devastation he’s done? Don’t you understand that your very soul is at stake? All of these people you’ve gone to school with for the last six years. These will be your foes. These people who have cheered you on the Quidditch pitch, ate with you, sat in class with you, done detention with you. You can so easily watch them die?”

A momentary flicker passed over Draco’s eyes but it was quickly squelched by his smile curling up his mouth. “Watch me,” he said, and turned on his heel.

“Malfoy!” Harry took a step toward him and then stopped. It was useless. It was all useless. How could he possibly have feelings for such a monster? Harry felt sick inside. Even as he watched Draco walk away, he longed to have him back sitting beside him.

Chapter Two—Duel

Harry carried his Firebolt to the pitch and looked up at the wide expanse of blue sky bounded by a range of impossibly high, white clouds towering over the distant blue mountains. Quidditch practice wasn't for a few hours and he wanted to get some flying time in first, just to experience the utter freedom it allowed him. Up in the sky on his broom, he could be alone with his thoughts. He didn't have to be famous Harry Potter or even lonely Harry Potter. He could just be one with the sky.

As he mounted the broom, pushed off, and climbed languidly into the air, he idly wondered what on earth he would possibly have done if he had no magic, if he had been condemned to simply be with the Dursleys until he came of age and left their horrid home. He honestly didn't know. Probably become some sort of psycho-bomber or something. Become something horrible like Dudley. Despite his traumas with Voldemort and with coming to grips with his own sexuality, he was very grateful to be a wizard. He knew—however ironic it was—that it had saved his life in more ways than one.

For the first few minutes he simply circled the pitch, doing some lazy barrel rolls and some dipping and rising, just to get the feel of the wind direction and force. Though the pitch was usually windy, it wasn't so very strong today, and so he just enjoyed the wind in his face and the sun on his skin. He closed his eyes and let the broom meander higher.

He was extremely lucky that the bludger only skimmed the tail of his broom, for as it was, it suddenly sent the broom and Harry pinwheeling until Harry—startled out of his wits—could get the Firebolt under control again. Once he righted himself he scanned the field. A familiar laugh sounded to his right and he spun.

Malfoy came up along side him, the quaffle tucked under his arm. "It doesn't do to daydream, Potter. You never know what may come out of the blue."

Harry scowled. It would really be easier all around if he just went back to hating Malfoy. It shouldn't be too hard to do.

Then why didn't he? his mind cried out.

"Pretty cheap trick, Malfoy. But what else can one expect of a Slytherin?"

“Cheap tricks are the best tricks, Potter.”

“You know, I think you may be right.” Harry kicked up at Malfoy. Draco jerked back but Harry only punched the quaffle out of his arms and then dived for it. He grabbed it, tucked it close to his body, and headed at full speed toward the hoops at the other end of the pitch.

Malfoy reared over and went after him.

Harry had a clear shot at the center hoop and took it, hurling the quaffle in. He ducked in time for the bludger’s return, and watched it make a long slow angle upward away from the ground.

Malfoy retrieved the quaffle and roared up next to Harry. “You think you’re so good at this, Potter.”

Harry smiled. He was out of breath but it didn’t matter. “That’s because I am, Malfoy.” In an instant, he dipped below Draco, reached up, and snatched the quaffle again. He zoomed down the center of the field but this time Draco was right on his tail. Harry whooped into the air. It was perfect. It was just he and Draco alone with the sky, and like it or not, Draco was suddenly playing a game with Harry.

Harry aimed for the center ring again but at the last minute, dropped the broom, spun to the right, and hurled the quaffle through the far right hoop while Malfoy, falling for the ploy actually flew through the center hoop, unable to stop himself in time. He retrieved the quaffle a second time and kept a bit of distance between them.

Instead of anger, he wore a grudging smile. “That was pretty good, Potter. Worthy of a Slytherin.”

“A compliment, Malfoy? You must be getting soft. As an almost-Slytherin myself, I guess that’s worth something.”

“What do you mean ‘almost-Slytherin’?”

“Didn’t you know? At the Sorting Ceremony, the Sorting Hat wanted to put me in Slytherin.”

Malfoy almost dropped the quaffle, but recovered it at the last second. "You're lying."

"Nope. I could have been your best mate after all, Draco."

Malfoy seemed to consider this at length. "Why weren't you sorted into Slytherin, then? More special privileges for the Boy Who Lived?"

"Well, funny thing about the hat. You can ask to be put where you want. It isn't a given."

"What? Now I know you're lying."

Harry shook his head. "I just asked not to be put there. Didn't know I could. I just did."

Malfoy angled his head to look at Harry. Harry hadn't seen that expression on Draco's face before and he wondered what it meant. But then his gaze darted behind Harry and widened. Without turning around, Harry ducked, and the bludger whizzed by again and made a rather disappointed turn to the right.

Malfoy threw the quaffle up a few inches and caught it. "Tell you what, Potter. I'm going to get this quaffle through one of those hoops. If I do, you have to wear a sign all day that says 'I'd rather be in Slytherin.' That is, if you're brave enough to take a wager."

"What do I get if I stop you?"

"Dunno. Pick something. You won't win."

"All right. If I stop you, you have to have a decent conversation with me for one hour."

"What? What sort of poul wager is that? Gone woman on me, Potter?"

Harry blinked slowly. "That's my wager. Take it or leave it."

Malfoy looked as if he was considering it. His broom floated forward and suddenly shot ahead.

Damn you, Malfoy. Although it wasn't as if Harry didn't expect it. He whipped his broom around and hurled after him. Malfoy was considerably ahead and Harry began to worry for the first time if he wouldn't be stuck with that stupid sign around his neck after all. But the Firebolt was showing what a fine broom it really was and Harry poured on the speed and finally came up beside Malfoy, though Draco tried to dodge and dip all over the field to lose him. He had the quaffle tucked before him so Harry couldn't easily knock it free. Several strategies ran through Harry's mind, none looking promising. He clutched the end of the broomstick and just kept pace. Malfoy was smiling, a fully-fledged victory smile and Harry almost thought it might be worth it to wear the sign just to admit to himself that he had put that smile on Draco's face.

But looking up, Harry saw it. The bludger was coming right at Malfoy, and he was certain Malfoy, in all his gloating, hadn't seen it. He had to think fast and the only thing he could think to do was leap off his own broomstick and pull Malfoy down. The Firebolt sailed away without him and he threw his arms around Malfoy. It was too much weight at that speed for Malfoy's broom and the two went spinning down to the earth as the bludger flew by them, barely missing Malfoy's blond locks.

Embracing one another, they hit the ground hard enough to knock the wind out of them. Harry lay sprawled on top of Malfoy. It would have been cozy had he had any breath in his lungs. His face was close to Draco's, his lips even closer. They both gasped for air and Harry could smell Draco's breath. It smelled of mint and lime. It was close enough to taste and he suddenly longed to move an inch closer and just press his mouth to his. In a daze from the fall and from Malfoy's being so close, he was on the verge of doing just that, when Malfoy looked at Harry. His wide gray eyes seemed to waken Harry from his daze and he moved off of Malfoy. The quaffle rolled out of Malfoy's arms.

Malfoy sat up first, gasping. He glared at Harry. "Potter! What the hell's wrong with you!"

Harry slowly sat up and breathed in short, shallow breaths. "You're welcome for saving your life."

Malfoy's eyes watched the bludger make another circle from where he had been and he grudgingly turned his face back to Harry. "A simple 'lookout, Malfoy' wouldn't have done, I suppose?"

"No time," he breathed.

Draco noticed the quaffle a few feet from him and he sneered. Harry wondered if Malfoy would call 'foul' and refuse to honor their bet. He fully expected it, in fact, and readied a retort when Draco slowly got to his feet. "All right. We'll talk, then. Sure was a stupid wager, Potter."

Harry was further surprised when Draco leaned down and offered his hand to Harry. Before Draco could change his mind, Harry took his hand and allowed Malfoy to lift him to his feet. "Thanks," said Harry, wiping uselessly at the grass stains on his Quidditch breeches.

They both limped to the stands and found a bench in the shade. Gingerly, Malfoy sat resting his hands on his thighs. He glared expectantly at Harry. "So? You wanted to talk to me. So talk."

Chapter Three—A Quiet Conversation

Malfoy rubbed his thigh and stared across the Quidditch pitch. “Well, Potter? You wanted to talk.”

Now that he had the chance Harry's mind suddenly went completely blank. He tried to recall what he had wanted to say to Malfoy and slowly drew it out of the depths of his mind. “Well...I just think we should put aside our differences.”

“But our differences are like night and day, Potter. Or, if you prefer, like the difference between Slytherin and Gryffindor.”

“But don't you see? Maybe there aren't that many differences. If I can be in either Slytherin or Gryffindor, then where do the differences really lie?” Of course, he wasn't about to tell Draco that the reason he was probably going to be sorted into Slytherin was because of the remnants of Voldemort's curse imbedded in his mind. No reason to confuse the issue, though, he reckoned.

“The differences lie in two words, Potter. Pureblood and Mudblood.”

“You can't honestly believe that, Malfoy. I mean look at Hermione. She's the smartest student, a really accomplished witch. She can do anything. Doesn't that really prove how false that notion is? And besides, without Muggle-borns, Pureblood wizards would all have to be marrying their siblings soon. I think we're all a little too closely related as it is.”

“You don't know anything, Potter.”

“It's simple math, Malfoy. Even you can do it.”

Malfoy didn't reply. He merely stared at the grass and kicked it a bit.

“Look, even Voldemort—Tom Riddle—had a Muggle father. That doesn't make him a Pureblood. Makes you wonder why he's so all-fired up for them. Doesn't it sound a little lunatic to want to get rid of your own people? Even to you?”

Malfoy shot a venomous look at Harry. "Maybe you're just jealous, Potter. Your own mother, after all, is a Mudblood."

"Why don't you just stop," he said wearily. "Just listen to yourself. You're seventeen years old, for Merlin's sake. And you're still spewing what your father believes? Can't you think for yourself? Can you honestly say you want to face Voldemort and ask him pretty please can you put this permanent dark mark on my arm so I can be summoned to you at a moment's notice like some house elf?"

Something in that instant seemed to change in Draco's eyes. Aha. I must have hit a sore spot. Maybe it was that house elf remark. Harry plowed on. "It's not enough that he has a psychopath like Bellatrix LaStrange as his right arm, but also a freak like Peter Pettigrew who would have rather spent his life as a rat than a man standing up to Voldemort. Yes, he's got some prize companions, does the Dark Lord. MacNair, Crabbe. Some real brain trusts there."

Malfoy was thinking, but he didn't like what he was thinking. "Your point, Potter? My father is also—"

"Oh yes, your father. How does he like his status as lackey? Do you think he isn't considering where he'll be in a few years? Do you ever wonder how often a person can endure the Cruciatus Curse? I wonder how many times Voldemort's used it on Lucius Malfoy." Draco cringed. "But I think your father is thinking ahead. You see, if I kill Voldemort, that will leave a nice big void in dark wizards and I imagine he thinks he will fill that void. Or if the Dark Lord manages to kill me, he thinks he'll be able to outwit and destroy Voldemort himself eventually. But Lucius doesn't have the power. He doesn't have any idea—"

"And just how the hell do you know?"

A surge of anger engulfed by power Harry couldn't quite control caused him to let loose. "BECAUSE HE'S IN MY HEAD ALL THE TIME! DON'T YOU GET IT? I KNOW WHAT HE'S THINKING! I KNOW WHAT HE KNOWS!" He slumped against the bench and forced his breath into something resembling calm. "I'm...sorry," he said. "This is supposed to be decent conversation. Sometimes I'm just so full of anger that he manages to come through. At least, I'd like to think it's him and not me."

Malfoy was staring at Harry with a frightened look. "He's...he's in your head?" he whispered.

Harry raked his fingers through his sweaty hair, momentarily revealing the scar, which Malfoy darted a glance toward. "Yeah. It gets distracting."

Malfoy clutched his fingers and said nothing for a time. Finally he raised his head and looked at Harry. "What do you want from me?" It was the sincerest tone Harry had ever heard him use. He looked at Malfoy, studying his features. It was so easy to do.

"I just...I just want you to think. To stop just hating for no reason. We're not a bad lot, me, Hermione, and Ron, you know. You could do worse. You have. I can't think of anyone more useless than Crabbe and Goyle."

For the first time, Malfoy chuckled. "You got that right. I'd rather carry around a mandrake in my pocket than hang around with those two sometimes."

"Then why do you?"

Malfoy threw up his hands. "Habit. And they're easy to control."

"Instead of controlling, why not find someone who will be your equal? That you'll actually have fun with?"

"I have fun with them. Though mostly—" He never finished the thought. He looked up at Harry with a wince. "Why are you doing this to me? You're ruining my whole life."

"Better that than end up dead."

Malfoy swallowed. This time he seemed to believe Harry.

It was Harry's turn to swallow. "There's always...Pansy. She seems fairly bright."

"That cow? She was a diversion a few years ago, but now she's just an irritant. Like sand in one's knickers."

Harry stifled a laugh behind his hand, but Malfoy caught it and let out a guffaw. Harry joined him and they shared a laugh, something that had never happened before. They both seemed to realize it at the same time and abruptly stopped.

“So who’s my equal, Potter? You, perhaps?”

“Well. Yeah.”

“Are you really saying you want to be my friend? Honestly?”

“Yeah. I don’t see why not.”

“That is, if I conform to everything you want.”

“Not...necessarily.”

“Oh? Can I, for instance, keep calling Granger a Mudblood?”

“No. Of course not.”

“Oh well then. That’s no fun.”

“She could be your friend, too. You would find her surprisingly sympathetic.”

“And just what would I need that for? Oh, I know! Probably for when my father found out I was being friendly to Mudbloods and Muggle-lovers. Yes, that would sit well around the dining room table. ‘Tell me, Draco,’” he said, in a rather eerie rendition of his father, “‘what Mudbloods did you manage to despoil today?’ ‘None, father. I made little baskets with them instead. I thought it would be much nicer.’”

“I didn’t say it would be easy.”

“How about your little life at home with the Muggles? Can do anything you please, can you? Word has it they hate wizards. Keep you in a cupboard under the stairs.”

Harry didn't get angry. He flattened the expression on his face as an extra precaution. “No. I understand how one's homelife can make it harder. But I know I won't be with the Durselys forever. You've got the same choice.”

“Sometimes, Potter, we don't have choices.”

Harry looked longingly at Draco, then tried not to in case Malfoy caught that look. Too right.

Harry fell silent. He said all he could think to say. But then wild notions came into his head. They were being so open. What if Harry just threw a hint in, just to see how Draco might feel? Could he risk just a little well-placed question? “So... we all kind of thought it would be you and Pansy.” Lame, Harry. Really lame.

“Wrong again, Potter.”

“It's...really hard to connect sometimes. Everyone has these expectations.”

“Please tell me we haven't resorted to discussing our love lives? Is this what you call a decent conversation?”

“It's just tough, you know,” he said, barreling on through, hoping Malfoy wouldn't notice. Oh Merlin! I do sound like a girl!

“Yeah, well,” Draco said conversationally. “These aren't the best pickings I've ever seen.”

Still gender neutral. Or was Harry just projecting his own needs into the conversation.

“Though with the end of the year dance, I suppose I’ll have to come up with someone,” Malfoy continued. “Maybe you should go with Parkinson and I should go with Granger. Tongues would wag then.”

Harry thought of another couple that might make them wag more, but he kept his mouth tightly closed.

Malfoy looked at his pocket watch. “Hour’s up, Potter. If that was the best you could do, I don’t mind wagering with you again. Still. It would have been worth it to see you wear that sign.”

Harry watched him leave with a sinking heart. Well, what did he expect? Did he think Malfoy was going to come out to him? He probably wasn’t even gay. But at least he seemed to have accomplished one thing: He made certain that Malfoy wasn't going to become a Death Eater.

Though by the next day, he found that wasn't really the case at all.

Chapter Four—Wands at the Ready

Next day Harry felt a little better about his conversation with Malfoy. It was actually the longest conversation he'd ever had with Draco and though Harry did most of the talking, it looked like something had been accomplished.

But when he turned the corner and saw Malfoy hexing Colin Creevy so that he floated upside down, he realized that nothing had changed at all.

"Malfoy! Put him down! Now!" Harry's wand was out and pointed right at him.

Draco twirled his wand in his fingers and smiled at Harry. "Gonna make me, Potter? Oh, I thought about what you said yesterday, and I guess I have to say 'no' to it. Because you see, this is far too much fun. Maybe next time it will be Granger. Wonder what color knickers she wears."

Harry sent a burning curse at Malfoy, singeing Draco's robes till they smoked. Colin suddenly fell to the floor on his head and a heap of robes.

"Ow!" he cried, and rubbed his skull vigorously.

Malfoy sneered. "All right, Potter. Let's see what you can do. Astronomy Tower at Midnight."

"Are you going to chicken out again like you did last time, Malfoy?"

Draco's eyes scanned the crowd that had gathered and he smirked. "I'll be there. Just you be there."

But when Hermione found out, she rounded on Harry. "Are you crazy? You will get into so much trouble. And your N.E.W.T.S. are coming up. Harry, what if your punishment affected them. You want to be an Auror. You'll never get in if you can't get the grades."

"He was asking for it. If I can't be his friend maybe I can scare him from being a Death Eater."

“You know what I think? I think you’re just trying to impress him.”

“Oh come on, Hermione!”

“No. I mean it. You’re just showing off for him. And does he care? No. And it will be your head on the block, not his.”

“All he knows how to do is threaten people. So I’m giving him what he wants.”

Hermione stared at Harry. “Threaten people, eh? Harry—”

“Just don’t worry about me, Hermione. I’ve been dealing with Draco for a long time. Maybe I’m just destined to do it.”

* * *

Harry waited in his bed until almost midnight, rolled up his invisibility cloak and tucked it under his arm, and then pushed the curtains aside. Instead of a stealthy get away, he was confronted with all the seventh years wide awake and apparently waiting for him. “Er...guys? What—?”

“You took forever, mate,” said Seamus. “We’re waiting for the rumble.”

“Does...everyone know about this?” asked Harry, slipping into his shoes.

“There may be a first year or two in Ravenclaw,” said Dean. “But other than that—”

“Harry,” chirped Neville, “Malfoy challenged you in front of witnesses. You don’t think they didn’t tell anyone.”

“Yeah,” said Seamus, following close behind Harry down the dorm stairs. “This is the fight of the century!”

“I thought that was the fight with Voldemort.”

Everyone cringed on his saying it, but Ron recovered first. “No one wants to see that go down, Harry. But everyone wants to see you wipe the floor with Malfoy. Bloody hell, Harry. We’ve all been waiting for this for six years.”

Harry made it to the common room which was full of girls. “Well it’s about time!” said Lavendar.

Harry’s stomach fell. Was there anyone in the school who didn’t know? He noticed Hermione sitting in the corner, her arms folded tightly over her chest. She wasn’t looking at them. She’d be the only one who didn’t see the fight.

Harry bolstered his courage, gripped his wand, and stomped toward the portrait hole. With the cloak still under his arm, he ducked through the opening. He wondered how all of these students were going to make it unseen across Hogwarts. When he reached the stairs, he saw the ghostly shadows of more students heading in the same direction. Oh Merlin! What had he done?

Nothing for it but meet his destiny. He started thinking of spells and ran them through his head. He was going to have to be quick and clever to beat Malfoy because he was certain the Slytherin was going to do all within his power to somehow cheat. He didn’t know how he could, but if there was a way, a Slytherin could figure it out.

Amazed at their good luck so far, Harry and the others managed to make their way across the grounds without being seen. Students hurried across the dark lawn in small groups, staying close along the shadows. Finally Harry was at the foot of the Astronomy Tower and he leaned back to look at the top. He tested the door and it was open, so he went in and began to climb the spiral staircase all the way to the top.

He was out of breath when he reached the roof. Draco was already there with Crabbe and Goyle by his side. Pansy, looking particularly pouty, stood off to one side.

“So you’ve come, Potter.”

“So you didn’t chicken out, Malfoy. That’s a point for you.”

Draco began to circle Harry. Harry got his wand ready and tossed his cloak to a far corner. He knew that it could start without warning and he wanted to be on the offensive.

“So here are the rules, Potter... There are no rules.”

“Fine with me.”

“Wait, Malfoy,” said Ron with a worried voice. “No permanent damage spells. Nothing that will maim—”

“Are you fighting this, Weasel or is he? Potter agreed. All you have to do is get out of the way and shut up.”

“Move, Ron,” said Harry.

For such a large crowd it certainly got quiet. Harry didn’t waste precious energy looking at them. His eyes were on Draco. There were about twenty people on the tower roof with them and a line of people on the stairs whispering what was happening like a bucket brigade down the stairs to the crowd below on the lawn at the foot of the tower. Harry wanted to make this quick and clean. He wanted Draco to know exactly what he was going to be up against if he met Harry in the real world.

Harry didn’t hesitate. He flung his wand forward, not even waiting for a signal. “Serpensortia!” A snake coiled out of his wand and fell with a deadening slap to the floor. Before Malfoy could retaliate, Harry aimed his wand at Draco and yelled, “Wingardium Leviosa!” Malfoy flew into the air right over the snake and Harry looked at the snake and spoke. To him, it sounded like normal speech, but he knew by the crowd’s shrinking back that what came out of his mouth was Parseltongue. “Move to strike, but don’t until I tell you!”

“Pleeeessse,” said the snake. “Jussst one?”

“No. Not until I command you.”

Malfoy hadn't even made a countercurse. He was too terrified staring pointe-blank at the snake, bobbing its head and baring its fangs mere inches from his head.

“Immobulus! yelled Harry at Draco and Draco was now literally powerless to do anything. “Can you hear me, Draco? I just told this snake to be ready to strike you, but he won't until I command him to. Do you see what you will be facing if you become a Death Eater? I'm playing with you now. Out there, outside of Hogwarts, I won't have time to play.” He allowed the frozen Malfoy to bob helplessly over the hissing snake for a few more seconds before he flicked his wand. “Finite Incantatum!” At once, the snake disappeared in a puff of smoke, and Malfoy loosened and fell to the ground.

He looked up with a malevolent eye, but someone by the staircase cried, “Snape!”

Everyone rushed down the stairs in a pile up. Everyone but Harry and Draco. Someone sent up a fogging spell and the students all managed to disappear into it making their getaway, but they could hear the voice of the Potions Master, yelling and threatening down below.

And then they heard Snape coming up the stairs. Harry grabbed the cloak from where he'd thrown it and grabbed Malfoy. He tossed it over their heads and dragged him to the wall.

“What the hell are you doing, Potter?”

“It's an invisibility cloak, Malfoy. Shut up.”

Draco's eyes widened in shock, but soon he silenced as he looked over at the doorway.

Snape slid into view, clutching the doorway with one white hand and scanning the tower with dark little eyes. He moved cautiously onto the roof and moved methodically into the alcoves and shadows.

Harry and Draco stood as still as they could, but the cloak wasn't really designed for two almost full-grown wizards. They stood pressed against each other, and because Harry had grabbed him hastily,

Harry's arm wrapped around Draco's waist and they were clasped together almost face to face. Harry was suddenly aware how close, filling his nose with Draco's scent, a subtle mixture of new sweat and Draco's spicy cologne. His eyes looked into Draco's and they breathed almost into each other's half opened mouths. Draco kept his eyes on Harry's, but occasionally his gaze would drop to his lips. Their shared fear kept them from moving apart but it didn't seem that Draco particularly wanted to move away. Harry held his breath. Being this close to Draco was torture; being unable to do anything about even worse. Except that Draco's face seemed to be moving almost imperceptively closer to Harry's. Wide-eyed, Harry felt Draco's cheek just touch his own with a slight, exploratory stroke with the air of an accidental touch, as if it couldn't be avoided. Maybe it was so, and Harry thought it might have been his imagination getting the better of him in this tense situation, but he didn't think it could be true when Draco's cheek slid further and the far edges of their lips barely touched. Not in a kiss but in another somewhat accidental caress, their noses bumping.

Snape crept along the wall, still searching. Harry cringed closer to Draco and the other leaned into him. Harry breathed raggedly, feeling Draco's equally stabbing breaths on his lips. How sweet it felt! Their noses prodded one another while Draco still moved his face, lips still barely caressing Harry's. Was it a dream? Harry didn't know what he should do. He sensed what a fragile moment it was. Their mutual fear of being caught kept them quiet and still, but this strange intimate caress confused him even more. It was maddening. And worse. Pressed so tight to Draco with Draco's lips practically on Harry's, Harry's intense arousal could certainly not go unnoticed.

Harry held his breath when Draco, breathing harshly, angled his head, and slowly pressed his lips firmly and this time unmistakably to Harry's. Draco rubbed Harry's lips with a gentle pressure, doing only that with maddening tenderness. But then he snaked his tongue into Harry's mouth just barely touching the other's tongue. And once they touched, it seemed to be the invitation Draco was waiting for and he opened his mouth wide to cover Harry's completely. Harry welcomed him, embracing Draco tighter and pressing his body to him with a fervor he was forced to hold back before. They kissed deeply with a mutual need that sent Harry's senses spiraling into the night. Lips and mouths glued tightly together, they knew nothing but each other's breath and taste, felt their two bodies react to one another, hands sliding over chests and backs. All of Harry's emotions were bound up in a kiss he had never before experienced and had wanted for so long.

They barely noticed when Snape left. He'd never detected them in the hidden intimacy of the invisibility cloak.

Harry could feel Draco's sharp breathing through his nostrils blasting against his cheek as the kiss went on. Oh Merlin! Let it go on forever! But slowly, Draco's breathing changed and he pulled sharply away. He stared at Harry, his blue eyes searching Harry's face for an explanation. He looked down at their two bodies so tightly pressed, and pushed Harry back. With a sharp inhale, he wiped his mouth with the back of his hand. "What the hell are you doing, Potter!" he hissed, and threw the cloak aside.

He stepped back and Harry lowered the cloak. Stunned, he could say nothing but reach for him. Draco took another step back, shaking his head. "Don't...touch me!" With a stifled sob, Draco tore for the doorway and scrambled down the stairs.

Harry stood alone on the tower, the wind whipping his cloak, his heart battering his chest, and a sinking feeling twisting his stomach.

Chapter Five—Muggle Bard

Points were taken from all the houses for the night's doings and though Harry and Draco were never discovered by the Snape, it was suggested they do detention anyway for disrupting the school with threats of a duel.

Harry felt worse than he had before. What happened? One moment Draco was making all of Harry's dreams come true with a passionate kiss and the next moment he was running away as if it disgusted him. All day he saw Draco in classes, and Draco studiously avoided even looking at him. Harry wanted to ask. He felt adrift. He couldn't believe that his one moment of utter joy could be smashed so irreparably.

Harry sat in the great hall pushing food around on his plate. He didn't really have much of an appetite.

"What's wrong, Harry?" asked Hermione. "Is it about your detention?"

He flicked his eyes up to Ron, too consumed with eating to notice the quiet words he and Hermione were exchanging. "I'll tell you later," he whispered.

When they found a moment later to be alone in the corridor, he told Hermione what had happened under the invisibility cloak. When he finished, Hermione's brows lowered, thinking. "That's very interesting, Harry."

"Interesting? It was devastating! Here I was thinking one thing and suddenly it was something else completely. I really feel like I've been tangling with a blast-ended skrewt."

"Yes, but you said Malfoy kissed you."

"Yeah," he said, almost barking a laugh. "He certainly did."

"And then left in disgust?"

"Yeah," he said shoulders sagging.

“And he’s always picking fights with you. He’s been picking fights with you since day one, hasn’t he Harry?”

Harry pushed his hair back from his face and it flopped back as if untouched. “Yeah. Just me. No one else, it seems.”

“Of course not.” She was smiling.

“What? What are you getting at?”

“Don’t you see? He’s always taunting you and only you. ‘Methinks he doth protest too much.’”

“What does that mean?”

“It’s a quote from the Muggle Shakespeare. Draco has protested that he hates you, from the day he met you. Hate is a very strong emotion. Can you think of an emotion equally strong as hate?”

“I don’t know. Love?”

“Precisely. And sometimes the two can get confused.”

“How can that be?”

“Oh it happens more often than you know. You see, I think Draco does love you and has for some time. But he doesn’t understand these emotions. He may not even realize he has these feelings for boys. But because he can’t deal with them, it manifests in another strong emotion he is well familiar with: Hate.”

“He loves me so much he hates me?”

“In a sense. He can’t come to grips with his love and so hate is easier. But last night emotions ran high and the intimate setting of your close proximity just...let it out. But once he realized what he was doing his confusion set in again and he pulled away, receding into the more familiar and safer feelings of hate. I think Draco is in love with you.”

Harry looked at her, stunned. How could that possibly be? She wasn’t there. She didn’t see the look of utter disgust and contempt on his face.

He leaned against the wall. But still. Draco had been the one to kiss Harry first, not the other way around. He looked at Hermione’s smile of triumph and wondered if this information would ever do him any good. “But Hermione. If he doesn’t want to admit how he feels, I’m still out of luck.”

“You’ll just have to convince him.”

“How?”

Her smile turned to a frown. “Harry James Potter. I can’t do everything for you. You’ll have to figure this one out on your own.”

* * *

Harry dreaded detention that evening. He trudged slowly to Snape’s office, looking over his shoulder for any sign of Malfoy. He wondered if he would have the chance to talk with him alone, and then his stomach did a somersault just thinking about that. He didn’t know if he really wanted to be alone with him. What if Malfoy rejected him again? He couldn’t stand to see that expression of disgust.

He reached for the door knob and opened the door. When he walked in, Draco was already there. Malfoy made a half turn to look at the door, but stopped himself. Harry walked in and stood beside Malfoy. He couldn’t look at him.

“At last, Potter,” said Snape, as if he were late. He rose from his chair. “You two. Come with me.”

Snape took them to the far corner of the potions dungeon to a small door. He took a key from a pocket and turned it in the lock. Pushing the door opened revealed a dusty storage room that looked like it hadn't been touched in centuries. "This needs cleaning and organizing. I suggest you get started right away since you will not be allowed to use your magic. Obviously, you are far too eager to use it for ill ends."

He swept away from them in a flourish of black robes. Malfoy and Harry just stood there at first, saying nothing. Then Malfoy spoke. "If you say one word about the Astronomy Tower—I don't care what Snape says—I'm hexing you."

Malfoy stepped into the store room and Harry stood frozen, his hopes dying. With a deep sigh, he entered the room and looked around. Every square inch was covered in dust. "How do you suppose we're supposed to organize this?" asked Harry quietly.

"How should I know, Potter? Let's just get started. The sooner we start the sooner we can get out of here."

They began by looking at the names on the boxes to classify them. They were all ingredients for potions so they quickly figured that the dried ingredients could be kept longer and so decided to put them toward the back of the room and the more perishable they stored near the front. They argued at first whether to stack them by alphabetical order or by their classification.

"We could just ask Snape how he wants them," said Harry.

"You go ask him, then."

Harry slammed down his rag. "All right, then. I will!"

Harry opened the door and looked around. He stepped cautiously into the dungeon, but Snape wasn't there. He returned to the store room. "He's not out there. Just do what you want, Malfoy."

He stood and watched Draco moving boxes before Draco looked up at him. "Are you just going to stand there?"

Harry's shoulders slumped and he sat on a box. "Draco. I really think we should talk."

Malfoy pulled his wand. "Potter, I warned you—!"

"Put it away, Malfoy. You're just as confused as I am. Wouldn't it be helpful to just talk?"

"No! I don't want to talk about it! I don't want to think about it!"

"Well I do! I know just how hard it is to finally realize that all the confusion had a name. I know what it is to struggle with your sexuality. I know what it is to finally say 'I'm gay.' And I know all about the tears and loneliness. The hardest part is just admitting it."

"You think I'm gay? That's a hoot, Potter. I'm so far from gay it's a riot."

"Malfoy—"

"Just what are you getting at? Do you think I'm in love with you or something? Get a grip."

"Malfoy, it's not easy believing the truth about one's self. Do you think I liked knowing this? I was depressed for weeks. But finally, at least knowing the truth at last was a relief. Of a sort. And actually," he said quietly, "I do think you're in love with me. As much as I...love you."

Malfoy froze. His fearful breathing was loud in the small room. "You take that back," he said in a whispering, deadly voice.

Harry stood. "I'm not taking it back. I'm in love with you, Draco Malfoy. I've been in love with you for a long time."

With a strangled cry, Draco threw his wand aside and fell on Harry with his fists. Harry took one to the jaw and fell backwards. Draco tumbled with him, punching Harry in the gut. Harry fought him back, grabbing his face and pushing, but Draco was a Fury now. They rolled and skidded against the boxes, teetering them until they came crashing down. Harry managed to get his feet under him, and tried to

stand up, but Draco was pummeling him with both fists now. All Harry could think of was Dudley and how helpless he had been under his huge cousin's onslaught. Harry defended himself—it was what he knew best—and felt Draco's anger deflate. He stopped punching Harry and Harry grabbed his shoulders, hoping it would keep him from starting again. Harry gasped. His lungs seemed compressed and he waited for them to fill with air again.

Draco panted, looking at the floor. He stood that way, Harry holding him at arm's length a long time. Until Draco lifted his face. He raised his hands and Harry flinched thinking he was going to hit him again, but Draco's hands slipped under Harry's sore jaw and brought his face to Draco's. Without preamble, Malfoy opened his mouth and kissed Harry. Harry's body followed and soon he was pressed against Malfoy again and Malfoy was kissing him thoroughly, putting the force of his emotions behind it.

Harry tasted a little blood from the blows they had each received, but Malfoy's tender assault took away all the pain of his fists. Malfoy's kiss was desperate, passionate. His tongue slid over Harry's, warm and wet. His lips, plastered so furiously over Harry's, rubbed and caressed in a sensual dance of utter seduction. He groaned in Harry's mouth which turned to a whimper. Draco drew back and Harry saw the tears streaking down Malfoy's face. He enclosed Malfoy in his arms and let him cry against him, making small circles on his back with his hand.

Harry heard a step and looked up. Snape stood in the doorway, his expression one of shock. Harry narrowed his eyes, daring him to say anything. Snape looked at the state of the room, of Harry, and of Draco who had his back to Snape and was unaware of his being there. Slowly and deliberately, Snape backed away without a word and quietly closed the door.

* * *

Harry and Draco finished their detention, but after their embrace, Draco didn't say anything more to Harry. He left the dungeon, his cheeks blazing red.

More confused than ever, Harry returned to his own dorm room at almost one a.m. He lay in his bed and stared at the ceiling. He finally understood how much worse it was for Malfoy than himself. With a father like that? What would Lucius Malfoy say to a gay son? When Pureblood wizardry was so important, how would this be taken? Harry didn't know. He really didn't even understand the possible ramifications of his sexuality on the Wizarding world. Hermione seemed to take it well enough in stride, and Merlin knew what Snape thought. But somehow he didn't think Lucius Malfoy would be as accommodating. It wasn't fair, then, to subject Draco to the misery. Although, misery would be inevitable.

He resolved to leave Draco alone from now on. If you loved a thing, you let it go. He'd heard that somewhere once. Let it go? That's the stupidest thing I've ever heard. He rolled over and tried to sleep. He managed a little, but the sun came streaming in far too early for his liking.

He'd forgotten that there was Quidditch today.

He dreaded facing Slytherin. Why did it have to be them? In the changing tent, he slowly suited up, buckling the arm guards on his right arm clumsily. He had to get his mind on the game. He knew he had to get past this. He owed it to his teammates, but it all seemed suddenly so frivolous.

He grabbed his Firebolt and walked with the others onto the pitch, the roar of the crowds in the stands only so much white noise. He mounted and pushed off and he was in the air again. He breathed his relief. He forgot how forgiving the skies were. The broom—more of an extension of his power, much like his wand—moved seemingly at his thoughts, and he made the first pass of the stands and came to a stop on the far side of the pitch. He looked over toward the other side, and there was Draco clutching his broomstick, bobbing in the wind. He didn't look at Harry.

The snitch was released and Harry watched it zoom away far out of the pitch. Madam Hooch blew her whistle, tossed up the quaffle, and the game began.

Players zoomed past him. The quaffle tossed from teammate to teammate, unless it was intercepted by the other side. The crowds roared their approval as broomsticks soared and chased. Bludgers flew and players dodged. The beaters on both sides did their best to dislodge the riders, but everyone seemed up to the challenge.

The score was sixty even, but still Harry did not see the snitch. He looked in earnest now, meandering along the far corners of the pitch. He didn't know if he had the energy to try to fool Malfoy, but he kept an eye on the Slytherin just in case he had any tricks.

Just then the sun gleamed off of something not too far from Malfoy and Harry moved his broom lazily in that direction. Malfoy watched him, and so Harry didn't want to make him suspicious. He closed on the spot. Malfoy still hadn't moved. Harry held his breath, gripped the broom, and suddenly dived. Malfoy was right after him.

Harry had the snitch in his sights and zoomed toward it, but Malfoy was on his tail and then he came up along side of him. He glared at Harry. "I'll show you, Potter."

He cut Harry off, flying just over the front of Harry's broomstick, nearly clipping his nose. On instinct, Harry pulled back, and it was enough for Malfoy to get a good lead.

Brilliant move, Malfoy. Harry recovered and urged the broom faster. He came up just under Malfoy's right. Draco's cloak flapped behind him. Harry reached up and yanked it, causing Malfoy to swerve. Harry released him and took the lead. He looked back once to spy the expression on Malfoy's face.

The snitch was within reach now, and Harry stuck out his hand to retrieve it. Malfoy came up beside him again and his hand was there almost touching Harry's like the last time. Their team couldn't afford another tie. It had to be a win this time. Harry had to win. He leaned even further forward, cautious not to cause an imbalance to the broom. Suddenly, his fingers closed on it and he clasped it tight in his fist, the snitch's wings flapping impotently against his fingers.

The crowd roared and he heard the faint announcing over the noise that, "Harry Potter has caught the snitch! Gryffindor wins!"

He slowly glided to the ground, Malfoy in formation next to him. Harry held up the snitch, turning to the stands. When Malfoy landed he dismounted and threw his broom aside. He stood on the grass and merely glared at Harry. Gryffindors hurried to the field with hearty congratulations. The team gathered and made a whoop of victory. The usual rejoicing ensued, until it finally broke up and the Gryffindors left the field and the team members stalked to their changing tent.

But when the crowd dispersed, Harry noticed Malfoy still standing there.

His heart fluttered at the unexpected sight of Draco in his Quidditch uniform waiting for him.

"Going to beat me up, Malfoy?" asked Harry. He didn't move.

Malfoy said nothing and slowly took a few steps closer. "No. I just wanted to...talk."

“About what?” Harry didn’t mean to be coy, but he was feeling cautious and a bit emotionally bruised.

Malfoy scanned the field. No one was there. The stands had emptied long ago. The equipment had all been put away, and the team members were surely changed and returning to where they were supposed to be.

He turned back and Harry flinched. He had never seen such raw emotions raging on Malfoy’s face. “You bloody well know what I want to talk about. It’s just—” He clutched his hands and rubbed them. “This is all pretty new to me.”

Harry resisted the urge to enfold him in his arms. “I know. Believe me. I know exactly how you feel.”

That old Slytherin expression took over for a moment, but it just as quickly died away. “Do you really...I mean. Are you really...in love with...me?”

Harry raised his chin and looked up into the clouding sky. White now covered the blue, taking away the shadows. A chill wind blew up and with it came the smell of rain.

Harry dropped his eyes to Draco’s. Those were surely enough blue for him, he decided. “Yes. I am.”

“And what if I didn’t feel the same?”

Harry shrugged. “Then I guess I’d be pretty sad about that.”

“But you said you...I-loved me for a long time. How did you...how was it to—?”

“It’s been difficult.”

Draco lowered his eyes. He stopped wringing his hands and dropped them to either side of him. “I don’t know what I’m supposed to do.”

“Do you love me?” Harry was amazed at how steady his voice was. It shouldn’t have been. His insides felt like jelly.

Draco looked at Harry. His silky hair blew up around his face but even as a few strands teased his nose it never interrupted his concentrated gaze. “Yes.”

“Then come here.”

More like a prisoner to the gallows, Draco dragged himself forward. But once he reached Harry, Harry raised his arms and took him into an embrace. With hesitant hands, Harry felt Draco touch his back and then slowly squeeze him tighter. Still holding Draco, Harry drew back, raised a hand to his face, and tenderly swept back his long hair. He leaned in and gently kissed Draco’s lips. He kissed the corner of his mouth, then the other corner, then full on. Draco opened his lips and Harry covered his mouth completely, drawing him in tightly. The kiss became more urgent, more encompassing. Harry’s hands combed into Draco’s hair, while Draco’s hands gripped Harry’s shoulder blades. The kiss went on a long time, until gasping, they finally pulled apart. Draco adjusted Harry’s glasses and smiled. “Okay. That was nice.”

“Just nice? I put everything I had into that kiss, Malfoy.”

The nervous look on Malfoy’s face fell away. “Oh Potter. You’ve got to be kidding. You call that a kiss? I’ll teach you how to kiss.” He picked up his broom and took Harry’s hand.

Harry felt the change and happily fell in step with Draco. “What are you talking about, Malfoy? If you think that was a decent snog, then you are sorely misinformed.”

“Oh yeah? You amaze me, Potter. You have all the arrogance of a Slytherin.”

“So do you.”

They slowly walked toward the changing tents, arguing the whole time and squeezing each other’s hand.

The End