

# Hero

*by RedOrchid*

Pretty much all the Harry/Cedric clichés you can think of, all rolled into one. Prefects' bathroom, Yule Ball, angsty fluff, you name it. Oh, and it's a songfic to boot. Go on, read it--I dare you... :-)

## Would You Dance, If I Asked You to Dance?

*Chapter 1 of 2*

Pretty much all the Harry/Cedric clichés you can think of, all rolled into one. Prefects' bathroom, Yule Ball, angsty fluff, you name it. Oh, and it's a songfic to boot. Go on, read it--I dare you... :-)

### Hero

#### Chapter I - Would You Dance, If I Asked You to Dance?

"Care to dance with me?"

Harry heard the words spoken somewhere to his right and didn't pay much attention at first. Partly because no one had attempted to ask him to dance all night (or hardly even to approach him after Parvati had stalked off in a whirl of pink), and partly because the disembodied voice over his right shoulder was most decidedly male and therefore obviously not talking to him.

When no reply came from any of the giggling girls that had been standing near the refreshment table when Harry arrived, however, he looked up and around himself, finding a) no girls in the general vicinity (they seemed to have moved their giggling flock over to the Beauxbatons table) and b) a decidedly unaccompanied Cedric Diggory, standing immediately to his right, holding out his hand in what looked suspiciously like an invitation.

"Wh-what?" he stuttered, half-certain that he must have misinterpreted something. Cedric smiled.

"Dance with me," he said, and no matter how Harry turned the words over in his head, he couldn't find a way to make them plausibly sound like something else. "Harry," Cedric added, as though suddenly remembering that they hadn't said so much as 'hullo' to each other all night.

"Sorry, what?" He was vaguely aware of repeating the same thing and it not sounding any more intelligent the second time around. Coherence didn't seem to be forthcoming anytime soon, however.

"I would like to dance with you," Cedric clarified, as though this was a perfectly reasonable request and nothing out of the ordinary. "Fleur is dancing with Krum, so I thought it would be nice if we could join forces for a while. And I happen to really like this song."

Harry tried to say something. His rather passable imitation of a fish caught out of water made this fairly difficult.

"But I'm not a girl."

He'd meant to say 'But you don't like me,' or 'I thought you were dancing with Cho,' or 'I don't dance,' but for some, unfathomable reason, his mind decided to pick the most embarrassing (not to mention self-evident) alternative.

If Draco Malfoy had been standing before him (or any of his other enemies...since the Triwizard Tournament started, he seemed to have quite a few of them), he would, most likely, have said something like 'Really now, Potter? That's not what the blokes on your Quidditch team say.' But this wasn't Malfoy, and instead of mocking him, Cedric only repeated his winning smile and shrugged slightly.

"So what?" Through the haze of his shocked and inarticulate state, Harry realised, to his horror, that Cedric had grabbed hold of one of his forearms and was steering Harry towards the side of the dance floor.

"I don't know how to dance." Great. Now the second most embarrassing reason decided that the first hadn't been quite clear enough (though perhaps it hadn't, seeing as Cedric was pulling him into the circle of his arms with a smooth, deliberate movement that Harry wished he'd known how to do a few hours earlier, when Parvati was manhandling him all over the floor).

"Shh, just relax," Cedric said, cutting through the active monologue in his head. "Even Harry Potter should be able to unwind for an evening and just float along for a bit. So don't think, alright. Just follow, and I will be the hero for a while."

His voice was so openly earnest that Harry felt himself being drawn in and his hands guided to the right positions without really stopping to think. Cedric's hand came up to rest against the centre of his back, and then they were moving, gliding across the floor.

It was nice, not having to think, not having to plan his next move or worrying that he might be doing things wrong or leading in the wrong direction. Cedric's hands were firm on his back and steady around his own hand as he moved smoothly through the steps and turns, bringing Harry with him. Dancing with Parvati, his feet had felt somehow detached from his body, struggling to keep up with the beat of the music and the set movements across the floor, generally failing abysmally in their task. Dancing with Cedric, they seemed to be more of an extension of his spine, shifting automatically with the weight of his body, following the momentum of Cedric's movements against him. It was almost like flying...the same sense of *instinct*, of letting his body surge through the motions, responding to every twist and turn. He felt the corners of his lips turn into a smile and breathed deeply, letting the last of his conscious mind go and falling into the flow of things.

Towards the middle of the next song, he started to feel the pull of the music, the different beats and harmonies of the tune. There was a trumpet in there...and the smooth, steady beat of a bass; the trill of a clarinet on high notes and the joyous, teasing workings of someone who clearly loved to play the piano. Cedric had let go of the closed hold now, laughing and twisting as he guided Harry through the motions of a less lethal version of the type of dance he'd seen Fred and Angelina do earlier. He let his body move to the little details of the music, pretending that he was another one of the instruments playing, and let out a laugh. This was not only nice, it was downright *fun*, and the things Cedric was taking him through, the intricacies of movement...far more advanced than he'd ever thought he'd be able to pull off with any kind of grace...it was...just kind of great. Another bout of laughter bubbled up inside him as they spun. Around and around, like clockwork.

Cedric laughed with him, cracking little jokes whenever he got Harry close enough to make himself heard over the music. Harry's head joined in the spinning sensation as Cedric pulled him flush against his front and began turning with him, faster and faster across the floor. When they came out of a double turn (and Harry thought he was going to get a small reprieve and find his sense of balance again) Cedric changed his hold and leaned in close to Harry's ear.

"Do you trust me?"

Harry nodded automatically, because he did trust Cedric. Trusted him to be a decent bloke, someone who valued fair play and would have your back in a duel. And he'd got Harry through two entire songs worth of dancing without stepping on his toes or having him fall on his head or crash into somebody. "Yes," he clarified, nodding again before tilting his head back a bit to better feel the curve of his spine.

"Good," Cedric whispered, grinning in a way that almost looked slightly evil.

And then Harry's feet disappeared from under him.

It all went so fast. He had barely time to register the inversion of gravity before his feet were once again on solid ground. Cedric's knee had come up against the back of his thighs, flipping him neatly around the length of his arm, sending the adrenaline of sudden shock pounding through Harry and rushing straight to his head.

"That was bloody brilliant!" he exclaimed, replacing the look of total surprise with a huge grin, which made Cedric laugh harder. "Do it again." Cedric raised an eyebrow at the request, which looked quite silly paired with the look of complete delight on his face.

"Alright. Jump on three," he said, and Harry did, hurling himself into the air and feeling Cedric's arms grab hold of his back and legs, manipulating the movement of energy to send Harry flying, legs first, over the taller boy's shoulder.

"Now hold!" Cedric yelled, and Harry did, spreading his arms and legs wide for balance as Cedric spun them around and around. Fast. Exhilarating. Just like flying.

A hand came up to his shoulder, running briefly through the hair at the back of his head before taking a firm hold of his neck, pulling Harry back towards the ground. He shifted his weight and fell into the hold, trusting Cedric completely as he felt his body plunge towards the stone. A second later, he was standing again, flushed and breathless on his own two feet, Cedric's arm still wrapped firmly around his back, steadying him.

The sound of whooping and applause reached Harry's ear, as though someone was quickly turning up the volume of an old radio, going from a faint murmur to a mind-cracking din in the space of a heartbeat. The magic of the moment came crashing down, and he instinctively tried to pull back. Cedric didn't let him.

"Don't think about them," he urged, keeping Harry close to his chest as he turned, Harry awkwardly stumbling with him, momentum lost. "They don't know what they're doing, don't know what it's like to always have people's eyes on you, to always have to live up to expectations." Harry blinked, and for a brief flash, he saw Cedric's face shift, the handsome, confident exterior of Hufflepuff's shining star and the proud and smiling Triwizard champion falling away to show a naked, slightly desperate expression underneath. "They don't know what it's like," he repeated, swinging Harry out into a twist and a turn. *But I do*, his eyes added, and Harry felt the message trickle into him like a stray drop of rain. Some of the tension left, and he could concentrate on the music again, on the subtle directions of Cedric's hands and arms and chest and hips as they moved across the floor. The song was coming to a close, and he caught Cedric's eye, reading his message of equal parts resignation and rebellion in them as the older boy pulled him close one last time.

"Time for a bow," he stated wryly. "Lean your head back." Cedric's hands moved to his wrists, and Harry felt himself fall backwards, arms crossed before him, keeping him from crashing to the floor. He closed his eyes, feeling his hair brush the grey stone as they held the pose. Heat tingled in every part of him, adrenaline coursing through his veins with a sense of purpose he hadn't felt since racing across the air on his Firebolt during the first task. Complete abandon and total trust...all thought and worry gone from his head.

Freedom.

Applause erupted all around them and turned into an inferno of sound, uncompromising and unceasing. Cedric pulled him up, but didn't meet his eyes, letting go of his hands and stepping away from Harry with a friendly...and almost insultingly casual...pat on the back.

"Thanks, Potter, that was fun," he said pleasantly, and Harry felt as though someone had just poured a bucket of icy water over his head. From the corner of his eye, he could see Cho approaching, no doubt coming to steal her date back. There was a new song playing...a slow, hauntingly beautiful tune that seemed to travel through the stone and go straight into Harry's bloodstream. Forcing a smile to his face, he murmured something equally empty, clapped Cedric on the back with a short laugh and quickly moved away from the Great Hall.

\*\*\*

"Harry!"

He had just put his foot on the first step of the staircase, and for a brief moment, he considered simply ignoring the voice and keep moving. He was tired, off centre and had just had to mediate in a screaming match between his two best friends. No matter what Cedric had caught up with him for, he was fairly certain he didn't have the energy to hear it. Not now.

"Harry, please," Cedric urged, touching a hand to Harry's arm to turn him around. "I'm sorry for being such a jerk earlier."

"Don't worry about it," he said, starting to turn away again. "Let's just forget all about it, alright?" He moved to leave, but the hand on his arm held him in place, tugging him closer to Cedric's tall frame.

"No," the other boy said quietly, insistently. "I don't want to forget about it. I liked dancing with you tonight, and I'm sorry I flipped out at the end." That desperate earnestness was back in his expression, and Harry's spirits couldn't help but to lift a little.

"Apology excepted," he said, managing a small, if rather tense, smile. "Good night."

"Wait." Cedric's voice was very low now, and Harry turned back to him with a frown on his face. "There's something else I need to talk to you about," Cedric said, words falling in a quick, quiet stream from his lips. "About the Tournament. Can you meet me later?" Harry's frown deepened.

"Why not now?" he asked, looking quickly around to make sure no one was listening. "What is it?" Cedric looked pointedly to the left, and Harry followed his gaze, finding Cho waiting a little nervously over by the staircase that led to the Eastern parts of the castle. "Oh."

"I just want to say goodnight," Cedric explained hurriedly. "It's the gentlemanly thing to do." Harry nodded uncomfortably, thinking suddenly of his own manners as someone's date that night. Parvati was probably going to hex him when he got back to the tower.

"Alright." He didn't know what he was replying to exactly, but from the way the tension dropped from Cedric's shoulders, he figured that the older boy took it as confirmation of his earlier request.

"Great," he said, flashing a quick smile at Harry. "Fifth floor, at the top of the staircase. Bring the egg. I'll meet you there in an hour when things have quieted down a bit."

A last tug of his lips, and Cedric was gone, moving swiftly across the hall to offer his arm to Cho with a flourish. Harry watched the two of them walk up the staircase together and felt something burn in his chest, leaving a painful sense of blackness in its wake. He stood there, completely still, until the handsome couple disappeared from view and then made his way back to Gryffindor Tower, conflicting thoughts swirling in his head.

---

*A/N: Please review!*

## Would You Tremble, If I Touched Your Lips?

*Chapter 2 of 2*

Part the second: the Prefects' bathroom. Hot boys in bubbles. Need I say more? :-)

### **Chapter II Would You Tremble, If I Touched Your Lips?**

The fifth floor corridor was empty. The ball was over, and people had finally made their way back to the dormitories now. Cedric walked quietly past the sleeping portraits, trying to look normal...just a prefect doing his habitual rounds. It wasn't working very well.

He looked at his watch again. Ten minutes past. He wondered how long he could dare to linger in this specific corridor. Filch had already passed him once, roughly half an hour earlier, and running into him a second time would be difficult to explain. Especially as he was quite some distance away from his scheduled patrol area.

"Cedric, over here."

He spun around, letting the pale light from his wand span over the walls, trying to identify the source of the voice. The corridor remained empty.

"Harry?" he asked quietly, narrowing his eyes as he took in the surroundings, searching for movement. He hoped he hadn't begun to hallucinate, or that Peeves had somehow learnt how to imitate voices.

"Over here, by the railing," the disembodied voice confirmed, and Cedric felt something soft brush across his arm as he walked closer. He reached out into the seemingly empty air and felt his fingers connect with an invisible someone, someone who was standing right in front of him. A second later, the air flickered in the wand light and Harry's face appeared out of nowhere.

"Invisibility cloak," he explained hurriedly, and now Cedric felt rather stupid. Of course it had to be a cloak; Disillusion Charms were never that strong when you really tried to spot someone. Still, such cloaks were extremely rare. He'd heard his father speak about a distant relative having once had one, but that had been a long time ago. "Now what did you want to talk to me about?" There was a small noise in the distance just as he said it, and Cedric watched Harry's face vanish immediately under the hood of the cloak. Throwing a quick glance over the railing, he got a glimpse of Filch and Mrs Norris, coming out of another corridor just below their landing. He swiftly extinguished his wand and grabbed for the place where he thought Harry's arm was most likely to be.

"Come on," he urged, keeping his voice down and leading them away from the staircase. "There's something I need to show you. Did you bring the egg?"

Harry murmured his assent, and Cedric lead them over to one of the paintings on the wall, whispered a password and pulled Harry with him through the portrait hole. Once inside, he flicked his wand and lit the sconces placed along the walls. The air next to him shimmered, and Harry Potter came into view, still in the emerald green of his dress robes. He took in the room and let out a surprised gasp.

"What is this place?"

"The Prefects' bathroom," Cedric answered, moving over to the side of the large pool and turning on a few of the taps. His hand moved to the top of his robes, loosening the necktie a little as he worked. "What kind of scents do you like?" Harry looked at him as though he'd just grown an extra head.

"Why?" He asked, frowning slightly. "Why would you..." His eyes suddenly turned impossibly wide, and Cedric saw a slightly panicked expression settle on his face. "I'd better go," he said in a rush. "I'm sorry that I... I mean, that I made you think that I..." He broke off again, blushing profusely, then turned on his heel and started to move

quickly back towards the portrait hole.

"No!" Cedric exclaimed, realisation hitting him and knocking the air from his lungs, even as he lunged forwards to stop the younger boy. "No, that's not...I mean...I would never..." He reached Harry with a few, long strides and lost his train of thought as the other boy turned around.

"It's for the egg," he explained quickly, the words stumbling out of his mouth as he hurried to set the record straight. "You need to put the egg in the water, to hear what it says."

"Oh." Harry's blush went from dark pink to red, and for a moment, he looked absolutely mortified. Cedric's stomach clenched painfully. God, this was all going so very, very wrong...

"I'm sorry. I should have told you right away," he tried. "I wasn't having a laugh; I wouldn't do that." Harry's head snapped up.

"I never thought you were," he said quietly, and Cedric heard a small tremble in that voice, something which registered as 'fear' with him, even as Harry seemed to gather up all his courage and force his lips into a tense smile. "So let's do this, yeah?" he said, moving away from Cedric and towards the pool. "What do I need to do?"

"Open it under water," Cedric replied. "While you're under yourself, that is. The sound doesn't travel well in the air." Harry nodded and walked over to the dressing area, beginning to awkwardly strip out of his clothes. Cedric just stood there, frozen, for a couple of seconds, before his mind snapped back into working order and he quickly turned his eyes away.

"I'll leave you alone, then" he said, starting to move backwards towards the exit. "There's really nothing else to it. Just open it in the pool and listen to what it has to say. You'll be good from there."

"Cedric."

He stopped. Closed his eyes. And slowly opened them again.

"Yeah?"

"Stay. I'm sorry for getting it all backwards; I know you were just trying to help. So stay. Relax after the ball. I'm sure your feet are even more sore than mine."

His feet were aching, actually, or at least had been earlier that night...somehow, he couldn't feel them very well anymore as he crossed over to the dressing area. "You're sure you wouldn't mind?"

Harry smiled then, a real smile this time. "Yeah, Cedric. I'm good," he said, reaching for a white, fluffy towel on a shelf. "It's no big deal. Let's just get in, shall we?" He pulled the robe over his head, folded it haphazardly and put his glasses on top of the jumbled pile. With the golden egg under one arm and the towel in the other, he walked over to the edge of the pool and lowered himself into the warm water.

"You alright?"

Cedric blinked and tried to refocus. And realised that he had been staring at Harry Potter, following the way the moonlight fell through the painted glass of the high windows across the muscles on his back. Every line was lean and graceful, the kind of perfect proportions that had the whole body working together as a single unit, and which Cedric with his taller frame would never be able to achieve. Harry reached out to grab his egg, and Cedric watched the movement pass from the centre of his back, up through his shoulder and out along the line of his arm, ending in the stretch of his fingers. Completely natural, unhurried, like a pulse of smooth magic or a spark of light. He blinked again.

"No wonder you're such an exceptional Seeker," he said, not realising that he had spoken the thought out loud until the slightly rough quality of his voice registered in his ears. "I mean, you have the perfect build for it," he tried to explain, and then mentally hit himself over the head. *Stop talking.*

"Oh," Harry said, nearly dropping his egg into the water. "Erm. Thanks, I guess?" He was blushing again, and Cedric kicked himself for continuing to put his foot in and making the other boy uncomfortable. "I'm not that good, though. I mean, I can fly alright, but I'm nowhere near exceptional."

Cedric felt his eyebrows rise in surprise. He looked at Harry closely as he, himself, slid into the pool, trying to make sense of the last statement. Something inside firmly told him that this was not false modesty, even though it felt impossible to wrap his head around the idea that it could be anything else.

"Are you serious? How can you not know how amazing you are?" He bit his lip. He really needed to stop talking or Harry really *would* think that Cedric had dragged him here in order to seduce him. He let himself fall under water in an attempt to escape, closing his eyes firmly as he tried to force himself to relax in the warm, soothing currents of the pool. When he could no longer hold his breath, he resurfaced, shaking the hair out of his face.

He felt the tension before he even opened his eyes, and when he did, he found Harry's green ones fixed on him, looking as though he'd never really seen Cedric before and didn't know what to make of him. The intensity of the stare seemed to be drilling a hole right through him, and Cedric struggled to breathe as the two of them faced off, still a fair distance away from each other. Harry's face was a richly painted canvas of conflicting emotions, his heart on courageous display wherever Cedric's eyes would move to look. He suddenly realised that here lay the true courage of Harry Potter: not in daring, flashy displays on a broom, but in the boldness of trust and the ability to deal with whatever was thrown at him. Harry's eyes blinked but didn't waver, and Cedric felt a firm pressure begin to build in his chest, spreading outwards, paralysing him. He'd worried about Harry after the selections, and again after the interviews, feeling angry with Dumbledore for not finding a way out, when Harry was clearly at a loss and nowhere near ready to be in the competition.

He'd been wrong. His eyes roamed over Harry's upper body and face (they were both leaning against the edges of the pool, half-way out of the water) and no longer saw the younger, slightly awkward boy, but someone powerful enough to take his breath away and bold enough...brave enough, even in the face of what should have been impossible...to make Cedric want to follow without knowing in advance where it would take him. Trust. He'd always had it, always valued it, but he'd never before felt it as an actual tug at his heart. Never before known it to be painful, to make him struggle for conscious thought.

*You're fawning over Harry Potter. Get a grip on yourself!* Luckily, that thought stayed firmly inside his own head, and he let out a laugh...all the tension in the room rising within him, too big to dissipate silently, through a smile or a shrug. Harry's look turned into one of complete surprise for a second, and then he was laughing as well, his voice joining with Cedric's, bouncing on the walls and echoing slightly across the room.

"So, the egg?" Cedric asked, once they'd calmed down a little. Harry tossed his head and smiled, the former tension gone from his face.

"Ready?" He twisted the top under water, his eyes widening slightly as it began to glow.

"Let's go."

Cedric released his hold on the white tiles and dove, swimming under water towards the source of light and sound a few yards away. He saw Harry join him, eyes wide in the water as he listened to the alluring melodies coming out of the charmed object.

*Come seek us where our voices sound;*

*We cannot sing above the ground...*

They went down several times, probably more than were strictly necessary for Harry to grasp the meaning of the song, and every time ended up a little closer to one

another, as though the soft notes of the Merpeople were tugging at them, pulling them together. The egg closed itself and fell silent, and Harry picked it up, lifting it out of the water to rest on the white tile. Then he sank back down, leaning heavily against the edge.

"I'm going to drown."

"Of course you're not." Cedric moved in next to him.

"An hour in the lake? Cedric, I can't even swim well." Harry looked up at him, eyes filled with trepidation, and Cedric didn't think, just reached out and pulled him close, pressing him tightly against his chest.

"You'll do fine. There's bound to be tons of magic for this...I mean, they're expecting a sixth- or seventh-year to be able to find a solution, right?" He frowned, suddenly remembering something. "Or maybe not...is it just me or have you noticed some of the professors behaving strangely lately with regards to the Tournament? Moody practically told me how to open my egg in the first place, and Flitwick has added this whole section on something called 'Bubble-Head Charms' to the curriculum for next semester." Against his chest, Harry chuckled, and his breath tickled slightly against the skin there.

"Yeah," he said. "Moody did the same to me, before the first task...after I knew about the dragons. He practically had to spell it out to me. I hadn't even thought about a Summoning Charm. And Hagrid was the one to show me the dragons. He said cheating has always been a part of the Tournament. Madam Maxime and Karkaroff were there that night in the forest as well."

"Really?" Cedric asked, disappointment rising within him, which quickly mixed with gratitude that Harry had passed on the message to him, since he seemed to have been the only one not included on the tour.

"I know, it's kind of shitty, isn't it?" Harry agreed, and Cedric suddenly realised that one of Harry's hands had started to move, absentmindedly, along his side, brushing over his ribs as they played with the currents of water curling around them. "I mean, it's supposed to be about fair play and ability and resourcefulness, isn't it? Not about how many people you have in your corner who can help you figure things out and plan your strategies for you."

"Well yes, in a way," Cedric said, frowning. "But at the same time, we're only representatives for the school, and the Tournament is a competition between the schools in the end. I think that it's strange for the teachers to get involved so openly, but as a Champion, you're meant to channel and represent the school's magic...how well you do it, on the other hand, that's up to you."

Harry pushed back slightly, his fingers freezing to a stop in a tight grip on Cedric's waist. In a way, this was even more distracting.

"What?" he said, sounding mildly incredulous. "But that's cheating! We're supposed to work things out for ourselves."

"No, it's teamwork," Cedric replied, putting some more distance between them. "Knowledge isn't bound to books, it's a living, breathing thing in everyone you meet, just like magic. That's how you learn, by interacting with other people's knowledge and magic, allowing them to shape you in order to make you grow. The Tournament is all about the schools and the Champions they create. How would you ever get a true Champion if they couldn't carry pieces of the school with them? With all of its students and teachers as well as the books they might read?" He was standing now...they both were...looking down into Harry's face, no doubt flushed from getting himself worked up over the issue, the way he always did when talking about something he was truly passionate about. In front of him, Harry swallowed.

"I...I never thought of it that way," he said, a half-shocked, half-sad expression on his face as he met Cedric's eyes. "Everyone is always saying how everything is up to me, how only I can make myself do what I need to do or be what I need to be." He fell away, turning to move out of the pool. "It must be nice," he said, so low that Cedric almost didn't catch his words. "Must be nice to not be alone all the time."

The words hit Cedric like a curse to the back, and before he knew it, his hand was on Harry's arm, spinning him around and pulling him to him, sending them both crashing into the edge of the pool with the force of the momentum. They fell sideways into the water, going under, tumbling over each other in the warm currents, both of them struggling to get back on their feet. They surfaced in a tangle of panted breaths, neither having had the opportunity to fill his lungs before falling under. Cedric's head was spinning from the lack of oxygen...or the adrenalin rush, it was difficult to tell...and he watched the whole thing happen in a blur of motion, as though part of his mind had detached itself and was looking at him from across the room. He felt his hands in Harry's hair, pushing the wet strands out of his face, and then his lips were against the other boy's, his hands tilting the gorgeous head back so that he could lean in closer, go deeper, feel everything.

Harry froze, and then he started shaking. A moment longer and he was kissing Cedric back, hard and frenzied, hands coming to life against the older boy's skin. He threw an arm around Cedric's neck, lifting himself out of the water to press their bodies closer together, and Cedric moaned, releasing his hold on Harry's face to grab on to his back and one of his legs, helping the movement as they pressed and rubbed urgently against one another.

"Wait. Wait!"

He was prepared to just ignore the words in favour of the pulsing need that was pounding with increasing fervour in his bloodstream...until he realised that it wasn't Harry who had spoken them. Moving his hands back into the dark, wet hair, he wrenched their mouths apart and pressed their foreheads tightly together, holding himself...Harry...both of them...out of reach. He felt hot water skim against his chest. Somehow, he'd fallen to his knees, bringing Harry with him.

"What are we doing?" he panted, feeling his voice break slightly at the last word. Harry's hair was wet and thick against his hands, his arms pulling at Cedric's body almost painfully.

"I don't know," the younger boy answered, his hands moving over Cedric's back in rough, shaky caresses, gliding up to get a firm grip on his shoulders. "I don't care." He angled his head, breaking Cedric's hold to take his lips again, pushing him back into the water so that they were swimming together, letting the water carry them as they moved against one another. Cedric suddenly felt hard tiles against his back and realised that Harry was pushing him up against the edge of the pool, breaking away from their kiss to latch on to Cedric's neck...and then move downwards, over his shoulder and unto his chest. Harry's mouth skimmed over a hardened nipple, and Cedric groaned, arching into the touch and pulling Harry's head back down with the hand that was somehow...inexplicably...still in the other boy's hair, despite his efforts to pull away from what was quickly escalating from a kiss into something he was quite sure he wasn't ready to handle. As a confirmation of this last thought, he suddenly felt Harry's hands let go of his shoulders, running a shaky trail down along his spine until they reached, and began fumbling with, the elastic of his soaked-through boxers.

"No, Harry, stop. Stop." He gritted his teeth together to keep himself from crumbling, to keep himself from grabbing hold of the hands that pulled away from him and push them back down to where he quite desperately needed to feel them. Harry was scrambling away, almost losing his balance as he tried to get out of Cedric's lap. He didn't look up.

"Harry!"

Harry hoisted himself out of the pool, drying himself in all of two seconds and nearly running over to the dressing area.

"Harry, wait!"

He managed to get out of the pool as Harry pulled the robes over his head, wet hair soaking the beautiful material. He moved in front of him to block the exit. "Wait, please. Just... please don't run off like this."

Harry didn't say anything at first, and he didn't look up, but he stopped moving, standing before Cedric, tense and trembling with the force of his self-control.

"Why should I stay?" The words were quiet but cutting, and Cedric felt them slice across his skin with a force that sent him reeling. "It's okay, Cedric, I get it. You don't have to be a gentleman about it."

"What?" he exclaimed, thoroughly taken aback. "Please explain to me what part of grabbing you and kissing you and obviously making a royal mess of this situation is me

being a gentleman." Now Harry looked taken aback.

"But, weren't you...I figured that..."

"That I, what? See, and now I'm cutting you off, not very gentlemanlike either." Harry's brow furrowed, and a shadow of uncertainty descended on his face.

"Aren't you trying to let me down easy?" he said, the sudden uncertainty in his voice forming the accusation into more of an actual question. "Because if you are, there's really no need. You made a mistake, I get that, I..."

Without a word, Cedric grabbed the front of his robes and pulled him flush against his chest, kissing Harry deeply, swallowing the rest of the sentence.

"I'm not trying to let you down easy," he said, when they finally broke apart. He raised a hand and ran it over Harry's face, touching the slightly swollen lips with a single finger. "I want you so bloody much it hurts." Harry's eyes fell closed, and he leaned more fully into Cedric's touch, as though trying to figure out what to do with his words.

"Then why did you stop?" The courage he'd seen earlier was back in the green eyes, the boldness of the challenge causing Cedric to falter for a minute. God, how had he ever been able to think of Harry Potter as just a kid?

The silence stretched and grew between them.

"I wasn't ready," Cedric admitted, at last, and watched Harry's jaw drop with a sinking feeling in his stomach. "I mean, I know it's stupid," he hurried to explain, "I know that people probably think I can have my pick of anything...Triwizard Champion and all...not to mention being seventeen, which I know is on the late side in this school, but, erm, that was sort of... my first kiss, and I guess I..." Harry's eyes locked with his, burning into him with such intensity, he half forgot what he was saying, "...panicked," he finished weakly, forcing himself not to sink through the ground in embarrassment.

Harry just looked at him for a while, so long, in fact, that Cedric started to shiver from the cool air, making him uncomfortably aware of the fact that he was standing nearly naked in front of Harry at the exit of the room. Then the other boy blinked, and the expression of near shock on his face turned into a smile.

"Okay," he said, and Cedric felt an answering smile spread across his own lips. "Okay."

He took Cedric's hand and led him over to the dressing area, handing him a towel and taking up another one to begin to dry his hair. Cedric moved the fluffy terrycloth over his skin, inhaling sharply as Harry stepped close, put his arms around him and started drying off his back.

"So, how is this going to work?" he asked. "Since you're not letting me down easy and all."

"I don't know."

"Me neither. Do you care who finds out?"

"Don't know that either." Harry chuckled.

"Aren't you supposed to have figured these things out? Being the older one and all?" he said, running the towel over Cedric's shoulders and pressing tightly against his chest. Cedric couldn't breathe.

"Sorry, what?" he asked, shaking his head slightly to try to clear the haze before his eyes.

"I don't care," Harry whispered into his chest, drawing his lips slowly across the skin. "People are always looking at me, spreading rumours about who I am, what I've done and what I think. I want you. I didn't know that I did, but now I do. And I don't care if they know." Cedric swallowed, thinking of his friends, his father, the image of the perfect son carefully cultivated through his entire life. Thinking of people looking at him the way he'd seen them look at Harry, whispering behind their hands, half-intrigued, half-afraid.

"Harry..."

The shorter boy reached for the back of his head, pulling him down, taking his lips in a kiss that was somewhere between rough and just alluringly sweet. Cedric felt himself drop the towel he had been holding, running his hands over the taut muscles in Harry's back, still discernable through the fabric of his robes.

"I don't care, either," he breathed against the other man's lips, and felt his gut clench, even as heat spiralled from it when Harry deepened the kiss.

*God, I've completely lost my mind.*

Harry smiled against him, and they broke apart, Cedric reluctantly beginning to reach for his clothes while Harry went over to the side of the pool to collect the golden egg, forgotten in the heat of the moment.

"So," he said, weighing the egg in his right hand and looking up at Cedric. "Any ideas on how to breathe under water?" Cedric took the egg from him, turning it in his hands.

"Not yet," he said. "But I'm sure we'll find something. Perhaps there is something to the Bubble-Head Charms Professor Flitwick keeps pushing, or there might be a potion, or some sort of magical plant. I'll ask around. Why don't you do the same? Even if you Gryffindors are as hot-headed and narcissistic as they say, there's bound to be at least a few of you with a head on their shoulders. Hey!" He laughingly removed the wet towel Harry'd thrown at him from his face.

"Look who's talking," Harry quipped, taking his egg back from Cedric and shaking out his invisibility cloak. "I don't see people referring to me as 'Pretty-boy Potter,' which is more than I can say for some people." Cedric raised an eyebrow at him.

"You obviously need to spend more time with the Hufflepuffs," he said, grinning. "But it's good to know that I have a fan club in Gryffindor. It might come in handy." He reached for his own cloak and pulled it on, fastening the clasp at the neck. "So, you okay with this? Working together, I mean?"

"Yeah," Harry said. "More than okay. Just as long as you know that once the signal goes off, you'll be on your own and I'll be beating you so soundly, you won't be able to show your face in your House for a week." Cedric laughed.

"Deal," he said, holding out his hand. Harry took it, and Cedric took advantage of the connection to pull Harry off balance, drawing him close for a last, heated kiss. "Goodnight," he murmured, reluctant to let go of the warm lips against his own. Harry smiled.

"Goodnight," he said, wrapping his cloak around him and vanishing without a sound right in front of Cedric's eyes. "See you tomorrow."

The whispered promise lingered in the air as Cedric stepped out into the empty corridor. Unable to wipe the grin off his face, he lit the tip of his wand once more and quickly made his way back to the Hufflepuff dormitories.

THE END

---

A/N: Please review! :-)