

# Gilderoy and Lucius: The Battle for Peacock Domination

by *Clairvoyant*

Gilderoy Lockhart has a new roommate at St. Mungo's: Lucius Malfoy, freshly released from Azkaban.

## One-Shot

Chapter 1 of 1

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Disclaimer: JKR owns 'em, I just plays with 'em.

A/N: This story is a gift fic for the inimitable lulabelle72, writer extraordinaire and awesome LJ ambassador. It is based on a plot bunny that Lula had graciously given up for adoption so long ago. The original prompt from tonksinger can be found below. Finally, I give my undying gratitude to my beta, kittylefish, for the countless hours she spent plodding through this story, giving it a high gloss shine. Thank you ever so much, kitty.

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Gilderoy Lockhart preened twice as long on Wednesdays as on any other day of the week. For on those particular nights, St. Mungo's served the best Italian-themed dinner of any hospital for magical maladies and injuries in the British Isles. That it was the only hospital of its kind in Britain went without saying, but nevertheless, the Wednesday evening meal alone was worth the price of admission. With any luck, the memory-challenged wizard might be able to sweet-talk the dining room attendant into giving him a second helping of tiramisu.

Gilderoy spent all afternoon in meticulous preparation. He soaked in a lavender-scented bubble bath, its aromatic, calming benefits prevailing over the slightly feminine fragrance. He used a special moisturising shampoo on his long, wavy, golden locks, then applied cream rinse *and* conditioner to his crowning glory. He spent an inordinate amount of time fussing over his hair, like a peacock dressing his impressive plumage. After drying himself with the threadbare, standard-issue institutional towels, he donned a French waffle-weave robe with matching slippers. At precisely five o'clock, an aide would arrive to magically shave Gilderoy's face, but in the meantime, the vain wizard stared intently at his reflection in the mirror of the antique mahogany vanity.

"Gilderoy, old boy," he addressed himself, flashing his dazzling trademark smile, "you may have lost your Gobstones, but you are still one handsome devil."

Freshly shaven and dressed in the finest lilac silk charmeuse robes and custom-made, Italian leather shoes, Gilderoy slowly made his way to the dining hall, pausing to introduce himself to anyone having the misfortune to make eye-contact with him.

"Hello, ladies. I'm Gilderoy Lockhart," he charmingly announced to a family of visiting witches. "Did you know they are serving an extravagant, seven-course Italian meal tonight?" He didn't wait for a response before forging ahead with a boastful, one-sided conversation. "The chefs in this fine establishment are utilizing recipes I created years ago whilst on holiday in Tuscany. I would favour you with my autographed portrait and regale you with tales of my adventures in *Italia*, but I fear it would delay my enjoyment of tonight's repast. I regret our time together has been so short. You didn't have an opportunity to discover the real me; you barely scratched my surface, as it were. Oh, well. Goodnight, ladies." He walked away in a billowy, silken flourish, leaving the gobsmacked witches to ponder the strange encounter.

He arrived at the private dining room of the Janus Thicky Ward, gliding regally to his seat. Gilderoy was the most famous resident self-proclaimed, of course of the long-term care ward, and accordingly, he occupied a place of honour at the head of the long, rectangular table. He considered the ward's ugly, utilitarian furniture an insult to his cultured aesthetic sensibilities, but it was well-constructed and all the pieces matched. It still annoyed him that hospital administrators had not consulted him when they redecorated the ward in late-20th-century-boring style. And then there was the dinnerware. *Plain white? Merlin's bollocks, why not apply a bit of magic to create a beautiful table setting, complete with Waterford crystal and Royal Dalton china edged with a delicate 24k-gold trim?*

Gilderoy claimed his seat and beamed at his fellow residents shuffling into the room, slow and graceless, in his opinion. At any given time, ward 49 housed a dozen or so witches and wizards, ill-fated victims suffering permanent brain damage from a variety of jinxes, hexes, curses and so forth. In an ironic turn of events, Gilderoy, once an expert himself in memory charms, had become a casualty of an unsuccessfully executed *Obliviate* and had lost his memory entirely. With the help of dedicated Healer Miriam Strout, he had regained a few of his precious memories. Still, there remained many incongruous puzzle pieces he could not fit together.

"Good evening, friends." He couldn't be bothered to learn the names of all his fellow residents. "Please find your places quickly, so I may be served dinner as soon as possible. I look forward to Italian night more than any other, so I want to take full advantage. Sit, sit." He gestured at each empty chair with an impatient index finger, sharply stabbing the air.

A few had enough sense to be insulted and glared in response, but he was too self-absorbed to notice. Once they were all comfortably ensconced in their mass-produced chairs, the meal was served. The first course, an antipasto, included prosciutto and salami, provolone and mozzarella, olives, roasted red peppers and other marinated vegetables. The diners tucked in at a leisurely pace, quietly conversing while eating, yet not engaging in these activities simultaneously. They knew such an infraction of good manners would merit the wrath of Lockhart, who frequently noted that in polite society, one did not speak whilst engaging in the act of mastication, which by the way, must always, always be done with tightly closed lips.

Gilderoy's nostrils flared as he inhaled the aroma of the second course, thick, hearty Minestrone with macaroni, whole beans, chunks of tomatoes, pieces of spinach and garnished with freshly grated Parmigiana cheese. Gilderoy savoured every luxurious spoonful, enjoying the rich flavours, each swallow punctuated with a sigh of contentment. His quiet mewling went unnoticed, his dining companions ignoring him for the most part.

Where usually Gilderoy made every attempt to be the centre of attention in all situations, on Italian night he preferred to be left alone to enjoy his meal in singularly hedonistic fashion. On every other day, when the food was less than adequate, he made amends for his anti-social behaviour on Italian night by regaling his ward 49 compatriots with a detailed accounting of his daily activities. He assumed stories of haircare, arts and crafts mostly self-portraits, of course, made in different media and the other minutiae of his life brought endless enjoyment to the dull lives of the spell-damaged folks. In actuality they had learned to tune him out long ago, his incessant, self-promoting chatter a faint buzzing to their ears. But Gilderoy remained blissfully unaware of their feelings toward him, and no one was bold enough to speak up and tell the blustery fool to shut it.

Once the soup plates were cleared away, the meal continued with ricotta-stuffed manicotti, smothered in beefy, tomato-saucy goodness. The main course, a rich, heavy ossobuco alla Milanese, redolent of tomatoes, carrots, celery, onion and herbs, was accompanied by risotto, creamy and tender.

The meal concluded with a rich and delicate tiramisu made with decaffeinated espresso because the last thing the staff needed at night was wide awake, brain-damaged magical folk prone to sudden, caffeine-induced outbursts of wandless magic. In the days of yore, when they had served coffee with pudding on Italian night, strong containment spells had been needed to keep the residents from using accidental magic to unlock their doors and inadvertently escape. But tonight everyone passed on the tempting dessert except for Gilderoy, who had two helpings.

"The chefs outdid themselves tonight. Bravo," he cheered, patting his slightly bulging belly. "My boyish figure would be ruined were I to partake of such gustatory pleasure every night. It's a good thing the kitchen puts out such bland offerings at every other meal. I'm less likely to indulge in that swill."

While the other residents retired to their rooms for the evening to enjoy some unstructured time before lights out, Gilderoy lingered in the dining room over his espresso-soaked-lady-finger-and-mascarpone confection. He chatted with the dining room attendant, who worked evenings at St. Mungo's to pay for school.

"They tell me I wrote some very popular books about my adventures, battling Dark creatures and all that. I don't remember any of it, however the writing or the fighting. Have you read my collected works for any of your classes at University?"

The pretty, young witch smiled slightly as she shook her head, then turned away and continued to tidy up the dining room. She collected the food-encrusted china and flatware, levitating them into a large dish pan before Disapparating with it to the kitchen. When she returned to the dining room no more than ten minutes later, she found Gilderoy fast asleep in his chair, snoring lightly, a golden forelock quivering with every breath exhaled. The young witch quietly chuckled to herself at the sight, but she refused to disturb him until she completed her task of setting the table for the morning meal. The silence was golden; she enjoyed the brief respite from his constant, self-centred chatter.

Her gentle hand upon his shoulder caused him to wake with a start. "Who goes there? Friend or foe?" he questioned timidly, unsure of his surroundings.

"It's me, sir, Glinda," she reassured him with a quiet, soothing voice. "I'm sorry to disturb you, Mr. Lockhart, but you fell asleep in the dining room. Again."

"Oh, yes, of course... Well, that happens when I'm full of fabulous food," he stammered, flashing his dazzling white smile, trying to cover up his faux pas. "Did you know they served an extravagant seven-course Italian meal tonight? The chefs in this fine establishment used recipes I created years ago whilst on holiday in Tuscany. I would favour you with an autographed portrait and regale you with tales of my adventures in *Italia*, but the hour is late, and I fear it would impinge upon my beauty sleep. I regret our time together has been so short. You didn't have an opportunity to discover the real me; you barely scratched my surface, as it were."

"Thank you for your kind offer, Mr. Lockhart," she said, giggling. How many times had he used those tired, scripted lines on her already? "You gave me an autographed photo last week, remember?"

He stared blankly, not recalling the incident at all, but he had so many adoring fans clamouring for pictures, he couldn't be expected to remember them all.

"Well, anyway, it's close to lights out, and you must return to your room." She bid him goodnight and watched him leave the dining room before she locked up for the night.

Gilderoy glided through empty corridors back to his room. As he approached, he noticed the open door, bright light pouring into the darkened hallway. *Well, that's peculiar. I could swear that the lights were dimmed and the door closed when I left for dinner.* His sixth sense instantly activated; something unusual was happening. Was there an intruder in his room? Or worse, had someone tampered with his belongings? There would be hell to pay if his haircare products were missing!

He crept stealthily along the corridor wall to his doorway and quickly poked his head into the room to assess the situation. A moment of silent observation revealed an unknown man with long, platinum blond hair seated at the vanity. He examined Gilderoy's antique, silver-plated hair brush, his fingers rubbing the monogram on the back before experimentally smacking it against his palm, gasping slightly at the sting of cool metal against his tender flesh.

Gilderoy's right eye twitched nervously, watching this stranger touch his precious possessions. The puffed-up, territorial wizard could stand it no longer. "Who are you?" he demanded loudly. "Why are you touching my things?" He stormed into the room, lilac robes billowing in his wake, the alpha male standing his ground against a challenger.

The man rose slowly, but with graceful economy, and extended his hand in greeting. "Good evening," he drawled, smooth and sexy. "I'm so sorry we have to meet in such an awkward, informal manner. I am Lucius Malfoy, your new room-mate."

The wizard's well-bred manners put Gilderoy at ease, but only slightly. He shook the man's hand firmly, but watched his face closely with narrowed eyes. He had hoped to intimidate this newcomer with his penetrating stare, but Lucius only smiled, showing no outward signs of discomfort. He took in Lucius' striking blue-gray eyes, exquisitely high cheek bones, aristocratic nose, and full, soft lips. Gilderoy wasn't about to surrender his well-earned privacy by giving this man uncontested entry to his room.

"I'm Gilderoy Lockhart," he introduced himself with confidence and his flashy trademark smile. "I'm sure you've heard my name bandied about the wizarding world on more than one occasion. I'm a famous author and conquistador, taming the many and varied Dark creatures that would wreak havoc on us."

"I know who you are or, more appropriately, *were*," Lucius said, barely concealing his contempt. "We were classmates at Hogwarts, Lockhart. Don't you remember?" He took half a step forward, almost invading the dandy wizard's personal space.

"Really?" Gilderoy's voice cracked as he tried to hold his ground. He truly did not remember this handsome, slightly menacing wizard.

Lucius had a talent for making uncomfortable situations even worse. "Yes. You were in Gryffindor, home of the brave, boastful and foolhardy. How did you end up here, a resident of this particular ward?"

Gilderoy's voice was small and sad in response. "Memory loss. I don't recall the incident." He continued, however, with his usual swagger. "No doubt it happened whilst I faced off against some hideous monster, thus saving the damsel in distress." He swung his arm in a swift, figure-eight pattern, as if brandishing an imaginary sword. "You'll sleep well tonight, Malfoy, knowing there are no Dark creatures here in St. Mungo's."

Lucius smirked, muttering under his breath, "Not that you had anything to do with that." He backed away from the other wizard and moved toward the more luxurious of the two beds in the room. "Now that you mention it, sleep does sound rather good. I've had a long, tiring day, fraught with one annoyance after another."

Gilderoy saw an opportunity to give the boot to this intruder. "Apparently a mistake has been made regarding your sleeping arrangements, old boy. You see, this is a private room. I've never had a room-mate in all my time here."

"There are two beds in here," Lucius countered, walking toward the braggadocio, encroaching on the other wizard's personal space once more. "So it can't be a private room, old boy. Besides, I overheard the administrators say this ward is currently full to capacity. It is the only option, however uncomfortable the situation may be." He stopped, inches away from his new room-mate, who stepped back in concession, or perhaps submission. Lucius chose that moment to smile graciously.

"Right, then. You can have this bed," Gilderoy said cheerfully, directing Lucius toward the standard issue hospital cot with its scratchy, grey wool blanket and stained, threadbare sheets. He patted the manky, old pillow at its head, hoping to demonstrate the innate charm the bed held. However, all he managed to do was send clouds of dust and goose down into the tension-filled air.

The rusty, old bed springs seemed to groan with arthritic pain as the high society, pure-blood wizard sat on the bed, testing out the mattress with a few bounces. "It will have to do... for now," he said dejectedly. He couldn't help but stare at the ponce's bed, a four-poster masterpiece of gleaming, hand-carved mahogany. A sumptuous, deep-purple velvet duvet covered lilac-coloured Egyptian-cotton sheets six-hundred thread, no less all layered neatly upon the thick, comfy, pillow-top mattress; a bed fit for the ward's most ostentatious resident, indeed.

Gilderoy knew a covetous look when he saw one, and his room-mate's stare forced him into action. He hurtled headlong onto the bed, claiming his property. "You wouldn't do well in this bed at all. It's custom-made for me, you see. *Lum-ba-go*," he explained, drawing out the syllables as if he were lecturing a group of first-year Healers, not a disinterested, snobby wizard.

Lucius rolled his eyes as he reclined on the plain, functional bed. "Goodnight, Lockhart," he said in an exasperated whisper.

"Goodnight, Malfoy," Gilderoy responded in kind before using the wandless Clapper Charm to force lights-out in the room.

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Gilderoy awoke Thursday morning with a pounding headache, a migraine brought on by clenching, an unconscious reaction brought on by stress, an anxiety brought on by a room-mate who snored at very high decibels throughout the entire night. It was a wonder the whole hospital hadn't collapsed from the earthquake-like vibrations.

"I will have to insist that man be placed under a time-released Silencing Charm at bedtime. If I don't get at least eight uninterrupted hours of sleep, my boyish good looks will be shot to hell." Despite his temporary disability, he noticed that golden silence reigned at that moment. Not only had he awoke in solitude but his room-mate's bed had already been made and quite neatly, too. Gilderoy heartily endorsed neatness.

He dressed and completed his morning toilette in record time; he wasn't going to allow a headache to stop him from enjoying the full English breakfast buffet. He arrived at the ward's private dining room in a swirl of gold satin and brocade robes. But the sight that greeted him there stopped him dead in his tracks at the doorway.

At the head of the table *my place of honour*, Gilderoy thought sat Lucius Malfoy, buttering toast with a delicate thoroughness, wearing his handsome, devil-may-care smile. *Just who does he think he is?* Anger spurred him to action, each stomp of his saffron-yellow silk slipper-clad feet crushing the commercial-grade, plush carpet and echoing with a light thud. He stood beside the former Death Eater and glared at him with narrowed, icy blue eyes, hands on his hips for added effect.

"You're sitting in my chair." If petulant behaviour were to be rewarded, Gilderoy would be crowned 'Drama Queen of the Janus Thickey Ward'.

Lucius was poised to take a bite of sausage when he looked up. "Oh, I'm sorry. Were you talking to me?" He took a vicious bite of the skewered link and chewed in a slow, exaggerated, rhythmic fashion.

"As the ward's most famous resident, I always sit at the head of the table."

Ennui had a new standard bearer in the platinum-haired wizard as he replied, "I wasn't aware there were assigned seats in the dining room. I don't see a chart posted. Nobody said anything when I took this seat."

Gilderoy huffed in frustration. "Well, I don't understand why such an oversight occurred. Everyone knows the pecking order around here."

"I'll keep that in mind for the future. In the meantime, there are other seats available." Lucius gifted his room-mate with the most insincere, plastic smile he could muster before returning to his rapidly cooling breakfast. He took a bite of toast, chewed a bit, but his swallow was interrupted by the sound of the arrogant, loopy wizard clearing his throat.

"I'm not moving from this spot until you vacate my chair." His voice was raised, but tremulous; he was unaccustomed to anyone challenging his authority.

Alice Longbottom jumped into the fray. "Keep it down, Gilderoy. You're making a ruckus and ruining our breakfast."

His eyes grew wide at her accusation. "I'm ruining your breakfast? What about me? Why aren't you up in arms about Malfoy ruining my breakfast?"

She pleaded with soft eyes and voice. "Please, Gilderoy, just sit down and let us eat in peace."

"I'd rather eat standing up than sit anywhere but there," he replied, pointing at Lucius, who continued to eat while the drama unfolded.

"Well, it's settled then," Alice said cheerfully. "The attendant can bring you breakfast, and you can eat on that spot. Seems a shame to disrupt Lucius midway through his meal. He's endured so much hardship of late, haven't you dear?" She patted his hand, and he responded with a forlorn, pouty nod.

For the duration of the meal, the peevish man stood whilst eating. However, his ongoing tirade, denouncing that 'seat-stealing miscreant Malfoy,' interfered with his fine motor skills, and he failed to demonstrate proper dining etiquette. Unable to utilize flatware in any meaningful manner while holding his plate, he used his fingers to shovel

food into his mouth. Large morsels fell from his plate, only to be ground into the carpeting. Worst of all, the conceited wizard was talking with his mouth full and inadvertently spraying hapless, irritated ward-mates with bits of egg and toast.

When Lucius had sipped his last drop of tea, he daintily dabbed at the corners of his mouth with his napkin, refolded it to place atop his plate, and bid his fellow residents farewell as he stood to leave.

He paused beside Gilderoy for mere moments to whisper frosty words with warm, Darjeeling-scented breath. "In polite society, Lockhart, one never speaks while eating."

The pompous wizard stopped mid-chew, mouth agape in silent indignation.

Lucius smirked and added, "For good measure, you should keep your mouth closed when you chew. Have a good day."

Then he took off in a swirl of fine gabardine wool robes gray with purple undertones which vaguely reminded Gilderoy of a set at the back of his wardrobe. *The nerve of that man, making off with my robes! Does fit him rather nicely, though, snug across the chest and shoulders, swishy around the hips...*

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Conditions seemed to return to the pre-Malfoy status quo for subsequent meals. However, it could be argued that Gilderoy no longer presided as de facto leader of ward 49. For while he sat at one end of the long, rectangular table in the private dining room, Lucius took up residence at the opposing end; the beast of popularity no longer had a clear-cut head, just two arses. The ward remained blissful and quiet as long as the narcissistic wizards avoided each other, but since they were room-mates, keeping their distance proved to be a Sisyphean task.

On Saturday afternoon, a commotion took place on the Janus Thickey Ward, as if a concentrated cyclone had let loose gusty micro-bursts of damage in the Lockhart-Malfoy room. Gilderoy opened every drawer and cabinet, dumping his belongings onto the floor and, after a cursory glance, tossing them aside to begin his search anew. Robes of all shades purple and blue were strewn willy-nilly upon the floor, and silken boxers hung from the wall sconces, threatening to combust at any moment. Autographed portraits and stationery-grade parchment flew through the air en masse to land on the ever growing pile of refuse.

"I can't find it. Where in hell is my favourite peacock quill with the matching peacock blue ink? I've searched through all my possessions, and it's still missing. Where could it..." He turned mid-sentence and contemplated his room-mate's side of their quarters, spartan and neat. "I bet a thousand galleons that supposedly reformed Death Eater has taken my quill, and he's using it to plot another heinous coup d'état of the Ministry."

With renewed furore, he tore through Lucius' property, scattering the man's meagre belongings atop his own. He even ripped open the manky, old pillow, certain he would find his special peacock quill hidden amidst the common goose down. The room was a disaster area now replete with tiny, dusty feathers on every surface.

When his quill hadn't surfaced, despite his thorough search (and destruction) of the room, only then did he burst forth into the hallway, shouting, "Whoever has my peacock quill, I demand you return it this instant. And my special ink, as well. I promise no harm shall befall you, as long as my property is returned to me at once."

From inside her quiet office, Healer Darcy Bridges heard the commotion in the corridor and went to investigate. Her eyes grew wide as she noted a drastic change in the wizard's appearance. His face was pinched so very tight, only a licensed aesthetician could have brought it back to its former boyish beauty. His wavy were locks awry, pointed in several directions at once. His robes were creased and crumpled, marred by oily stains from broken bottles of moisturisers and haircare products. Little feathers dotted his messy hair and stuck to the greasy spots on his robes.

"Gilderoy," she spoke in dulcet, soothing therapist tones, "please tell me what has upset you so?"

"My quill is missing, Healer Bridges. I have searched my entire room and it's not there," he whined as he pointed out his handiwork to her. "This leads to one conclusion and one conclusion only: there is a thief amongst us, the quiet law-abiding citizens of the Janus Thickey Ward. It has to be the newcomer, Malfoy. He was a Death Eater, after all."

The comely witch's eyes widened further at the sight of the normally neat and tidy room in utter disarray. "You cannot make such claims without proof. It is a sure way to alienate your mates."

He stomped his foot like a spoiled child who had been denied his very own Oompa-Loompa. "I don't think you understand the gravity of this situation. That's my favourite quill, and I use it to sign all my portraits and write responses to my adoring fans. It's made from the tail feather of a royal peacock, I'll have you know." He was so agitated the veins in his neck were threatening to burst open and spray the therapist's lime green robes with his precious life's blood.

Healer Bridges placed a gentle hand on his back and directed him toward her office. "Gilderoy, let's go and have a cuppa, and you can tell me all about it."

After a warm, milky cup of Earl Gray and thirty minutes of his self-centred blathering, Gilderoy had calmed down to a normal level that being an overwhelming concern for his personal appearance. When a glance in the mirror demonstrated how dreadful he looked, the golden-haired goof excused himself and returned to his room to freshen up. The scene which greeted him gave him pause. For there on his vanity, unharmed amongst the broken glass and puddles of *Dorian Gray's Fountain of Youth Moisturiser Just for Men*, he saw his prized peacock quill and its accompanying ink. They sat atop a note, written in the most perfect script.

Dear Lockhart,

Thank you for the use of your stationery and writing implements. I just assumed you wouldn't mind if I borrowed them without asking your permission first. In my haste to leave Azkaban, I didn't have time to make any arrangements for the transfer of my personal belongings to St. Mungo's. Seems my mind is like a sieve these days. Oh, well, I suppose that's why I'm here and not locked away in that hell-hole in the North Sea.

Sincerely,

Lucius Malfoy, reformed Death Eater

P.S. - That really is an exquisitely gorgeous quill.

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With order restored to their room, a delicate détente was achieved between Gilderoy and Lucius. They managed to avoid each other, save for mealtimes and sleep. While the poncy wizard admired his reflection in the vanity mirror while strictly following his beauty regimen, Lucius would enjoy blissful solitude in the solarium. While the Slytherin wizard attended to his correspondence, Gilderoy could be found pacing the hallways, searching out his rabid fans to gift them with autographed portraits or regale them with stories of his bravery.

But the following Monday morning, the peace and quiet shattered into jagged shards of tension. It occurred during art therapy, a Muggle programme instituted by Healer Bridges in hopes of encouraging healing and life-enhancement through creative expression. All residents of ward 49 were expected to participate at a level commensurate to their skills and interests. Some would sketch with pencils, pastels or charcoal. Others preferred the fibre arts of sewing, knitting, and needlepoint. A few were devoted to painting in different media: watercolours, acrylics, oil-based paints. Gilderoy and Lucius were two such wizards who delighted in putting brush to canvas.

On the morning in question, a bowl of assorted fruit rested atop a shaky pedestal shaped like a Grecian column, Corinthian to be precise. Lucius chose to go against convention and paint in an abstract style with oils. Gilderoy adored the artists of the Renaissance and leaned toward a realistic representation using acrylics. But the fruit display never quite satisfied his aesthetic. He rearranged the succulent pears next to the fragrant oranges and stepped back to his easel all while holding his thumb up at arm's length to judge perspective. After only seconds of superficial contemplation, he rushed back to the bowl and tucked the cluster of green grapes into the sensuous concavity of the bananas.

Back at his easel, he evaluated the subject once more, tilting his head from side to side, narrowing and widening his eyes for focus. "It's still not right." He exhaled a heavy sigh of such long duration, it must have collapsed every alveoli in both his lungs. "Healer Bridges, I'm simply uninspired by this composition. It lacks balance of colour, shape and texture. The addition of a pomegranate, a few kumquats and a star fruit will put it right."

"Oh, for Merlin's sake!" Lucius exclaimed, his brush and palette thrown to the ground with such force as to bounce several times, leaving in their wake colourful paint splashes on the drab carpeting.

"If anyone within the sound of my voice is in possession of a wand and willing to cast the Killing Curse upon me, I will absolve you of all guilt and pledge to you my undying gratitude."

"Just how do you intend to give your undying gratitude to your killer if you're already dead?" Gilderoy questioned, his mind just sharp enough to note the irony of Lucius' incongruous request.

The platinum-haired man embodied sleek, predatory grace and rabid anger as he reached Gilderoy in two strides, grabbing him by the lapels and jerking his lithe body just once. "I can't stand this... this... anal-retentive, nit-picky, egocentric ponce of a has-been."

Gilderoy winced each time his face was hit with frothy spittle issuing from the irate man. He wrested himself from Lucius' grip, then quickly smoothed his wrinkled robes as he stepped back, lest he allow the man another opportunity for attack. A smart wizard would have hidden behind Healer Bridges' skirt, feigning fear of the mean, old Death Eater; Gilderoy, however, was not that wizard, or his enormous ego simply overruled the logic centre of his brain.

"Me? An anal-retentive, nit-picky, egocentric ponce of a has-been? You brush your hair so much, I'm surprised it hasn't fallen out entirely by now. And Merlin forbid if the mushy peas come within a centimetre of the mash on your plate. And your reputation precedes you. Apparently you weren't famous or wealthy enough to escape imprisonment. Were you too stingy when you lined the pockets of influential Ministry officials or members of the Wizengamot?"

Silence. His verbal attack was answered with unexpected silence. In the few seconds it took for the smug smile to spread across Gilderoy's face, Lucius leapt into action, tackling the loopy wizard to the ground, knocking over the bowl of fruit in the process. They wrestled and rolled about the floor arms, legs and robes all tangled each man trying to gain the upper hand. Healer Bridges allowed their ineffective grappling to continue for mere seconds before she cast *Dirimere* to separate the hooligans, then *Incarcerous*, and completed her hat trick with *Silencio*.

The humiliated, emasculated men struggled against their bonds, the magical ropes tightening around their bodies like Devil's Snare, restricting their breathing and painfully chafing the delicate skin of their hands and necks.

Healer Bridges spoke with threatening authority reminiscent of Minerva McGonagall when the stern educator would dole out detentions to naughty Slytherins. "If you're done behaving like petulant children, I'll release you, and we'll talk like civilized adults in my office."

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By mid-morning that Monday, peace and calm were restored to the Janus Thickey Ward. Gilderoy reclined with ease on the therapist's Swedish modern sofa naturally from Ikea staring blankly at the white ceiling. While he enjoyed the pleasant surroundings and comfort of Healer Bridges' office, he didn't understand why he was under scrutiny; the fight was due entirely to Malfoy's provocation. The wizard in question sat on the opposite side of the room in a matching modular chair, posture perfect, legs crossed, hands clasped in his lap, face curiously blank; he appeared to be the model resident, quiet, demure and bland.

Next to Gilderoy, Healer Bridges sat in an uncomfortable replica of a Queen Anne chair, constantly pulling on the hem of her tight, short skirt and clicking her Muggle pen with annoying regularity. "Gentlemen, in your own words, tell me why you are in my office today. Let's begin with Mr. Lockhart." She readied her note pad to record his responses.

The absent-minded wizard's eyes darted furtively around the cozy, panelled office, finally alighting on the framed collection of personal photos arranged neatly on the bookshelves. "You wanted an autographed portrait of me? You know, it wasn't necessary to set up a special appointment just for that. And please call me Gilderoy. May I call you... what is your given name?" He added a flirtatious wink, hoping to dazzle the young witch with his charm.

It seemed Darcy Bridges was not easily swayed by a pretty face. She glared at him and shook her head. "You may address me as Healer Bridges." She tempered her professional manner with a smallest of smiles. "You are here today, *Gilderoy*," she stressed his name, "because of your recent behaviour, which culminated in today's fisticuffs. In addition to that, twice as many complaints have been lodged against you in the past five days as in all of last year."

He was momentarily silenced, taken aback by her statement. "Really? Are you sure your records are accurate?" She nodded, smiling through gritted teeth. "I thought I was the very model of the perfect resident here. I'm shocked and wounded to think my compatriots are complaining about *me*. Perhaps they are hypersensitive of late. Were their potions adjusted recently?"

Healer Bridges released an impatient sigh. "That's uncalled for, Gilderoy. Every single Janus Thickey Ward resident has submitted a formal complaint against you, save for one, your room-mate, Mr. Malfoy."

That revelation provided the perfect segue for Gilderoy's whinging. "Well, I would like to lodge a formal complaint against him. Did you know that he..." The healer raised her hand, and he stopped mid-tirade, accusations still caught in his throat like bugs on adhesive no-pest strips.

She clicked the pen again and added foot tapping to her irritating repertoire. "Let's remain on topic, shall we? I'd like you to explain your behaviour. In all your years at St. Mungo's, Gilderoy, you have been as docile as a Pygmy Puff. What has happened to change that?"

Lucius indulged in the tiniest of smirks, seeming to enjoy her admonishment of Lockhart.

"Healer Bridges, for such an experienced therapist, your lack of insight is shocking." Gilderoy bolted upright and planted his feet on the floor, ready to defend his actions others considered offensive. "That one," he said, jerking his head in Lucius' direction, voice overflowing with more venom than an adult basilisk. "He usurped my authority, stole my property, called me names and physically attacked me. I had to defend myself. But it's all his fault."

His words began a subtle transformation, from the righteous indignation of perceived injury to the plea for rescue from heartbreak of the worst sort, jealousy. "The status quo of the Janus Thickey Ward has been unbalanced since Malfoy's arrival." When he said his room-mate's name, Gilderoy's left eye began to twitch with abandon. "I've not received half of the recognition I so richly deserve. No-one cares for my opinion any more, but they hang on every word *he* utters. Where are my accolades? I am the proverbial dragon slayer, and he is nothing but a wealthy, slick, snake oil salesman."

Gilderoy looked to his therapist for the answer, but she was not the one to provide it.

"Healer Bridges, if I may interject my observations please," Lucius offered, his tone at once both sympathetic and condescending. He moved forward before she could voice

her objections to his arm-chair analysis. "Gryffindors by nature are glory-seeking trollops; Lockhart is no different. He wants to be the centre of attention in every situation. If the spotlight fails to illuminate him for even the briefest of moments, he is sullen beyond belief. He suffers from narcissistic personality disorder, a pervasive pattern of grandiosity, a need for admiration, and a general lack of empathy."

Gilderoy nodded in agreement, eyes wide in amazement at Lucius' perspicacity. *He really does understand me.* His interest piqued, he leaned toward the handsome man, hoping to encourage more of his spot-on character description.

Healer Bridges had other ideas. "Mr. Malfoy, a generalization like that is wholly unfair to Mr. Lockhart. Since when do we allow a silly, old hat to define us? Being a resident of this ward for less than a week hardly qualifies you to dole out psychological diagnoses."

"Let him speak, Healer Bridges," Gilderoy implored in earnest. "I'm intrigued by his analysis." He looked expectantly to Lucius, a curious smile playing upon his lips. *His hair looks shiny and so touchable. I wonder what he uses?*

Lucius wore his most clinically indifferent expression, his blue-gray eyes flat, his full lips a slash across his flawless, pale skin. "My presence here hasn't disrupted the delicate balance of power, but rather I have inadvertently pushed Lockhart out of the limelight because I'm a new resident and people are curious about me. But I'm not interested in being the centre of attention. I like being in control. I like being... dominant." He dropped his mask of indifference and revealed his true face, a killer smile showing off his perfect, white teeth, eyes glimmering with the seductive charm of a snake luring a mouse to an intimate dinner.

Gilderoy fought hard to contain his glee. It wouldn't be proper behaviour to hurtle himself across the room and envelop his new best friend in a tight hug; rather, he nodded in agreement, quirking a tiny smile to show his gratitude. He would gladly give up control if it meant he could be the nexus of the Janus Thickey universe once again.

"Well, then, I think we've reached an understanding," Gilderoy turned to address the therapist. "I promise exemplary behaviour on my part; I will be the model resident once again. So if you have no objections, we'll just..."

Gilderoy and Lucius had risen mere centimetres from their seats and were about to make a hasty retreat when Healer Bridges cast a sticking charm to their bottoms, effectively holding them captive.

"Not so fast, you two. There are many issues still to cover. Mr. Malfoy, your comments about control and dominance alarm me and need to be addressed."

"And I promise to make an appointment with you to discuss that and more," he said in his smoothest coercive tone. "However, the lunch hour is upon us. This morning's activities have left me exhausted and famished, so I'm quite eager to break bread with my friend here."

She narrowed her eyes and crossed her arms. "Very well, but I expect you in my office after lunch." No sooner had the words left her mouth, she cancelled the sticking charm with a deft swish of her willow wand. She instantly regretted her impulsive action.

"It will most likely be after tea, if at all today," Lucius said almost apologetically. "I'm going to need a nap after the midday repast to regain my strength." Even the experienced Darcy Bridges wasn't immune to his manipulations. The room-mates departed together, Lucius guiding Gilderoy with a feather-light touch to his back. As they walked away, he could be heard complimenting the other man. "Lockhart, your hair looks fabulous today. You simply must tell me what you use."

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Harmony returned to ward 49 by lunchtime that Monday. On their way to the dining room, the wizards discussed the aesthetic and engineering changes that would be required to allow them to sit side by side at the head of the table. Lunch was a very pleasant experience for all the residents. No longer were bitter words or glaring looks flying across the room.

Perhaps most astounding, Lucius and Gilderoy genuinely enjoyed each other's company; the men discovered they had much in common, despite the differences in their backgrounds. Both were fascinated with peacocks, haircare, fine food and wine, classic literature and art, especially the glowing, colourful landscapes of Impressionist Claude Monet.

From that day forward, Gilderoy and Lucius were inseparable like brothers from another mother together at every meal and activity. They were only apart for therapy sessions with Healer Bridges. Even she noted Gilderoy's narcissistic tendencies had diminished now that he held a rapt audience of one in the palm of his manicured hand.

She also noticed that while Lucius allowed his friend to shine in the spotlight, behind the scenes, the Slytherin wizard discreetly manipulated him like a marionette. He made *suggestions* as to Gilderoy's choice of clothing, secondary dining companions, topics of conversation, daily activities. In other words, he seemed to control his room-mate's every move.

Since nobody complained especially the other residents the therapist didn't feel a need to broach the subject with the men. But late at night, in the privacy of her office, she sometimes wondered what else Lucius might be controlling, especially behind closed doors. Such ruminations always ended with a vigorous shake of her head, clearing it of all those twisted thoughts. *Oh, I mustn't go there, lest I be the one in need of therapy.*

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Prompt: Gilderoy Lockhart has a new roommate at St. Mungo's: Lucius Malfoy, freshly released from Azkaban, and as loony tunes as dear Gilderoy, not to mention having as much charm and ego.