

A Taste is Just a Teaser

by christev

After a late night encounter, Draco can't get Harry off his mind.

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Chapter 1 of 3

After a late night encounter, Draco can't get Harry off his mind.

Author's Note: After reading [A Kiss](#), a lovely one-shot by [norwegianeyes](#). I just didn't want the story to end. This story assumes the events of A Kiss have taken place, and I humbly acknowledge my debt to her imagination.

Disclaimer: Making no money and anyone you recognize belongs to JKR... which is everyone, in this story!

Draco Malfoy put his quill away and stoppered his ink flask. He knew he wouldn't finish his Transfiguration essay as long as he had a clear view of Potter and his pals across the library. Ever since that night almost two months ago when he'd caught Potter out past curfew, he'd been having a hard time properly concentrating on his studies.

He wasn't sure when it had started. Potter seemed different this year. He'd heard stories, of course, about the showdown in the Department of Mysteries. How the same incident that had sent his father to Azkaban had killed the criminal Sirius Black. And how Potter had some kind of connection to Black. Whatever the cause, the result was that Potter was different this year. Always a bit of a drama queen, lately his mercurial emotions fluctuated between withdrawn-and-morose and flying-into-a-rage at the slightest provocation.

When Draco began to sense Potter trying to spy on him, his interest was piqued. He was having his own troubles this year. Dealing with his father's imprisonment was bad enough – who would've believed Fudge would have the unmitigated bollocks to send Lucius Malfoy to Azkaban? – without the additional burden of the task assigned him by the Dark Lord. Draco would have been tempted to tell the snake-faced monster to go slither up another tree, were it not for the threat to his family, should he fail.

So. Potter.

Potter had started out as a curiosity this year and had somehow morphed into an obsession. In classes or the library, upon hearing a drawn out sigh, Draco would turn to see liquid green eyes lost in a daydream, Potter's hands framing his delicate face as he leaned on his elbows. Other times (few and far between, this term), when Draco's taunts were able to rile him, those same eyes glittered bright with anger.

And when Draco began to encounter Potter in the oddest places, he realized that he was being quite unsubtly stalked. The worry of being caught trying to work out the Dark Lord's task only added to the amount of time Draco spent thinking about the Boy Who Lived.

The first time he pictured Potter's face while wanking came as something of a shock, but he couldn't deny the power of his orgasm. After that, fantasizing about green eyes surrounded by black unruly hair became part of his routine.

He hit pay dirt when he caught Potter out alone past curfew and wrangled a kiss from him. The memory of that kiss was imprinted on Draco's mouth. He'd taken to tracing the outline of his lips with one finger, finally forcing himself to stop when Goyle, of all people, remarked on his new habit.

Draco gathered up his parchments, placing them neatly in his carryall. He pretended to pay attention to book titles as he meandered between the stacks, heading slowly toward where the Golden Trio had their heads together.

"Harry, you can't keep – you need your sleep. And you know it's only a matter of time before you end up in detention—" Granger, lecturing, as usual.

"–or lose us House points, or get suspended from Quidditch." Leave it to Weasley to focus on what would hurt him.

"I – I just think better up there. And it's—" Potter choked back his words as he noticed Draco standing near them. "Nothing better to do than listen to conversations that don't involve you, Malfoy?"

Draco leaned against the table, sneering at the group. "Stuff it, Potter. As if anything you'd say is worth listening to! I just came over to tell you to be quiet and let the rest of us get our work done."

He glared at the green eyes just a bit longer than absolutely necessary, then turned and stalked out of the library. At least he'd be able to finish his homework back in his room, away from certain... distractions. When he got back to his room, however, a scrap of parchment fell out of the front pocket of his bag and fluttered to the ground. His mouth fell open as he read the messy scrawl.

"an enterprising prefect might find a prize worthy of detention atop the Astronomy Tower tonight"

Silently, Draco ascended the stairs to the Astronomy Tower, Disillusioned in case this was a setup. For a few moments, he thought the Tower was deserted, but then a tell-tale sigh drew his attention to the furthest corner from the stairwell. All Draco could see was a bit of a school robe lying on the floor. Potter must have that blasted cloak with him, but he had neglected to make sure everything was covered. In three quick strides, Draco had reached him and snatched up the cloak, uncovering a startled Gryffindor. Harry jumped to his feet and faced him.

"I can't believe you're stupid enough to get caught twice, Potter! One kiss wasn't enough for you, eh?"

"Not enough for me?! Who was it wanted a kiss in the first place, Malfoy? Does Pug-Nose know what you're up to when she's not around?" Everything about Harry's attitude spoke belligerence: chest out, chin jutted forward, and fists on hips. He took a half-step toward Draco.

"Whatever goes on between Pansy and me is none of your business, Potter. And before you protest too much, I seem to recall a certain... enthusiasm on your part last time, yeah? Hmm... not just last time, it seems." Draco looked pointedly at the unmistakable bulge in Harry's trousers.

"No, Potter, I think just one kiss was not enough for you, and this time you're asking for more."

Draco's heart was racing as he once again pulled Harry to him in a crushing embrace. Any protest from Harry turned into a moan as their lips touched. This time it was Harry's tongue demanding entry into Draco's mouth, tasting the other boy. Harry's hands slid through Draco's hair to cup the back of his head.

Draco couldn't hold back any longer. He forced Harry against the wall, grinding his arousal into him, thrilling to feel Harry's hard length against his own. One hand tightly grasped Harry's shoulder while the other rubbed his chest, feeling the hardened buds of his nipples. He and Harry were kissing so violently and frotting against each other so furiously, it more resembled fighting than snogging. He was close, so close to completion. His hand continued lower, past the hard muscles of Harry's stomach, beneath his shirt and around to his back. Draco had never been so aroused in his life as he slipped his hand down the back of Harry's trousers, one finger stroking between the cheeks of his arse. The two of them simultaneously cried out as they shuddered together.

"Guh! Malfoy! What – God! You pervert!" Harry could barely catch his breath to speak, his face florid and his body still shaking with the aftereffects of his orgasm. He shoved Draco hard, then punched him square on the jaw. Without bothering to do a cleansing charm, Harry grabbed up his cloak and fled to the stairwell.

Draco, still reeling from his own orgasm, was completely caught off guard, although he wasn't sure which stung worse, the physical blow or the rejection.

"I'm the pervert, eh?" Draco growled. "The one looking for a bit of private action with the Chosen One?" He pulled the piece of parchment out of his pocket and stared again at the familiar scrawl.

He ran to the top of the stairs and hollered after Potter's retreating form.

"Did you think I couldn't put it together, Potter? As if I couldn't recognize your penmanship – or lack of it – by now!"

fin

A/N: Many thanks go to miamadwyn and ApollinaV for their beta-reading and their encouragement.

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Chapter 2 of 3

After a late night encounter, Draco can't get Harry off his mind...

Harry Potter was in a bad way. He was a healthy sixteen year old, which meant his hormones were doing most of his thinking for him. Some days he felt so miserably horny he actually welcomed homework because it forced him to concentrate on something other than his demanding penis. Intellectually, he knew it was normal for him to be so freaking randy, but he was quite accustomed to thinking of himself as not normal. Anything but normal. So when the pictures supplied by his brain when he was wanking kept featuring a pointy-faced, white-haired, silver-eyed ferret of a Slytherin MALE, he wasn't sure whether to think of it as abnormal or just life as usual taking him off in another direction.

He used to think of boys who liked other boys as flaming poufs, shirt-lifters, perverts, sweet Sallys who had a little sugar in their shoes. But now he was starting to wonder. Faced with the fact that at least once a day he found himself gasping for air, pulling himself to completion, trying desperately not to shout Draco's name, he was beginning to accept that his shoes were the ones filled with sugar.

It was ironic that Harry considered being a flaming pouf a far less damaging secret than the identity of *whom* Harry fancied.

Being 'The Boy Who Sashayed' was also a little less newsworthy than 'The Boy Who Lived to Snog a Death Eater.' Harry was still working up the nerve to talk to Hermione and Ron about his first secret, which he knew they'd accept ... eventually, in Ron's case. He didn't know how they'd react to the second. So for now he daydreamed about Malfoy and stocked up on hand lotion.

He'd kissed Malfoy twice now. Both times Malfoy had initiated the kissing, even if Harry was the one responsible for their second meeting. He'd carried that note in his pocket for days before he'd had a chance to pass it to the Slytherin.

Their first kiss was definitely a wake-up call to his sexuality, but that night on the Astronomy Tower had rocked Harry's world. Oh, he knew about the things those kinds of boys did together; the guys talked about it sometimes after Quidditch practice, usually in the form of vulgar jokes. But he'd never had any experience except for a bit of very unsatisfactory wet kissing with Cho and two extremely hot kisses from Malfoy. Not to mention the touching. Oh, God, the touching.

Harry definitely wanted more of the touching. There was one big problem. He knew, just knew, that Malfoy was up to something, but hadn't been able to actually prove it yet, even after countless hours spent poring over the Marauder's Map or under cover of the Invisibility Cloak, tracking Malfoy's movements. He simultaneously wanted to string him up and snog him senseless.

About the only thing going Harry's way was the unexpected help in Potions he was getting from the Half-Blood Prince's book.

There! Harry watched as the pair of footprints marked "Draco Malfoy" walked up the dungeon corridor and headed off in what looked like normal territory for prefect rounds.

Draco Malfoy was in a bad way. He'd made two botched attempts at killing Dumbledore and was at his wits' end trying to think of another way to do the job. His mother's stress level was evident in the things she did not write in her letters. Snape was breathing down his neck, Potter was still spying on him, and he couldn't stop thinking about Potter's lips. The strain was beginning to show in his marks. He was no longer second only to Granger in Potions; Zabini had bested him on the last test. And he knew the Charms essay he was tuning in tomorrow was sub-par.

He couldn't talk to anyone about his problem either, so spending time with any of his friends was getting less and less tolerable. The only time he was with Crabbe and Goyle these days was when they were on guard duty for him.

At least his prefect status allowed him free roam of the castle after curfew. And he took full advantage. Punishing errant students boosted his mood a little. He wanted to catch Potter out late again, but he hadn't seen him after hours since the time in the Astronomy Tower. He wasn't entirely sure what he'd do though, since Potter gave him such mixed messages. Little tosser just couldn't accept the truth that he liked boys.

There was just too much to deal with this year, and Draco wasn't all that sure his sanity was holding.

Heaving a sigh, Draco left his Common Room to take up his nightly wandering.

Another uneventful evening passed, and both boys went to bed tired, frustrated, and out of sorts.

The next afternoon Harry resolved he'd force a conversation with Draco somehow. When he saw Draco's footprints just downstairs of him in Moaning Myrtle's bathroom, he dashed down there. Fortifying himself, he entered, rehearsing the line he'd prepared.

"Malfoy, that is, Draco, we really should talk. I..."

He stopped, mouth agape, transfixed at the sight of Draco Malfoy's tear-stained face.

"What do you want, Potter?" Malfoy snarled. "Not enough just to play the cock tease, now you feel it necessary to search me out and humiliate me any way you can? 'Hey, let's catch that little fag Malfoy crying like a girl in the loo!' Well, I'm sick of it!"

Malfoy grunted as he threw a Stinging Hex in Harry's direction, which glanced off Harry's Protego.

"No! Malfoy...! Draco...! Stop!" Hexes flew, and it took a monumental effort on Harry's part not to retaliate in kind, to only block them with Shield Charms. As Harry jumped out of the way, he was vaguely impressed with Draco's progress in spell-casting. Breathless, he finally managed to throw himself on Draco, trapping his wand arm against the wall.

"I'm trying to talk to you, you moron, that's all, just talk!"

"Oh, really? Are you going to tell me more about how snogging boys disgusts you so much? How straight you are? And how shoving your tongue down my throat was purely accidental?" Even pinned to a bloody wall, wiping sweat, snot and tears from his face, Draco managed an impressive sneer.

Harry reluctantly pushed off of him and leaned against the stall facing him.

"No. None of that. I... I guess I wanted to say... the Astronomy Tower. And the other night before that. I, um..." Harry ducked his reddening face.

"Gods, Potter, you're hopeless."

"I liked it, okay? I liked it. I thought you did, too. And I wondered if you wanted to... um, more." Harry ended almost on a whisper.

Draco stared at him.

"Do you have any idea what you're asking?" He moved imperceptibly toward Harry. "Any idea at all?"

"Oh, shut up, you idiot." Harry crossed the remaining space and grabbed Draco to him in a ferocious, breath-stealing kiss. Draco responded violently, not caring that their teeth clacked against each other or that in his desperation, he was bruising Harry's mouth. Harry reached down to grab Draco's loosely hanging shirt, jerked it the rest of the way out of his trousers, then started on his zip.

"Here..."

"Let me..."

Draco's fingers fumbled with the buttons on the fly of Harry's Muggle denims, finally just forcing them open. Harry reached Draco's cock at the same time, eliciting a drawn-out groan from him.

Draco pushed Harry's hand away so he could hold their two pricks together. They both gasped at the contact of the warm, luxuriously silky flesh, already thrumming in anticipation. He started to stroke, Harry's hand immediately curling in around his. Draco's eyes closed and his head lolled back. His other arm went around the dark-haired boy, holding himself upright against Harry.

"Oh shit, oh *shit* yeah, Potter."

"Harry."

"What?"

"It's Harry, call me Harry, Draco. Please, just say it."

"Harry. *Harry*. Oh, guh, HARRY!"

"Yes, Draco, gods, yes!"

For a long moment there was no noise but hard panting and the slight smack of flesh sliding against flesh. Then two voices moaned in unison as they came together. Harry fought to keep a whimper inside him and instead lifted one hand to Draco's cheek, cupping the fine pale flesh in his palm and stroking Draco's cheek softly with his thumb. Draco kissed him slowly, eyes still shut tight as if he didn't want this moment, this feeling, to end. He leaned his forehead against Harry's and drew a shuddering breath.

Draco looked down to where their hands were still joined and raised an eyebrow to Harry, giving him a small smile. Harry watched as Draco flicked his wand to clean the mess they'd made of themselves, and gently tucked first Harry, then himself, back inside their clothing.

Harry sighed. "I've thought lately how it would be nice if we didn't have to be enemies," he whispered.

Draco snorted. "You know, everything would have changed if the seating arrangement had been different on the Hogwarts Express our first year." He paused a moment, thinking back. "If we'd sat together back then, who knows? Maybe we'd be working with each other now, instead of against. Maybe even have gotten sorted together."

Harry smiled. "Can you imagine us in the same House? Only *really* can't picture you as a Gryffindor."

"Or you in Slytherin."

"Is it... Is it still too late, Draco? Is there not any way we can come out of this together?"

"Don't fool yourself, Har-Potter. Our ways have been set. We're both caught up in things.... I... We're both caught up in it. We can't turn around and change now."

"Bullshit! You've been up to something all this year! I know it, you know it. But if you want to get out from under it, you can. Go to Dumbledore! He'd help you, Draco, I know, and so would I! You could become part of the..."

"Shut it, you idiot! Don't tell me things that you know I can't hear! Go to Dumbledore? Don't you realize? There are things bigger than just you and me going on here!"

"But Dumbledore could help you! Listen to me, you great prat! He'd help you if you just went and told him what was going on!"

"And get my father killed? Potter, you can be so naive sometimes." Draco had begun to back away from Harry and now started pacing in the small room, his eyes growing wild and desperate looking.

"Merlin save me from self-righteous Gryffindors! Listen to me and listen good. Whatever it is you think I'm up to, you can't stop *me* *have to do this*"

"That's it? You're not going to even try to change things? It's too hard to ask for help? 'Our ways have been set?' Merlin ~~save~~ *save* me from cowardly Slytherins!" Harry lowered his voice, hissing out the words, "Are you going to take the Mark then, too?" Harry knew he was only making things worse, but they had been so frustratingly, maddeningly close. He just didn't know what he could say or do to make Draco see reason. And his fall-back behavior with the blond had always been this, taunting him to provoke action.

It came almost before he saw it.

"*Cruci...*"

"*Protego! Expelliarmus!*" He dove around the corner as his counterspell missed the mark.

Draco's face contorted as he aimed his wand, and Harry saw the yellow path of another hex heading toward him, barely missing his left shoulder. When had Draco perfected his nonverbal hexing? He was crap at them in DADA!

Harry searched his brain for a hex to throw back, and the writing in the Half-Blood Prince's Advanced Potions book came to mind.

"*Sectumsempra!*"

Beneath the Invisibility Cloak, Harry was watching Draco's progress again, this time from his vantage point in the Infirmary. Pomfrey had hardly left Draco's side after Snape had brought him in, but she had finally gone to her quarters for the night after putting a Distress Monitor Charm on Draco's still form. Harry neared the bed where Draco slept. He looked pale, much more pale than normal. He had lost so much blood. Oh, God, the blood! Harry knew with unaccustomed insight that it was only because he was "The Chosen One" that he hadn't been expelled.

The same clarity of mind told him now that Draco had been right. Maybe in another world, another time, they could have found a place together. Maybe after Voldemort was finally gone, they...

But that line of thinking would only drive him mad. He'd had a few shining moments with Draco. If there were to be more, they could only come because Harry had concentrated on the main task. Research Horcruxes. Find and destroy them. Take away Voldemort's backup plan, his quest for immortality. Figure out how to effectively and finally kill him.

A tear fell on the bedspread. Harry hadn't realized he'd moved so close.

"One day, Draco, I promise," he mouthed the words, not daring even to whisper aloud, "I'll make it safe for you. I'll make this up to you. Somehow, I will make this up to you."

Wiping the moisture from his cheeks, Harry stayed one more moment looking at the boy in the bed. The boy he'd hated, fought with, lusted after, yearned for... and almost killed.

With renewed purpose and a white-hot pain in his heart, he turned and walked out the door.

~fin~

A/N: This was inspired by [A Kiss](#) by [norwegianeyes](#).

I was so pleased to receive reviews on the previous chapter on both TPP and OWL, in which some readers asked me to continue the story. Thanks so much to all of you

who encouraged me like that. Another big thank you goes to Miamadwyn, who forwarded softobsidian's LJ post about Writing Buddies. I'd all but put this aside until then. And finally, many, many thanks to ApollinaV and Mischievous_T, who held my hand and beta read this, and without whose invaluable suggestions this story would have remained unposted.

A Christmas Story

Chapter 3 of 3

We are now into Seventh Year, and firmly in AU-land, so just ignore what you think happened that year. Harry is at Grimmauld Place for Christmas, and as it turns out, so is Draco.

A Christmas Story

Gasping and shaking from pain and the cold, a damp cold that insinuated itself into his bones, the man furtively looked about him. His sudden appearance was neither noiseless nor subtle; the fact he remained undetected was only because no sane person was out willingly on a fierce night such as this.

Satisfied that he'd not been followed, he peered at the house numbers. He knew he was close to his destination; he'd been here numerous times as a young child. He was counting on the home's recognition of his bloodline, combined with certain inescapable characteristics of its current owner.

He looked at the homes lining the street. The cozy holiday decorations and warm lights twinkling from many of their windows only heightened his awareness of the blustering wind and the inadequacy of his cloak against it.

He began walking, searching for the numbers which bracketed his goal.

It had been years since he'd spent Christmas at Grimmauld Place. He remembered the huge house as unfriendly and ugly, filled with numerous dark and scary alcoves. He had been pleased when his mother began insisting on hosting the family gatherings at the Manor.

Number 8, 10 and then Number 14. Even though he knew Number 12 should be there, he wouldn't be able to see it unless given the address by its Secret Keeper. That was fine he figured he'd rely on the Christmas spirit of the home's current inhabitant. He made a slicing motion on his left palm. When a small trickle of blood appeared, he smeared it on his wand, covering as much of it as he could.

He positioned himself in an attempt to be as close as possible to where the door of the house would be when it revealed itself for him. Right... there. If he squinted, he could make out the irregularities in the patterns of brick between the two homes. Concentrating on the between-ness, he raised his wand and spoke.

"Expecto sanctuarium!"

Panting from the effort of the magical exertion, he waited. Three beats. Ten. He wasn't sure how much strength he had left after the Apparition and then this magic that drew from deep within him. He had started to sag against the wall, chin dropping almost to his chest, when a hand appeared from nowhere, grabbed his arm and pulled. His eyes closed and all went black.

"Malfoy? Can you hear me?"

He knew that voice. Draco grimaced as he shifted toward the source of the question. He lay on something soft. Opening his eyes, he squinted against the light and looked at the figure seated opposite him.

"Potter? Is...? Am I...?"

"What the hell are you doing here? I'm not surprised you know where to look, but what was that... that...*summons*? And what's the matter with you? You fainted dead away when I grabbed you. The only reason I haven't called the Aurors is because you seem too weak to stand... that and I've got your wand."

"Curse. Cruciatis. Something else, dunno... You've potions? Anything? Can... can help me?"

It was an effort to speak louder than a whisper, and he wanted to use that effort in remaining conscious long enough to hear an answer. Normally, he'd be mortified at asking anyone for assistance. But incongruous as it seemed, Potter was one of the very few to whom he would turn at his weakest.

He focused on Potter's face, where emotions clearly visible, as always warred for control.

"Things *must* be bad if you're coming to me for help," Harry said, then heaved a sigh and shook his head. But decision was now evident in the set of his features.

"Thank you. Potter... Harry, you're..." Draco's relief allowed him to let go again, and he shut his eyes, letting oblivion take him.

He woke and must have made some sound for Potter roused and straightened in his chair. He reached for something on the bureau and offered it to Draco.

"Here, Malfoy, don't go fainting again before you drink this. It's Pepper-Up. I don't have a lot of potions, but this is left from a bunch of stuff we got from Madam Pomfrey a while back. In the morning, after you've eaten a little, I'll give you some Strengthening Solution."

Draco gratefully took the phial. His fingers lightly brushed against Harry's in the transfer. If he hadn't still been so exhausted, he would have made more of that touch. As it was, even the steam issuing from his ears couldn't keep him awake as his eyes drifted shut again.

Draco woke again, feeling a long way toward normal. He looked around the room, seeing Quidditch posters on the walls, a pile of dirty clothes in one corner, and a framed photo of Harry laughing with Granger and the Weasel from sometime in their fourth year at Hogwarts. He realized with a shock he was in Harry's room, Harry's bed.

He stretched his legs and arms, sampling the feel of the Chosen One's sheets. They were likely overdue for a cleaning, but he didn't care. He turned his head into the pillow and inhaled Potter's scent, thinking of the two scarce occasions he was close enough to get a good whiff of Potter's natural aroma. Of course those two instances were so sexually charged that considering the raging pheromones, probably anything would have smelled good to him. Finding more comfort than arousal in the smell, Draco wrapped his arms around the pillow, buried his face in it, and inhaled deeply.

"You two want to be left alone?" Potter sounded rather smug.

Shite! "It's called stretching and deep breathing, Potter, gets one's limbs and lungs ready for the day." He didn't really care how ridiculous that sounded. He sat up in the bed and looked at Harry, whose brow was raised slightly in disbelief.

"Right. Well, when you and my pillow are through, you have some questions to answer."

"Erm." Draco shifted uncomfortably, breaking Harry's gaze. "We shouldn't really be talking. And I'm leaving as soon..."

"Leaving? You're not going anywhere without your wand."

"My... Listen Potter, you know I can't tell you anything. Now just..."

Harry interrupted again.

"Wait. For one thing, you're the one who forced this little tête-a-tête. You're not going anywhere until you tell me what the hell is wrong with you. I mean, there's all sorts of stuff I used to say was wrong with you, but... you know. I mean what happened to you? You couldn't even stand up last night. That's not from just a Cruciatus, not unless you had a prolonged bout of it, to practically suck all the magic out of you. And what could you *possibly* have been thinking by coming here? Not to mention that whatever-it-was that *called* me to come get you. And what is it you want from me?"

Harry's questions came fast and loud.

Draco screwed his eyes shut and held up his hands.

"Merlin's balls, Potter! One at a time. If I tell you why I'm here, will you give me my wand back?"

"You'll have to answer a lot more than that to get your wand. You're a wanted man, Malfoy. Your face is pasted on posters all over. You think I wouldn't turn you in? Why did you come here, of all places in the world?"

Draco looked back at Harry, deciding something.

"Here it is, Potter: I knew you're too much of a Gryffindor to refuse me, and I was banking on our... uh... *history* that you wouldn't call the Aurors without at least hearing me out first." They stared at each other, neither saying a word, but both obviously thinking about that 'history.'

"Um." Now it was Harry's turn to squirm. He made a go at looking serious and determined, crossing his arms as he leaned against the bureau. "Well, I haven't called the Aurors yet, that's true... but I haven't decided not to, mind. I'll be seeing two of them tomorrow for Christmas at the Burrow, for heaven's sake. Right. Next question: What in Circe's name was that thing you did? It felt like a summons or something, like I had to go *get* something, *do* something, but had no idea what it was."

"How much do you know about magical history, Potter? And not that rubbish Binns shovels out year after year; I mean old pure-blood ways, ancient magic."

"You mean Dark..."

"No, not Dark, just old. And not used that much in a world that isn't filled with feudal fiefdoms. I pled Sanctuary from the home of my ancestors, a home to which I have a blood claim, and that holds blood protection for me. This particular house might not be from feudal times, but the Blacks always prided themselves on following the old ways."

"I... I guess that makes sense. Merlin knows there's more magical residue in this place than seems good for anyone gives me the creeps sometimes. So moving on, what happened to you to get you so weak you fainted twice on me."

Draco laughed mirthlessly.

"You might say *you're* the cause of my condition, oh Boy Who Won't Give Up. Let's just say the Dark Lord has been very displeased with me for my inability to do anything up to his standards, and he is displeased with you because, well, you're *you*, and you're proving ridiculously hard to kill. And since he can't inflict his displeasure on you, he'll do so on me.

"He's changed the Cruciatus Curse somehow. Or combined it with something, I'm not sure. But it lasts longer, and seems to leave you a lot weaker. You have that thrown at you several days in a row and see how long your magical energy lasts..." Draco trailed off, lost in thought for a few minutes before he continued.

"He was done with me and went off somewhere on a new rampage, so I left as soon as I could. No one there seemed all too eager to help me out, and if You Know Who would've decided to give me a few more goes, it probably would have killed me. Hell of a Christmas present, eh?"

Harry tried to replace the stricken expression on his face to one of forced neutrality, with minimal success.

"Draco..." Harry finally sat down, resting on one side of the bed. He started over.

"Draco, why... what made you ever think it was worth going with that maniac? Was it just because of your parents?"

"Gods, Potter, there is no 'just because' of my parents. I'm a *Malfoy*. Family is *everything*. I had no choice in following the Dark Lord, just as you had no choice but to follow Dumbledore."

Both of them flinched slightly at the mention of the wizard whose death did not come at the end of Draco's wand, but might as well have.

"If I had not obeyed what I was commanded, to find a way to get the Death Eaters into the castle, and to kill the Headmaster, it would have meant my death. But only after my mother and father were killed in front of me first. There was no other choice, Potter. That's what I wanted to tell you last year, but how could I?" Draco slumped back down in the bed.

Harry thought of what Lupin and Moody had said, that Draco had been given an impossible task, doomed for failure from the start, that was likely meant as punishment for his father's failure at the Department of Mysteries. He wanted to ask what the point of even trying was. But then he thought of the love he felt for his own parents and imagined he'd try to do the impossible, if it meant he'd be able to be with them. He realized Draco was waiting for him to respond.

"And so... what now? What do you want from me?"

"It's Christmas Eve, Potter."

"Harry."

"Harry. It's Christmas Eve. And while I realize I'm no hope for the world, isn't it a bit of a tradition to give a person a safe place to spend the night on Christmas?"

Harry searched Draco's eyes for any hint of duplicity, and found none.

"Yeah, Draco. I guess you could say it is. Here, budge over."

Draco looked at Harry questioningly.

"Oh, calm down, fragile flower, I'm not going to take advantage of your delicate condition," Harry sniggered. Draco rolled his eyes and then budged over.

"Draco?"

"Yes?"

"You can't go back to Him, you know. Not... not now that you've come here. And not if you're just going to get yourself killed." Harry wanted more than anything to get this next bit just right. "Draco, I want you to be safe. And I know you want your parents to be safe... Maybe there's a way to do both. Let me talk with the Order..." Draco flinched "...or at least just Professor McGonagall to see how we can work this out."

They stayed that way for a while, just lying in the bed together, touching along the length of their bodies, but neither making a move toward more intimacy as they stared at the ceiling.

"Remember our very first meeting, Harry?"

"Honestly, Draco, how could I forget? I thought you were such a stuck up little shit."

Draco snorted. "Well, I was. And why shouldn't I have been? I thought you were a right arse for refusing to shake my hand when we got to Hogwarts. There've been so many times since then I've thought..."

Harry turned on his side and propped up his head on his arm.

"Yeah, I know. Different choices and all," he said gently.

Draco cleared his throat and turned onto his side facing Harry. He touched Harry's free hand with his.

"Just one little handshake, and we'd have been side by side in all this..."

Harry sighed. He curled his hand around Draco's for a moment, then moved his hand up Draco's arm, stroking gently, as if he were calming a nervous Thestral. When he reached Draco's shoulder, he reversed directions. Up and down he drew his hand again, then continued to trace the line of Draco's throat. He felt Draco swallow, and moved his hand to cup Draco's cheek, his thumb gently stroking the curve of his ear.

The two men silently regarded each other. Draco moved his hand to balance lightly on Harry's waist as he slowly leaned toward him. He closed his eyes, and kissed Harry firmly on the lips for a moment, then drew back.

In the distance, a clock bell began to chime the midnight hour.

"Happy Christmas, Harry."

"Happy Christmas, Draco."