

# Princes in Exile

*by LiteraryBeauty*

After the war, Harry Potter is left with no one to save, no one to fight, and one extra wand. Draco Malfoy escapes punishment by leaving the country... or so he thinks. Seven years pass before they see each other again. Draco is no longer the master of his wand and a battle of talent and wills ensues. A story of a wand without a true master, and two men who fight to master each other... and themselves.

## Chapter One

*Chapter 1 of 28*

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**Author's Note:** This fic is co-written: every other chapter will be written by me. Chapters written in Harry's perspective are mine, chapters written in Draco's perspective are written by the lovely and talented keppiehed.

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### Chapter One

Harry's fingers flexed around his holly wand even as his feet pounded on the pavement. Blood rushed to his heart, the panting of his breath lost amidst the cries from his Auror squad and the hexes fired at him.

Just another day on the job.

"Neville!" Harry shouted, but his partner had already ducked the curse and shot two back in quick succession.

Throwing a wild grin, Harry threw a hex with a wide arch of his wand. Time seemed to judder and fray as the hex twisted through the mire of red, green, and black spells to land with fury against the chest of the attempted murderer.

With a cheer, Neville approached the would-be killer, casting *Incarcerous* with a sneer that Snape himself would have been proud of. The rest of the team hung back, giving Harry and Neville the chance to secure the area.

"Brilliant work, Harry." Neville was breathless but obviously exhilarated. The man they'd chased through half of Diagon Alley gave them both baleful glares. He half-twisted a few times, probably trying to Disapparate, but the Auror-level binding spell was jinxed against Disapparition.

Not against spitting, though. Neville grimaced in distaste and spelled away the glob of saliva from his crimson robes.

"Not so bad yourself, Longbottom," Harry said. Heartbeat returning to normal, Harry couldn't help but nod at a job well done. They'd been staking out the bloke for nearly a week before he'd finally left his flat. Neither Harry nor Neville had expected to have to chase the bastard, but they were more than trained for such circumstances.

"Wrapped up neat and tidy," remarked a familiar voice from behind them. Ron dismissed the rest of the squad and a series of pops marked their departure.

Harry turned, accepting Ron's pat on his back. "Couldn't have done it without you." Ron had been stuck on desk duty for ages. He and Harry weren't able to work together...too many instances of being foolish and rushing in. Ron hadn't been paired with another partner yet, and Harry had been teamed with Neville, who, even Harry could admit, did an amazing job of keeping him in check.

Still, he missed his old partner. He imagined he would have been hauling Ron off the perp rather than having him tied up in neat knots if things had been different. Ron was there for identity verification; once he'd confirmed the magical signature of the man who'd tried to kill his brother-in-law for cheating on his sister, he replaced the binding spell with a cuffing spell and Apparated them both to the Ministry for processing.

"Pint?" Neville suggested, still catching his breath. He had the flushed cheeks of an Auror whose day was done. Harry knew his were the same.

"Can't," he said, infusing regret into his voice.

Neville nodded, the epitome of understanding. He never pressed; not like Ron. That was probably the only good thing about no longer having Ron as his partner. The constant pressure to go out, to *do* things, wasn't there anymore.

Feeling guilty for his negative thoughts against Ron who only had the best of intentions, Harry said, "Rain check?"

"Of course." Neville smiled. "You just let me know."

"I will," Harry said, saying the words and meaning the opposite.

\*

Harry wasn't naïve. He was a lot of things, things Ginny would probably love to list if she thought he'd listen, but he wasn't naïve.

He'd known, going into Auror training, that it wouldn't be like Dumbledore's Army or the Order of the Phoenix. There would be paperwork and bitter coffee and rules to follow (and not break). Still, knowing all that didn't change the fact that he'd expected more. Every day began to blur together much too quickly. He'd always assumed that sort of rush of time wouldn't start until he was at least middle-aged. Being only halfway through his twenties should have meant every day was an adventure, or at least had the potential to be.

By the time he'd finished training, he'd realised he was being groomed for Minister. He'd been only nineteen years old. His horror at this discovery had led him to beg Kingsley Shacklebolt for mercy. *Take the Minister position permanently*, he'd pleaded, heart on his sleeve, bared for disappointment.

Because Harry would have done it. If he'd been needed, if he'd been better than the best choice, he would have taken that role as expected, conformed to that ideal yet again. He'd hate himself every day and probably pickle his liver in a matter of years, but he'd do it. Harry's duty to the wizarding world hadn't ended with that final *Expelliarmus*. No, things had only begun.

Naïve.

Kingsley had heeded his pleas, and Harry didn't think he'd ever stop being grateful.

Tipping more Firewhisky into his mug...not his teacup; fuck you, Ginny...Harry contemplated his paperwork. The write-ups following such a major bust were almost enough to convince Harry to let criminals go free. He'd be much more inclined to catch the bad guys if ten hours of deskwork didn't immediately follow.

Once the Firewhisky bottle was little more than swirling dregs and the name of the person he'd help take down escaped him, Harry pushed the paperwork away with a sigh. When had life become so rote?

By habit, Harry withdrew his hawthorn wand to start some water boiling for tea. Better for everyday magic, Harry's second wand was impressive in its flexibility. His own wand, the holly and phoenix feather, was perfectly suited to putting paid to evildoers and halting nefarious schemes aplenty, but it was a little overzealous when it came to day-to-day spells.

After the war, if it could even be called such, had ended, Harry had found himself in possession of two wands. He'd had, of course, every intention of bringing Draco Malfoy's wand back to him. He'd gotten as far as the front door of the Manor, and that was a feat in itself, considering Harry'd vowed never to return.

Draco hadn't been there. Lucius and Narcissa Malfoy had been missing as well.

With the wand burning a hole in his pocket, sometimes even literally (the wand was as spiteful and pernicious as its former owner), Harry had kept an eye on the Manor for a few days. He'd known, or thought he'd known, that the Malfoys would not just leave all their possessions behind.

When the news had reached the Ministry, still in its fledgling state of reestablishment, that the Malfoys had fled sentencing and punishment, there had been an uproar.

People wanted justice, the newspapers had claimed. People wanted closure, as was said in secret.

Harry just wanted to give the fucking wand back.

His first concern had been making sure Severus Snape got the accolades he deserved. And what a bittersweet pill to swallow that particular discovery had been. The extent of Dumbledore's machinations still sent a shiver down Harry's spine. He'd since vowed to never be so manipulative...not even for the greater good. Not that he thought he had it in him, of course, but it never hurt to make a vow one knew one could keep.

After Snape's posthumous Order of Merlin had been awarded...to Harry...and hung in the Ministry atrium, Harry had focused his attention on getting Draco and his mother exonerated and Lucius Malfoy's sentence lightened. Draco's refusal to identify him and Narcissa's lie about his supposed death had saved his life. As far as the testimony from the rest of the Death Eaters desperate to make a trade to evade Azkaban, no one had claimed to witness Draco or Narcissa cast an Unforgivable. With that knowledge, he'd been able to have the entire family's sentence lowered to a mere seven years' exile from the wizarding world.

Harry had no idea whether they even knew about what he'd done for them, let alone if they'd actually left the wizarding world. Knowing how spoilt Draco had been, he doubted the boy could have made it even a few months in the Muggle world. Still, no one reported them and Harry hadn't found them. Not that he'd really searched... He'd simply had some time off every summer. He wasn't one for sunny beaches, so he'd travelled a little.

Okay, he'd travelled a lot.

To no avail. Draco and his parents were missing, their seven years' almost up, and Harry *still* had a wand he didn't want. At this point, however, he had no idea as to whether he could give it up. He'd fallen into using it while his own wand had been in another room or the time it'd gotten trapped in his trunk and wasn't able to come when Summoned. That had been a long week.

With Draco's wand, almost as familiar as his own now, Harry fixed his tea.*sans* Firewhisky because he was a good lad...and glared at the paperwork until he fell asleep at his desk with the bitchy wand jammed under his cheekbone.

\*

During his Hogwarts years, Harry had always thought that he, Ron, and Hermione had formed something of a triangle. Each corner offered different talents, different insights, different perspectives. He'd even gone so far as to think the line connecting his point and Ron's had been shorter than the lines connecting them to Hermione. It wasn't her fault; she was a girl. Back then, that had been rather important. There was also the fact that Harry and Ron shared a dorm and had Quidditch in common, not to mention not being altogether brilliant or very good at studies at all, when it came down to it.

So he had to wonder when it had happened that the line between Hermione and Ron had shortened, and the ones between them and Harry had become so long that he was almost a part of another shape altogether. Someone's random rhombus or maybe just his own lonely dot.

That was depressing.

Across the booth from him at the Three Broomsticks, Ron and Hermione held hands under the table and shared smiles and drinks and looks full of concern. They were like bloody parents already, and they'd only just gotten engaged.

"What now?" he asked, wariness heavy in his voice.

It wasn't enough to ward them off, especially Hermione. She was brave, that one. "Now, Harry, don't take that tone. We're only concerned about you! We love you and..."

"And we want you to be happy," Ron finished. He basked in Hermione's warm smile for a few gag-worthy moments before they turned their identical sympathetic faces toward him.

He didn't like being disloyal but *honestly*. Just because he hadn't settled down to put a rock on some bird's...or bloke's...finger didn't mean he was damaged goods.

"I'm fine," he said through gritted teeth. He sent a strained smile Rosmerta's way, and like a charm, she was at his side...against his side, really, the cheeky wench...with another double Firewhisky.

Hermione lifted her empty butterbeer glass to signal that she wanted another, but Rosmerta slinked away, winking at Harry from behind the bar.

Fame. Wasn't it supposed to corrupt *him*? Why did it seem that everyone was affected by it *but* him?

"You haven't had a decent relationship in ages," Hermione reminded him after sending Ron to the bar for refills.

"Define decent," Harry retorted with a leer. He laughed at her blush, amused that she always went red whenever he spoke about his exploits.

"I meant... meaningful."

Harry shrugged. Not everyone was looking for that other half, that soul mate. Some people might not even believe such a phenomenon existed. Harry wasn't entirely sold one way or another, thought Hermione and Ron made a decent argument for it. "I'm not ready for meaningful," he admitted.

"Merlin, Hermione, let the bloke sow his oats a bit before you have him making babies like he was a Weasley."

Harry turned to the familiar voice. Justin Finch-Fletchley. Things hadn't ended well between them, but it might be nice to have someone on his side again...and he didn't just mean on his side of the bed.

"Hey, Justin," Harry said, hating the almost shy tone of his voice. That was why he never pulled...he just wasn't assertive enough.

"Hey, baby." Justin smiled, knowing Harry had come to hate the nickname. They'd only been together a few months, but it had been enough for Harry to discover exactly what he *didn't* want in a relationship with another man. Pet names were high on the list.

"Mione, Luna's here," Ron said, coming back to table. He eyed Justin, a warning in his face. Never really friends, animosity had grown between the two after Justin had broken it off with Harry; it didn't matter to Ron that Harry really hadn't minded.

"Oh! I haven't seen her in... Harry, will you be okay?"

"Course," he said, shooing them away. "Tell Luna I say hullo."

Ron hesitated but followed Hermione after a moment, throwing Harry a look full of support and a very clear message to not go there again.

"Been a while," Justin remarked. He looked Harry over slowly, moves right from the Saucy Twink Handbook.

"How've you been? How's Micky?" Justin's cat was missed more than Justin. The cute little thing had attached itself to Harry from the first, and Harry regretted losing the purring ball of warmth at his feet much more than the purring warm weight of Justin.

"Good. Fat, now."

"Yeah? That was fast. I told you to get him indoor cat food."

Justin laughed. "Yes, you did."

For a moment it was easy. Justin was familiar. He was sexy. He knew how Harry liked his cock sucked, and anything was better than a lonely wank in his bed.

"Want to come over for some drinks? We can pick up some cat food on the way and tease Micky about his diet."

Harry was tempted. Justin's hand smoothed over his shoulder, the touch reminiscent of the fifteen minutes or so things had been perfect between them.

"Can't," he said finally, putting a more appropriate amount of space between them. "Have to work in the morning."

Justin pouted and Harry knew he'd made the right choice. There'd always been something fabricated, something forced about being with Justin.

"Another time, then?" Justin purred, making Harry even more nostalgic for Micky.

"You bet," Harry said. He didn't plan on burning that bridge just yet. A man had needs, after all, and being the most famous wizard in the magical world made finding a boyfriend next to impossible. Why was it that only witches sent knickers in the mail?

He made his way over to Luna, Hermione, and Ron, who were standing near the bar. Luna's earrings were blinking blue and pink, and Harry let them guide him through the crowd.

"How are you?" he asked, pulling her into a hug. She smelled like raisins.

"Just fine," she said, her voice barely travelling over the raucous of the bar. "Just passing along the news."

Luna owned and wrote for the Quibbler and always had the best gossip. That the gossip was interspersed with random factoids about imaginary creatures or exposés on wizards long dead and gone was just another part of the charm.

"What's the scoop, Luna?" Harry asked brightly. He was in a good enough mood, despite having turned down a sure lay, to entertain notions of reincarnations and mystical happenings.

"Sources say," Luna began in her best serious tone, "that Draco Malfoy is back in England."

## Chapter Two

*Chapter 2 of 28*

After the war, Harry Potter is left with no one to save, no one to fight, and one extra wand. Draco Malfoy escapes punishment by leaving the country... or so he thinks. Seven years pass before they see each other again. Draco is no longer the master of his wand and a battle of talent and wills ensues. A story of a wand without a true master, and two men who fight to master each other... and themselves.

**This chapter was written by *Keppiehed*, whose journal with all her writings can be found here: <http://keppiehed.livejournal.com>**

Chapter Two

Draco stared out the mullioned windows at the rain. It lashed down in great torrents, matching his mood. He clenched his jaw, the only outward sign of his agitation he would allow.

"Malfoys don't mope about, Draco. I had hoped that you would have outgrown such theatrics by now."

Draco stiffened, but didn't break his stance. "I'm hardly *moping*, Father. Merely enjoying the view."

Lucius approached his son. "Come, now. First brooding and now lying about it? Tsk, tsk. Your manners are deplorable. A mere seven years away from polite society, and look at you. What would you're..." He broke off and fell silent.

Draco whirled about, his eyes as raging as the storm outside. "My mother? What would she say? Well, I don't imagine much, *Father*, as she's a little indisposed, what with being dead and all."

The silence hung thick between them. Lucius' eyes glittered. "Don't speak to me in that tone, Draco," he warned. "And don't be flippant. It doesn't suit you. You sound like a spoilt child." Lucius sniffed and flicked nonexistent lint off his sleeve, the tension broken. "You are behaving in a most unbecoming manner. This has to stop. We came back to do our duty. It's time to let it go."

"And how do you suggest I 'let it go'? You don't have to live with the fact that you could have saved her," Draco said, the bitterness heavy in his voice.

Lucius looked at his son uneasily. Narcissa was the one who had been better equipped to deal with these sorts of things. He sighed. Needs must, it appeared. He put his hands on Draco's shoulders, hoping it didn't feel as awkward to his son as it did to him. They hadn't been big on touching when Draco was younger.

"Draco, look at me."

He tried for stern and commanding, which was his specialty. "We have been over this before. Many times. You can't still believe that you carry the fault for your mother's death. She caught pneumonia. In her weakened state, this is the course that nature takes. Your wand wouldn't have made a bit of difference."

"You can't know that!" Draco burst out. His eyes were suspiciously shiny.

Lucius released him and looked away, giving Draco time to compose himself. "I had my wand. Narcissa had hers. It was just time, son."

Draco said nothing.

Lucius faced the window and gazed thoughtfully at the raging tempest. "We came for what we intended. Our deed has been fulfilled. Your mother's ashes are resting in the family vault. I, for one, realize that I am tired of running. When we came back here and I saw the state of this place, what I had allowed happen to our ancestral home... I'm not leaving again, Draco. This is your legacy. I may have to go to Azkaban, but this is your home. One day, Merlin willing, it will be your sons' home. The entire Malfoy ancestry isn't going to break with this little snag in the line. I'll pay that price. I'm going to go tomorrow and see what we can do to make this right. Perhaps I should have done that a long time ago."

Draco gaped at his father's back. "What are you saying? After all these years? You made me live in *America*! In the fucking middle of nowhere! For what? So you can just go turn yourself in like a common criminal?"

Lucius frowned in disapproval. "Draco, language. You make it sound as if we were living in some kind of hovel. We were in New York, for Merlin's sake. It is one of the art and cultural centers of the Western World."

"It was nothing short of hideous," Draco stated stubbornly. "They didn't even have *tea*. Nothing proper, at any rate. Only that dreck they insisted on peddling every morning instead. I couldn't get a decent cup of Earl Grey until we got back to England!"

Lucius laughed and turned to face Draco. "You can have all the Earl Grey you can drink now. Crates of it."

"Do you really have to turn yourself in, Father? Do I?" Draco asked seriously.

Lucius cocked his head. "Word's gotten out, my son. They know we're here. It's better to make the first move, choose your ground for the opening volley. That's how you

beat them at their own game."

"But are you going to win? Are we?" Draco felt like a child again, asking impossible questions. His father always did that to him.

"Of course. Malfoys only play games they can win." Lucius said it with confidence.

Draco knew his father couldn't possibly know the outcome, but for some reason he believed him.

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Breakfast the next morning was a somber affair. Both men had taken to dressing more casually in their time away, as it seemed the Americans didn't have the sort of style and panache that the Malfoys were accustomed to for everyday wear. While they still maintained their grooming, they had needed to learn to dress down a little to blend in. So it was something of a shock for Draco to see his father in dress robes at the breakfast table after so many years. Although Lucius looked impeccable, it cast a sense of foreboding over the meal that neither man was willing to acknowledge. They ate in silence, both absorbed in their respective thoughts.

All too soon it was time for Lucius to depart. There was too much to say, but true to form, Draco couldn't seem to find the words to voice his fears. And Lucius wouldn't. They faced each other in the foyer.

"I shall return shortly," Lucius said. He raised his hand, as if he wanted to touch Draco's cheek, but then he dropped it to his side and turned on his heel. He was gone before Draco could think to say goodbye.

Draco had never realized how empty the Manor was until he was left abandoned in it. He couldn't remember a time when he had ever been so utterly *alone*. He had never had a lot of friends over as a child, but there had been bodies...unseen and unappreciated, but there nonetheless. House-elves were always present and lurking, around to lend a hand, to be called upon to do his bidding. The Manor had been alive in its own way; even if he couldn't see it, he could sense it. Of course his parents had been there if he had need of them. He had wanted for nothing.

Now he was in a shell of his former existence. The Manor had been ransacked. While the damage had been less significant than he had imagined, it had left a mark. Of course, there were no more servants. The rooms were deserted. Magic was gone from this place. His mother was dead. His father had just left. And Draco was completely without his magic. He couldn't even clean the dishes from breakfast like a wizard. He was no better than a... he didn't even think the word mudblood. Muggle. He was no better than a Muggle. He scowled at the thought. It had never bothered him so much as it did right at that very moment. The indignity of being magicless in his own home bit deeply.

He supposed he could have have gotten another wand, but at what cost? It wouldn't have been *him*, wouldn't have had his essence. It would have felt like an imposter. After all, as much as Draco didn't want to give credit to the old windbag Ollivander, it seemed he knew his craft. The wand *did* choose the wizard. Draco had held others in the years since he'd gotten his own, and none felt right. They were too blunt, too weak... nothing fit him just so. They were not an extension of his reach, as natural as his own hawthorn beauty. If he couldn't have his own wand, he didn't want one at all, he thought petulantly. It hadn't seemed as bad when all three of them were living the mundane life together in America, where they were forced to keep up the pretence of being Muggle. Never had it grated so much on his nerves, the loss of his own property, as it did right now. Now he felt it keenly, as if it had just happened. It was if he had lost an appendage. How had he gotten by so long without it?

He rolled up his shirtsleeves and got to work in the kitchen. He had learned a lot in his time living in New York. He didn't like living like a commoner, but he could do it. He had learned to survive. In fact, most days he didn't even think of it anymore, he just got by. It must be something about this place, something about being home that made it rub raw. It was like a scar had reopened and was trickling blood. It irked him to wash dishes in the kitchen of Malfoy Manor, although he'd been doing it for the last seven years without complaint. Well, without much complaint.

A loud thud on the window made him jump. He looked up to see an owl on the sill, waiting to be let in. Draco dried his hands and reached over to let it in. Who could be owling him? He untied the note.

*Draco,*

*I heard rumours that you were back in the country and living at the Manor again. I can only hope that this is true. I have searched everywhere for you and haven't found a trace. I suppose that's a good thing...if I can't find you, no one else can, either. Anyway, if you are reading this, know that I am still your friend, that you can always count on me. You need only let me know what I can do to help you. I had hoped you would return after your sentence of exile had finished. It has been a long seven years, but now that you are back I know it will be like no time has passed. I just want you to know that I miss you, and I hope that this finally finds you...that, and this rumour is true. Please let me know that you are safe.*

*Yours always,*

*Pansy*

Draco stared at the note with unseeing eyes. He could hardly believe what he was reading. He had to go over it, line by line, before the message finally sank in. They were free? Their sentence had been exile for seven years? Then... his father would be safe! They were free!

"Accio paper..." Draco broke off in irritation. Old habits. It was something about being back at home. He hadn't even attempted magic in all his time away. He had things to do now, and he didn't even know where they kept the quills and parchment!

It took him some time to locate the supplies to compose a response to Pansy, but he hadn't felt this excited in a long time. It was time to get his life back! There was so much he had to do, but he couldn't do it without help. Pansy would be a good place to start. She had always been loyal to him, had always hung on his every word. It sounded like she still felt the same way. He could use that.

Draco clenched his fists. The first thing he had to do was avenge his mother. It was true that it was his fault that she had died, but it was his fault because he didn't have his wand. And the reason for that was because of a certain Harry bloody Potter. No doubt Potter had spent these years since the war being toasted as the *crème* of society, soaking up the hero and saviour bit for all it was worth. Draco's eyes blazed at the very thought. It was time to bring Harry down a notch or two.

## Chapter Three

*Chapter 3 of 28*

After the war, Harry Potter is left with no one to save, no one to fight, and one extra wand. Draco Malfoy escapes punishment by leaving the country... or so he thinks. Seven years pass before they see each other again. Draco is no

longer the master of his wand and a battle of talent and wills ensues. A story of a wand without a true master, and two men who fight to master each other... and themselves.

Author's Note: Wow, sorry about the delay in posting this! I swear, I need a secretary. Enjoy!

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Harry heaved a sigh and pushed back from his desk. Neville had long since headed home, leaving Harry to catch up on work that didn't need to be done for days. It wasn't that he was the overachieving type...far from it. He just didn't particularly relish going home some days. If he got there after it was already dark, it didn't seem as... lonely. It was perfectly acceptable to be alone in one's flat after dark. When it was still light out, that was when Harry felt uncomfortable, like he should have friends over or that he shouldn't be in that early at all. He was still young, after all.

The problem was that he didn't have it in him to go out with his friends as much as he used to. He had neither the energy nor the desire. Once a week was the most he could manage, and even then, he was slipping out before midnight, giving excuses that didn't match the reality of his sad life.

Glancing outside, he saw that he had at least another half hour before the sun set. The evening shift had already started...Harry could hear them outside his door. Harry envied their built-in excuse to never have to go home in daylight to an empty house.

Just as he was starting to pack up his briefcase, there was a knock on his door.

"Come in," he said, grateful for the last distraction.

"Auror Potter, Lucius Malfoy is here to see you," said the bright-faced young man who'd poked his head inside the door.

Harry twitched...he hadn't been sure whether he could trust Luna's 'source' who'd claimed to have seen the two Malfoy men Apparate just beyond the gates of the Manor. The source had apparently been sleeping off a rough night...on the side of the road...so Harry hadn't let himself get his hopes up too high.

Not that he actually *hoped* for Malfoy's return...either Malfoy. Just... there was unfinished business there, and it had always bothered him.

"Show him in, Greer." Harry straightened his robes and made a half-hearted attempt to do the same to his hair.

When Lucius walked in, Harry couldn't help but shake his head. Seven years and the man hadn't lost an inch of his imperiousness.

"Potter," he said, inclining his head. He looked pointedly at one of the chairs in front of Harry's desk as if he doubted Harry would have gotten around to offering him a seat.

"Malfoy," Harry returned, nodding and waiting for Lucius to settle. "Back in London, then?"

"Evidently," Lucius drawled. Then he sighed and it was like someone had cancelled a Glamour...he looked very weary, exhausted, even. "I've come to turn myself in."

Harry's hand went unerringly to his holly wand. "What have you done?"

"I'm a Death Eater. I escaped justice. I assume there's no statute of limitations on such a thing."

Confused, Harry frowned. "You're confessing to being a Death Eater?"

"Yes, yes," Lucius said as if bored with the proceedings.

Harry hated to disappoint, but he needed clarification. "We already knew that."

"All I ask is that Draco be given some leniency. I'm sure I have names for crimes you weren't even aware of. I'll give you my testimony in exchange for Draco's freedom."

It seemed that Lucius Malfoy didn't know he was already a free man, as was his son.

Harry's testimony on behalf of the Malfoy family had been met with mixed response. Hermione had been proud of him, Ron furious, and the public confused. He hadn't bothered clearing it up to the public...they didn't have to know how broken and lost the Malfoys had looked in the Great Hall after Voldemort's defeat. Had the public seen that, there would be no question as to what was most important to the Malfoys...each other. Exiling them together was the best thing for everyone.

Except the Malfoys hadn't bothered to pick up a *Daily Prophet* in all their years away.

"What names and what crimes?" Harry asked, not willing to give away his hand if he could solve some old cases in the meantime.

Lucius beckoned for the legal pad on his desk. Harry handed it over, along with a ballpoint pen. Quills were just not feasible when one had as much paperwork as Harry did, and Harry didn't care if Lucius glared at the pen like it had mocked his pretentious outfit or questioned his lineage.

For the next twenty minutes, just enough time for the sun to settle beyond the horizon, Lucius Malfoy wrote out names, dates, places, and crimes. Harry watched with increasing glee as the sheet of paper filled. Even if they'd already solved half those crimes, the rest would be enough to significantly dwindle the unsolved crimes file.

Lucius' pen began to slow and finally scratch to a stop. With a decisive nod, Lucius handed the pad back to Harry and dropped the pen onto his desk with disdain.

Harry made Lucius wait as he went over the list. Merlin, there was enough there to practically shut down the cold case department altogether! They wouldn't be pleased with the additional work, but it would be more than worth it.

"This is impressive," Harry said, magically copying the file and having one sent directly to cold cases.

"Yes, well, those were busy times. Can we get on with this?"

"Of course." Harry paused. "You're free to go."

"What?" Lucius snapped, seeming to think he was being toyed with.

Harry sighed and leant forward on his elbows. "I don't know where you went," he began, "but you might have thought to have the *Prophet* forwarded. You, your wife, and your son were cleared of charges with the caveat that you leave England for seven years. Your exile ended approximately four months ago. You're very lucky you didn't decide to come back earlier...you would have been arrested and put in Azkaban without trial."

Lucius' face was white and his hands were unforgiving on the arms of the chair. "That's it, then?" he whispered. He looked almost lost, and Harry wanted to feel sorry for him, but then the haughty mask slipped back down and Harry forgot feeling anything but exasperation.

"That's it," Harry confirmed, sitting back in his chair.

Without another word, Lucius rose and turned to leave. Harry cleared his throat and stood as well.

"Mr. Malfoy," he said, waiting for Lucius to face him. "Someone will have to come by the Manor to alter the wards back. They were changed to inform us if you returned before your sentence was over, and we don't need to get an alarm every time one of you enters your own property."

Lucius nodded, looking tired. "I have a few errands to run, but my son will receive you."

For some reason, the turn of phrase made a blush stain Harry's cheeks. "All right, then. Don't get into any trouble," he warned. He'd put up with enough fallback from defending the Malfoys in the first place...he didn't want them making a fool of him by falling back into their old ways.

A moment saw Lucius ready to snarl something surely vicious, but he schooled his features and gave a tight nod.

After he left, Harry snorted. A thank-you was evidently too much to ask for.

Harry packed up and put on his gloves. A curl of warmth in his stomach had him remembering when Hermione and Ron had given them to him, two Christmases ago at the Burrow. He'd always worried that, with them being married, he'd feel like a third wheel. The truth was the exact opposite. He never felt more at home than with his friends, and he hoped Ron would feel the same way after Harry made him go to the Manor to tidy up the wards.

Until he remembered that Ron...and everyone else...had long gone home. He was the only person on his shift still in the office. He ~~he~~*could* ask one of the evening shift Aurors to take care of it, but he hated asking favours, which was what it would be as he was the same rank as they were.

He thought about leaving it for the next day, but the thought of coming in to a desk full of ward-breach memos made him shiver. He'd probably end up doing it tomorrow, anyway. Better to just get it over with.

*The wand.* Harry's eyes widened. With Draco back in London, he could return the hawthorn wand finally. That last bit of unfinished business would be nicely wrapped up and he could get on with his life.

Walking through the building, Harry used Draco's wand no less than four times. His own sat in its holster, unused since he'd returned from active duty. In the office and at home, he very rarely used his own wand. He didn't *want* to give up the second, more precise wand. It channelled his power so much more efficiently. He couldn't say when his own wand had stopped reacting favourably to him, but it was after he'd killed Voldemort.

Decision made...or at least delayed...Harry sheathed Draco's wand and withdrew his own. Let Draco think he'd burned it or something. Harry *needed* it. That was all there was to it.

With a sigh of one who truly did not want to do what he was about to do, Harry reached the Apparition point and turned on the spot, letting the uncomfortable pressure...it had never gotten better no matter how often he did it...take him to the gates of the once-resplendent Malfoy Manor.

No white peacocks met his gaze this time. What once had been an ostentatious show of wealth and disregard of care for cost or modesty was now a near-shambles. Ivy had wormed its way up the entire west side, crawling across the front like it planned on devouring the entire thing, inhabitants notwithstanding. The garden was overrun and looked wild and dead at the same time. As he approached, he saw that the paint on the front door looked weathered. Seven years had done a lot of damage. He wondered if the same was true of Draco himself.

Harry knocked. He waited. He wondered if the Malfoys still employed house-elves and if not, how they got along without them. He knew they could afford them...their fortune was intact, as far as he knew, which would be a good thing because they would be hard-pressed to find work and would hardly be accepted back into the social fold as if no time had passed. Some transgressions were more difficult to move past; some people preferred to forget.

To his surprise, Draco himself opened the door. His shocked silence allowed Harry to get a good look at him...he looked...*good*. The years, wherever they'd been spent, had been kind. His hair looked even lighter, passing the boundary from pale blond to almost white, and his skin had lost a touch of its pallor. He'd been somewhere warm, then, Harry surmised. And he was wearing...

"You're dressed like a Muggle!"

Draco's eyes, which had been wide, narrowed. "What are you doing here?" he said in a low voice that was almost trembling with rage.

Taking a step back out of self-preservation, Harry coughed...not nervously, of course; he was a bloody Auror for Merlin's sake! "I have to change the wards." Harry remembered that if Lucius hadn't known about the exile, Draco must not, either. "You're a free man, Malfoy," he said, trying for kind and ending somewhere between sarcasm and almost accusatory.

"Yes, I know," Draco said snidely.

Shrugging, Harry said, "Well, the wards are geared to warn us about your return, and I need to fix them so we don't get inundated with memos telling us to go arrest you already."

Crossing his arms over his chest...his stupid, fit chest...Draco raised an arched eyebrow. Harry was sure that if he'd had less breeding he would have been tapping his foot.

"Why would I care *what* you're inundated with?"

Harry resisted the urge to run his fingers through his hair...but only just. Draco was just as infuriating and snotty as ever. Harry was almost relieved to find that time didn't change everything.

"I don't care what you care about," *you great git*, "but I have to do my job and since the wards are technically Auror property, you don't have a choice."

Impotence wasn't a good look on Draco. His lip curled up in a most ugly fashion. Harry wondered that if he knew how twisted his features were if he'd ever make that face again. Draco did seem like the type to care whether he looked like a ferret with rabies.

"Fine," he snapped. "Get it over with." With that charming permission, Draco stepped back within the house and slammed the door a scant inch from Harry's nose.

"That went well," Harry muttered, glaring as he pushed his glasses up his nose and started with the wards. He wasn't chuffed about having to knock again and tell Draco that he'd need inside to finish the job, but he hoped the ensuing time would give Draco a chance to collect himself. He'd looked ready for an apoplexy, and Harry didn't relish having to Side-Along him to St. Mungo's if it came to it.

The wards were extensive because they contained information on every single Death Eater that had been alive at the time of the Malfoy's sentencing. Now all those Death Eaters...every last one, Harry was proud to say...were in Azkaban or either had served or were still serving their Ministry-approved sentences. There were none still on the run; none had gone without judgement. Now the Malfoys were free to entertain as many former Death Eaters as they liked...though the Ministry wouldn't be best pleased if they did, were they to find out.

When the labour-intensive job was finally finished, Harry knocked again, harder this time. He wasn't thrilled about having to do the job in the first place, and his wand wasn't as quick as Draco's would have been with the finer details. He just wanted to get home, have a drink in the dark, think about starting on some paperwork for half an hour or so, and then watch his haphazardly spelled telly for a few hours before bed.

"What now?" Draco barely opened the door enough to see through.

Harry rolled his eyes. "I need inside to finish. The wards were set in there in case you had a way of getting in without triggering the outer wards."

"You are a major inconvenience," Draco informed him, spite making his cultured tone hateful.

Harry said nothing and just waited. After a moment, Draco hissed and yanked the door open, stalking away to stand by the staircase with the most impatient demeanour humanly possible. If Harry actually liked Malfoy, or if he'd been a stranger, he would have been uncomfortable. As it was, he got a sick glee from seeing Draco so put out.

"What do you think you're doing?" Draco snapped as Harry started toward one of the main rooms. He had his hands on his hips and couldn't look any more hassled.

"My job." Giving in to the urge to roll his eyes and seeing that Draco gave in to ~~the~~ urge to tap his foot, he continued on.

He took his time finishing up. Seeing Draco manage to spit and snarl without even moving a muscle was too good to pass up, even though he did have three hours of sitcoms waiting for him at home.

Moving about the massive house, Harry mentally noted the changes. The manor had lost its opulence but was still decadent enough to remind the Malfoys of their status, or former status, anyway.

Once the last Auror ward had been felled, Harry set about finding Draco. He expected to find him at the foot of the stairs, still stewing in his own powerlessness. Draco wasn't there, though, and Harry had to search a little before finally finding him in the kitchen. Harry watched as Draco, with his back to him, drained the sink from its bubbly water. There was a squelching noise and then Draco dried his hands on a tea towel before setting it rather daintily on the counter. When he turned, his expressionless face twisted once more into an almost feral anger.

"All done, then," Harry said, walking up to Draco and grinning right in his face. He holstered his wand, tucking it snugly beside Draco's without thinking.

Draco's eyes followed the movement and recognition flared in them, hot enough to scorch. His teeth bared and he lunged forward...

...But Harry had already Apparated away.

Back in the safety of his flat, panting a little, Harry wished that he'd stayed to actually fight Malfoy. He could have used the exercise, not to mention the stress relief of seeing the condescending little wanker bruised and broken. Okay, maybe just bruised. A lot, though.

He had his job to think about, though. As fun as it might have been, getting into a scuffle while on the clock would have been cause for at least a reprimand if not a dismissal.

And the total truth of it was, he just didn't want to give the bloody wand back.

It wasn't until he was in his bed, four glasses on gin and way too many hours of television under his belt, that he realised Draco had been doing*ishes*. Draco Malfoy, paragon of wizardry, probably unable to even get out of bed without magic, had had his arms in soapy water, Muggle jumper sleeves pushed up to his elbows to reveal lean, slick forearms...one unfortunately marred... and no wand in sight.

Sweet sweaty Merlin's sac...Draco Malfoy was living as a Muggle!

## Chapter Four

*Chapter 4 of 28*

After the war, Harry Potter is left with no one to save, no one to fight, and one extra wand. Draco Malfoy escapes punishment by leaving the country... or so he thinks. Seven years pass before they see each other again. Draco is no longer the master of his wand and a battle of talent and wills ensues. A story of a wand without a true master, and two men who fight to master each other... and themselves.

*This chapter was written by keppiehed.*

A shaft of sunlight pierced Draco's closed lids and burned into his very brain. He shifted in his sleep, moaning a little at the unwelcome intrusion, but it was too late. His dreams melted away from him like so much smoke and he was awake before he could grab onto the last vestiges of them. All he could remember was that they had been pleasant... *very* pleasant. Draco sat up irritably and scowled at the bright orb that had disrupted his repose. The sun kept shining, impervious to the dark mood Draco was in. This further served to unreasonably ruffle his feathers, as though his temperament ought to have some bearing on the weather. Proof that it didn't only heightened his annoyance.

The truth was, Draco hadn't been sleeping well at all. Ever since *that man* had shown up here and brandished Draco's own wand in his face, waving it under his very nose and acting so pompous about the whole thing... well, Draco hadn't been able to think about anything else since. The fact that *Potter* of all people had his wand...it was absolutely intolerable! He had it tucked away so handily in a holster, at his beck and call. Draco's blood boiled at the very thought of his wand snuggled close to Potter's person and being used by that smug bastard every time the whim took him to do so. It was infuriating! What gave him the right? Draco gritted his teeth so hard he thought they might crack. That arrogant jerk waltzed right into his home and flaunted it just to bait him. Draco clenched his fists in frustration. He had a headache and the morning hadn't even started yet.

He took a deep breath and forced himself to calm down. The pulsing behind his eyes abated slightly. First things first. He needed tea...strong tea, and a lot of it. A good, bracing cup of Darjeeling couldn't fail to help him feel better. At least it would wake him up and settle his jangled nerves.

Draco dressed and made his way to the dining room. There were several in the Manor; he chose the less formal of the three. It turned out he had made the right decision; Lucius was already seated and partaking of breakfast.

"Draco," he said, inclining his head. "There's tea, of course, and toast. Apologies. I can't say I ever mastered the art of baking."

"Tea's fine, thank you." Draco immersed himself in the morning ritual, and they sat in companionable silence for a moment.

"I trust you slept well?" Lucius asked from behind his paper.

"Just fine," Draco said shortly. "When did you start reading the *Daily Prophet*?"

Lucius folded down a corner and raised an eyebrow. "Since I decided to. You are in fine form this morning. If you want the business section, you need only ask."

Draco made a sour face. "You know very well I don't want to read that."

"Temper, temper, Son. One would suspect that you did not sleep as well as you indicated. Careful, that obsession of yours is showing."

"I don't have an obsession!" Draco snapped.

"If you say so," Lucius said mildly.

"I do," Draco said. He knew he sounded childish, but he couldn't seem to help himself.

The two men lapsed back into silence. Draco jiggled his leg. Lucius kept reading. Draco slurped his tea.

"Draco!" Lucius sighed and set his paper aside. "If it bothers you so much, why don't you just ask for him to return it?"

Draco's eyes blazed. "I wouldn't ask him for anything! Not a single thing! If I were drowning, I wouldn't ask him for a life raft! If I were dying of thirst, I wouldn't ask him for a cup of water! If I were the last person on earth, and fucking *Harry Potter*..." Draco stopped mid-rant. He realized he'd been shouting. A lot.

"Go on," Lucius said, amused. "You are being so dramatic, I'd hate for you to stifle all those theatrics. You might do yourself harm. You were saying? About not being obsessed, I believe."

Draco paused. "You know I can't stand Potter," he finished lamely.

"Yes. That much is apparent," Lucius said. The corner of his mouth twitched. "Listen, Draco, why don't you get out and go somewhere? You haven't been out of the Manor since our return. It might do you good to make some contacts again."

"You mean like you have been?" As soon as he said the words, Draco regretted them.

Lucius' gaze turned stony. "It was merely a suggestion. Do as you wish." The older man returned to the paper, snapping it crisply up in front of him like a shield.

Draco felt shame wash over him. How was it that he was a grown man and he still felt like a child when he talked to his father? Would that ever change? He bit his lip and looked down. "I'm sorry, Father. I didn't mean it. You're right; I haven't been sleeping well. I'm a little on edge, that's all. Please forgive my rudeness."

"There's nothing to forgive, Draco. Just... don't let this consume you."

Draco could hear the finality in his father's voice. The discussion was over.

\*

Two days passage saw Draco in better spirits. He decided to ignore thoughts of Potter. It wasn't easy, because that git was so damned *irritating* that the very idea of him made Draco nearly lose it, but he had lived seven years without magic, without his wand and, most importantly...*without Potter*. So, with that thought in mind, he resolved to just put the whole idea of Potter right out of his head. He didn't know how he had lived so long without the thought of Potter bothering him when now it seemed intolerable. Draco didn't examine it; he just wanted to live his life in peace.

Resolved, he owled Pansy and made plans to meet. He wanted to ease back into society, so he tried for somewhere familiar. It seemed that the Three Broomsticks was still in business, so he opted for that. Pansy was happy to let him take the lead in making arrangements, so they had a date for that day at three o'clock.

If Draco were honest with himself, he would have to admit that he was a little nervous about going back out into wizarding society. He knew that he likely wouldn't be received too kindly, so he compensated with the best arsenal he had at his disposal...his looks. If looking good was the best revenge, he intended on throwing the first punch in this war. Draco knew it was a simple afternoon get-together with an old friend, but he also knew that every eye in the place would be on him, and that once word got out, the potential for exposure would be great. He had to look his best.

Draco spent more time making himself look carelessly casual than he ever had. He dressed himself to his best advantage, making sure to accentuate his greatest features. He deliberately dressed in Muggle attire, not only because the clothes looked damned good on him, but to show that he was at ease in either world, could choose to come and go as he pleased. He was not bound by convention, would bow to no wizard. That would show them that he wasn't broken, no matter what they might have presumed. No Malfoy would come crawling back with tail tucked between his legs, war or not.

When he could put off the inevitable no longer, Draco made his way to the Three Broomsticks. He kept his head held high as he scanned the room. Pansy was already there, waiting. A hush descended as everyone recognized him. He strode over to her, determined not to let any signs of distress show on his features. He used to thrive on attention, but what he wouldn't give to fade into the woodwork now.

He concentrated on keeping his steps even and measured, the appearance of unhurried. He was there before he knew it. He didn't even realize that Pansy had been staring. He let out a breath; he'd made it. Nothing bad had happened. He sat down and almost chanced a smile before he caught himself. *Keep the mask on.*

Pansy's eyes were huge in her rather pointed face. "Draco! You... you've hardly changed a bit! I mean... it's hard to believe that it's been seven years!" she stammered.

Draco finally studied the girl sitting across from him. He'd been so wrapped up in his own drama, he hadn't really considered her at all. Now he let himself see her. She had much of the same countenance and expression that he remembered from their earlier days, but she had aged a bit. She seemed older, more mature. He might have been able to pick her out of a crowd... had he thought to look for her. She had never been particularly pretty, but time had given her a little grace, he supposed. She appeared unremarkable, mostly. He leaned back, uninterested and unimpressed. He summarily dismissed her for looks and hoped that she was more interesting in conversation, at least.

"Yes, you look the same, too," he said a touch impatiently. "What have you done with yourself all this time?" Not that he cared.

Pansy rattled on about what had taken up her time in the intervening years, and Draco was glad that he was a good conversationalist. It allowed him to give cursory answers without really paying attention. He scanned the room in the meantime. He didn't recognize anyone. He had just enough time to catch the tail end of what Pansy was saying.

"...you know, I've been waiting for you all these years. I just *knew* you'd come back to me, Draco!" Pansy leaned across the table, her eyes suspiciously shiny.

Draco frowned. What was this? Was she still harbouring that schoolgirl crush on him? He felt absolutely nothing for her, but if he played his cards right, he might be able to use that. He just had to take care not to get tangled up with her. If memory served him, she was rather clingy. For some reason that thought was more than a little off-putting. "Yes, well, I, of course, have had a rough time of it. You know I had to live in America, which wasn't easy."

"And your poor *mother*!" Pansy wailed. "You have been through so much, I can't even imagine it!" Just then, her eyebrows drew together and a look of malice crossed her features. "Don't look now. I think I've lost my appetite for this place, with the riff-raff. Come on, let's go for a walk."

Draco turned around to see what bothered her so much, and he froze. His eyes locked unerringly with the very person he tried so hard to avoid. Time seemed to stand still, and he heard a rush in his ears. Either every voice in the place fell silent, or he had lost his hearing. And instead of politely going about his business, like a magnet that man drew closer, until he and his groupies were standing right in front of Draco. It all had a surreal quality of a dream...Or a nightmare.

"Draco." Harry's voice broke the dream.

Draco's eyes narrowed dangerously. "Potter," he spat. He could hear a pin drop as every ear in the place tuned to listen to the exchange. "Come to wave some more stolen goods in front of me? Being a bully seems to suit you. Power's gone to your head these days, hasn't it?"

Harry's eyes looked pained, but he said nothing. Instead, Neville jumped in to his defence. "Listen, you ungrateful..."

Harry shook his head. "No, stop, Neville. Listen, I have to have a few words with Draco. Can I join you guys in a bit? I'll be right over. It'll just be a minute."

Neville looked doubtful.

"Please. It's personal," Harry said quietly.

"Fine," Neville said, deflated. He wandered off and took a seat at the bar.

"Well, isn't that cosy?" Draco said snidely. "I guess you really do give the orders these days, even to your 'friends'."

Harry turned back to Draco. "I have something to say to you. Can we talk? Alone?" He gazed pointedly at Pansy.

She snorted. "Where Draco goes, I go. Right, Draco?"

Draco didn't much like Pansy, but now he was caught. He didn't want her in his business, but he didn't want Potter to see him send her packing, either. "Just state your business and be off, Potter."

Harry sighed. "Fine. Can I at least sit down?"

Draco smirked. "I don't know. *Can* you?"

Pansy sniggered.

Harry looked annoyed. He pulled up a chair. "Okay, here's the deal. I am here to give you your wand back." He opened his robe, pulled it out of the holster and set it on the table.

Pansy's eyes got wide as she realized what was happening and that Draco didn't have his wand.

Draco heard the soft click that his wand made as it hit the table. He tried not to look at it as it sat there, emanating power, practically begging for him. He curled his hands into fists under the table to keep from reaching out for it, and with studied nonchalance that cost him more than he would ever care to admit, said, "Who ever asked you for it?"

Now two heads swivelled to look at him. "But... Draco..." Pansy gaped.

"Oh, come off it, Malfoy!" Harry said. "Just take your damn wand back already! I didn't mean to keep it for so long. Here it is, take it back. In fact, it's a pain in my arse, so just take it already."

"Well, guess you should have thought about that before you *stole* it. It's too late. I don't want it anymore." The breezy lie tasted metallic on his tongue and Draco nearly got sick saying it.

Harry scowled. "You're just trying to spite me, don't think I don't know it! You are being such a ... *baby*! I mean, what? You're going to live for the rest of your life like a Muggle? Where are you going to work? How are you going to get by? Have you even ever thought of that, you great idiot?"

Draco felt a vein in his temple throb. All he had now, all he had ever had, was his pride, and he clung to that like a dying man to salvation. His eyes glittered and he stood up to his full height. He watched as Harry's eyes travelled up his denim clad thighs, up the stark black turtleneck and finally, to his face, which, he knew, was the picture of ice-cold enmity. It was what he had, this shield of contempt, and he would use it well.

"You want people to think you care, but I know the truth about you, Potter. You care less about life, about people, than anyone else. You care about yourself. This is all about you, not about me. So go sell your bleeding heart routine to the next fool you come across, because I'm not buying. You can keep that wand, and your own, and any others you steal. I don't care if you use it to pick your teeth or your toes... You can ram it right up your arse, for all I care. What I know is that you aren't going to use me to assuage your guilt. Fuck you, Potter, and the hippogriff you rode in on."

And with that, Draco whirled around and made the most dramatic exit the Three Broomsticks had ever seen. He heard Pansy stumble after him, but it took all his effort to keep his teeth from chattering. He was a lot of things, and now he could add liar to the list.

## Chapter Five

*Chapter 5 of 28*

After the war, Harry Potter is left with no one to save, no one to fight, and one extra wand. Draco Malfoy escapes punishment by leaving the country... or so he thinks. Seven years pass before they see each other again. Draco is no longer the master of his wand and a battle of talent and wills ensues. A story of a wand without a true master, and two men who fight to master each other... and themselves.

*This chapter was written by literaryspell.*

Harry let his head slam against his desk. He could barely feel it, anyway. His brain was total and complete mush *Paperwork*. It was the bane of his existence, and Neville

wouldn't let him foist it off on him any longer. He'd cottoned on to Harry's sly ways, and now Harry couldn't even convince him with bribes or pints or new brooms or his own endorsement with George's shop.

Neville could be a real...

"Neville!" Ron poked his head through the door of their office, giving Harry a grin that said he was going to like what came next. "You're needed onsite."

"Oi, mate," Harry cried, devastated that Neville got to leave and he was stuck here amidst quills and parchment and nary a Firewhisky in sight.

Ron just smirked. "Boss said Neville was to handle it." To Neville, who looked interested, Ron said, "Someone tripped up the Auror wards at Malfoy Manor."

"What wards?" Harry demanded. "I took them all down last week!"

"Not all of them. There's a memo saying one's going off right now even though they were supposed to be cleared." Ron looked entirely too thrilled at the prospect of the Malfoys getting caught up in the wards of their own home.

"I should go," Harry said, rising. "It was my mistake if I missed one."

"S'exactly why Robards wants Neville. He says it could be that the ward rejected your dismantling. Happens sometimes when you do a lot at once." Ron nodded sagely; everyone knew he'd fumbled his own share of ward dismantling.

But Harry never had.

"All right, thanks, Ron." Harry waved him away, grateful when Ron didn't take umbrage but just left with a chuckle. "I'm going in your place," he informed Neville.

"Harry..."

"Listen, I don't ask you for anything... and when that pretty bird had trouble with that boggart not once but eight different times, I let you handle it, didn't I?"

"That's because you don't *like* birds," Neville grumbled, obviously put out at the idea of not following the rules.

Harry waved it off. "Regardless. I need to do this. If I don't, Malfoy will never let me live down the fact that I fucked up."

"Okay, but if you need back-up..."

"I'll send my Patronus. But don't worry about me...this is nothing I can't handle." He didn't need to say that half his eagerness came from the fact that Neville would feel obligated to finish his paperwork and they both knew it.

When Harry Apparated to the gates of the manor, again he was struck by the appearance. There was no majesty at Malfoy Manor these days...though in the short time they'd been home, the Malfoys had obviously begun the spellwork to bring it back to its former glory. Whether they'd ever be able to accomplish that, Harry couldn't begin to guess.

Half because he had to by law, and half because it made him smile, Harry rang the chime a few times. It amused him to think of Malfoy trapped inside a room, unable to answer the door, possibly even shouting for help.

Getting a hold of himself, Harry created an emergency opening in the wards, something only Aurors could do. He then opened the door by magical force when, as he'd expected, no one came to let him in. With his holly wand drawn, Harry waited to see if the Malfoys had any traps set for intruders the way most pure-blood families did, but nothing happened.

"Hello?" he called, then repeated the greeting with the *Sonorous* spell. No response. A complicated spell had the outline of the manor in glowing blue lines before him, like a floating Muggle blueprint. One section had an additional outline in red, meaning the wards in that room had set off the alarm that had brought Ron to dispatch Neville.

The room was through a door in the parlour. It was a study...Harry remembered it well from when he'd been in it putting up the wards, years ago now, because it was obvious that someone spent a lot of time there. Harry had wondered if it was Draco. It hadn't seemed like his type of room, but then Harry knew hardly anything about the man.

The reason for the alarm became apparent when Harry followed the blueprint and saw an additional door, hidden to both casual and prying eyes. If the wards hadn't been lifted from *all* doors, an alarm would go off and the wards would react to whoever broke them...which meant someone was trapped inside the room, a Malfoy victim to their home's own magic.

Instead of the taking the time to dismantle the wards, Harry made another emergency entry, hastening to get to the person inside. When the secret door, hidden behind a rich-looking tapestry, swung open to admit Harry, he was horrified at what he saw.

Draco Malfoy, flat on his back in the centre of the room. His chest wasn't rising and falling, and Harry gave a shout and fell to his knees before the arrested form.

"Malfoy! Can you hear me?" Harry shook his shoulder and noticed the body was stiff...too stiff. Rock solid, even. "Draco!"

Draco's eyes were opened, and to Harry's somewhat confusing relief, they darted over to him, panic and fear as vibrant as if the emotions had been spelled out on his forehead. He was alive. Immobilised.

"Hang on, I've got you," Harry said, trying to sound reassuring. The ward wasn't complicated and it was easy to take down, but it felt like forever before the last bit of magic gave way.

When Malfoy was released from the spell, he took a deep, shuddering breath and scrambled back against the wall, a hand to his chest. He was more vulnerable than Harry had ever seen him, with the possible exception of when he'd been sandwiched between his parents in the Great Hall after the war.

Harry rose and waited for Draco to gather himself... but he didn't seem to be able to. His breathing became more and more shallow, and he was rocking himself with his hands clenching his hair.

Harry knew enough about panic attacks to be able to recognise one. He got up and knelt beside Draco, his hand hovering awkwardly before landing on Draco's back. "It's okay," he said, feeling useless. He'd never seen Draco like this, though there'd been one time... Harry's mind drifted back, water and blood. No, this was different. This wasn't fear in the face of unimaginable pressure and a near-certainty that his life was going to end if someone else's didn't. This was just simple fear because something bad had happened. Draco must have been truly beyond himself if Harry was even allowed to see him like this.

As soon as the thought filtered across Harry's mind, Draco's face shuttered and he rose, brushing off his robes as if he'd just stepped through the Floo, not been freed from an Immobilisation spell after who knew how long.

"Do all Aurors have free rein to break and enter, or is it only the great Harry Potter?" Despite his attempt at nonchalance, Draco's fingers trembled as he refastened a finicky tie on his sleeve.

"Malfoy." Harry scrubbed at his face with his hands. He had to give the wand back. That was all there was to it. Leaving Draco to die from something that could have been

easily thwarted, had he had a wand, might be fitting and maybe even deserved, but it wasn't something Harry could stand to have on his conscience. "Where's your wand?" He *had* to have another one. There was no way he'd gone seven long years without one. It was impossible. And Harry *really* didn't want to give up the hawthorn wand.

"I must have left it in the other room," Draco said. Harry remembered him being a better liar...he couldn't even meet Harry's eyes now.

"Let's go get it," Harry suggested.

Draco folded his arms over his chest. Maybe he meant it to be distancing, but it looked self-protective and Harry had the strangest urge to force those arms down at his sides, to force him to let someone in that space. "I'd rather you just leave."

"You don't have a wand," Harry told him, not leaving any room for Draco to think his words were a question or a guess. He was stating a fact. "You haven't used a wand...you haven't used magic...in seven years. You haven't been a wizard..."

"I'll *always* be a wizard," Draco snapped, eyes glittering like Floo powder. "Always."

Harry waited until Draco realised he'd as good as confirmed Harry's comments about him being wandless. When it struck Draco, it seemed to defeat him. He closed his eyes, his shoulders slumped an inch or more, and his head bowed a fraction...but it was enough.

"I don't need one," Draco said. Like a chameleon that'd been rudely moved, Draco's demeanour changed once more, gearing up for the fight they both knew would ensue.

Harry laughed, but it wasn't funny. "You can't be serious. How long do you think you would have lasted in that position? Can you imagine the horror of dying of thirst in your own home all because you couldn't cancel a ward? Is *that* the sort of death you imagined for yourself, Malfoy?"

"And what the fuck do you care?" Draco snapped. He unfolded his arms, though it looked like an effort...his hands were clenched at his sides and since they were no longer shaking, it was his voice that took on a trembling cadence.

Harry groaned. Draco was bloody impossible. "Well, for one, I would have gotten sacked if you'd died because I hadn't properly lifted all the wards..."

"You *will* be sacked!" Draco interrupted. There was a look of manic glee in his eye, like he was thrilled to have been given something to latch on to. "I'll have your job and your pension for your... your... your sheer ineptitude!"

It wasn't that Harry loved his job *that much*. It wasn't even the thought of Malfoy, grey with ignoble death in the middle of his study that made Harry lose his temper.

No. It was the fact that Draco looked so goddamned *smug*, as if he'd planned his own Immobilisation just to get the opportunity to get Harry in trouble. As if the tremor in his hands and voice were nothing more than an affectation, that he'd like for Harry to believe that it was all *nothing*...

That was what set Harry off. No one should be so nonchalant. No one should have to be. And that Draco still was, after all these years...it made Harry *angry*.

So it seemed like the most natural thing in the world...an acceptable progression of events...to slam his hands onto Draco's shoulders and launch him against the wall. A portrait to their right shuddered but Harry paid it no mind, hoping it would return the favour.

"You absolute prat," Harry said, his voice almost a growl. Maybe he didn't have any height on Draco, but he *felt* more intimidating, and he used that, getting into Draco's personal space and not relenting. His hands were still squared on Draco's shoulders, pinning him to the wall as surely as if Draco was still under the ward's spell. "Maybe you don't give a shit one way or the another if you live or die, but I'm sure your parents do. How would Lucius suffer if he'd been the one to find your body, if it had come to that? What would your mother have felt, deciding which flowers would follow you into the grave?"

"You..." Draco pressed his back even closer to the wall; Harry hadn't thought it would be possible. "You don't know the first thing...!"

Harry shrugged. "You're right. So tell me."

Draco recoiled. "What?"

"Seems like you need someone to talk to. I'll make you a deal. You take your wand back, and I'll play therapist." Harry blinked at his own offer, uncertain if he'd meant to be sincere or sarcastic.

"Fuck you, Potter," Draco snapped, for what felt like the hundredth time over the course of their acquaintance. His eyes were narrowed and his lips pursed hard enough that they were almost white. He looked furious and had Harry been any other man, he might have felt nervous.

As it was, he wasn't deterred. Without relenting his grip, surprised that Draco hadn't made too much of an effort to escape it, Harry chuckled. "All right, but you do have to take your wand. This is ridiculous, Draco. I can't keep coming over and saving your arse."

"One time!"

"But it won't be the last." Harry's voice was serious now. "And you know it. Wherever you were for seven years, maybe you didn't need magic. But you know better than me how these old manors function. You won't be able to manage forever. And like you said...you're a wizard. So... do magic, Draco."

In what Harry knew to be a rare moment of vulnerability, Draco said, "It's more complicated than that."

"It always is." Harry finally took a step back. He was starting to get a little confused. This Draco wasn't the man he'd known growing up. Yes, the sneer, the cultured tones, the imperial attitude, they were all the same. But there was something more, something as yet indefinable, and damn it...Harry was drawn to it.

Reaching into his wand holster while keeping an eye on Draco as one would a wild animal, Harry withdrew the hawthorn wand.

"It's only a stick," he said with a goofy smile. He took another step back and placed it on the floor between them. "You're the one with the magic, not it."

"Leave now," Draco said, but there was no power to it, no conviction. His eyes were on the wand. He was pale and still slightly dishevelled; the rather violent meeting with the wall had mussed his hair, but his pale, slender fingers twisted in front of him instead of straightening it. All at once he seemed to notice what he was doing. His hands were back at his sides, his eyes cool and face blank. "Now, Potter!"

Harry sighed and left the room. He checked the blueprint spell one last time, making sure *all* the wards were down. They were.

He didn't think of Draco, alone in the manor. He had other, more important things on his mind.

Like the Firewhisky...or twelve...he'd be treating himself to when he got home.

# Chapter Six

Chapter 6 of 28

After the war, Harry Potter is left with no one to save, no one to fight, and one extra wand. Draco Malfoy escapes punishment by leaving the country... or so he thinks. Seven years pass before they see each other again. Draco is no longer the master of his wand and a battle of talent and wills ensues. A story of a wand without a true master, and two men who fight to master each other... and themselves.

*This chapter was written by keppehed.*

Draco stared at the object on the floor before him, immobilized not by wards now, but by his own hesitation. He dimly registered Potter's diminishing footfalls and the eventual slamming of the front door that echoed his exit. The silence hung thick like cobwebs over everything, but Draco didn't have time to spare a thought for loneliness. He was transfixed by the wand...his wand. It called out to him, it sang to his blood, and he could deny it no longer. Nor did he want to.

Draco stooped and finally plucked it gently from the ground where it had been placed. The crackle of magic sizzled through his nerves. Draco closed his eyes and gripped the end, leveraging the weight of it for just a moment. He savoured the feel of its tapered grace between his fingers. Ollivander had first described it as springy, and indeed, when Draco flicked it, there was an answering coil, a little bit of life in the length. Some wands were thick and blunt...they were so clumsy and unresponsive. Not this one; never this one. It had suited Draco right from the beginning: a ten-inch beauty made of hawthorn, the same wood as his birth tree in the Celtic calendar. It was meant to be. The core contained a single unicorn hair, and it was only fitting that he would master a wand that held traces of the very purest magical being. Draco smiled as he realized how much he had missed having his wand. It was a homecoming of sorts; it was back where it belonged, in his hand to command.

*Not with some pretender to borrowed glory* Draco's lips curled. He hardly even knew what he meant by that, but his rancor flared when he thought of his mother dying, of this wand tucked away under Potter's arm. A wizard with two wands was as unnecessary as a wizard with two heads...a foolish extravagance that the Malfoys had paid for. In blood.

Draco wouldn't soon forget that. Potter could waltz in here and act the hero all he wanted, but Draco knew him to be significantly less than that. He was nothing but a coward with a complex, and even if no one else could see it, Draco could. And since no one wanted to make Potter play fair, Draco would just have to take on that task for himself.

The rage at the unfairness of it all bubbled up in him. The thought that Potter was universally loved when he was clearly so undeserving...that Draco had been made to pay, was *still* paying, yet was viewed as a villain...the fury boiled over and he wrathfully threw a curse out at the nearest object... *acloisonné vase*. "*Expulso!*"

Draco waited to hear the shatter. He couldn't relax until the explosion of violence had released, and he stared, a little perplexed, at the untouched and perfectly formed vase before him. It wasn't so much as teetering on the stand.

"*Confringo!*" he tried again, intent on utter obliteration. Now he didn't just want a shatter, he wanted fire, too...the whole works.

Nothing happened.

Draco frowned and stared at his wand. The pent up frustration began to turn sour in his gut as he examined it. It was, indeed, his wand. This was no joke, nor was the wand an impostor. Perhaps Potter had enchanted it somehow into only casting nonviolent charms? Draco gave it another go. He concentrated on making a duplicate vase. That should be considered harmless. "*Geminio!*"

Only the dust motes danced in a shaft of sunlight.

Draco's frown deepened. He didn't know what was going on here, but one thing was certain. Harry Potter had fucked up his wand.

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After Draco had spent the better part of the afternoon and evening trying out every spell he knew with no success, he had to admit that he was stymied. Had he lost his magic? The idea shamed him; Draco instantly discarded the thought. No, this was certainly all Potter's doing. Draco racked his brains to come up with a feasible explanation for why his wand would malfunction, but nothing came to mind. He was at a loss.

Draco didn't want to go to his father and ask for advice on this matter. He knew that Lucius wouldn't belittle him, but he would rather work it out on his own before he had to bring a possible failure to his father's attention. Unfortunately, he was fresh out of ideas. In desperation, he turned to the only contact he had: Pansy.

Scowling, he sent an owl asking for her to come to the Manor at her earliest convenience. He hated feeling backed into a corner. His return to England had been fraught with nothing but problems. Had it really been easier to live as a Muggle? The very thought seemed blasphemous.

The Parkinsons' house owl returned promptly with Pansy's response that she would arrive at the Manor just after breakfast.

Draco didn't know whether to be relieved or wary at her obvious eagerness. He settled on his usual indifference. Pansy was welcome to have her own agenda, as long as it didn't deter him from his own. He couldn't care less what her machinations were, so long as she served his purpose.

Having decided on a course of action, Draco got ready for bed. It didn't matter that he knew less this evening than he had the last, that even though he had his wand he had more questions than ever before. At least he *had* his wand, and he was going to talk with Pansy tomorrow. And he was going to work on a plan of revenge to cut Potter down to size. It would all work out in the end. It had to.

\*

"I've been meaning to ask you if you had considered your employment opportunities," Lucius said casually over scones the next morning.

Draco choked as a grain lodged in his throat. It took him a few awkward moments and ended with a rude spraying of crumbs before he regained his composure. "I beg your pardon?" he managed.

"A job," Lucius drawled. "Surely you have been thinking of employment."

"You want me to... work? Like a common... person?" Draco gasped. He could feel his mouth hanging open, and he tried to close it, but it kept wanting to unhinge.

"Come, now!" Lucius said in irritation. "It isn't as if I am asking you to sully your hands in trade. You are always so melodramatic, for Merlin's sake! I am merely asking you if you had considered all of your options, that's all."

"But... but..." Draco could only stammer in shock. *Malfoys didn't work*

"I can see that you are under the misconception that Malfoys don't work. Malfoys don't work at menial labor, low-paying jobs, Draco," Lucius clarified helpfully. "We do, however, have a fortune to protect. How do you think the rich keep getting richer?"

"Um. Investments and all that?" Draco guessed.

"Perhaps. I am anxious to hear your theories about what my days were comprised of while I was at the Ministry. Do you care to expound upon that for my edification?" Lucius asked.

Draco pouted. "Now you are just poking fun at me."

Lucius schooled his features. "What did you think I did all day at work, Draco?"

"Drink brandy and smoke cigars. Play games. Do... whatever," Draco mumbled.

"What?" Lucius sounded incredulous.

"I thought there was a club there for people like us. To go and do whatever we wanted." Draco's face was flaming.

"Draco! A special club! At the Ministry! Whatever gave you such an idea?" Lucius sounded strangled.

"I didn't think it for my entire childhood. I just...I thought we were special," Draco defended himself.

There was a sigh. "Draco, we are special. But we still have to work...At a real job."

"But we don't need the money!" Draco wailed.

A glint of steel entered Lucius' eyes.

Draco recognized that look, and he inwardly groaned. The argument was over. Now.

"Some things aren't about money, Son. You need a *raison d'être*, as it were." Lucius made an offhand gesture as he spoke.

"I already have one...making Potter pay," Draco muttered.

"What was that?" Lucius asked, a hint of menace creeping into his tone.

"Nothing, Father," Draco answered darkly. "Go on, I can see that you aren't finished."

Lucius gave him an assessing look. "You certainly aren't going to find it sitting around here. It's time you pursued a career. Failing that, a job. You will go out today and begin seeing what might appeal to you," Lucius said calmly. He dabbed the corners of his mouth with a napkin and stood up.

"Today? Wait, I..."

The bell rang sonorously and echoed throughout the empty marble halls of the manse. It was one of the things to have recently been restored, so both Lucius and Draco jumped when they heard it.

"Guests at this hour?" Lucius queried.

Draco grinned guiltily. "Sorry, Father, I forgot to mention that I invited Pansy over today."

Lucius held up a hand. "No need to apologize. I shall finish up here and retire to the South Study for the duration of your guest's visit, should you require privacy. After your company, I can assume you will make the appropriate arrangements, as per our discussion?" Lucius raised an eyebrow meaningfully. It wasn't a suggestion.

"Thanks, Father. I'll remember." Draco gave a small nod and turned to let Pansy in.

"Oh, and one more thing," Lucius called.

Draco paused.

"This hardly bears mentioning, but I trust that you will not do anything to cause Potter to review the terms of our exoneration?" Lucius gave him a hard stare.

Draco dropped his gaze. "Of course not, Father."

"Very well. I will see you this evening." Lucius turned away in dismissal.

Draco trotted the not inconsiderable distance to the front door, his guilt close behind him like shadow.

Pansy was fidgeting on the other side of the door. "I came as soon as I could! What do you need, Draco? What's wrong, why..."

"Shhh!" Draco glanced behind him to see if his father was within earshot. "Come on, let's go to the Blue Room."

They made their way to one of the parlor rooms and Draco shut the door. He scowled when he remembered that he had to go to town today. He had to get a job! Damn it!

"What? What is it?" Pansy fluttered around.

Draco snapped back to the problem at hand. "Nothing, I was just thinking of something else," he grumbled. "I brought you here because I have something to show you."

"Oh, *Draco*," Pansy breathed. "I'm so glad you finally..."

Draco pulled his wand from his sleeve and held it out before him.

Pansy broke off. "Oh," she said lamely. "*That*... um... wand." She coughed delicately. "I mean, what can I do for you, Draco?"

He ignored the pained expression on her face. She was lucky that he was using her at all, the ungrateful wench! He could have called anyone else! Like... well, anyone else. Draco brandished it impatiently.

Pansy shrank back.

"No! You don't understand. It isn't working!" Draco had to lower his voice. He felt his temper threatening to rise up and consume him. The mere thought of Potter was like a Muggle hair trigger.

"Wait a minute..." Pansy's eyes turned calculating. "Didn't *Potter* have your wand? The last time we saw him at the Three Broomsticks? How did you get it back?"

Draco sighed. Pansy hadn't been Sorted into Slytherin for nothing. "Yeah. It's a long story, actually, but it's here now. I would say good as new, but that's obviously not the case, is it?" he said snidely.

Pansy crossed her arms over her chest. "I can't help you if I don't know all the facts, Draco."

Draco narrowed his eyes. He stood up straighter and stepped closer to her. Pansy didn't give an inch. Draco eased into her personal space. He could feel the heat of her body radiating out. Her eyes widened. He could almost hear her heart beating faster. He knew he had her. He was close enough to see the flutter in the delicate vein at her throat, the tremble in her breath...that little hitch that he knew was just for him. He leaned down and said very softly, "It's none of your business, Pansy." He let his breath ghost softly over her ear, down her neck. She shuddered.

He pulled away. "Besides, it doesn't matter how it came to be in my possession. I have it now." He let a leer take over his features, as if there were some delightful exploit he had masterminded to trick Potter, or embarrass him out of the wand. He didn't have to say any more than that. He certainly didn't want to have to explain the less-than-glorious truth. He put on his most confident, self-assured expression.

Pansy bought it. "So, why isn't it working? What does that even mean?"

Draco rolled his eyes. "Watch and learn. *Furnunculus!*"

Pansy shrieked. She grabbed her face.

"Oh, shut up, will you?" Draco snapped. "I said it didn't work, didn't I?"

Pansy's piercing scream died off. Her eyes were round with fright. "That's not funny, Draco!" she said shakily. "I thought I'd have boils all over my face!"

"Weren't you listening? I've been trying to tell you. You're starting to bore me. Maybe I should have called Zabini," Draco bluffed.

Pansy drew in a breath. "Well, good luck on that account," she huffed.

Draco pressed his lips together. This wasn't going as he had planned. "Listen, I didn't mean to frighten you," he tried in his best conciliatory tone. "I called you because you have the greatest ideas, Pans. I thought you might know what's going on."

Pansy stuck her lip out. "Yeah, I don't know. I'll have to think about it, but I have never heard of a wand that doesn't do magic. Maybe I can ask around."

"No, no!" Draco said, alarmed. The last thing he needed was for word of this to get out. "I only trust you with this information."

Pansy cracked a small smile. "Really?"

"Of course," he affirmed. Merlin, she was easy. "Listen, I hate to be a boorish host, but I have some things to do in town. Can I walk you to the Apparition point?"

"Oh, I'll just go with you! I have some errands to run, too!" Pansy had a new spring in her step. "I have to stop by Flourish and Blott's because my new stationery is in, and then..."

Draco tuned her out, but he wasn't pleased to hear that she would be around to see him have to try and sell his soul. He managed to catch the last of what she was saying, "... meet up at the Three Broomsticks by four o'clock? Will that give you enough time to finish up your running around?"

Draco grabbed onto that lifeline. He didn't particularly relish having to spend more time with Pansy, but a few hours scouring for work was more than enough. He could tell his father that he had tried, but then had keep his word to a friend. "Yes, perfect," he said quickly.

"Great! See you then," Pansy said.

"See you then," Draco echoed. He felt a headache starting. It was going to be a long day.

\*

Draco rubbed his aching temples. It had been a long day. It wasn't even four yet, but he'd had about all he could take. His pride was hanging in tatters. Looking for a job was the hardest thing he had ever had to do... *one* of the hardest things he'd ever had to do, he amended. Once people realized that the reason he was there was to apply for work, the reactions had ranged from incredulity to amusement to sarcasm to downright malice. Draco couldn't go in one more place, couldn't bear to make one more inquiry. He had never felt so defeated. It was only through muscle memory and years of perfectly maintained posture that he didn't slump his shoulders, but squared them. It sure didn't feel like pride keeping them stiff right now.

Draco wearily made his way to the bar at the Three Broomsticks. He wasn't due to meet Pansy here for a quarter hour or so, but he could do with an extra drink today, anyway. He placed his order, got his drink, and decided to take a seat in the corner. He was tired in mind and body. He felt broken, and he just wanted to disappear.

It was a testament to his distraction that he didn't see them until he stumbled into the chair. "I'm sor..." The apology died on his lips as he saw exactly whom he had sloshed with his Firewhisky.

Ron Weasley.

Draco's brain felt numb. That face hadn't changed much in all these years. It still looked as dumb as pudding, and that shock of miserable red hair didn't help things. Draco made himself look around at the faces he knew would be assembled. It was worse than he thought.

The table looked like a reunion of the Gryffindor glee team, Draco thought sourly. He recognized Hermione, Ginny and Neville instantly. Of course, no gathering could be complete without the king of their tidy little group.

Grey eyes meshed with green.

Draco was on guard instantly to say something nasty when he realized that Potter was looking scattered. Well, more unfocused than usual. What was his problem? Draco looked closer. Was he drunk? At four o'clock in the afternoon? What a sodding idiot! Draco felt the opportunity for unchecked embarrassment spread out before him. What a gift on such a miserable day! All of what he had been through was nearly worth it, as his bitterness now knew no bounds. He was in a fine mood for spite, and he wasn't going to pass this up.

"Oi!" Ron shouted. "Watch what you're doing, you clumsy oaf!" He shook his arm where a drop of whisky had landed. "Can't even eat lunch in peace with out being fallen on by klutzes!" he complained to Ginny.

Hermione looked a little sick. "Ron! Let it go. We don't want a fight," she said softly.

"No, my apologies," Draco said pleasantly. "I'm *so sorry* to have intruded upon your luncheon, Weasel. But then it looks like there isn't much eating going on here. Quite a bit of drinking for the afternoon, though! You Gryffindors never could hold your liquor worth a damn." He shook his head in mock sympathy. "In fact, it's high time you got your great hero home before someone sees him in this state, Weaselette. You wouldn't want people knowing that he has to get totally *smashed* in order to stomach the

thought of being with you."

Ginny drew in a sharp breath.

"Malfoy..." Harry growled.

Draco cocked his head. "Ooh, that one sting? Is it true that you can't get it up unless you've had enough alcohol to make Ginny look like her brother, you pathetic drunken louse? Don't think I haven't heard the rumours, and I've only been back a few weeks. Why don't you have another bottle and maybe she'll end up looking like the twins? Then you can shag two for one, you bleary-eyed sot!" Actually, Draco hadn't heard any rumours whatsoever, but throwing in mentions of shagging your best pal and his brothers was about the worst insult he could think of at the moment, and Draco was in it for blood.

There were gasps all around the table. The feel of a punch that landed and hit its mark squarely, like a fist connecting with bone, couldn't have been more satisfying. There was a primal glee in the pit of his stomach. If Draco hadn't been gloating so much over the humiliation of his rival, he might have seen the murderous look on Potter's face. What happened next took him by surprise.

With lightning-fast reflexes, muscles and a physique honed by years of Auror training, Potter was up and out of his chair before Draco could blink. He wouldn't have predicted that Potter could still be so agile while obviously blind drunk. And while Potter was shorter than he was, Draco was powerless to do anything except struggle against the man who held him completely in check, one arm twisted behind his back. The balance of power had shifted in that instant. Draco felt breath on his neck.

"We are taking this outside, once and for all, you sack of shit," he heard, for his ears only. He didn't have time to shiver at the menace he'd rarely heard in Potter's voice before he felt himself being propelled through the bar and out the front door.

In that moment, it was as if the world fell away and they were the only two left standing there in the aftermath. For the first time in his life, Draco forgot his audience. He didn't care what he looked like or who was watching. He could only feel the other man at his back, in total control. He let the rage burst through him and take over.

It felt good to finally unleash the beast of emotion within. He had always been so carefully controlled. He was always aware of himself, his body, his tremendous responsibility. Now, here, he was alive and there was nothing but him and Potter in the street. He let go of it all and let himself break free.

Potter threw Draco away from him and Draco stumbled out into the street. He whirled, and the two men faced each other. All Draco could see was hate; all he could taste was his fury. He just wanted to beat Potter to a miserable pulp! If he could get his arms around his neck... He lunged for him, but the other man was too quick, and he shifted out of the way.

Potter drew his wand as Draco stumbled after him once again. "Been living the Muggle way too long, eh, Draco? Forgot the way we do things here? But then I was always quicker on the uptake than you were," he taunted. Potter waved his wand in front of Draco. "This is how a *real* wizard fights. Or have you forgotten?" He raised it in front of his face in the unmistakable signal for the challenge to a duel.

Draco gritted his teeth. *This* was where losing control had gotten him! How could he ever possibly win? He searched the faces in the crowd that had started to gather, but no one stepped forward. Not that he needed it. He sniffed and raised his chin defiantly.

"No one here's going to help you, Draco. Fight your own battles, for once!" Harry shouted.

"I always fight my own battles, Potter," Draco ground out. He drew his wand and saluted. He wouldn't cringe, no matter the curse, he promised himself. He would stand here and take it like a Malfoy.

Time seemed to stop, as it does in those surreal moments before a catastrophic event. Draco raised his own wand in a cursory attempt to look as if he was blocking the spell, but when he heard Potter's "*Expulso*!" he understood, too late, how far he had pushed. Potter meant business, then. Draco closed his eyes, let his wand fall away, and waited for the explosion to engulf him.

He didn't see Pansy pushing through the assemblage, and in the spell's rush toward him he couldn't hear her cries or the fevered "*Protego*!" that she cast. It was too little, too late, but it served enough of a purpose to shield him from the severity of the blast.

All Draco felt was a gentle waft of a breeze on his forehead before the kiss of the two spells crushed him. He was dreaming of green, so much green... Was it the Slytherin shade of his house colours, or a brighter hue? That was his last disquieting thought as he fell over in the dirt in front of the Three Broomsticks, never having uttered a word in his own defence.

## Chapter Seven

*Chapter 7 of 28*

After the war, Harry Potter is left with no one to save, no one to fight, and one extra wand. Draco Malfoy escapes punishment by leaving the country... or so he thinks. Seven years pass before they see each other again. Draco is no longer the master of his wand and a battle of talent and wills ensues. A story of a wand without a true master, and two men who fight to master each other... and themselves.

*This chapter was written by literaryspell. My apologies for the delay.*

"And... that was it." Harry shrugged and took a sip of his beer.

"What do you mean?" Ron demanded before calling Rosmerta over for another pitcher; they both ignored Hermione shaking her head at their drinking.

She did have a point...it was six o'clock on a Tuesday afternoon, after all. But it had been a long day. Harry had earned it.

"I mean, my hex hit him. He fell over. Parkinson Disapparated them both while he was still out. That was it. Not much of a fight." Despite his nonchalant tone, Harry found himself consternated by Draco's failure to protect himself against a pretty standard hex. It was understandable, he supposed, given that Draco had been living as a Muggle for so long and he'd only just gotten his wand back, but self-defence was, for most wizards, an ingrained instinct. He didn't think Draco could have lost that basic reaction just because he'd been wandless for a few years.

"Merlin, what I wouldn't have given to see that." Ron leaned back in his chair, looking proud. "Eh, Hermione?"

"Yes, seeing Draco Malfoy get hexed into unconsciousness while he did nothing to protect himself sounds just lovely."

"Oi," Ron protested, topping up his and Harry's glasses with the beer Rosmerta delivered. "Don't act like you don't want to see him taken down a bit."

"From what I've heard, he's already been taken down, and down, and down." She sighed. "I'm the last person to feel sympathetic toward his plight, but..."

"...But you feel sympathetic toward his plight," Harry finished with a smile.

She shrugged. "He's been through a lot. Maybe he's learned, maybe he hasn't. It isn't our place to judge that. All I know is that he's back, apparently can't protect himself, and still hates Harry. At least we can always count on the latter."

For some reason, Hermione's words bothered him more than he cared to admit...he might not have even noticed under normal circumstances, but Draco's cruelty had cut him. Had he expected them to become friends? Absolutely not. Harry's life was easier and more enjoyable without any Malfoys in it. Had he, a part of him, hoped that they would be able to move past petty childhood rivalries to at least be able to be in the same room together? Yes, he could admit that he had hoped that.

Now all of that was obviously no more than a passing fancy. Draco had no intentions of burying the hatchet, if his words at the Three Broomsticks were any indication. Harry cringed to himself as he thought back to them: *pathetic, drunken louse, and bleary-eyed sot*. Yes, maybe it had been a little early in the afternoon to have imbibed to that extent, but with Ginny sitting across from him, alternating between glaring at him and giving him hopeful glances, he'd needed to escape a little.

"Whatever his problem is," Ron said, his glass hitting the tabletop hard for emphasis, "it doesn't give him the right to talk to Harry like that. I'm surprised you didn't kick his arse, mate. I would've."

"Wasn't worth it," Harry said, shrugging. But the truth was, with his hands on Draco, hauling him out of the tavern like that... it had seemed worth it. Very worth it. Only it had become about something other than just besting Draco, beating him. He'd told Draco they were going to end it once and for all, and yet... it felt anything but finished.

"I wonder why he didn't hex back, or hex first?" Hermione said. She tapped her chin with her finger and looked at Harry as if he were withholding the answer on purpose.

"Dunno." Harry shrugged again, not wanting to let them know how much that question had been plaguing him.

"Coward," Ron offered knowingly, looking satisfied with his conclusion.

Harry grunted as his lap became full of a wriggling, gin-smelling Justin Finch-Fletchley. He saw, over Justin's blond head, Hermione and Ron exchange a glance, but he couldn't decipher it in his admittedly inebriated state.

"What do you want, Justin?" Harry asked, trying to push his pushy ex off his lap.

"I miss you," Justin said, nuzzling in to Harry's neck. His tongue darted out a quick lick, and before Harry could chastise himself, he groaned. It was so familiar, so easy with Justin.

"You miss his money," Ron said, glaring at him and then at Harry for good measure.

"No," Justin said, a slow smile making his normally handsome features a little cruel. "What *really* miss is the way his big, thick co..."

"That's enough!" Harry said, pushing Justin to the floor...his cat-like reflexes allowed him to regain his balance with only a little embarrassment.

Justin glared at Harry and stormed off, but there was mutual agreement around the table that he'd be back. Harry was just glad no one had really seen the incident. He wouldn't want anyone getting the wrong idea. Then he frowned...who would get the wrong idea? Ginny knew he was gay, even if she hadn't quite accepted it. What was the wrong idea...that he was gay, or that he was taken?

Why would it bother him that someone think he was taken?

His thoughts going in circles, Harry decided to call it a night. He wasn't feeling all too well and he still had to work the next day. He left Hermione looking thoughtful and distracted and Ron looking bright-eyed and well on his way to a wicked hangover.

Despite his decision to make an early night of it, Harry had a few more beers when he returned to his flat. He tried not to dwell on how his wand seemed a little too rough when it came to certain charms...like when he'd tried to spell the cap of his beer off and the neck had shattered. He didn't miss Draco's wand, he didn't. It was just a stupid stick. Sure, it had been *his* for so long that Draco hardly had any claim to it at all... Harry's muddled thoughts slowed to a standstill. Yes, Draco's wand *had* belonged to him. *He* was the owner.

*He* was the master. Not Draco.

Oh, Merlin. He needed Hermione.

\*

The only thing that made Harry's hangover bearable was Ron's hangover.

Firmly of the school that misery loves company, Ron had been hanging around Harry and Neville's office for most of the morning, trying to garner sympathy for an age-old ailment. He wasn't getting any from Harry, but Neville was kind enough to offer coffee and a headache potion.

"Aren't you two a little old to be out drinking on a workday?" Neville chided, refilling Harry's mug as well and topping it off with the potion.

Harry lifted his mug in thanks. "Never too old, Neville. You should join us, you might have fun."

Neville laughed and rolled his eyes. "I did have fun last night. My new batch of octo-orchids sprouted and I was up 'til late, nursing them."

Exchanging a glance with Ron, Harry managed to keep the sarcasm from his voice when he said, "That does sound fun."

"If you and your plants ever need to get out and cut loose, you know where to find us," Ron added with a chuckle.

"I certainly do," Neville said. His tone made Harry look at him sideways.

Maybe he was just sensitive after Draco's callous name-calling, but Neville's remark had almost seemed like a chastisement. Honestly, it wasn't like he drank *that* much. He hardly ever went to the bars, really...only when Ron managed to convince him or when his excuses weren't solid enough.

Draco had just caught him on a really bad day.

But if Harry's realisation from the night before bore any weight, he wasn't the only one who'd had a bad day.

As if brought to fruition by his very thoughts, a memo from Hermione whizzed around Ron's head, pecking him a few times as if to tell him to get back to work, before landing on Harry's desk.

"Remember," Ron said on his way out, "Protocol training at two o'clock. Don't be late, Harry...remember what Robards said last time."

"I'll get him there," Neville said.

Harry waved them both off. He hadn't been listening, too involved in Hermione's note.

Harry...

*You're right. I've done a little research, and it seems that in rare cases, when a wand is taken and mastered by another wizard, it will no longer obey its original master. Mostly, wands are interchangeable, but there are few cases where the wand and the wizard bond so intensely that if that bond is broken, it can't be reforged. In addition, the wizard might be hard-pressed to find another wand to bond with because the magic sees the wizard as incapable of keeping a wand.*

*You're daft if you think your 'hypothetical, Auror-business' scenario fooled me, Harry Potter. I know exactly what this is about. And didn't I tell you that using two wands was unnecessary? What do you plan on doing about this? Are you going to tell him?*

*Also, Justin told Ernie who told Padma who told Parvati who, don't ask why, told me that Justin is saying you guys went home together last night. I thought you went alone. You know that he's bad news, Harry. You're too good for him.*

*Tell Ron to get back to work! And eat something, won't you?*

Love, Hermione

Harry groaned as he finished the letter. He'd hoped he was wrong. He didn't want to be the reason why Draco suddenly couldn't work a wand. He didn't want anything to do with Draco after the last conflagration. If nothing else, that had proven that there couldn't ever be anything but anger and old spite between them.

For about fifteen minutes, Harry seriously considered not telling Draco anything. It would be easy enough. There was no reason Draco would suspect that Harry was behind his wand not working. Harry'd only put it together in a fit of drunken brilliance, and Draco didn't seem like the type to over-imbibe, so he wouldn't be having one of those any time soon.

Of course, it was possible that Draco could suss out the truth the old-fashioned way. Harry could risk that. He could plead ignorance if Draco ever confronted him.

*And so, asked his conscience, which sounded too like Hermione for his comfort, how will you feel if something happened to Draco, something that could have been prevented if he'd had his wand?*

*What, he argued back, inside his head of course, like if he verbally attacks and insults someone to the point where they'd risk their job and health just to put him in his place, and he's stuck without a means of protecting himself?*

Yes. Exactly like that. Because not only had it already happened, it was very likely to happen again. Draco just wasn't the 'plays well with others' sort. He could come into the path of harm and the guilt would fall on Harry if Draco got hurt.

"Stupid Hermione-conscience," Harry muttered.

"What was that?" Neville asked, looking up from his paperwork.

"I have to go," Harry said, rising. "Er, tell Ron... tell Robards... just... I have to go."

"Need back-up?" Neville called as Harry strode from the office.

"Merlin, I hope not," he said under his breath. He waved Neville off, shooting a reassuring smile back at his partner before getting into the lift.

It all happened so quickly that Harry didn't have time to talk himself out of it, but when he was fresh-squeezed from his Apparition and standing in front of Malfoy Manor, he gave himself a moment to again consider just pretending he knew nothing.

*What good was telling Draco going to do, anyway? What could he say? Remember that time at your house when I overpowered you and unknowingly gained mastery of the Elder Wand? Well, I also became master of your wand, which you might not ever be able to use again.*

As far as plans went, Harry had come up with better.

"If you've come to arrest me, I'd like to file a complaint, first."

Harry looked up, surprised to see Draco standing in the doorway with a scowl on his face. He was wearing black slacks and a dove grey, ribbed jumper. Despite how frustrated and annoyed he made Harry, there was no denying the annoying but visceral pull Harry felt toward him. Luckily, it was all physical. He had an unfortunate history of going after blokes on looks alone, so he felt confident that it would pass, and soon.

"Let me guess...you were manhandled by an off-duty Auror and challenged to a duel you couldn't fight in?"

Draco's scowl deepened, demarcating his face with shadowed lines. "If you don't get out of here, I'll add trespassing and harassment to the charges."

"Will you now," Harry said, rolling his eyes. How did they always manage to fall back into fifth year? It was ridiculous and yet horrifyingly comfortable. "I'm not here to arrest you, so you can relax." Draco remained as stiff as ever, glaring down at Harry from his vantage point a few steps up. "Do you even know how to? It's when you let your guard down a little, stop plotting the demise of your enemies and just... be yourself?"

Draco's lips twisted into a cruel smile. "Maybe I just need a few pints of alcohol in me first. Say, you wouldn't happen to know the location of a pub or eight, would you?"

Unruffled, Harry said, "Sure, but they'd be pretty tough to get to without Apparition. Or would you like me to make you a Portkey, seeing as you can't do it yourself?"

Draco gasped, quickly covering it with a scoff...but his eyes were uncertain. Harry closed the distance between them and waited for Draco to move aside and let him in. "I really do need to talk to you," he said, forcing his words to sound sincere when all he wanted was to turn around and just let Draco fall victim to whatever fate awaited a magicless wizard.

"What is it in regards to?"

"Your wand, Draco. Come on."

Draco's lips pursed together, turning white in the process. "Very well," he said, stepping back to let Harry pass.

Draco closed the front door and led them into a parlour, taking a seat on a chaise and gesturing for Harry to sit as well.

So far no major confrontations or disasters. Harry was duly impressed. He waited for Draco to pour tea from a silver service, taking a sip when a cup was passed to him.

He was pleased with Draco's civility, but he couldn't stop himself from sniffing the drink first.

"I'm not so stupid as to murder Harry Potter in my own home," Draco said, shaking his head as he leaned back in his chair, the picture of casual elegance.

"But in someone else's home?"

Draco's lip quirked. "One never knows."

"Listen, Draco..."

"For Merlin's sake, call me by my surname. Hearing my name on your lips..." Here, Draco's cheeks inexplicably reddened and he cleared his throat. "You using my first name is insulting."

"I don't see why, I certainly don't mean it that way," Harry said honestly. "And I'm not going to stop just because you don't like it. Grow up."

Draco's fingers tightened around his teacup, and through gritted teeth, he said, "Is there something I can help you with, Potter?"

"As I was trying to say, I have a feeling I know what's wrong with your wand."

"What makes you think something's wrong with my wand?" Draco was obviously trying to appear nonchalant, but Harry could read him better now than he could when they were students. He was nervous about something, or maybe even ashamed.

"You didn't use it to defend yourself from my hex."

"Maybe I simply wasn't concerned about some half-arsed curse from a..."

"Draco," Harry interrupted. He put his teacup down and leaned forward, perching his elbows on his knees. "Listen to me. It doesn't have to be like this. I'm not calling you weak and I'm not going to take advantage of the fact that you're wandless. I really do want to help."

"I don't suppose you'll ever learn that some people just don't need saving?"

In the ensuing silence, Harry knew without a doubt they were both thinking back to Draco lying motionless on the study floor, paralysed by his own wards.

"Some people don't. You do."

Draco rose to his feet in a rush; somehow, without wizard's robes, the action wasn't terribly impressive. "You can leave now."

Harry stood as well, drawing his wand. He was glad to see Draco reactively reach for his own. Despite Harry's near-certainty that it wouldn't work, Draco still kept it on him. That was a good sign...it meant he wanted his magic back.

"I'll leave as soon as you show me that your wand works."

"I don't need to prove anything to you! Is this even official Auror business? What are you doing here?"

Harry forced himself to remain calm. "I'm here to help you master your wand again."

"What do you mean?" Draco asked, looking like the wind had been vacuumed from his sails.

"When I took your wand from you, here in your house, back when the Snatchers brought us here... I became the master of both your wand and the Elder Wand. That's why it won't work...it's rejected you."

"What are you on about? That's not..."

"Then use it." Harry's voice was quiet, insistent. "Cast a spell, hell, cast a curse. It won't work, Draco, and you know it."

Draco's hand trembled as he put his wand back into his pocket. He seemed... not defeated, but resigned. "How can I fix it?"

Harry ran his hand through his hair. He probably should have spoken to Hermione more on the matter before he'd rushed off. He didn't exactly know how to get the wand to see Draco as the master. Draco'd become master of the Elder Wand from Dumbledore. Harry'd become master by beating Draco.

So... Draco just had to win it back.

"You have to beat me to get it back," Harry said slowly, knowing it was true.

Though Draco's eyes lit up a little at Harry's words, he immediately found a flaw in the plan. "Won't that give me mastery of your wand, too?"

"I don't think so. Hermione said that what's happened to you is actually really rare. Most of the time, wands can be used interchangeably and even a defeated wizard can use his old wand, just not very well. I think it might have something to do with the fact that you lost mastery of two wands at once. Fuck in both ends, if you know what I mean."

"I certainly don't," Draco said. "You're saying my wand thinks I'm incapable of using it because I lost power over it and another wand?"

Harry shrugged. "Makes sense, doesn't it? You still have magic, don't you?"

Draco nodded. "When I get angry, I can feel it..." He looked like he was going to say more, but he didn't.

"So I guess you'll just have to get it back from me, then."

Draco, even when perfectly coiffed, gave off the impression of someone ready to tear his own hair out. "How do you propose I do that? I can't beat you magically, not without a wand. Though rest assured I'd be able to best you otherwise."

"That's sort of a moot point, isn't it, since I *am* the master of your wand, meaning I beat you."

Not willing to cede the point, Draco waved him off. "And I can't very well fight you like a Muggle...I've no experience with such barbaric tactics, and you must admit you're built for just those type of barroom antics."

Harry couldn't help it...he leered. Hearing Draco talk about how he was *built* brought out something primal in him. Luckily, he wrangled it under control before Draco could recognise the look. "I could teach you to fight," he offered.

"Why are you even doing this?" Draco suddenly asked, looking suspicious.

Since Harry didn't have a satisfactory answer for himself, let alone for Draco, he settled for a rote response. "It's the right thing to do."

"Of course. Merlin forbid Harry Potter do anything else."

"You say *Harry Potter* like it's some sort of title, but that's just who I am, Draco. I know you can't possibly understand it, but that's me. I took your wand. I don't feel bad and I'll never apologise...I killed Voldemort with that wand. But I shouldn't have kept it for so long. It's your wand and I'm going to help you win it back." The *whether you like it or not* was strongly implied.

"I..." Draco frowned and looked at Harry before casting his eyes to the ground. "So what do we do?"

Cheered by the response, Harry said, "Well, I suppose I could teach you wandless magic. I've never been very good at it but I know ~~how~~ to do it. And it seems like something you'd be good at. It's all about control, precision, and dedication."

Seeming to realised he'd just been complimented, Draco flushed. Harry offered him a small smile, but it wasn't returned, though Harry rather thought Draco's eyes weren't as hard as they'd been a moment ago.

"I could do that," Draco said, nodding.

"I know." And as far as plans went, Harry'd come up with worse.

## Chapter Eight

*Chapter 8 of 28*

After the war, Harry Potter is left with no one to save, no one to fight, and one extra wand. Draco Malfoy escapes punishment by leaving the country... or so he thinks. Seven years pass before they see each other again. Draco is no longer the master of his wand and a battle of talent and wills ensues. A story of a wand without a true master, and two men who fight to master each other... and themselves.

Draco shut the door after Potter with more force than necessary. He didn't catch the other man's heels, but the temptation to do so was great. Draco was a gracious host, but even he couldn't restrain himself from slamming it with zeal. Magic lessons with Potter? The idea was beyond ludicrous.

"A moment of your time, if you can spare it?"

Draco turned from where he was still staring at the front door to see his father standing in the foyer, a slight smile on his face. Draco scowled. He recognized a patronizing look when he saw one.

"That is, if you are finished with your social engagements for the afternoon," Lucius said. He quirked an eyebrow.

"You know very well that I am!" Draco snapped.

"One can't be sure. You are the centre of a veritable flurry of activity these days, it seems." Lucius held up a handful of owls, fanned out to illustrate his point.

"Reading my mail, Father?" Draco asked. He strode forward and snatched the stack of owl notes. He could tell from a glance that they were all from one person and couldn't suppress a groan.

"Miss Parkinson is a rather ardent admirer of yours, it would appear," Lucius remarked. "And no, I wouldn't read your correspondences, Draco. They are rather hard to miss when they keep inundating the front hall." His look held mild reproval.

Draco clenched the missives hard enough to wrinkle them.

"Shall we retire to the South Gallery? There are some matters we need to discuss, and I don't think we need to resort to standing here in the hallway like cretins. Of course, if you prefer to ..." Lucius held out his hands, as if to indicate that the choice was Draco's.

Draco pursed his lips, recognizing that there was no choice, not really. "The South Gallery is fine," he replied, working hard to keep his tone civil. He turned first, not wanting to follow behind like a whipped pup. He was a grown man, after all, not some teenaged boy who was being called before council for some slight or infraction. He could have a talk with his father in his own house!

However, the sound of Lucius' footfalls behind him still made him unaccountably nervous, and he was glad when they finally reached the long gallery room. Draco went stiffly to a leather chair closest the door. His father chose an upholstered one with a spectacular view of the gardens. They settled in silence.

Draco fidgeted.

They both spoke at once.

"Father, really..."

"Draco, have you..."

They stopped.

Draco sighed.

Lucius cocked his head. "Son, did you really think it would escape my notice that Harry Potter was just in our home? And not for the first time, I might add. I was waiting for you to tell me what is going on, but I find I must ask directly, as it appears that you are not going to be forthcoming with the details. What exactly were you doing having tea with your archenemy?"

"He's not my archenemy!" Draco protested.

"I beg to differ. Just yesterday at luncheon I believe you said, and I quote, 'Potter is my archenemy, that bastard.' In point of fact, we were discussing another matter entirely, and you broke in with that little bon mot completely unprovoked." Lucius crossed his legs neatly at the knee. "Do you care to enlighten me as to your change of

heart?"

Draco could feel himself blushing. "I...we..." He gritted his teeth. His lack of eloquence was not doing credit to his argument. And the more patient his father was...just sitting there, damn him, waiting for him to trip up on his own tongue...the worse it got! Draco took a deep breath. "I guess Potter isn't as bad as I thought," he mumbled.

"What was that? I couldn't quite hear what you said," Lucius said.

Draco stared at the parquet floor. "Erm. Potter isn't that bad. We're going to be hanging around sometimes." The words wanted to stick in his throat. The lie that Potter wasn't so bad wasn't something he thought he could repeat. If he had to say it again, he wasn't sure he could go through with it.

Luckily, Lucius didn't seem to need another declaration. He was preoccupied with his own amusement. Or so it seemed to Draco, who didn't think that his smug smile was quite so necessary. "Is that so? You and Harry Potter are going to become chums, hmm? Interesting."

"I wouldn't say that!" Draco felt queasy at the mention of such familiarity in regards to *Potter*.

Lucius gave him an assessing look. "Well, which is it? Are you to be friends, or not?"

"Yes. Great bloody friends," Draco muttered. That one almost hurt to say.

There was a twinkle in Lucius' eye. "So, Mr. Potter was here to bury the hatchet, is that the case? And you two are going to be spending time together?"

Draco couldn't bring himself to do anything but nod. He felt his gorge actually rise. Thank Merlin Potter wasn't here to listen to his disgrace! He'd never live this down.

"Splendid! This comes at an ideal time, in fact."

Draco didn't like the sound of that. His father was no fool, and Draco dreaded the idea that he might know that he was being lied to. If he did, he was sure to make Draco pay.

"I have some business to attend to in Italy. There are investments that require my direct attention for a few weeks, and I have been concerned that you will have to be left alone here in the Manor for the duration of my absence. Now that you have made allies with a powerful Auror such as Mr. Potter, you can invite him to come and stay here. I need not worry." Lucius seemed a little too delighted. A devilish glint lit his grey eyes.

Draco couldn't conceal the horror that flitted across his face at this news. "But ... Father! Why can't I come with you? I love Italy this time of year! You know I adore the country home! And I need to practice. My accent is tending a little too rustic, I noticed just the other day!" He didn't care about the edge of desperation he heard in his own voice; he just couldn't stand the thought of any other alternative.

Lucius smirked.

Draco noted that if it looked anything near like that on his own face, it was no wonder he had gotten into a lot of fights in school, because that was a really *annoying* look when he was on the other end of it.

"Son, I thought we discussed this already. It is unlike you to be so ... forgetful. Need I already remind you of your employment responsibilities? You have your own matters to attend to here, and I wouldn't dream of taking you away from them at this crucial juncture," Lucius said with a thin veneer of politeness to his tone.

"Father!" wailed Draco. "You know I can't find work. I've tried already. No one will have me!"

"Then I suggest you try harder. Malfoys don't give up so easily. And I absolutely insist that you have Mr. Potter come and stay with you in my absence." Lucius said. His firm tone brooked no argument.

Draco folded his arms across his chest. He was in the mood for a fight. This was not a decree he was going to take lying down. "That's ridiculous. I'm a man now, if you haven't noticed. I'm not a little boy anymore. I won't have a babysitter. I can stay by myself, you know. You always treat me like such a child!"

"Draco, I know that you are fully capable of handling most affairs. I would not leave the running of the estate to you if I doubted your abilities. This manor is going to require your attention and all of your aptitude. When have I ever given you the notion that I doubt your competence? I have full confidence in you in that regard. Unfortunately, you are still without your magic, and it is a fact that there are those out there who would do us harm. Anti-Malfoy sentiment is running high at the moment. I, myself, have been made aware of threats against former ... practitioners of a less desirable nature." This time Lucius dropped his gaze.

Draco sat up in alarm. "What? There have been threats? When?"

His father waved a hand. "Don't worry, there is nothing to be concerned about. *If* I am here. If you are alone and unguarded, I would fear for your safety and for the security of the manor."

Draco frowned and slumped back in his chair. "You make me sound so helpless."

Lucius paused. "Without your wand, son ... you just need some aid. And I fail to see what the problem is, if you are telling me the truth. Your association with Mr. Potter is coming at a most opportune time. I can take care of what I need to, and this manor is big enough to house the both of you for the duration of my absence. Am I correct?" Lucius' gaze probed.

Draco searched his father's eyes. He sensed that Lucius knew he wasn't being entirely honest. This was his chance to come clean, to tell him exactly what was going on, that no, he couldn't stand that insufferable Potter, that this was all about his wand. Somehow the thought of confessing that he had lost control of his wand, that he wasn't wizard enough to keep his own magic...well, he knew that his father would be understanding, but Draco couldn't bring himself to say it. He didn't want to say the words to his father, that his own wand wasn't working and he had to ask the very man whom he hated with all his heart for help. The despair, the worry that he wouldn't be able to do it rose up in his breast. What if he was a failure at everything he tried to do? What if Potter tried to teach him, and he just couldn't learn it? Draco felt sick for a wild moment before he tamped it down and responded. "Yes, you are correct."

Lucius didn't say anything, just kept his steady gaze on Draco's face.

Draco began to get nervous. This was a tactic his father had employed when he was a child, and it was more effective than it seemed. A guilty Draco had often cracked under that imperious, silent stare and confessed not only whatever wrongdoing was being weighed, but every other thing that could have otherwise possibly gone undetected. Draco couldn't stand up to the scrutiny. Even now, he felt himself break out in a cold sweat, and the need to tell everything to his father, to make it all right and let someone else bear the burden for him was nearly overwhelming.

Just when Draco didn't think he could take it anymore, Lucius nodded. "Then make ready, Son. I take my leave before week's end, and I expect your arrangements to be in place before that time." Lucius stood with feline grace and made his way to the doors of the gallery.

Draco was relieved that he had passed whatever test or scrutiny his father was looking for, at least for now. Then the meaning of his words sank in and Draco shot to his feet in alarm. "A week! What if Potter isn't ready to stay here by the end of the week? That isn't much time!" Holy Harpies! How was he going to even broach the subject in less than a week?

Lucius didn't bother turning around. "Then I'm sure Miss Parkinson will be able to make the accommodations possible." His words echoed behind him. "The choice is yours, Draco."

If Draco hadn't felt sick before, those words were like a punch to the gut now. He fell back into the chair.

His fool pride reminded him that this was the same time of day that he had goaded Potter for being drunk, but damn, he could really use a drink.

\*

Feeling sorry for himself was really quite boring and besides, the leather chair in the gallery was more for aesthetics than for comfort. After a considerable time spent hefting sighs and sticking out his lip and still being no closer to an acceptable solution to his dilemma, Draco decided that he needed sustenance. He would feel less out of sorts after a sandwich, surely. Watercress and cucumber finger-food always did wonders for his self-esteem and complexion at the same time, he had found. Nothing cheered him up like working on his beauty regimen.

Draco made his way to the kitchens. He decided to put the whole disturbing idea of who he would have to ask to come and stay with him completely out of his mind until after his snack. No use ruining a good chance to enjoy a meal. He was caught up in trying to decide whether Brie went better with flaked salmon or if he would try and find the last of the Havarti when he stumbled over something. It hit him at knee-height, and he went sprawling in a tangle of limbs all over the chequered floor of the kitchens.

There was much wailing and shrieking. None of which was coming from him.

"What the ...?" Draco drew his brows together in confusion.

A house-elf jumped up and bowed. "I'm so sorry for my clumsiness, Master Malfoy! I have shamed myself on my first day here! I am such an idiot! *Idiot!* I would never forgive myself if something happened to you because of my great stupidity!" The elf started trembling and weeping.

"Who are you? What are you doing here?" Draco was still sitting on the floor. "How do you know my name?" He started getting suspicious. His father had said there was Anti-Malfoy sentiment. What if this was a plot? Draco jumped to his feet. "Who sent you?" He grabbed the snivelling house-elf by its grubby sack-shirt. "Who are you working for?"

"Miss Pansy sent me! I work for her!" The elf was crying and snotting all over his hand. Draco let go in disgust and wiped his hand on the thing's shirt. No use dirtying his own, after all. It was imported.

"Pansy?" What the creature said percolated through. "What? Why would Pansy send a house-elf? What the *fuck* is going on here?" Draco ran his hand through his hair, before he realized, too late, that it was covered in snot. Great. He scowled. Someone was going to pay. "What did you say your name was?"

The thing's knees were knocking so hard that it fell to the ground in supplication. "I am called Peachy, sir."

Draco sighed. He might have a reputation for being a tyrant, but he hadn't been raised to be rude to the help. "I'm not going to hurt you. Er ... Peachy. Can you explain how you came to be standing in my kitchen? I was understandably shocked to find you here with no expectation of your arrival."

"Of course, sir! I am so sorry to have surprised and scared you! It is my fault that you were injured! Poor Master Malfoy ... " Peachy broke out into fresh sobs.

Draco restrained another sigh. He had no patience with these theatrics. That always had been the problem with house-elves, in his opinion. They were so damned susceptible to dramatics. "It's fine. Can we just stay on topic here, Peachy? What's the story? And I'd like some *petit fours*, if it wouldn't be too much trouble. The savoury kind. I had a hankering for something cheesy just before our ... meeting." Draco found from past experience that house-elves tended to talk better if you gave them a servile task to complete during the conversation.

Peachy jumped up. "Of course, sir!" She appeared familiar with the kitchen already, a fact that didn't escape Draco's notice, and she began assembling ingredients while she talked. "Miss Pansy sent me over to help you recuperate. She has been most worried about you, sir. Most worried. She sends you owls day and night, but since you have not responded, she thought that maybe you were still Stunned. She knew that you wouldn't go to St. Mungo's, and she was desperate to be of help. Do you prefer rosemary or thyme?"

Draco frowned, thinking of all of Pansy's owls accumulating unanswered in the front hall. "Thyme," he answered absently.

"Yes, she knows that you are in need of staff, so she sent me to help. She wants you to know how much she cares. You can keep me for as long as you need me. Butter or cream?"

"Cream. So, Pansy talks to you? She tells you things?" Draco asked.

"Oh, yes. She is a kind mistress." Peachy whipped up the dough and cut little circles.

Draco bit his lip in thought. "Are you supposed to report back what I am doing to your mistress? Are you a spy?"

Peachy dropped the rolling pin. "Oh, no, Master Malfoy! Miss Pansy loves you, and she just wants..." Peachy clapped flour-covered hands over her mouth, her eyes wide. "I wasn't supposed to say that part. You aren't going to tell her, are you?"

Draco felt the room spin. That was the second sucker-punch to the gut of the day. Pansy? In love with him? He mentally reviewed all of their interactions since his return, and his mouth went slack. It was true! Had he been blind? He hadn't seen that coming. How could he have missed it? He had thought that this was like back at Hogwarts: a simple schoolgirl infatuation. He could see how anyone would be attracted to him...it was hard not to be. He was quite a catch, after all. He had it all: the looks, the money, the charisma, the brains and raw sex appeal. He was almost jealous of other people: he couldn't have sex with himself, after all, and even he wished he could after he saw his own bum in a tight-fitting pair of denims, it was that spectacular. Just about anyone who knew of him had carried a torch for him at one point or another; it was just part of being a Malfoy. He had to beat off all the women...and quite a few blokes, to be honest...with a stick.

But love? That was a different thing entirely.

"Master Malfoy? Please! Please don't tell Miss Pansy that I told you!" Peachy was crying again.

Draco gave her an annoyed look. "I won't tell," he promised. "Just...don't get my pastry all teary. I won't have it."

Peachy gave a watery smile. "Thank you, sir. I can stay?"

Draco was already lost in thought. "Hm? Oh, yeah. Fine, that's fine. Dinner's at eight. And I feel like steak." He turned to go. He had to wash his hair again. It had recently become...sullied.

"Yes, sir. Whatever you want."

Draco smiled as he left the kitchen. Those words had never sounded so good.

On his way through the Grand Salon, Draco caught sight of a quill and pot of ink sitting ready for use on the massive walnut desk in the corner. An idea came to him. What if he didn't ask Potter in person to come? It would be a lot easier to dash off a quick invite than to face him, like he was asking some sort of favour. This way, he didn't have to let Potter have all the power. Decided, Draco was momentarily distracted from his hair disaster as he sat down to compose his summons.

Potter,

*I've decided to allow you to teach me wandless magic. I think that I would have enormous aptitude for the skill. For my accommodation, I insist that you repair to the Manor for the duration of my tutelage. It will require all of my concentration, and I don't want to be inconvenienced by running all over town. I will make a suite ready for your arrival and expect you in three days time.*

*Respectfully,*

*D. Malfoy*

Just as Draco finished toweling off his hair from the cleansing of the filth of the house elf, an owl tapped at his window. He frowned. Potter sure was prompt. Well, then again, why wouldn't he be eager to reserve his spot at the Manor? People used to stand in line for an invitation! Draco slit open the missive and began to read.

*Draco,*

*You are off your nut if you think I am going to come and live with you like your little lap dog. Not everyone in the whole world does exactly what you want, when you want. I'll teach you, but on my schedule. Got that? Is next Saturday okay? I only have weekends free. I'll meet you outside the shop at the corner of Wellington Street at eleven. See you then.*

*Harry*

*Potter,*

*It most certainly is not okay. I insist upon your compliance in this issue. Your rooms are being made ready, and I can compensate you for salary that may be missed, if that is your grievance. Money is no object in this matter. The restoration of my magic is of paramount importance and must be treated as such. I will expect you at the aforementioned time.*

*Respectfully,*

*D. Malfoy*

*Draco,*

*You don't seem to fucking get it, you annoying idiot! You can't buy me off! I have a job, Draco, not that you have any notion of responsibility whatsoever. Why are you so keen on having someone that you can't stand come and live with you, anyway? Can't get enough of me?*

*H*

*Potter,*

*Fuck you! How dare you imply that I don't work! You have no idea what I do with my time. It's your job to watch over me, since you seem to think I am so obviously inept that I can't be by myself for one minute without magic. In fact, after I send this ruddy owl, I am placing a call to your supervisor to ask for your leave of absence in this matter, which is more important. Witness protection and all that. So there.*

*Malfoy*

*P.S. Don't call me by my given name.*

*Draco,*

*You are such an arse. Fine, I'll be there. You'd better start practising whatever magic you have now, because you are going to need a head start on me.*

*H*

Draco stared at the ominous last note that the owl had dropped into his hand. It fairly bristled with the force of Potter's wrath. Draco closed his eyes. He might have won the battle to keep his dignity, but he had a feeling that the war of wills had just begun.

## Chapter Nine

*Chapter 9 of 28*

After the war, Harry Potter is left with no one to save, no one to fight, and one extra wand. Draco Malfoy escapes punishment by leaving the country... or so he thinks. Seven years pass before they see each other again. Draco is no longer the master of his wand and a battle of talent and wills ensues. A story of a wand without a true master, and two men who fight to master each other... and themselves.

*This chapter was written by literaryspell.*

As he had every day for the past three days, Harry stared at the owl letter from Draco demanding his presence at the manor.

He still couldn't believe it, but no amount of disbelief could make the situation go away. How he'd managed to become trapped...no, entrapped...in this bloody mess was beyond his understanding.

The scariest part of it all...well, second scariest, next to being kidnapped and forced to teach Draco Malfoy wandless magic against his will...was that Robards had actually sanctioned Draco's demand. Harry had been forced, tail tucked, to ask for a week off, and of course Robards hadn't let him off easy, knowing that Harry had never taken a vacation in all his time as an Auror. When Harry had eventually let the truth out, Robards had laughed. *Laughed!*

Then he'd said that because Harry had been the only one showing any sort of interest in Draco since his return, Draco was his responsibility. Adding to that, legally, Draco did have a leg to stand on, according to Neville, who looked entirely unsympathetic towards Harry's plight. Harry had stolen Draco's wand. That was, in wizarding law, illegal. So now he was making amends.

Damn Draco! Harry's job was important; he couldn't just blow it off to play houseguest to the Malfoys in their twisted time warp of a manor while teaching Draco something that came naturally to Harry.

As Harry really didn't have to the first clue as to how to teach a person wandless magic, he spent those three days until he was due at the manor studying. He hadn't cracked a book since he'd left Hogwarts, except for the occasional detective thriller or sci-fi novel that Hermione insisted on giving him on his birthdays. Now he was being forced to study like an errant first year who hadn't known there would be a test on the first day of school. It was ridiculous.

There was lots of information on wandless magic, so Harry was able to get the gist of it quickly enough. It was all about focus, mental stamina, and determination. Harry didn't really have any of those things, but somehow he was able to use wandless magic. He didn't like it; it wasn't reliable and his wands...no, his *wand*, damn Draco again...did the trick just fine. Without a focusing agent, he felt like he was flying blind.

The book he spent the most time reading was one Hermione had found for him. It was a teacher's guide on wandless magic, meaning it gave information on how to teach someone *else* the ability rather than have a person learn it themselves. Why Draco had never bother trying to figure it out in the seven years he'd been gone, Harry couldn't begin to guess. But he suspected it was something along the lines of: Draco was lazy and spoilt and why do himself what he could get other people to do for him, people who needed their jobs for a living but also to help others.

Only Ron had given Harry any sort of sympathy. He'd come over for a pint before Harry was due to leave. His bags were packed, his fate decided.

"If you don't hear from me, at least come find my body," he'd said. "I don't want Draco messing around with it for potions ingredients or anything."

Ron had agreed, probably without realising that Harry was dead serious.

When it was time to leave, he'd given his friend a brief hug and told him he'd owl in the evenings so they knew he was okay. Ron even offered to go in his stead, but it was an empty kindness because they both knew Ron was even less adept at wandless magic than Draco Malfoy apparently was.

Harry Apparated to the gates of the manor and paused. He could just... not go. The idea had been running through his mind for days. Ever since the first letter from Draco had arrived, stating that Draco was going to *allow* Harry to teach him the most complicated method magic known to wizards. He didn't owe Draco anything. Sure, he'd... borrowed his wand. He was sure no one begrudged him that...he'd killed Voldemort with it, after all. No, that couldn't be held against him. And yes, he'd used the wand without really giving thought to its owner for seven years. Yes, Draco's magical reaction to having his wand taken was unusual and meant that Draco could not use any wand, including his own. That wasn't Harry's *fault*. That was just... crap luck. It happened. Harry'd seen his fair share of it. No one was scrambling to make up for his horrible years with the Dursleys, and he certainly wasn't demanding that someone else come in and make it all better.

He wasn't like Draco. He could solve his own damn problems.

Which was why he was here. He wasn't like Draco. He was going to do the right thing just because it was the right thing. He wouldn't get anything from teaching Draco...or trying to teach him, because Merlin knew Draco was a pain in the arse and promised to make Harry's life very painful for the next week with no promise that he could actually *do* wandless magic at all...and he certainly wasn't going to enjoy it.

He would just do the best he could and then leave, guilt-free. If Draco couldn't manage to learn it, that was no skin off Harry's back. It wasn't his responsibility to make sure Draco could do wandless magic...no, his job was simply to teach what he knew and go on his merry way.

With that decided, Harry approached the manor. Every time he visited, a bit of its former splendour was repaired. It still looked depreciated and rather unimpressive, but it was no longer sinking into despair.

Harry knocked on the door and almost immediately a small house-elf opened it wide, staring up at him with wide...wider than usual...eyes. "Yes?" she said in a high-pitched squeak. He deduced that she was female only because there was a bow made of frayed ribbon tied around one of her ears.

"I'm Harry Potter. Draco Malfoy is expecting me." Of course Draco wouldn't open the door himself, that was *to* *plebeian*. Still, he hadn't seen the house-elf the last time he'd been at the manor. He supposed that meant he wouldn't see Draco elbow-deep in dishwasher this time. For some reason, the thought disappointed him.

"Oh, of course! Young Master Draco is, indeed, expecting Harry Potter. Please be following Peachy, now!" Peachy turned and led Harry one of the many parlours he knew the manor boasted.

Draco was sitting on a settee, a tea service in front of him and a delicate and ancient-looking book in his hands. He looked up when Harry entered, nodding at Peachy to dismiss her. She left, and Harry took a seat in an armchair as far away from Draco as was possible without sitting on the floor.

"So." Harry crossed his arms over his chest. He didn't plan on making this easy on Draco.

Draco rolled his eyes. "Listen, Potter, I don't like this any more than you do. I need to learn wandless magic and you need to teach it to me. It will be awkward and boring and I'm sure boorish. But it must be done."

Harry sighed. Loath as he was to admit it, Draco was right. He was here, he had already made up his mind to do it, so he might as well just get it over with as easily as possible. "Fine. If we're going to be civil, you can start by using my first name and permitting me use of yours."

"You already use my first name," Draco said, looking unimpressed.

"That's right, I do, Draco. So go ahead and stop glaring every time I say it or my feelings will be hurt. And call me Harry. You have a lot of nerve, demanding my assistance, and don't think I won't make demands in return. I know how much you need this. I would say that puts *me* in the position of power, wouldn't you?"

Draco glared until Harry lifted an eyebrow. He sighed and said, "Fine, Potter. How do you plan to go about this? Do you have any sort of schedule in mind or are you just going... *wing* it?"

"I have a bit of a schedule worked out," Harry said, noting that Draco had again refused to use his first name. The books had all said not to try wandless magic right away. It was easy to get discouraged and discouragement meant less confidence, which in turn meant a greater unlikelihood that it wouldn't work.

"May I see it?"

"Oh. I don't have it written out or anything," Harry admitted.

"So we're trusting my success on your ability to recall things at will?"

"I suppose we are. Why, do you have a problem with that?"

Draco shifted, looking very much like he did and like he would rather do nothing more than tell Harry just that, in fine, pointed detail. Instead, he said, "If you wouldn't mind writing out just the barest of schedules so I can adjust my own accordingly, it would be much appreciated."

Draco said *much appreciated* like he meant *I'll kill you if you don't*.

Harry just sighed again and opened his pack. If the forty minutes he'd spent at the manor felt like four weeks, he wasn't sure he could make it. Ron and Neville might be searching for his body yet.

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After writing out the schedule, which was very bare and not just because Draco had asked for it to be, but because Harry really didn't have any more detail to offer, he had Draco tell him about his experiences with wandless magic including Occlumency and Legilimency.

Draco had a basic capability for Occlumency. Harry was able to get into his thoughts, but it took a few minutes of force from his side. He had no aptitude for Legilimency, even when Harry stopped Occluding. The positive side of that experiment was that Draco still had magic. Harry had felt him probing, even if he hadn't been able to penetrate.

The downside was that Draco was going to have to spend the rest of the day meditating and working on his focus. Harry learned very quickly that it didn't take much for Draco to become frustrated when he couldn't do something right. He seemed to believe that he should have an innate ability to master anything on the first try, and when he wasn't able to, he became irritable and almost unbearable to be around.

Despite that, they sloughed through a few hours of mind training until Draco claimed he was exhausted.

"Let me show you to your room," Draco said, sound more congenial now that Harry wasn't badgering him to focus, pay attention, clear his mind.

Harry reminded himself of Snape, and the idea made him both cringe and smile. He had no idea if training Draco was going to work at all. Snape would have been able to do it...in fact, he would have laughed at Harry's attempts at teaching. So would Draco. The two would have a jolly time taking him down a notch but at least the responsibility wouldn't be Harry's.

"Thanks," Harry said, grabbing his overnight bags. He could use a shower before dinner. Which reminded him... "You will be feeding me, won't you?"

Draco tossed an incredulous look over his shoulder as he led Harry up the massive marble staircase. "What kind of host would I be if I didn't?"

Harry hoped Draco didn't want an answer to that, because he was sure it wouldn't be appreciated. If being a host included keeping someone pretty much against their will, Draco had it down pat.

Harry's room was almost as large as his entire flat. There was an enjoining bathroom, a massive closet, and a huge canopy bed that he would feel utterly ridiculous sleeping in.

He put his bag on the bed and turned to thank Draco, but the prickly bastard had already left. Harry sighed and wondered if it would always be like that. He didn't expect...or *want*, really...Draco to let him into his life, but since he'd been the one to *invite* Harry in, the least he could do was be civil.

Not bothering to put his things away in the bureau, Harry organised the books Hermione had given him while thinking on how he could help Draco learn wandless magic. There was no sure way to learn it and not everyone even could.

It had to have been a few hours later when Peachy the house-elf popped up, startling Harry into tossing his quill into the air. He watched it fall onto the expensive-looking carpet with an impressive splash of black ink. Both Harry and the elf looked at each other with wide eyes. He watched as Peachy tried to work her elf magic on it, but the ink was Harry's own invention...utterly ineradicable from *any* surface.

He cleared his throat when it became obvious that Peachy was ready to tear out her sparse hair. She stepped back and he placed a wastebasket over the spot.

"I won't tell if you won't," he said.

Peachy nodded solemnly. "Master Draco says dinner is served and please to not be late."

"Thank you," Harry said. He stood and followed the house-elf...his new partner in crime...down to the dining room. An ostentatiously long dinner table was set up with dishes at the head and foot. He and Draco wouldn't even be able to talk at that distance.

As Draco was nowhere to be seen, Harry moved his dishes down to Draco's end, seating himself at the right. Then he didn't like how that put him in the position of second to Draco's first, so he moved Draco's plate setting as well, across from Harry's spot. Perfect.

When Draco entered, he stopped dead and took in the new arrangements. Harry sat back in his chair, pleased with himself. To his surprise, Draco didn't fight the set-up. He sat down and called for the first course.

Peachy popped in with two loaded trays. She looked confused for the longest time, staring from Draco's old seat at the head to his new one across from Harry. Finally, she put the dishes down, looking confused almost to tears.

"They don't like change much, do they?" Harry said, chuckling.

"Hmm."

"So I take it your parents aren't coming? There were only two settings."

Draco looked up. "My father has business to take care of."

"Ah." Harry poked at the meat on his plate with the slender tines of his fork. It looked like lamb. He thought. "And your mother?" Harry waited for Draco to finish chewing his food, but even after he watched that Adam's apple bob, Draco didn't speak. "Draco?"

"My mother passed." His tone was cool but there was underlying pain, clear as day to Harry, who had had to bluff his way through the pain of losing loved ones himself.

"I'm so sorry," Harry said honestly. She had saved his life, after all. More than for her, though, he felt for Draco. Losing a parent was never easy, and Harry hadn't even known his. Draco had to be devastated. Even though it was horrible, it did cheer him slightly...maybe Draco's cruelty and coldness was just a front for the pain he was feeling. Maybe he wasn't completely beyond hope after all.

Draco nodded and continued to eat. Peachy came in and filled their glasses with wine. Harry couldn't help but feel grateful. Working with Draco was going to tax him and he could use a drink.

However, as he drank, he felt Draco's eyes on him. The harsh words were all too easily recalled, and Harry sat his glass down. Then he felt foolish for letting the snark of Draco Malfoy get to him and he drank some more. Eventually he had no idea what he was proving and to whom, so he just ate instead. When Peachy came back to pour more, he asked for water instead.

"Clever thinking, Potter, as you're going to need your wits about you when you attempt to teach me wandless magic."

Harry sighed. "Listen, you can put aside the bullshit right now. I'm not working *for* you, okay? You don't pay my salary and you can't boss me around. I'm working *with* you.

And if you don't like it, I can find the door on my own."

Draco raised his hands in mock supplication. "I meant no offense. Merely commenting on what seems to be a habit for you."

"Okay. That's it for tonight. Here's your lesson, okay? Ready?*Let it go.* Your mind and your magical spirit have to be free and without emotional weight. Because instead of the wand, your *mind* is the focusing agent. If you're carrying around hate and spite and anger, your magic, if it comes at all, will be sporadic and violent. Work on that tonight. I'm going to bed. We'll start at eight o'clock in the morning, and you'd better be light as a fucking feather, got it?"

Draco sat back, his eyebrows lifted in surprise. "Why, Potter. I had no idea you could be so forceful. Must be the Auror in you coming out. But then I do have some experience facing brutality at your hands."

Harry stood, exasperated, and walked around to Draco's side of the table. "Belt up, Draco, or my hands won't be the only thing I'll brutalise you with." He stared into Draco's surprised grey eyes before he strode from the room.

\*

"Okay. So just close your eyes. Seriously, Draco, I can see that they're open a crack. Why aren't you taking this seriously?"

Draco sighed. "I'm not comfortable closing my eyes around you. Who knows what you'll do when my guard is down."

"Without a wand, your guard is *always* down. I could immobilise you in seconds. I could Stun you and rob you blind and if you wanted your stuff back, there wouldn't be a damned thing you could do to me to get it."

Draco glared, but he shut his eyes.

"Now, focus on the table in front of you. You don't need to see it; you know it's there. Reach out with your senses. Imagine it in your mind. Can you see it?"

"Yes," Draco said in a quiet voice. His blond brows were furrowed and he seemed to be concentrating very hard.

"Do you see the quill on the desk? The long peacock feather quill with the ink stain all up the side?"

"Yes."

"Good. I don't want you to move it. Don't even try. Just get to know it. Feel with your mind how light it is, how soft. Imagine you are writing with it. Imagine you're brushing it over your lips as you pause in thought. Imagine you're tickling a lover with it, brushing it over their..."

The quill moved, like the softest of breezes has kissed it.

Harry smiled, relieved. Draco *could* do it after all.

"Okay, Draco. You did great. I think that's enough this time."

Draco's eyes flew open. "What? We only just started! I swear, I felt something that time, like my... mind was touching it."

"We haven't *just* started. We've been at this for at least three hours and I'm starving. Your mind needs to rest. You must have done really well with clearing your angry thoughts like I told you last night."

"Yes, who knew your Muggle New Age rubbish would actually help." But Draco looked pleased with himself, even though he hadn't seen his own progress.

"Well, make sure you keep it up. It's really important. And it will help, I promise."

"So what do you plan on doing for the rest of the day?" Draco asked, standing and stretching.

Harry's eyes caught the tiniest sliver of his pale midriff as his arms went over his head. There was a thin, white-blond trail of hair that disappeared into his tailored slacks. "Oh, right. Er, I'll be reading. And planning the next lesson. I want to meet again today. How about just before dinner? And then we can do another hour or so before bed."

"Full schedule," Draco said. He nodded. "I'm going to have a nap. I feel exhausted."

"Good idea. You need to listen to your body's signals. It knows what's best, and having a happy body will make your mind more open to the magic."

For some reason, Draco's cheeks pinked. Harry waved and left the room. He wondered if Draco was retiring to his room to do what Harry had in mind: indulge in a leisurely wank.

## Chapter Ten

*Chapter 10 of 28*

After the war, Harry Potter is left with no one to save, no one to fight, and one extra wand. Draco Malfoy escapes punishment by leaving the country... or so he thinks. Seven years pass before they see each other again. Draco is no longer the master of his wand and a battle of talent and wills ensues. A story of a wand without a true master, and two men who fight to master each other... and themselves.

*This chapter was written by keppiehed*

Draco let his hand move faster, encircling the engorged shaft fully now. He was aching hard and had been for what seemed like hours...he needed relief. He stroked himself a little desperately; the lubrication charm was wearing off.

Draco grunted and took a deep breath, renewing his efforts. He had been in a foul mood the last several days. Since Potter's arrival, in fact. *That* was no coincidence.

He had realized that he was in need of some time alone. His body wanted release. Lately, his dreams were filled with salacious images, fuelling a growing desire. But when he woke up, he could never remember anything beyond the fact that he was frustrated. If he didn't come soon, he was in danger of going insane.

The problem was that all of his usual fantasies seemed to fall short of closing the deal. Nothing excited him the way it used to. Draco didn't want to wonder why all the centrefolds in Velvet Veelas Weekly seemed drab, he just wanted to find something to do the trick, and fast. He couldn't take another afternoon of walking around hiding his erection. Stupid Potter would no doubt think that was hysterical. *He* probably never had this problem!

Draco redoubled his efforts. His arm was starting to get tired.

He began to feel a flicker of pleasure rather than just stimulation, and he was concentrating on that when he heard something. Draco paused in his personal ministrations. What was that?

Out of convenience and economics, Draco had assigned Potter the room next door to his own. He was, after all, in charge of the finances while his father was away. It didn't make good fiscal sense to open up a whole new wing just to accommodate Potter. He also didn't like the idea of Potter snooping around to see how the other half lived. He was surely curious about the lives of his betters, and Draco wasn't about to provide fodder for his no doubt depraved imagination. All of the favourable rooms were right here, anyway, and so far Draco didn't think that Potter was even aware of their proximity. Draco had been careful to use the exit of his room that was around the corner, and Potter, the stupid sod, still seemed confused about logistics. Since Draco didn't want to run into him any more than necessary, it had been a reasonable arrangement.

Until now.

Draco heard the unmistakable sounds of Potter jerking off on the other side of the wall. A picture flared to life, unbidden, in Draco's imagination. He could see the room that he'd given Potter, could imagine him in bed. His headboard abutted the wall that Draco's did...a detail that had escaped his notice.

*Until now.*

Potter apparently didn't feel it necessary to perform a Silencing Charm on his quarters, having been given the mistaken impression that he was alone in the entire wing of the mansion. Draco's ears burned as he listened...*heard!*...Potter's voice calling out. He was getting more impassioned by the moment, groaning and generally making a lot of indecent noises.

Draco's cheeks flared in the darkness. Who knew Potter was so...uninhibited? Draco himself was usually restrained and silent, the picture of control. If Potter was like that by himself, just imagine...

*Stop it!* Draco clenched his teeth. He was *not* laying here in his bed in the middle of a perfectly good wank, thinking about *Potter*, damn it!

It didn't escape Draco's attention that as the noises from next door became louder and more passionate, his own cock throbbed. He was harder than he could remember being since his younger years, the sounds of pleasure going straight to his groin. He sucked his breath in and held it. This was *not* happening! He was *not* going to masturbate to the sounds of Harry Potter beating off!

Draco's body thought otherwise. He trembled with the effort not to jerk his hips. His cock was rock hard and pulsing on its own. He could hear himself making little panting noises in the effort not to touch himself. He couldn't do it, not while Potter was. He wasn't going to.

*Think of something, anything... think of McGonagall here in bed with you* Draco's old stand-bys that got him through his randy Hogwarts days fell apart when he heard Potter moan next door. Draco's mouth went dry, and he grabbed at the sheets in desperation. *Merlin, would Potter never come?*

Finally, with a cry that heralded a satisfying orgasmic experience, Draco heard Potter reach his completion.

The sound of that alone was nearly his undoing. He hadn't been this turned on in a long time. His hand barely got around his cock before he was spurting into his palm and all over his stomach, his hips twitching on their own. It was almost beyond his control, it was that fast and unexpected.

Draco let his head fall back on the pillow until his breathing returned to normal. This was just proof that he had been without a girlfriend for too long. The Boy Who Lived To Jerk Off was cramping his style. Would this week never end?

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Draco cleaned himself up and calmed himself down. He had an appointment with Potter this afternoon in the solarium. He was supposed to have been spending the time after lunch resting and clearing his thoughts in meditation, a method Potter regarded as highly useful for their practice. Draco just knew that he couldn't have a clear mind with a raging hard-on, and he had spent the entirety of his meditation period trying to deal with it, only to have Potter do the same thing! The double standard for break time unaccountably ruffled Draco. And to make matters worse, he was grumpy because he didn't, in fact, feel better. He still felt as frustrated as ever. And he now had visions of Potter wanking in his head. He didn't want Potter polluting his thoughts that way. Draco felt slight panic rising at the idea of Potter mixed up in his fantasies, even accidentally. He hoped it was a one-time thing and not a trend.

He wasn't feeling very clear at all. He was more muddled than ever before.

Draco stepped around the corner, lost in thought, and realized his error too late. Just exiting his room was the self-same idiot who had ruined his wank-time! Draco glared. He had hoped not to have to face Potter until he got to the solarium. Now he supposed he'd have to *walk* with him there.

"Oh, Draco!" Potter spotted him and laughed. He ran his hand through his hair. Two pink spots stood out on his cheeks. "I didn't know you had a room down this hallway."

Draco smirked. It was a good look on him, he knew. He tried not to overdo it, but sometimes the occasion called for it, and this was one of those times. Potter was nervous. And with good reason. They both knew what Draco had heard. "Yes, I do. Right next door, neighbour."

Potter went white. "Just next door here?"

Draco's smirk was in danger of becoming a smile. He tamped it down, but it was close. Potter's embarrassment was exquisite. Served him right, the loud little bugger. "We share a wall, in fact. Didn't I mention it before? Must've slipped my mind."

Potter swallowed. "Well, I hope you got some rest. We have quite an afternoon ahead of us."

"Yes, I was trying to open my mind, but it was rather...loud. I found I couldn't concentrate with all the noise." Draco tilted his head to catch the exact reaction.

Potter scowled, his face bright red. "Oh, come off it, Malfoy. Quit being such a nancy boy! You act like you've never lived in a dormitory or had a good wank yourself. Get over it and let's go to the lesson." Harry stormed down the hallway.

Draco felt a flare of ire. Leave it to Potter to spoil his fun like that. "That's the wrong way!" He should just let him wander. That way would take him to the Sitting Rooms, and then he'd never find his way, Draco thought petulantly. "And anyway, I rather thought you *liked* being heard. You know how to cast a *Muffliato*, otherwise."

Potter partially turned in the hallway, looking disoriented. "You know, Draco, that doesn't make a bit of sense. I didn't even know you were there! And being without a wand isn't an excuse to be rude and listen in. I rather think *you* are the one who liked it."

Draco gasped. "Well, there wasn't much I could do about it, was there?" he huffed. "What did you want me to do?"

Potter whirled to face him fully, and Draco had the oddest idea that he was about to say something monumental. His eyes were wild, and Draco strained to hear what could only be something they would both remember, before Potter seemed to recall where he was and deflate a little. "Nothing. There's nothing you could do when a man is having a private moment except give him his space and stop talking about it. Merlin, Draco. You can be such a prat sometimes."

Draco was strangely disappointed. He wondered what Potter was going to say, but there was no way to know without asking, and he certainly wasn't going to admit wanting to know what he thought about anything. Draco jerked his head. "It's this way. You'll only get lost if you go that way yourself," he said, and turned on his heel. He didn't bother to see if Potter followed or not.

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"That's not on the agenda!" Potter exclaimed.

"I need a break from all of this moving stuff around. Besides, Legilimency is more interesting. I think I have a real talent for it," Draco said.

Potter crossed his arms. "You actually have less aptitude for that than anything else we've tried."

"Then it stands to reason that I need to work on it," Draco pointed out.

Potter rubbed his forehead. "Fine. Whatever. You are ... exasperating, you know that?"

"Thank you."

"It wasn't a compliment."

Draco picked a comfortable chair in the solarium, of which there weren't many. This wasn't meant to be a room for lounging around in. It was more of a glassed-in porch. "Why did we have to meet *here*?" he whined.

"I like it. I was hoping to put you in mind of lightness, airiness. Apparently all for nothing, since we're doing Legilimency now instead," Potter said.

Draco cracked his neck. "So, what do I do?"

Potter thought a minute. "You want to be the Legilimens, right?"

Draco nodded.

"Then why don't we start with some contact. I read that it helps at first. Here, help me pull this chair over..."

"Why don't you just use your wand?" Draco asked. He tried to keep the pout out of his voice, but somehow it crept in anyway.

Potter straightened up from where he had been attempting to move a pre-Raphaelite wingback. There weren't any furnishings at the Manor that weren't heavy furniture. "You should know better than anyone, Malfoy, that not everything requires the use of a wand." He sighed. "Can't you just give me a hand for once instead of whinging about it all the time?"

Draco gave him a speculative look. Potter did manual work when he didn't have to? How... rustic of him. Draco hauled himself out of his chair, and between the two of them they managed to lug the wingback until it was in an arrangement that suited them. Now both men could sit comfortably facing each other, close enough that their knees were nearly touching.

Draco looked around. He just now realized that nearly every room in the Manor was set up in this fashion. The chairs were at a respectable chatting distance, but nothing was ever closer than that. These two chairs were the closest pieces of furniture in the entire place. For some reason, it seemed awfully intimate.

"Okay, ready?" Potter asked. "Here's what you do. As the one attempting to gain access to my mind, you have to concentrate."

"Really? Concentrate? I never would have guessed." Draco said sarcastically.

"Come on." Harry frowned. "To learn it, the best way is to put your hands on my face and look right into my eyes. It will help you focus."

"What?" Draco yelled.

"What?" Harry asked, looking confused.

"But ... there's no *touching* in Legilimency!" Draco protested.

This time Harry smirked. "What's the matter, Malfoy, afraid I've got cooties?"

Draco narrowed his eyes. "You'd better not be messing with me, Potter. A lot of people want my hands all over them. If I find out..."

"You are unbelievable! You think I *want* your hands all over me, touching me like that?" Potter shouted.

Draco frowned. Potter needn't sound so offended. "Well, yes. I mean, you don't have to make it sound like such a chore for you. I *was* known as the Slytherin Sex God for a reason, you know." Draco frowned. Wait a minute. Was *he* trying to convince *Potter* to let him touch him? Draco was momentarily horrified. How had this conversation taken a left turn?

Potter didn't seem to notice. "For Merlin's sake, Draco, you are such a braggart! I'm not trying to scheme up a ploy to sexually harass you. Can't we just *do* this thing already? This is the fastest method, and I think we can both agree that's what we both want. Right?"

"Right!" Draco was more than happy to agree, especially since Potter didn't seem to notice that Draco had appeared to be begging for a chance to touch him. *Where did that come from?* He couldn't stand the other man, and the very idea of laying hands on him was making him nervous.

"Okay." Potter took a deep breath. "Here's what you do: first, give me your hands. No, get closer. You're too far away." Potter took off his glasses.

The sight of Potter's naked face discomfited Draco. He looked so... vulnerable this way. Draco didn't like it. He didn't want to think of Potter as anything other than his enemy. Which he was. And an annoying git with a big mouth. Glasses or no glasses, his mouth was still fully functional...Draco was sure of that much.

Draco scooted closer and offered his hands as if he were put out. Potter took them in his own and held them up to his face, arranging the fingers in places surrounding his eyes, cheekbones and forehead. Draco realized that he had never touched Potter before, not skin-to-skin like this. It was disquieting and surprisingly intimate to have someone's face under your touch, to have them stroking your fingers ...

"There, you're in place. It doesn't have to be perfect. These are just the best energy points."

As Potter spoke, Draco could feel his skin move under his fingertips, the bones and muscles shifting with each syllable. Draco swallowed. *Was it getting hot in here?* He shouldn't have worn a sweater. Peachy must have turned up the heat. She didn't know that he preferred to keep it cool.

"Are you listening to me, Draco?"

Draco snapped back to attention. "Yes. Pay attention and concentrate."

Potter sighed. "You aren't, though. What if I tried Legilimency on you? What would I find?"

Draco's eyes flared in panic. "That's unethical!"

"Well, some people aren't ethical. As you well know," Potter said.

Draco narrowed his eyes. "What are you saying?"

"Just...pay attention. I said, look into my eyes. Don't break the contact. And then think about breaching the barrier. Whenever you are ready."

Draco made himself look into Potter's eyes. He took a few deep breaths and just let himself fall into them. This was the first time he had been this close. There was no animosity between them, which was a first. He could feel Potter's warm skin under his fingertip and see himself reflected in Potter's eyes.

Potter's eyes were different from his own, he noticed, as he looked at them in closer examination. Where Draco's were famously gray, it was the dark ring around the edges that made the contrast so striking...he ought to know, he'd spent a fair amount of time checking himself in the mirror. Now that Draco was close enough to see the other man and really *look* at him, he saw that Potter's eyes were green through and through. They were the most startling shade Draco had ever seen, made more brilliant without the filter of his ever-present glasses.

Draco felt himself falling into those eyes, seeing the various flecks that painted them. There were endless gradients of colour there. He drank in the sight of the infinite shifting shades; it was like looking at sunlight shining through the forest primeval.

"Er, Draco? I'm not feeling anything. You have to really *push* with your mind," Potter prompted.

Draco blinked. He must have needed a nap more than he realized if he was waxing poetic over Potter's eyes. Draco drew his brows together in concentration and stared at his nemesis, refusing to be distracted this time. He pushed.

Potter's expression didn't change.

Draco focused his magic into what he imagined to be a tiny, strong stream. He directed the needle into Potter's eye and pushed again. He concentrated all of his effort on breaking through into Potter's mind. He was so close ... he could almost feel the barrier giving way ... he just had to want it enough ...

He felt like he was falling. He could hear things, see things whizzing around. He wanted to grab onto one ... *Bleary-eyed sot*. He managed to hear something. Draco focused harder and pushed through a silvery wall of thought.

He saw himself, stretching, a sliver of his stomach showing. His hair falling forward over one eye. It was yesterday just before dinner and he...

Potter jerked away, and the connection was broken. "You did it," he said, his voice shaking. "That was ... unexpected. You must have really wanted in."

Draco couldn't make sense of what he'd seen and heard. That was Potter's thought? Him at dinner in an obviously ill-fitting garment? Draco made a mental note to get rid of the shirt now that he could see how it fit. It was unflattering when it rode up like that, so much so that Potter couldn't stop thinking about it. Leave it to him to notice! Draco's face flushed with embarrassment.

Potter stood up. "That's enough for today. I'll see you later." He left Draco sitting there without another word.

Draco was confused. Potter seemed even more embarrassed than he was. Why was that? Probably because Draco had so easily broken through his defences. Draco grinned and headed for his room. Now he really *did* need a nap.

\*

"*Draco.*"

Draco stirred.

"*Draco.*"

Draco opened his eyes and looked around the room. He swore he had heard his name. What was going on? He listened. Was Potter calling for him? He didn't hear anything. Draco closed his eyes. He really was weary. This wandless magic was more draining than he could have predicted.

"*Draco ... mmm ...*"

Draco sat up. He had heard Potter's voice, right inside his head. His heart beat faster. What was going on? Was Potter mucking about inside his thoughts? Was he poking inside there, trying to see what Draco was thinking? The thought enraged him, and he jumped up to find that jerk. All those pointed references to ethics, and he was one to talk!

Draco slammed into Potter's adjoining room. The more he thought about it, the more incensed he became. How dare Potter take liberties with his power? Draco was going to find him and give him something to be sorry about!

Potter's room was empty. Draco's nostril's flared in ire as he took in the stillness. There was a crack of light under the far door. Ha! Trust Potter to squirm as far away as he could to perform his misdeeds, like a worm on a hook.

Draco strode across the room, making the trip in five big steps. He was seeing red by the time he got there, and without any further thought other than smashing his fist into Potter's face, he flung the door open. "Potter, you..."

The sight that greeted him made him drop his jaw in absolute shock. Potter was getting out of the shower. He had just wrapped a towel around his hips. His hair was still wet, the droplets coursing down his neck and joining other wayward rivulets on their trail south.

Draco just stood there.

Harry looked as stunned as he felt. "What the hell, Malfoy?"

Draco wanted to sink into a puddle of mortification. "I...I'm sorry, Potter. I thought I heard you calling me. I'll ... leave you to it." He turned as fast as he could and slammed the door.

His heart was racing faster than it ever had in all his life. This didn't mean anything, just because he'd seen Potter nearly naked. Like Potter himself had said, they'd been in plenty of dormitory showers before. No need to panic.

Why couldn't he get the idea of that towel...and what was behind it...out of his mind? Draco groaned and hit his head against the wall of his bedroom. This was all Potter's fault! He was messing him up, planting ideas in his mind and getting him all flustered. Draco couldn't wait for him to leave so that things could go back to normal.

He was desperate for a little bit of normal after this week.

## Chapter Eleven

*Chapter 11 of 28*

After the war, Harry Potter is left with no one to save, no one to fight, and one extra wand. Draco Malfoy escapes punishment by leaving the country... or so he thinks. Seven years pass before they see each other again. Draco is no longer the master of his wand and a battle of talent and wills ensues. A story of a wand without a true master, and two men who fight to master each other... and themselves.

It was definitely time for Silencing Charms around his room, Harry decided.

The image of Draco's pink cheeks and wide eyes still far too fresh in his mind, Harry cast the appropriate spells, doubling them around any areas that he felt needed it, like the window, the door, and the wall that separated his room from Draco's. After a moment's thought, he threw another one up around the bed, and yet another in the bathroom. He nodded to himself, satisfied. If his obviously damaged psyche decided that moaning Draco's name was the proper way to reach climax, well, at least this time Draco wouldn't find out about it.

Yes, Draco had invaded Harry's thoughts during a wank. It was perfectly natural. It happened to every wizard. Not thoughts about Draco...despite what Draco might think...but thoughts about someone in close quarters, friend *or* foe... or whatever Draco was now. It was the proximity, that was all. And Harry *did* have a problem with separating good looks from good *people*. Just take Justin Finch-Fletchley. An attractive...very, *very* attractive, damn him...man who'd shown an interest in Harry once Harry had come out to his small group of friends. Harry'd been drawn to him, thinking their foundation of friendship would be enough to build on. Beyond the sex, Harry soon enough came to see there was nothing between them. For a while, it had felt good to be wanted, to be needed.

Now Draco needed him.

That was the connection. Harry was thinking about Draco because he was attracted to men who needed him. Again, he nodded, not caring that he must have looked like a loon, wandering around the room he was staying in, grim-faced and nodding. His theory didn't hold very much water, though, when he thought about his other relationships. Neither Cho nor Ginny were the type to *need* a man, and they certainly hadn't acted half as clingy as Justin. Well, maybe Ginny in her more trying moments.

Harry realised that it wasn't because Draco needed him...it was because *he wanted* Draco to need him.

Which meant that he was insane.

Putting the entire incident from his mind, Harry moved to his desk and checked the schedule. Draco was supposed to try a wandless cooling charm that morning. Harry knew he could do it. He wasn't hopeless when it came to wandless magic. He just gave up too easily when it didn't come to him right away. Harry decided not to let Draco veer off the schedule any more. The previous day's foray into Legilimency had been both startling and unwelcome. Not only had Draco pushed past his mental barriers...though, admittedly, they hadn't been that strong since he'd not expected Draco to prove to have any ability whatsoever...but he'd latched on to the *exact* memories that Harry *didn't* want him to see...and that was the mark of a true, latent talent in Legilimency. It was worth encouraging, yes, but it wouldn't help Draco do the wandless magic that he needed to live his day-to-day life.

After the cooling charm, he would have Draco counter it with a warming charm. Harry had to know that Draco could defeat, or cancel, his own magic, or the results could be disastrous. Cooling charms that froze him to death in his sleep, hovering charms that floated objects right up to the ceiling, cleaning charms that scrubbed his skin right off... Harry shuddered. The possibilities were endless, many of them fatal.

It was all about control. Yes, Draco could probably *do* wandless magic. But could he control it? Could he master the nuances of such magic without a focusing agent?

Harry supposed it was his job to find out.

He dressed casually, donning snug denims...given to him by Justin, but there was no sense punishing them for Justin's wrongdoings...and a green jumper that Hermione insisted made him look *dreamy*. He wasn't sure how the jumper had even made it into his duffel, but there it was. He usually wore it just to annoy Ron, who hadn't much liked Hermione's glazed eyes when he'd tried it on at her insistence. He had to admit, he wasn't unattractive.

Next to Draco's automatic grace, however, he felt clumsy, like his body extended beyond its natural barriers.

He really had to stop thinking about Draco that way. The man was a git...it should have been easy to hate him. After all, he'd managed to do for so for more than a decade without thinking things like *automatic grace* and *piercing pale eyes*. Wait...when had he thought that second thing? Damn it, he was thinking it now!

Taking charge of the matter, Harry left the room and walked the six paces to Draco's door. He treated it to an authoritative knock before crossing his arms over his chest and waiting.

The door opened to reveal Draco as Harry had never seen him before.

*Piercing pale eyes* was the least of Harry's worries.

Draco lifted a slender, arched eyebrow, his hands tying a knot in his silk dressing robe, a silver so pale it was almost white and matched Draco's hair like it had been made just for him. Of course, it probably had. At this thought, Harry's eyes moved to Draco's hair...it was as close to dishevelled as Harry suspected it ever got, which meant it was miles neater than Harry's on his best day. There was a slight tangle on one side, and three soft strands fell onto his face as his other eyebrow rose to join his first.

"Well, who would have thought," Draco said with a smirk that was strangely lacking in cruelty. "Harry Potter *does* know that red is not his colour."

"My... what?" Harry asked, frowning. Draco was monochrome against a richly coloured backdrop, grey in a world of garish shades. He shook his head to send the thoughts scattering and ran a hand down the sweater over his stomach. "It was a gift."

Draco nodded. His expression changed when his eyes moved to Harry's jeans. "*Werethose* a gift, as well?" he asked with a sneer, obviously disapproving.

"Actually, yes. From an ex."

"I must say it doesn't surprise me that everything you own came from *charity*," Draco said, his voice suddenly cold. He brought a hand up to push the hair from his face and touched the knot on the side. His eyes widened and he stepped back into the room, closing the door without another word.

Harry waited. He could hear Draco moving around inside, hopefully getting dressed. He realised that his hands were clenched into fists and forced himself to relax. His clothes weren't *charity*. It wasn't like everyone saw what a hopeless case he was and gave him clothing to correct the errors of his ways.

Although, that probably was the case with Justin. Harry wrinkled his nose. The jeans needed to be thrown out.

When Draco emerged, after almost half an hour, he was wearing grey slacks and a black oxford with the cuffs rolled over twice. His hair was, unfortunately, impeccable.

"What's on the agenda today, oh, wise one?" Draco asked, breezing past Harry and down the hall.

Harry met his stride easily, not letting Draco take the lead. "Some simple charms to gauge your capacity for control. If you can't manage these, I'm afraid I'm going to have to suggest we not continue."

Draco stopped without warning, forcing Harry to backtrack once he realised. "What?" he asked, eyeing Draco's livid features.

"So, what, if I can't do this on the first try, we just give up? I'm relegated to living as a Muggle based on today's outcome?"

Draco looked more upset than Harry would have expected, and he tried to sound soothing when he said, "We won't give up, Draco. I just meant that you can't practise wandless magic, especially by yourself, if you can't manage to control it."

Draco's pale features brightened and he began to walk once more. "Well, then I suppose you'll be staying here until *have* perfected it, won't you? I'd say that's incentive enough to teach me properly, wouldn't you?" He gave Harry a smug smile and walked to the dining room, where they ate Peachy's breakfast in silence.

Harry was... *reasonably* certain that Draco couldn't force his presence forever. But given Robards' near eagerness to put Harry on Draco's case, he wasn't sure enough to make a snide comment in return.

"To the solarium?" Draco asked once they were finished eating.

"Actually, I thought we might go outside," Harry said. If anything went wrong, it would be much easier to deal with if he didn't have to be concerned about some ancient vase or heirloom tapestry.

"Out... side?"

"Yeah, you know, where the sun is. And trees, usually. Grass?"

"Yes, thank you ever so much, Potter. Like you, I learned what *outside* consists of at a very young age. I want to know *why* you think outside is a good idea."

Harry had just about had enough of Draco's attitude. It wasn't any worse than usual, but the culmination of bitchy remarks and the entitled way he questioned everything made Harry see grey at the edges.

"Because I bloody well said so, Draco. And if you've a problem with it, you know *exactly* where to shove it." With those words, he strode past Draco to the front door, using his wand to throw it open before walking through without a glance back.

He heard Draco huff, followed by the click of expensive loafers on the parquet.

Harry kept walking until he found a place to his liking. Around the back of the manor, the area beside the garden was flat and open with a small pond that would serve well if Draco managed to set anything on fire...or if Harry needed to drown him for a few seconds. He took a seat on the grass, cross-legged, and waited for Draco to catch up.

Draco looked down at him, his eyes incredulous even though his sneer tried to say he'd expected nothing less than Harry Potter in the dirt.

"You expect me to *sit* on the *ground*?"

"Yes."

Draco looked around as if a chair would appear. His fingers twitched at his right side, a sure sign that he was wishing he had a wand.

"Can you at least *Scorugify* the spot for me?"

Harry sighed. "If I *Scourgify* the ground, you know what would happen?"

"My trousers would live to see another day?"

"It's *dirt* beneath the grass. A cleaning spell would just make a hole."

Draco said nothing.

"Oh, for..." Harry reached for the hem of his jumper and began to tug it up, intending for Draco to sit his pristine arse on it instead of the evil, evil grass.

"Whoa!" Draco cried, stepping forward and reaching out with two hands to stop Harry without actually touching him. "I'll sit."

Harry was relieved, if a little perturbed at how adamant Draco was at not seeing him shirtless. He watched, stifling a grin, as Draco sat delicately, a small grimace marring his features.

It took a few minutes for Draco to get over the fact that he was sitting on the ground, but he settled in enough to give Harry an expectant look.

"Cooling charm first. I want you to close your eyes and imagine the wand movement, but instead of following through with your hand, I want you to picture the air around you following that movement. You can say the charm if you have to, but try it first without words."

Draco stared at Harry for a moment before closing his eyes. He shifted a few times, obviously finding the grass distasteful to sit on, but then he went still and exhaled very slowly.

Harry threw up a temperature-telling charm behind Draco's head so he could monitor whether it was successful without Draco being distracted by the numbers when he opened his eyes.

"Is it working?" Draco asked, barely opening his lips to speak.

"Not yet."

Draco frowned and his face took on a look of intense concentration. His eyebrows drew together and his lips were a tight line. Harry watched him, enjoying the play of emotions over his face. Draco thought he was perfectly contained, that he was unreadable, but the more time Harry spent with him, the more obvious he became.

"How about now?"

Harry sighed. The temperature-telling charm hadn't budged, but if Draco didn't get encouragement, he would give up whether he knew it or not.

"Temperature dropped two degrees, Draco. Great work. Keep it up. Concentrate. Don't talk, just imagine the wand movement like a dance. Dance and the magic will happen."

Draco's face softened...he was still concentrating, but he seemed relieved that it was working. Harry didn't feel bad about lying...especially not when the glowing red letters *did* denote a two, then four-degree drop. He smiled.

A fluttering sound reached Harry's ears, breaking Draco's concentration a moment later. He opened his eyes, unmasked pride visible just for Harry until Draco took it back within himself, impassive once more.

They both watched as an owl bearing a small note flew over, circling once before landing on the ground beside Draco and walking over, sticking its leg out while it eyed Harry with distaste. Stupid Malfoy owls.

"My apologies," Draco said distractedly, taking the letter and cracking the seal. He read it in seconds and closed it again. "No response," he said to the owl, which gave him a disapproving look...and one more for Harry...before swooping back into the sky and disappearing.

"Everything all right?" Harry asked, eager to get back to the lesson.

"My father," Draco said with an uncharacteristic sigh. "Again."

"Oh? Is he returning?"

Draco shook his head, looking a million Apparitions away. "I don't know what he expects me to do," Draco said. His eyes were on the letter in his lap. *Tried...*

Harry waited for Draco to finish. When he showed no signs of doing so, Harry prompted him. "Tried?"

Draco seemed to come back to himself. He glared at Harry, but it was weak. "To find a job, become worthy of my inheritance, to prove myself, all that rubbish."

"Ah," Harry said, hiding his shock that Draco would reveal anything so personal. "No luck?"

Draco narrowed his eyes at Harry. "Let's get back to the lesson, shall we? I can feel the filth seeping into my bones as we speak."

Over the next hour, Draco managed to lower the temperature ten degrees, a change they could feel without needing the temperature spell. Draco would have done much better if it hadn't been for another owl intruding no less than three times.

Finally, angered that the owl had interrupted Draco during a very steady decline into coolness, Harry snapped, "Persistent, isn't he?"

Draco looked confused but then said, "Oh. No, these aren't from Father."

"Who, then?" Harry demanded, frustrated that his time was being wasted and Draco's magic squandered.

"They're from Pansy." Draco exhaled through his nose. "I suppose I'd best tell the owl not to return." So saying, he instructed the pushy little owl not to come back regardless of what its mistress directed.

Harry was alarmed at the burn of jealousy that heated his insides. Pansy Parkinson. The one who'd taken Draco away after Harry had hexed him. He remembered them having a thing during their school years; it only made sense that the two snooty pure-bloods would end up together, and bully for them.

"Back to work," Harry said brusquely, angry with himself for caring.

Draco gave a curt nod and closed his eyes again. Almost immediately, the air around them became cool and then almost cold. At Harry's instruction, Draco eased off the charm, opening his eyes, pride written across his face.

"Well done," Harry said, perhaps less effusively than he might have before he'd realised the letters were from Pansy.

Draco just nodded his thanks, but he was obviously pleased with himself. Truth be told, Harry was just as pleased. Draco's success meant that he would be more likely to want to continue, which meant Harry might actually see his own flat again before the lease agreement was up.

"Heating charm now. And go slow," Harry said. He inched closer to feel the effects better. Cooling charms were easier than heating ones, and the latter were mainly contained to the immediate area around the wizard casting.

Draco straightened his posture, resting his hands on his knees. He took a few deep breaths, and Harry could see the exact moment he tried the spell. Nothing happened. Undeterred, Draco tried again as Harry watched. Still no sign of warmth.

"It isn't working," Draco muttered, his eyes still closed.

"Just give it time. Concentrate on the dance of the movement in your head. Imagine the area getting warmer. Imagine your magic working for you, a slave to your needs."

Draco's cheeks pinked and he pursed his lips. Harry could tell he was throwing himself into the spell.

Then the rest of Draco's face became pink with exertion. Draco rubbed his hands on his knees before reaching to tug at his collar. A fine sheen of sweat made Draco's throat glisten.

Harry frowned; Draco was overworking himself. He leaned forward and put his hand over Draco's, intending to tell him to take it easy.

Harry gasped and drew his hand back as if burnt. Draco's skin was *burning*.

He reached for his wand and changed the temperature spell to tell him Draco's body temperature instead. He was *way* too hot. "Draco," he said calmly, tightening his hand over Draco's. "End the spell. It's time for a break."

"I've almost got it," Draco rasped. He was panting. The hand under Harry's was inhumanly warm...and trembling.

Harry concentrated on bringing Draco's internal temperature back down, but he could tell right away it wasn't working. "Draco, stop it immediately!"

Draco only clenched his jaw. Sweat trickled down his temple.

Harry had no choice. He aimed his wand at Draco. *"Aguamenti!"*

Draco gasped and spluttered as he was doused in ice-cold water. His eyes opened at last, and he glared at Harry through the water dripping down his face. "You...!"

Harry ignored him and reached out to grab his face, checking to make sure the water had broken his concentration enough to bring him back down to his normal temperature. He sighed in relief; Draco was fine, if a touch warm.

"What in Merlin's name are you doing, you cad?" Draco screeched, leaping to his feet, somehow dignified even sopping wet.

Harry rose wearily. He hadn't realised how frightened he'd been. Now that the adrenaline was fading, the ramifications were becoming clear. Draco couldn't be trusted to practise wandless magic alone.

"You were raising your *core* temperature, you goddamn fool!" Harry shouted, his fear manifesting itself in anger.

"What are you on about?"

Harry closed his eyes. "You were so hot to the touch that had you gone on any longer you could have caused brain damage." He took a step back. "Goddamn it, Draco! Why couldn't you just stop when I told you? What am I even doing here if you won't follow my instructions?"

Draco paled, looking shaken. "I... I didn't know. It felt like it was working."

Harry laughed mirthlessly. "It was working. On *you*." He took deep breaths to calm himself, but he couldn't get the image of Draco's ordinarily pale face red and sweaty as his blood near boiled.

"Well, it worked, then. Right? I mean, not properly, but I did that without a wand. That's something." Against all things sane, Draco looked proud of himself.

Harry threw up his arms. "I can't do this. You need someone who doesn't care if you kill yourself. I can't have that on my conscience. I'm out of here." He walked a few steps before being stopped by Draco's quiet voice.

"You're the only one who *does* care if I kill myself. Anyone else... would have let me." Draco cleared his throat. "I'm sorry I scared you, Potter."

Clenching his hands into fists, Harry knew he was shaking. With anger or fear or frustration *or what*, he didn't know.

"I'll listen to you from now," Draco said. The fact that he considered his words a heavy concession was evident in his voice. He really thought he was doing Harry a favour by allowing Harry to keep him from killing himself.

After a long moment, Harry shook his head. "I'll be in my room. Don't try anything until the next lesson. I need some time to myself."

He left Draco, soaking wet with grass stains on his arse, standing in the middle of the lawn. He needed a fucking drink and he planned on raiding Draco's bar until his nerves were good and settled.

The only good thing about the entire morning was the fact that Pansy's letter had gotten drenched right along with Draco.

## Chapter Twelve

### *Chapter 12 of 28*

After the war, Harry Potter is left with no one to save, no one to fight, and one extra wand. Draco Malfoy escapes punishment by leaving the country... or so he thinks. Seven years pass before they see each other again. Draco is no longer the master of his wand and a battle of talent and wills ensues. A story of a wand without a true master, and two men who fight to master each other... and themselves.

*This chapter was written by keppiehed.*

As Draco stood there, sopping wet, and watched Potter storm away from him, he tried to remember the last time he'd ever felt so foolish. School, perhaps. Had he ever been chastened so thoroughly by any of his teachers? Draco couldn't recall. In fact, his outstanding school memories mostly consisted of him getting into scrapes with Potter, or one of his ever-present groupies. That time Granger had slapped him across the face still stung his pride.

It occurred to Draco that this was the first time he didn't feel anger at a scolding, but regret. Why should he feel regret? Draco squared his shoulders and attempted to swipe his hair out of his eyes. The strands stuck to his forehead and dripped all over his shirt. Great. It was ruined now. Trust Potter not to give two Knuts about cashmere when he'd performed that Aguamenti charm.

As Draco made his way back to the Manor, Potter's words kept replaying in his head. *You need someone who doesn't care... can't do this ... I'm out of here ... you need someone ... need someone ...* Draco clenched his fists. Potter thought he was weak. Draco came off as needy! Well, Draco would show him! He'd been trying to be pleasant and polite, but if Potter didn't like civil behaviour, he could just...

In the midst of his internal monologue, Draco had missed the approaching owl. The note that it dropped stuck ignominiously to his wet cheek.

Draco stopped and stared up at the source of his indignity. The Parkinsons' idiotic owl. Again. The thought that he was surrounded by incompetency enraged him. "Fuck off!" he screamed, his temper finally deserting him. The sound of his curse echoed back at him, at odds with the cultivated peace of the Manor's garden scene. A flock of birds took flight from a tree in the back corner, startled by his shout, but otherwise the tranquility of the picture remained. Unaccountably annoyed, Draco ripped the wet note off his cheek, aware of how silly he must look, soaked and walking back to his house with grass stains on his good trousers. It was too much to ask of anyone, really.

The owl gave a dip of its wing that somehow managed to look reproachful. Draco stared down at the note. Pansy, again. Gods, she was persistent. He'd give her that. Although, unfortunately for her, perseverance wasn't a quality he admired in anyone except himself.

Draco crumpled the note, ready to throw it down, but Potter's stupid face wouldn't get out of Draco's mind. *I need some time to myself ... you need someone ... I'm out of here ... can't do this ... you need ... need . . .*" If Potter thought he would leave first, he had another thing coming to him. Draco would show him that. Draco wasn't needy. And if Potter required time to himself, he could have all the time in the world. "Wait," he called, motioning the owl back. It was the kind of standard messenger owl that always kept a little pencil strapped to its leg. Draco scribbled his reply. "Now quit pestering me, or I will revoke my invitation. And then you'll be making twice the trips to deliver her contrition notices. Just ... get lost and dump the replies in the lake or something, because I don't want to read them. Deal? At least for the next few days."

The owl bobbed its assent. Draco squinted as he watched it fly off in the direction of Palazzo Parkinson, Pansy's ancestral estate, before he remembered that the expression would result in early wrinkles. He smoothed out his features and went to get cleaned up. His trousers were merino, and the wool was starting to itch. Damn Potter for his casual disregard of thread count!

\*

Draco checked his appearance in one of the many mirrors that adorned the endless stretches of hallways throughout the Manor. He looked especially striking this evening, if he did say so himself. Not many men could pull off that particular shade of purple that he was wearing and still manage to seem masculine, but Draco had it on good authority that not only could he make it appear manly, but elegant, as well, and that was no mean feat. It offset his colouring and made him look like the heir to the fortune that he was: beyond rich and deadly handsome. Not that he was trying to look better on this evening than any other; he simply liked to dress to his assets.

Draco made his way to the den, a smallish room that was becoming a habit for he and Potter to confer in just before the evening meal. Potter seemed to like the rather rustic décor...rustic being a term of relative comparison, of course...and Draco found that he didn't mind it in the room as much as he had previously supposed he did. The room used to bother him, as it seemed overly intimate before, but now...well, Draco found that he was coming to prefer more manageable spaces. It made conversation easier. Trying to shout across the Grand Salon wasn't exactly practical.

Potter didn't look up when Draco entered the den. He was sitting on a leather sofa, one leg crossed with an ankle up on his knee. He was reading one of those silly Muggle crime novels that he seemed to favour. Draco snorted.

"Hmm?" Potter looked up from his book.

"What?" Draco coughed.

"I thought you said something." Potter went back to his book.

Draco frowned. How dare Potter ignore him! "It's just...I was noticing your attire. Isn't that what you were wearing this morning?"

"Yeah, well, / didn't get wet." He didn't look up.

Draco felt that flare of annoyance that Potter always seemed to ignite in him faster than anyone else. "Some of us still have the manners to dress for dinner! wasn't raised in a pigsty."

That seemed to do it. Potter snapped his book shut, his eyes fairly crackling with green fire. "Not all of us had your money, Draco, but that obviously didn't stop you from being a boor." Potter stood up.

Draco felt a vein in his temple start to throb. "The only pig here, Potter, is..."

"Pansy!" Peachy popped her head into the den. Oblivious to the tension in the room, but aware of the mistake of being overly familiar with her mistress' name, Peachy blushed and curtsied her apology. "Peachy be sorry. Miss Parkinson is here. Peachy showed her to the Ladies' Parlour until Master is ready to receive her."

"Thank you, Peachy. Please take her a platter of *hors d'oeuvres* and see that she is offered a glass of...oh, why not make it one of the Beaujolais Nouveau, from the Bas region of the Nizerand River, please. The Haut-Crus is just bitter this year. Bitter." Draco waved the house-elf off. "Where were we? Oh, yes. You were calling me out for my manners, I believe." Draco examined his nails. "We'll see who feels like the swine at dinner when you are sipping the best wine of the season in your ... *denims*."

"Actually, Draco, I have plans. So you can just go bugger yourself." Potter pushed past him and made for the door.

Draco felt an edge of panic. This wasn't how this was supposed to go! How had he lost control of the situation? "Wait!" Draco heard the...that wasn't desperation *Anger*. Yes, anger!...in his voice, and forced himself to calm down. "Where you do think you're going, Potter?"

The other man paused in the doorway, without turning around. Merlin, those denims were a good fit! Draco forced his eyes up. He might have to investigate getting himself a pair if they fit that nicely on someone like Potter, whom, now that Draco recalled from that brief glimpse in the shower, certainly didn't have a *terrible* physique...

Draco shook his head to clear it. Why was he thinking about the cut of his clothing just now? What was Potter saying? He forced himself to listen. Something about not being kept prisoner here. Draco scoffed to cover his lapse.

Potter whirled. "What, you really think you can hold me hostage? Just try it, Draco. Now, understand this: I'm going out...with *my friends*. I don't need your approval, and I don't give a good goddamn if you like it or not. So, enjoy your swanky dinner date and I'll see you around. If / feel like it."

Draco was aware of little more than the fact that he was left standing there, open-mouthed like a fish out of water, while he tried to wrap his head around the fact that Potter had left him alone with Pansy. That wanker!

Wait, when had he gotten to the point where he'd rather spend an evening with Potter than Pansy?

"Master Draco? Miss Pansy is ready for you." Draco felt a tugging on his hand. He groaned. It was going to be a long evening.

\*

Pansy yawned. "Really? Another round?" She rubbed her eyes. "I didn't know you liked Wands and Winks so much."

Draco had to stifle the urge to yawn himself. This evening had been torturous. He hadn't remembered Pansy being so dull. Not in wits so much as just ... something about her general company was irritating. She was so eager to *please* him. He was tired of being surrounded by people who always said 'yes' to him, who constantly stroked his ego and told him what he wanted to hear. Being fawned over was ... well, it was *boring*, honestly. Draco sat up as the revelation dawned. Suddenly, he realized he might like a girl who was a bit different. Someone who challenged him. Someone who pushed him back, who stood up to him and could, possibly, give him a run for his money. Someone who was his intellectual equal! The idea was unexpectedly appealing. Maybe he'd been barking up the wrong tree all along? The idea bore consideration. Maybe he'd start dating stronger types from now on.

"Draco!" Pansy waved her hand in front of his eyes. "Even you're nodding off, I think!" she laughed.

"Sorry, Pans, just ... thinking." He tried to smile.

"Well, I had a fine time tonight, but I don't know that I can manage another game. Maybe next time?" She put her cards down on the table.

Draco felt his gut tighten at the thought of this evening, repeated. He reached out to grab her wrist. "No! Why the rush? Stay a little longer," he coaxed. "*Morðeur de sel caramels?*"

"I couldn't possibly. I'm stuffed. It's three in the morning, and I'm tired. Unless you're offering to allow me to stay the night ... ?" Pansy batted her lashes in a sickeningly coquettish fashion.

"Gods, no!" Draco dropped her wrist as if he'd been branded.

Pansy narrowed her eyes and stood up. The cards scattered as she pushed back from the table with more force than necessary. "I'll just be going, then."

"Wait," Draco didn't know why it was so important for Potter to see him having dinner with Pansy, but it was. He was determined to see this through and shove Potter's face in the fact that he could get along just fine without him, thank you very much. With every hour that ticked by, though, it became less likely that Potter would be returning home. Er, to the Manor. Draco scowled. He'd spent an evening with Pansy for nothing.

A Malfoy knew better than to burn his bridges, however, and Pansy, while cloying, had always been an asset to him. He couldn't afford to give her the cut direct.

"What?" Pansy crossed her arms over her chest.

Draco cleared his throat. "This is rather...indelicate, Pans. But we're friends, right?"

Pansy shifted her weight. "Yes. What is it?"

"Well, of course I would ask you to spend the night." Draco leaned in conspiratorially. "I want you to know that I have been worried about your reputation. I don't want anyone to ... to ... impugn your honour!"

Pansy had been leaning in closer and closer, drawn to Draco's voice. At this confusing turn of the conversation, she seemed taken aback. "My ... honour?"

"Impugned. I'm glad you agree. I shall, of course, walk you to the Apparition point." Draco held out his elbow. He breathed a sigh of relief that he'd got out of having Pansy overnight. He didn't know why the idea made his skin crawl, but seeing her over *croissants* wasn't his idea of a smashing great breakfast.

Pansy was just about to take his proffered arm when a crash resounded in the area of the front door. Both Draco and Pansy jumped.

"What the bloody hell ... ?" Draco frowned. That had been quite a crash. It was clear that someone had entered the Manor. The wards were all in place, though; he could feel them. Anger bubbled along his veins. What a night for Potter to pick to disappear! Right when he was being vandalized and was helpless in his own home...the very *point* of Potter's supposed presence, he might add...and where was the man? Off only Merlin knew where. Draco seethed. He turned on his heel to go investigate.

"Draco!" Pansy squeaked. "What are you..."

Draco was already halfway to the front hall, where there was a mighty commotion. There appeared to be some sort of singing going on. These burglars were not very subtle. Draco frowned. Did they not know where they had broken into?

When Draco finally got to the entrance of the Manor, he could sense a presence in the darkness. It wasn't hard; a person...or persons...was crashing around, making enough noise to wake the dead. Draco flipped on the light.

The sight that greeted him couldn't have astounded him more. It was Potter, lying on the inlaid marble, obviously blind drunk. He was missing a shoe, and there were more than a few questionable stains on that precious green jumper he was wearing. Weasley, that miserable coward, was attempting to simultaneously shush him and help him up. They had both been singing some off-key song, but the lyrics had devolved into some sort of slurring about 'Quidditch' and 'bitches', the strains of which were now reverberating and fading off into the empty corridors around them.

"What is the meaning of this?" Draco demanded.

Weasley stood up...or tried to. Though obviously the lesser drunk of the two, he was still pretty sloshed. "The meaning of this..." He cleared his throat and tried again. After a few false starts, he managed: "Oh, blimey. Harry's drunk. Again."

Pansy snickered. "That's very astute, Weasel. Maybe in an hour you can tell us what *you're* doing here."

"He'sh drunk, too," Potter answered, then hiccupped.

"This is too, too good," Pansy laughed. "Where is Rita Skeeter when you need her? Don't worry, I'll see that this gets around. And I won't even have to make up any details. Just look at him!"

"Huh?" Weasley tried to focus. "He said to bring him home, an' I did. So, g'nnight." Weasley turned and stumbled over Potter, who hadn't moved much.

"Don't splinch yourself!" Pansy smirked.

"Yeah, you either," Weasley called back, in what he must have thought was a clever comeback.

"Holy Harpies, I can smell him from here," Pansy said with more glee than Draco thought was entirely appropriate, given the situation. "What a wreck!"

"I hope he doesn't sick all over the floor. That marble was quarried from Italy," Draco said distractedly. Potter looked a little green.

"Oh, who cares? I sent Peachy, so it's not your problem. I can't believe what a mess he is. How embarrassing!" Pansy's eyes lit up. "I'm so glad you convinced me to stay for this!"

Draco hadn't taken his eyes off Potter since he'd snapped the light on. It must have been the shock. Draco felt something completely foreign stirring in his gut, something dark and unpleasant. It uncoiled and he felt it clenching on, something he'd never experienced. He didn't like it one bit. He wanted to panic. He felt a cold sweat breaking out just watching Potter lying there, pale and sick. Draco felt ... sad? Sad for him?

In another situation he could hear himself making a remark, sneering to Potter, asking where the vaunted image of saviour was now. It was suddenly so clear to Draco that there was only a man lying there, a man like any other. *What if it had always been so?* A swirl of confusion rushed through Draco's head, and everything he'd ever thought he'd known or felt about Potter was getting caught up in a tide that was turning. His thoughts were whirling. He could see Potter in his memories from when they were children and had got off on the wrong foot; he could picture them as teens and growing up, always locked in battle. All along, they'd both been caught up in expectations and images and the machinations of others. Draco could feel it all cracking, and the man on the floor before him made the smallest sliver of uncertainty lodge in his heart. Draco wasn't used to being unsure of anything. He looked up. All he knew was that he wanted Pansy gone. Now.

He grabbed her arm and steered her to the door. "Well, thanks ever so much for coming. I'll have to see you next time. Hugs to your mother and I'll owl you soon!"

"What? Draco, um, you're hurting me ..." Pansy looked up at him. "You're acting weird. There *is* no way I'm leaving now. Come on! This is too good! Think of all the things

we could do to him. Oh, I know! I have an idea..."

"No!" Draco stopped and faced her. The night breeze blew in from the open door, bringing with it cooler air. Potter moaned when the touch of it kissed him, reviving him a little. Draco and Pansy both looked at the pathetic figure groaning on the floor.

"Just ... let it go. For me." Draco spoke quietly. He knew that now was the time to sparkle and enchant, to throw out a witty *bon mot* and redirect, but he couldn't do it. He looked at Pansy. "Please."

Pansy looked back at him. She seemed shocked, but she nodded, her eyes never leaving his. She had the look of someone working out a particularly difficult Arithmancy problem, and she had just now come up with the answer. "Okay," she said slowly. She backed out. "Draco. I'm not going to owl you again. You'd better send the next one. And don't wait too long, do you understand?" She straightened her spine and turned to leave.

"Draco," Potter called softly from the floor.

Draco spared a glance to make sure Pansy was gone, and then he picked his way over to Potter, who really did reek. Had he attempted to imbibe the entire bar? It was one thing to get soused in your school days, but this kind of drunk was a disgrace. What kind of friends allowed him to get this inebriated? And more importantly, why did Draco care?

Potter had managed to prop himself into a sitting position. "Draco. Come here. I have a secret to tell you." He had a goofy grin on his face. His words were thick and slurry.

Against his better judgement, Draco crouched next to Potter. He balanced on the balls of his feet, so that he didn't touch anything on the floor. No need to dirty himself, after all. Enough of *that* for one day! "What is it?"

"It's a secret. You have to come closer." Harry managed to stop smiling so stupidly. His stare was rather intense.

"Yes, that's what you said. Just ... tell me. There's no one here." Draco frowned. Something about this whole situation made him nervous. Potter wasn't...right. Well, of course he wasn't right, but he was acting very strangely. He seemed awfully sober just now, for having been lolling around so sloppy drunk just a moment ago. Draco swallowed. Why was *he* the nervous one?

"No! I have to whisper it in your ear." Harry gazed at him, unblinking.

"Hm." Although Draco had done a lot of drinking himself at school, he had never had to personally deal with drunks. Perhaps it was better to humour them? Potter seemed harmless. "And then you'll go to bed?"

Potter made an indistinct sound. "Bed. Yes."

"Okay. Tell me." Draco leaned in.

Just as he leaned forward, Potter grabbed onto him. The unexpected tug made him lose his balance...he had only been on the balls of his feet, after all. Draco crashed into Potter. He didn't engage his hands in time, and he knocked Potter right back over. The two of them slumped together. Draco was horrified to feel himself press right up against Potter, chest to chest. He hadn't been this intimate with another man ... well, ever.

He could barely register how close those bright green eyes really were before it happened. Potter leaned up and kissed him.

Draco froze. Harry Potter, his worst enemy, his nemesis, *waskissing him! He was kissing a man!* The idea didn't seem to stick; it slid off his consciousness like oil. His lips responded before his brain did. When he recognized what was going on, when he came back to what was actually happening, he realized that he was on the floor of his ancestral home, snogging *Harry Potter*.

Draco pulled away in shock.

"What ... ?" Potter asked. "What's wrong? Did I do something wrong? You didn't ... you didn't like it?"

"What's *wrong*?" Draco screeched. "What are you, crazy? You are a crazy drunk, that's it. 'Did I like it?' *Did he like it?*"

"Er, I don't..." Without warning, Potter closed his eyes, pulled Draco down and slumped against Draco's shoulder.

Draco froze. What was going on? Potter didn't move. His hands were curled in the raw silk of Draco's fine lawn shirt. His breathing was still and even as if he'd fallen asleep. Just like that. In the middle of a conversation...if it could be called that.

Draco extricated himself and took a good look at the man on the floor of his front hall. Potter looked a little pale. There were dark circles that Draco could see even through those clunky glasses he insisted on wearing. Otherwise, he looked to be peacefully sleeping. He felt that curious stirring again in his chest. Compassion. He felt *bad* for Potter, watching him sleep like that. If he could see himself ...

Suddenly, Draco was horrified. What if someone came in here and saw him sprawled like that? The Malfoy reputation would never recover. This couldn't stand. Draco would have to move him. "Er, Potter?" He didn't want to get near him. It was one thing not to let Pansy tell the world about this, it was quite another thing to physically approach him and actually *touch* him for himself. He nudged Potter with his hand-tooled Italian leather shoes. He barely moved, but Draco could see that he was an absolute disaster and not likely to come to on his own anytime soon. Draco winced. He had never wanted his wand so much as he did at this moment. "Peachy!" he called. He was no martyr, after all. He was going to need help. A lot of help.

"Master Draco?"

Draco startled. That was fast. "Er, I'm going to need your help."

Peachy looked at the atrocity before them. "Yes, Master Draco, you is."

\*

It wasn't so much that Draco was *avoiding* Potter...the idea that he would avoid anyone in his own home was ludicrous...as he was taking a break. At least, that's what he liked to think. Surely Potter needed time to recover from all of that deplorable excess. He would be of no use to Draco in any capacity hung over. Draco didn't want shoddy lessons, that was all. It was much harder to unlearn the wrong thing than to just learn it the right way the first time, Draco rationalized.

So, it was not avoidance. It was self-preservation.

It was with this mindset that Draco holed himself away in the study to return some correspondence to his father. That man was worse than a mother hen, the way he insisted on checking in with owls or Floo calls every ten seconds! Draco was just getting ready to draft his response. He dusted the quill over his cheek, remembering the lesson with Potter when he had first moved it. He had been picturing a lover's touch ... Draco frowned. It was unlike him to be so distracted. What was wrong with him these days?

"There you are!"

Draco jumped, hitting his knee on the underside of the desk. He tried not to wince. "Potter. What are you doing?"

Potter came in like he owned the room. There were no extra chairs, owing to the fact that it was *private* study...trust Potter to completely disregard convention...so he perched casually on the edge of the desk. Granted, it was a huge desk, so they weren't actually in close proximity, but Draco felt his heart rate shoot up. What did he mean by that, sitting there in that fashion? "Looking for you. We wasted a whole day today. Where were you?"

"Er ... I thought you'd want some rest?" Draco scowled. Potter seemed awfully chipper for a man who had passed out on his Tuscan marble a scant fifteen hours ago.

Potter had the grace to blush, at least. "Oh, that. I'm fine. I'm here to do a job. That's all."

"That's all?" Draco had spent all day worried about what Potter was going to say, or do, and now he knew. A stone settled into his stomach, though he couldn't say why. He should be delighted that they were going to be professional about this. "Yes. Business as usual."

Potter cocked his head. "Draco, are *you* all right? Maybe we've been training too hard. You seem drained. Is something wrong?"

Draco heard the same words...words that seemed burned into his brain...from last night coming out of a sober mouth. He knew with a certainty...he just knew...that Potter had no memory of last night. A curious relief settled over him. There was no one to hold anything over his head, no one to have witnessed his shame. Not that it was his fault, anyway. *Potter* had kissed *him*. Still, Malfoys didn't like to have loose ends.

So why didn't he feel better?

"Draco? Everything okay?" Potter asked.

Draco rubbed his knee under the desk where it was still throbbing. He kept his face impassive. "I'm just fine." he said. "Let's get started."

## Chapter Thirteen

*Chapter 13 of 28*

After the war, Harry Potter is left with no one to save, no one to fight, and one extra wand. Draco Malfoy escapes punishment by leaving the country... or so he thinks. Seven years pass before they see each other again. Draco is no longer the master of his wand and a battle of talent and wills ensues. A story of a wand without a true master, and two men who fight to master each other... and themselves.

*This chapter was written by literaryspell.*

Peachy was definitely demoted, Harry decided. He ran his hands through his hair...he needed a shower. He needed *adrink*...but *that* wasn't going to happen.

From her former status as partner in crime, having hid the egregious stain of ink on the no-doubt priceless carpet, Peachy's status was now harbinger of doom.

And though house-elves normally liked Harry, Peachy had taken an almost gleeful tone when she'd told him the extent of his shame.

The day had been lost entirely. He'd woken late after his absurdly long night with Ron at the Hog's Head. He had no idea how he'd got to the manor...he would have been much more comfortable waking up in the privacy and comfort of his own flat while achingly hung over. In his flat, he knew where the Hangover Potion was. He didn't even have to look at the taps in the shower to know what heat was best to remedy his ails. His kitchen, if nothing else, had crackers, his failsafe Very Bad Morning snack. Draco probably didn't even know what crackers were.

It only made sense that he'd have made his way home last night...

Then Harry remembered... It'd been an hour before last call. He couldn't recall what they'd been talking about, but Harry had referred to the manor as 'home'. Ron had stared that wide-eyed Weasley stare of incredulity and judgement before laughing uproariously.

"First Justin, now this? Harry, you need *help*!" Ron had cried, looking only half amused.

So taking him to Malfoy Manor when he'd pleaded with his best friend to take him *home* was Ron's idea of a joke, it seemed. Damn him for managing to stay half a drink more sober than Harry *every single time*. Next time, Harry promised himself, he'd pace himself better and see how Ron liked treatment in kind. Maybe he'd take the sloppy git to Hermione's parents' house and see how that worked out.

Although an amusing distraction, the night before had nothing on the morning after. After an hour and a half of misery, Harry had showered, shaved, dressed, and gone downstairs to find Draco so they could get a start on the lessons, despite the fact that Harry's head was throbbing with no relief in sight. So he couldn't say he was disappointed when he hadn't been able to find Draco. He'd returned to his room, deciding to send a few letters. Hermione had been demanding updates on Draco's progress, so he wrote her a letter saying that it was slow but steady, with Draco being a more tolerable student than Harry had predicted.

He kept the door to his bedroom open so that if Draco returned to his room from wherever he'd disappeared to, Harry would see him pass. He never did. After finishing his correspondence, writing a bitchy letter to Ron threatening retribution (then finding himself in a game of owl one-upmanship with Ron, who was supposed to be working but had all sorts of ideas on how to torture Harry, some that were more creative than he'd ever given Ron credit of being), he'd puttered around his room, tidying what little the house-elves didn't. He even made a write-up of the days that had passed and the progress Draco had made, noting the incident of Draco internalizing the spell and almost killing himself. Harry didn't have the stomach for *that* again.

Part of him wondered at his reluctance to see Draco in pain...he was pretty sure that had been high on his lists on things that would make his day during school. Now... it was like Draco didn't even care that he could have cooked from the inside out, but Harry *did*. All that mattered to Draco was getting his wand back. It was obviously a matter of pride, and while Harry had some inkling of what it must be like, he'd only been a wizard for a few years longer than he'd been a Muggle (or thought he'd been one). Draco had been a wizard his entire life. Losing a wand was akin to losing a hand.

If Draco couldn't show significant progress soon, Harry wasn't sure he could be party to Draco hurting himself in the process.

Not that any of that bloody well mattered...not after what Peachy had told him.

It had been almost evening when Harry had finally cast his blueprint spell...the same spell that had revealed Draco's whereabouts when the manor wards had immobilized him...and found Draco in his study. He'd gone down, acting as though nothing was wrong. And at that point, nothing besides a little headache had been. He'd had no idea Draco knew about his late night entry. They'd had a quick lesson during which Draco had managed, under close scrutiny, to wandlessly cast a warming charm...yes, it had quickly got out of control, and Harry had had to counter it, but it was certainly progress.

And then... Peachy.

He'd mentioned to Draco that he had a headache, and Draco had said he'd send Peachy with a potion. So he'd let the eager little house-elf into his room under the impression that she would come bearing relief, not horror.

In no uncertain terms, with no leeway, and as truthfully as possible...for house-elves, she swore, could not really lie...she informed Harry that not only had Draco seen his sorry state the night before, but Harry had...

He'd... Oh, Merlin.

He'd *kissed* Draco Malfoy. On the mouth. Possibly with tongues; Peachy ruefully admitted she hadn't been close enough to judge that.

As soon as she said the words...words that branded themselves in the foremost of his thoughts in gaudy neon letters...Harry remembered.

It was blotchy, the memory, with no clear beginning or end. It was made of sensation more than sight or sound. A hard, ungraceful press of lips. A softening...on whose part, he wasn't sure. A slight movement, just a brush. Then it was over. A kiss.

Add to that the fact that Draco neither mentioned nor alluded to the kiss, and Harry had no idea what to think. It was the perfect opportunity for Draco to ruin his life, to turn it upside down, to humiliate him beyond the normal parameters of the word. But he'd done none of that. If it hadn't been for Peachy's animated retelling, he never would have known what he'd done.

No, he admitted to himself, it hadn't been a *great* kiss. Draco was too hard, unresponsive. Harry had been, of course, sloshed. But there had been something. And he'd kissed Draco for a *reason*...had he been hoping for a shag? Because even he could have told himself *that* would never happen. Draco was way too cold to have feelings that matched Harry's heat when it came to sex.

Now that the day was over, Harry felt only relief. Draco was apparently happy to pretend the kiss had never happened, and Harry thought that was a brilliant course of action. Of course, something *had* been bothering Draco all evening, Harry now recalled. But he didn't let himself worry over it. If Draco wanted him out of the house, Harry would have found himself on the driveway with asphalt burns on his arse. Draco obviously needed him and Harry hadn't proved himself useless, despite his overindulgence.

Harry got into bed, thinking about what he'd have Draco do during the next day's lesson. His thoughts rambled and moseyed, and he found himself wondering why it seemed, in the past few years, he'd been blackout drunk so many times. Alcohol had never been a big deal to him...when everyone had been drinking, Harry did as well, just because it seemed to be the done thing. Now, though, it was more like... everyone started drinking as soon as Harry did. And because he felt like everyone *wanted* to be drinking, he drank...a lot. Somewhere along the line, things had shifted. He didn't want to be the person everyone looked to before they raised their glass.

He couldn't remember the last time he'd had *one* beer, *one* glass of wine. But where had drinking until there was nothing left gotten him? Passed out on the cold marble of the Malfoy foyer, forcing a snog on his enemy. That wasn't a good place.

\*

Once more in the field by the pond just behind the manor, Harry and Draco sat...on a blanket, this time.

"Nice touch," Draco said, nodding at the blanket Harry had Transfigured from a doily in his room. He sat down, cross-legged, and waited in silence for Harry to announce the game plan.

Draco had been abnormally quiet...and not just quiet but lacking in vitriol, something that made Harry worry that he had a terminal illness or something. Breakfast had been silent and without barbs. Their first morning lesson had gone off without a hitch, Draco speaking only to address Harry's questions or ask his own. It was unnerving.

"Thought I'd spare your trousers this time," Harry said. He sat as well, arranging his legs out before him as he leaned back on his hands. The sky was overcast, but the warmth of the sun settled on his face through the grey.

Draco nodded and they sat in silence that was nothing but awkward. Harry wondered if things would ever go back to how they were before he'd made such an arse of himself, and then he wondered why he wanted that. He should be pleased with this new, reserved Draco. He wasn't being rude or condescending, or arrogant and unbearable. But he wasn't himself, and Harry didn't like to think that something he'd done had caused that.

He'd never directly faced the aftermath of a drunken episode like that. With Ron, they always laughed about it. Even Hermione would roll her eyes at his antics, giving him a soft smile and possibly telling him to ease up, but her concern was never overwhelming, and he'd always felt cared about, not embarrassed.

He cleared his throat. "Shall we get started, then?"

"Please do," Draco said. He got into what Harry thought of as his 'thinking position'. He straightened his back, tilted his chin up, and put his hands on his knees, relaxed but completely still.

Knowing that Draco always did best in the beginning of the second lesson of the day, ostensibly because he was warmed up but not overworked from the first lesson, Harry said, "I want you to try to cast *Incendio*." He paused, letting Draco consider the spell, roll around the wand action inside his mind. He wouldn't try it until Harry said go, so Harry gave him a moment. "I don't want some huge combustion or fireworks. Just a small flame, like you were lighting a match. In the grass beside us. Think of the blanket like a pool of water. The fire can't come in here. You control the fire. You want it small and steady. And remember not to pull it back inside yourself when you're finished. Just... cut the thread of magic, don't draw it back. If the fire doesn't die, I'll douse it. Don't worry about that. You just make the flame, that's it."

Over the past week, Harry had become better at explaining wandless magic. He wasn't entirely sure how it worked...the books had varying theories on that...but he knew how it felt to *him*, so he tried to get that impression across with Draco. By the time he finished speaking, Draco's face was peaceful, his eyelids lightly closed, pupils motionless behind them.

"Ready?"

Draco gave a very small nod.

"Go ahead."

A line appeared between Draco's eyebrows as his concentration intensified. After a moment, his nostrils flared, but no fire appeared.

Harry was used to using Draco's concentration as an excuse to study him. He knew Draco's face better than his own these days. He kept his peripheral vision on the grass, looking for the flame, but his main focus was Draco.

He had black eyelashes, but the very tips were blond, making them longer than they appeared at first. The black lashes lining his eyes were thick enough that it looked like

make-up...in fact, at first, Harry had been convinced it had been. His theory had been supported by the fact that his lips were red, too bold a colour to not be enhanced somehow. But that, too, was natural, Harry had discovered. Draco's face was sharp, angular, and everything looked so intense when taken in at once. But individually, from his nose to his ears to his eyebrows, his features were stunning. Annoyingly so.

He even had one freckle...one!...just beneath his lower eyelashes on the left side. Other than that, his translucent skin was unblemished.

The smell of burning grass tore his attention away from his study of Draco's face. He looked over to see a solitary strand of grass burning down to the ground, slower than a normal flame would burn. Draco was controlling it.

Harry glanced at him. There was a bead of perspiration on his temple, but the temperature-telling charm he now insisted on casting every single time revealed his temperature was normal.

"Very good, Draco," Harry said. He spoke softly so as not to interrupt Draco's focus, but Draco liked to be told if what he was doing was actually working.

Draco nodded to show that he'd heard. The flame flickered and died once it hit the ground. The grass strands around the burnt one hadn't even singed. His control was improving.

Draco opened his eyes and breathed deeply through his nose. After wiping his forehead with a handkerchief, he looked at Harry. "Are we ever going to pick this up? I don't want to be moving on to levitating charms on my seventieth birthday."

Happy to have the old, whinging Draco back, Harry smiled. "You're actually doing really well. You're way ahead of where the books say you should be. According to them, you should still be doing meditation and finding your inner magic and all that. The books describe wandless magic as a lifelong pursuit. You're taking the condensed course already." His voice deepened with warning. "Don't rush it, Draco. This can be dangerous." The episode from the day before last still haunted him, Draco's red, sweaty face imprinted forever in his memory.

Draco rolled his eyes, but he didn't push to try something different.

"Why don't you see if you can control two flames this time?" Harry offered. The truth was, he was almost as eager as Draco to see his power improve...and not just because he wanted out of the manor and back into his own flat. Watching Draco improve gave him a heady sense of satisfaction.

Draco sighed, sounding put upon, but obediently closed his eyes. After a moment, a flame sprang up beside them, dancing on top of a strand of grass. Seconds passed, and another flame touched down on a strand a hand-span away from the first.

Harry was about to praise Draco again when a third flame appeared. Then a fourth.

"Draco," he chastised. "Don't go too fast."

Draco, his eyes still closed, just scoffed...a small smile touched his lips when a fifth and sixth flame started up, all within the same small area.

Harry got his wand out, the spell ready on his tongue. Merlin, Draco was going to be the death of him. He wanted Harry to teach him and yet always assumed he knew best.

"Draco," he said, one last warning before he soaked Draco with water for the second time. "Cut the thread. Now."

And as if the flames had existed in a vacuum, they disappeared completely. Draco let out a shaky breath and opened his eyes. His grin was unabashed as he looked at the several half-burnt strands of grass. He looked at Harry, almost seeming like he was expecting praise, but the expression died on his face, replaced by the more familiar self-contented sneer.

Harry ran his hands through his hair, tugging at the messy chunks. "You need to start listening to me," Harry said, his voice almost a growl. "I can't help you if you just do whatever the hell you want!"

Draco's eyes were cold. "I think I can manage a few flames, Potter. Honestly, there's no need to get your knickers twisted."

The problem was, of course, that Harry wasn't certain *Draco could* handle a few flames. Last time, Draco had attempted a warming charm and heated his core temperature. If he'd lost control of the flames and taken the magic inside himself, Merlin only knew what could have happened. A fire inside a body would be a messy thing to heal, way beyond Harry's abilities. He was an Auror, not a Healer...he hated feeling like Draco wasn't safe with just him there.

At length, Harry sighed. He couldn't explain to Draco that he was *worried*...Draco would just laugh at him. All he could do was be around when Draco inevitably lost control.

"Okay," Harry said. "One more time. A bigger flame. Try to see if you can move it in a line. And ~~just~~ *one* this time, thank you very much." He looked sternly at Draco, who had the grace to look *slightly* chastened.

He got back into his thinking position, hands on his knees, face tilted up. Only a second passed before a flame, larger as instructed, latched onto several strands. It flickered there for a few moments before Draco grunted, and the flame moved along in a slow line, devouring strands of grass in its wake, but the damage never extending beyond the berth of the flame.

"You're showing excellent control." Complimenting Draco no longer made bile rise in Harry's throat as it had at the beginning. "Now, get ready to let the flame go...but don't cut the thread. Keep your magic available. You're going to keep the flame burning and then cast a water spell to put it out. Two spells at once...keep your focus on the water spell; spend only a fraction of magic on the fire. Defence and offence. Light and dark. Devote both sides of yourself to your magic."

Draco looked as though he was taking in every single word. His concentration was so intense that Harry almost wanted to keep talking, just to have Draco listen to him so carefully. But he could already see that Draco was thinning the thread of magic between himself and the flame: it stopped moving in a line, and the bulb of fire became a little less precise, a little more wild.

Harry waited for the water spell, but it didn't come.

He looked at Draco, whose face, instead of being red as Harry had feared it would be, was much too pale. To Harry's horror, Draco coughed and water spilled from between his lips...lips that Harry had *kissed*, damn it!

Draco's eyes opened in panic, his hands jerking to his throat as more water poured from his mouth.

"Oh, my god," Harry gasped. He froze for a half-second...long enough to see Draco's eyes fill with fear...and then launched into action. With a wave of his hand and the strongest concentration he'd ever afforded his own wandless magic, Harry Banished the water from Draco's lungs.

Draco coughed and hacked...more water kept leaking from his mouth and he couldn't seem to catch his breath. The Banishing spell had worked, but the water had replaced itself in Draco's lungs. Horrible gurgling noises escaped him. His hands that had been clawing at his neck and chest clenched into fists. His eyes closed and he went slack, falling over onto the blanket.

In the corner of his eye, Harry saw the flame die, snuffed by an invisible force.

The thread had been cut. Harry Banished the water again, and now that Draco was unconscious and his magic asleep, it didn't come back. He was breathing again.

He checked Draco's pulse, fingers slipping on wet, cool skin. It was weak but steady and growing stronger.

"Goddamn you," he whispered to Draco's form. He'd fallen on his side and to any outsider he'd seem as though he was having a kip.

Harry pulled his knees up and rested his chin on one, wrapping his arms around his shins. He stared at Draco. Would Draco kill himself for love of magic and the pursuit of perfection? Could he ever be content just moving at a normal pace?

Was Harry going to have to watch him die one day, helpless and impotent as some internalised spell destroyed him under Harry's less-than-ideal tutelage?

Anger rushed him like the Hogwarts Express. "*Renervate!*" he cried, wand aimed at Draco's motionless body.

Draco sat up with a watery gasp. He immediately began coughing and choking, but it settled after a minute. He seemed unable to meet Harry's eyes.

"You're a fucking moron," Harry told him, his voice calm...all the shaking was going on inside his head.

Draco sneered, but it was weak...there was still a tinge of panic in his normally masked face. "No magic is without risk."

Harry shook his head. "It's not *my* risk, though. So why do I feel like I'm the one suffering?"

"*You're* suffering?" Draco snorted. "I'm the one who nearly drowned in the middle of a field!"

"Yeah, but it was *your fault!* You seem perfectly content in condemning me to watching you *die*. I can't take it! I did *not* sign up for this."

"Maybe I just need a better teacher."

Harry stood so fast his vision went white for a second. His hands were still wet from touching Draco. He wiped them on his denims. "Maybe you do. Good luck with that." He turned to leave. The entire scene gave him déjà vu...and then he remembered what Draco had said the last time he'd threatened to leave. That no one but Harry cared if he lived or died.

*Damn it.*

He couldn't let Draco find another teacher, one who might have ulterior motives, one who might hurt or exploit him in some way.

Leaving Draco wasn't an option...it was as clear as day. Alone, Draco would never stop practising his wandless magic, and he *would* die. Maybe not right away, but it would get beyond his control and kill him, Harry had no doubt about that.

He turned and faced Draco, whose eyes were trained on the burnt patches of grass. He was abnormally pale and his fingers, as they caressed a scorched strand, were trembling.

"I'm staying," Harry announced. He took a deep breath. "For good. Until this thing is done. But you *will* listen to me, Draco. Or else." He didn't elaborate because he had no idea what he could threaten Draco with, but it seemed to be enough.

Draco went still, but after a long moment, his fingers plucked the grass he'd been playing with. He didn't look at Harry, but he nodded.

Harry went back inside, knowing he might be staying at the manor a long time.

## Chapter Fourteen

*Chapter 14 of 28*

After the war, Harry Potter is left with no one to save, no one to fight, and one extra wand. Draco Malfoy escapes punishment by leaving the country... or so he thinks. Seven years pass before they see each other again. Draco is no longer the master of his wand and a battle of talent and wills ensues. A story of a wand without a true master, and two men who fight to master each other... and themselves.

*This chapter was written by keppiehed*

The scrape of the silverware on the plate made Draco want to wince. Not only was this good china...though not the heirloom set, of course, Potter wasn't *that* exalted of a guest...but the sound was grating in the otherwise unbroken silence. He watched Potter take yet another sip from his water glass and wondered if the other man were as nervous he was. This whole dinner was awkward. They hadn't said two words to each other after this afternoon's debacle of a lesson. Draco cleared his throat.

"What?" Potter asked.

"What? Oh, nothing. Merely a crumb." Draco waved at the air in front of his throat. He took a small sip of Chardonnay. "The fish, I think. Was it dry?"

"Oh. I thought you said ... something." Potter said.

"What? No." Draco frowned. "It was the fish, as I said."

"My mistake." Potter took another drink of water. They lapsed back into silence.

Draco concentrated on cutting his asparagus into surgically precise pieces. He felt the weight of this evening on his shoulders. As a rule, he usually ate in solitude. Even if he had guests, he preferred silence. He was able to entertain, of course, but it was his personal preference to maintain order and dignity during the meal, if he was given a choice. Thus, silence during dinner had never bothered him before. He concentrated on his meal, which he usually enjoyed consuming in an unhurried way. Manners, in his opinion, were highly undervalued these days, as was a well-prepared meal. There was nothing wrong with savouring the finer things in life.

So why was tonight so different? Why did he feel so uncomfortable?

Draco sneaked a glance at Potter. He hadn't looked directly at him since the whole snogging incident. He looked like Draco felt: bored and uncomfortable. Draco frowned. It occurred to him that he was failing as a host if he was not keeping his guest properly entertained.

"So, Potter, what..." Draco pursed his lips in consternation. He might've thought this out a bit before he started talking. All of the things that he normally discussed at dinner parties were not exactly applicable here. What could he even say to Potter? What did the rabble discuss at dinner? Draco didn't know. He'd have to wing it and hope for the best. "...is your favourite colour?"

Potter's eyes widened in incredulity. "Is this a joke?"

Draco had the grace to blush, but it was dim enough in the dining hall that Potter, thankfully, couldn't detect it. "Just making conversation," he said defensively. "I assume it must be burgundy, since you wear it all the time."

"Oh, is that what we're going by? Then I know what yours is," Potter shot back. "That's not how you start a conversation, Draco. That's what pre-teen witches ask at slumber parties."

"Well, I didn't have a lot of slumber parties." Draco didn't realize how that sounded until it was out. The words sounded small and sad, and he wanted to take them back immediately. He could feel Potter looking at him, and he didn't want his sympathy. He cast about for something to say. Anything was better than pity. "There were no families in our social circle appropriate for me to associate with, of course."

"Of course." Potter's voice gave nothing away. "So, what do you do for fun, Draco?"

Peachy came in then with the dessert course. She held up the platter and Draco selected a few pastries. She went around to Potter, who looked at them suspiciously. "What are they?"

Peachy stared back, panicked. "Nutty cakes?"

"*Petit Praline Croquantes*. Holy Harpies, have you never eaten anywhere but Hogwarts? These are pretty standard fare." Draco shook his head.

"Don't be such a stuck-up prick all the time! What's wrong with having 'normal' food once in awhile? You know, just plain old food? Not everyone knows what's in this weird stuff!" Potter wrinkled his nose.

Draco considered that. He hadn't thought to ask if he enjoyed the food. This was the best, so he had naturally assumed ... he was failing quite miserably as a host. Draco took a deep breath and endeavoured to do better. This was the task that was entrusted to him, after all. And if there was one thing he could do, it was sparkling conversation and decent fare. "What kind of food would you prefer, Potter?"

Potter looked surprised. "I don't know. Just... regular stuff. You know, like, burgers and fries. Pizza. That sort of thing. It doesn't always have to be gourmet."

"And for dessert?" Draco was curious.

Potter paused. His eyes met Draco's for the first time since that kiss. Draco felt his pulse flutter. He was glad that Potter couldn't remember that night. "I like ice cream. Or strawberry shortcake. My favourite is treacle tart, though."

"Treacle tart? Isn't that a bit ... sweet?" Draco didn't know why he was holding his breath.

"I like it that way." Without breaking the eye contact, Potter reached over and picked up a little cake. He let his tongue peek out and taste the edge. Not enough to be rude, just enough to enchant.

*Enchant?* Draco put his fork down. It was a bit too forceful in the big room and the resulting clatter was louder than he had intended.

Potter raised an eyebrow at the noise and then opened his mouth. Draco couldn't tear his eyes away as Potter devoured the whole thing in one neat bite. "Although this is good, too."

Draco didn't know what had just happened, but he knew he didn't like it one bit. Something was wrong with him. He must not be feeling well. And why was it so damn hot in here? He kept forgetting to ask Peachy to turn down the heat. The Parkinsons might like to live in a house as hot as Hades, but he certainly did not.

"So, you never answered my question. What do you do for fun?" Potter leaned back in his chair.

"Since you ask, I enjoy cards. I like Solitaire," Draco answered.

"What a shock."

Draco ignored the jibe. "I also enjoy whist, should you care to play."

"Whist? Like, the old person's game?" Potter stared blankly.

Draco sniffed. "Certainly not. It takes a lot of skill..."

Potter laughed. "But it's for *old* people! What about poker? That's fun."

"Poker? I don't know that game." Draco waved his hand in dismissal. It couldn't be too much fun if he'd never even heard of it.

"That's a shame, because I'll bet you'd have quite a poker face." Potter smirked.

"Thank you. I *do* get a lot of compliments on it, especially my strong jawline. One time they even asked me to be on the cover of Warlock Wear, but that's just so common." Draco wiped his mouth and stood up. "Shall we retire to the Game Room?"

Potter's eyes widened. "You have a game room? Why didn't you mention it before?"

"You never asked." Draco walked towards the West Wing. Potter was still sitting there. "Of course, if you'd prefer something else, we could do anything you like."

"Anything I like?" Potter stood up. "How do I know what my choices are if you don't tell me?"

Draco felt the air turn in the room. Suddenly it was as if there were two different conversations going on, but he wasn't entirely sure what they were. This insecurity was entirely foreign to him. He was normally so assured and facile in any situation. He had never had a moment's doubt when it came to conversation. He could steer anything in the direction he desired. He was glib and charming. This was a whole new feeling. When had Potter got better than him at anything? Why did he feel so uncertain just talking about games? Draco didn't want to think about it, but neither did he want to make a fool of himself. He felt trapped in some sort of net that he never even seen descending. He didn't relish Potter thinking he was slow on the uptake, either. "I haven't kept anything from you."

"I beg to differ, Draco." Potter crossed the room and as he got ever closer, Draco could almost feel some sort of magnetism radiating from him. He had to be using his

wandless magic. That was the only explanation. "You've kept a great deal from me."

Draco clenched his fists. "I can't show you everything. Not all at once. It takes time."

Potter cocked his head. "I know. So, where are we going to start?"

Draco felt like he had been let off the hook, but he didn't know what hook he'd even been on. "Didn't you say you wanted to see everything? A tour? Would you please speak plainly, Potter? What is it you would like?"

Potter sighed. "What would I like? Just show me the game room, will you? That will have to do for now."

Draco knew he was missing something, but he couldn't quite put his finger on what it was. "Fine. It's this way." He walked down the hallway. The path to the game room was a complicated one, as it was considered a less-important part of the house. Also, it had been built after centuries of additions, so it was in a more remote part of the house. When they arrived, Draco was glad to be there. The awkward silence had descended again.

"Well, here we are. The Game Room." Draco opened the door and flipped on the switch.

"Wow!" Potter stepped in and seemed suitably impressed. It was an enormous room, equipped with every type of entertainment that could be conceived of. The Malfoys spared no expense in pursuit of the best. The Game Room was no exception.

"You have a Wii! Why didn't you say?" Potter rushed over to a big black rectangle in the corner and examined it.

"Oh, a Wii. Yeah." Draco stepped into the room and closed the door behind them. He watched Potter fidget with the Muggle gadget. It was amusing, in a strange way, to see him get so much enjoyment out of it. Draco had to struggle to keep a smile...a real smile...off of his face. Potter seemed so excited and happy. It made him look years younger, like a boy. Maybe they should have come here sooner. Not that Draco cared about making Potter happy. Just that he should have stepped up his duties as host. "Feel free to come here at your leisure. Now that you are going to be living here. Er, staying here for awhile."

Potter had abandoned the Wii and was examining the ping-pong table. After that he went over to the pool table. Eventually he made his way back to what he had called the Wii. "Fancy a game?" He grinned wickedly. He held up a little white rectangle and slipped his wrist through a loop dangling at the end of it. "Hermione taught Ron and me about this, and it is endless fun. I didn't figure you for the type to play, but trust me, I'm going to take you down."

Draco didn't know why, but those words went straight to his ... gut. Or a bit further south, if he wanted to be honest with himself. The only reason he didn't betray his complete embarrassment was his iron control, for which he had never been so glad of as he was right now. Something was *definitely* wrong. He needed a shag. Right now...it was clear. Potter was right, those sessions had boiled his brain. Something must have gotten damaged in the process, but he knew he needed to find a witch, and now! He felt a sheen of sweat break out on his upper lip. As soon as it wasn't conspicuous, he was going to suggest that they take a break from their lessons tomorrow so that he could call on ... someone. He didn't know who, but it didn't matter. Someone like him was never without options.

"Draco?" Potter dangled the plastic rectangle in front of him. "Are you prepared to have your arse handed to you?" He smiled to show he was just kidding.

Draco took a breath. It was getting hard to breathe. "Er. I don't play." His voice sounded squeaky. The word 'arse' was making his stomach flip.

Potter's grin faded. "What? What do you mean? Why do you have a Wii if you don't play? Is your ... dad ... a big fan of video games?" Potter looked incredulous.

"No, no." Draco shook his head. "I've never played them. The truth is, I don't come in here too much. I'm not one for games."

Potter's face turned serious. "Then why all of this? Why have everything? It takes so much effort. The Wii wasn't even around when you left! If you don't even know what it is ..."

Draco shrugged. "You know, only the best. Even if I don't want it." The words hung out there again, another admission that seemed too intimate.

Potter looked at him. "Have you ever given it a try?" he asked.

"No. It isn't my thing." Draco again had that indistinct feeling of double entendres that he couldn't quite grasp.

"Come on, Draco. You never know until you try. You might really like it. Try something new." Potter suspended the controller enticingly.

Draco bit his lip. "Okay. So, it's a game?"

Potter grinned. "It's a game. And one I'm going to win."

Draco felt that familiar competitive spark flare and catch, but for once, it was all in fun. He rolled up his sleeves and reached for the foreign device. "We'll see about that. Prepare yourself for conquest, Potter."

Draco glanced over and saw Potter's green eyes trained on him. "You seem pretty sure of yourself, Draco. Care to make a friendly wager on the outcome of the game?"

Draco's pride asserted itself. He could almost feel it rushing forward on its own. "Absolutely. What do you have in mind?"

"Well, to be honest, I have this kink in my back. I figure you are such a pain in my neck, you must've caused it. So, it's only fair that you should give me a backrub." Potter didn't blink.

Draco's eyebrows shot up. "You want me to be your personal masseur? Forget it!" The thought of his hands, all over Potter ... it wasn't as disgusting as it should have been. That was the problem.

"It's okay. I can understand that you don't want to take a wager like that. First of all, you *know* you're going to lose. Second of all, I always knew you were too good to do something that the rest of us would." Potter taunted.

Draco felt his temper explode. "So you're saying you'd give a massage? Fine, you're on, Potter," he said before he could think. "And be prepared to pay up, because you are never going to beat me at my own game."

"Your own game, hm?" Suddenly Potter looked awfully amused. "And what's the name of the game? Do you even know?"

Draco scowled. "That knowledge is not required. I just have to come in first. And I will. How do I strap this on?"

Potter choked. "Just slip in on your wrist. Not so hard! You don't need to force everything. Now, get ready. I'm going to turn it on."

Draco rolled his eyes. "I've *been* ready. Let's go."

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"Fuck! Fuck!" Draco threw down the Wii remote in disgust. They had been playing for hours, and he couldn't get a win in. Not one. If you asked him, this whole damn thing was rigged. "Fuck!"

"Nice. Well, that's another game to me."

Potter was cool as a cucumber, damn him. Draco bent over to retrieve the controller from where he had thrown it. "One more. I demand a rematch."

"Uh-uh. It's been hours already. You lose." Potter pressed a button and the whole system shut off. "I demand my payment."

"I didn't lose!" Draco protested.

Potter cocked an eyebrow at him.

"You didn't give me a chance to get warmed up! I was just starting!" Draco was desperate. This was humiliating. Not a single game! And now he had to...Merlin! Potter was taking off his shirt! Draco's mouth ran dry. "Stop it! What are you doing?"

Potter looked at him as if he had gone mad. "Draco, stop welshing on the deal. Last I heard, you could at least hold up your end of a bargain."

That did it. Draco narrowed his eyes. "I'm not welshing."

"Good. So rub." Potter draped himself facedown over one of the many couches.

Draco stared at the expanse of Potter's back. *How had he gotten into this?* Well, there was nothing for it. Malfoys didn't renege on deals. Draco approached Potter. How best to handle this? Should he sit on the edge? No. Definitely not. He couldn't just lean over. That was awkward. He would have to ... Draco swallowed. Get on his knees. It was that or sit right next to him on the couch, sharing the space, and *that* wasn't about to happen.

Draco fell to his knees on the soft carpet. Potter hadn't moved or made a sound. Maybe he was asleep. Draco stretched out his hands. Here was the moment of reckoning; he had to do this. He touched Potter's back.

Potter hissed. "You're cold!"

"What?" Draco jerked his hands back. "Sorry, it isn't my fault that I have poor circulation!"

"No!" Potter sat up a little. "It felt nice. Please, continue."

Draco shook out his hands and began again. He didn't know quite what to do. He thought of the many massages he'd had, and he tried to copy that. He let his hands ghost over Potter's skin, lightly at first, then with more pressure. He sought out harder spots that seemed like knots, and he worked at them. The kinks came loose under his ministrations, and before he knew it he was working up quite a sweat himself, kneading and pushing and rolling the muscles. Potter's skin was firm and unblemished; the heat of it was mesmerizing, and Draco wanted to just keep touching it ...

"Mmm ... Draco ... feels good," Potter murmured.

That sound of Potter's pleasure made Draco's cock stir, and he nearly froze. Those words, he could swear he had heard them before, spoken with pleasure. Was he having *déjà vu*?

"Don't stop," Potter muttered. "That's so nice."

Draco knew he wasn't in his right mind. He was clearly insane from lack of sex. If this is what abstinence did, drove him to think of things like this, then he would have to make sure to never let himself get so deprived again. For now, it seemed that there was nothing he could do except hope that Potter didn't catch on to the fact that he was being given a backrub by an undersexed pervert. Draco leaned into it and applied his hands to a tight spot near Potter's shoulder blade.

Potter moaned.

The sound went directly to Draco's groin.

Just then, as if it was amplified by a Sonorous Spell, Draco detected the click of the door to the game room. He would forever remember how events unspooled with the slow-motion memory of the traumatized.

"Draco, what in Merlin's name are you doing in here? I thought you detested..." Lucius stepped through the threshold. "...Potter." His eyes widened almost imperceptibly.

Draco snatched his hands back. The red of his blush scalded his face, and he knew he might incinerate on the spot. He had never before so fervently wished for the floor to open up and swallow him whole. He jumped to his feet. "Father! What are you doing here?"

Lucius' lips twitched. "In the Game Room? Looking for you. Otherwise speaking? I'm home."

## Chapter Fifteen

*Chapter 15 of 28*

After the war, Harry Potter is left with no one to save, no one to fight, and one extra wand. Draco Malfoy escapes punishment by leaving the country... or so he thinks. Seven years pass before they see each other again. Draco is no longer the master of his wand and a battle of talent and wills ensues. A story of a wand without a true master, and two men who fight to master each other... and themselves.

*This chapter was written by literaryspell.*

Harry slipped his shirt back on, trying to look innocent even as he sat with one ankle propped on a knee to hide his arousal.

"It was a bet," Draco said, his chin tilted skywards. "And though I lost...gracefully, I might add...it was you who taught me to never go back on a deal."

"Indeed I did, Draco." Lucius cast a look at Harry, one that said he knew too much. "And I do believe Potter is glad for the fact that some of my teachings have stuck."

Draco glanced between Harry and his father. "He was tense." Draco's tone was trying for dismissive, but there was the tiniest of creases between his fine blond brows that almost, *almost* made Harry think he was worried.

Deciding it was time to step in and end the awkwardness...or add to it, whatever the case may be, Harry said, "Your son is singularly appalling at video games. It was almost like I took advantage of him."

Lucius tilted his head to the side ever so slightly, taking in Harry from head to toe. "Almost," he deadpanned.

Silence stretched so long that Harry had the urge to break it with some Quidditch inanity just to end the torture, but to his relief, Draco spoke first. "I do believe I'm for bed. It is good to see you again, Father. Shall we meet for tea in the morning to discuss your work?"

Lucius dipped his head in agreement, and Draco walked past him toward the door. Harry watched him go, disappointed in the way the evening had ended for reasons he couldn't really explain. At the door, Draco turned and Harry met his eyes. Neither moved. Then Harry blinked and Draco was gone.

Lucius, unfortunately, wasn't.

"Please do join us for tea tomorrow, Potter. You might learn something." With that, he spun with more flair than was necessary for exiting a game room, and left.

Learn something? About the Malfoy 'business'? That was not something Harry wanted to wake up before noon for. Learn something about Draco, however... The way he interacted with his father was both amusing and concerning. He seemed to revert, if not to childhood, than at least to his late teens when Lucius was around. He was so much more tense and even his language became less fluid, more stilted, as if he weighed and considered every word.

Draco didn't do that with Harry.

Deciding he wasn't tired enough to go to bed but also wasn't comfortable enough to retire to his room for a wank when he knew Draco was right next door...Silencing Charms notwithstanding, it was just wrong...Harry played a few rounds of golf on the Wii. He thought about the massage. If it could be called that. Draco's hands were almost sharp they were so pointed, and Harry wasn't sure his back hadn't been bruised with the effort he'd exuded. None of that detracted from the *feel* of Draco's cold hands...soon warmed by Harry's skin...sliding down over the muscled curve of his shoulders, around his shoulder blades, down his spine with teasing pressure, to the small of his back. He *knew* he hadn't imagined it when Draco's thumbs had pressed into the dimples he knew were there before moving down to brush the waist of his trousers for a torturous moment.

Harry sighed and threw the remote on the couch next to him. Fuck Draco's delicate sensibilities. He needed a wank.

It took Harry almost ten minutes just to find his way back from the game room, stupid Malfoy Maze. To his relief, Lucius was not in any of the main areas of the house. Perhaps he'd retired for the evening. Harry spared a second's hope that his room was nowhere near Harry's, but he remembered Draco saying it was in a different wing or something ridiculous like that.

As he passed Draco's door, he noticed the light was still on within. Harry'd stayed up for at least two hours, so Draco still being awake was strange when he'd said he was going to bed. Harry wondered what he was doing. Then Harry wondered what Draco slept in. Would it be one of those old fashioned nightshirts? Did he wear a pyjama suit just as starched and proper as his robes? Did he sleep in snug black pants and an old Quidditch t-shirt that was frayed at the hem and had a small tear on the neck? Or did he sleep completely and utterly bared, just waiting for some thief in the night to sneak in and take ravenous advantage of him?

Harry shuddered and fairly bolted the last few steps to his own door. What in Merlin's name was he thinking? Had he completely lost it? This was *Draco Malfoy*...enemy! Draco Malfoy...twat! Draco Malfoy...everything else bad that Harry had ever called him, thought about him, or heard inferred about him. He was not someone that Harry was supposed to be thinking about when his cock got hard.

After making sure the Silencing Charms were still working, Harry settled on the canopy bed...it still made him feel like a kid in a fairy tale...and drew his cock out of his trousers. It was *aching*. Though he closed his mind entirely to images of blond prats with smart mouths and quick, cutting tongues, he couldn't completely avoid remembering what had reduced him to such a state of mindless arousal in the first place. The massage. Hands touching him in neither desire nor loathing. Hands that were cool and seemed to know exactly where he'd needed them.

Harry's own hand quickened its pace over his prick, any thoughts of edging out the pleasure lost in the decisive need of the moment. He imagined his hand was more slender, bonier, less warm, less familiar. Precome spilt from his slit and he quickly gathered it to round the head of his cock, hand flying now. In his head, Harry saw an inexplicable image, all tied up with thoughts of fucking and sucking and rubbing...five or six flames dancing in the grass, power and control.

Harry came.

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"This is absolutely ridiculous. I simply cannot work under these conditions. I don't think anyone could expect me to. You couldn't even litter-train a kneazle...I've no idea why you thought you were capable of teaching *me*. I need someone with more experience. You can't keep holding me back! I know my own limits and yet I have to sit here and listen to you act as if you know them better? No. No person was ever as tried as I have been this past week. Forget this. I refuse to go on. Refuse!"

Through Draco's tirade, Harry sat on the sofa in the sitting room. His arse was starting to go numb...Draco had been ranting for at least twenty minutes. Harry had to admit he was impressed. Draco rarely used the same slurs twice, and his sheer vocabulary when it came to complaining was unmatched. If there were a World Cup for whingeing, Draco would bring home the gold every time.

Now, though, it seemed like he was running out of steam. Harry had no intentions of giving in, so Draco had two choices: continue bitching until the end of time (Harry didn't much like that option, but it did seem the more likely one) or give in and let Harry run the lessons as he saw fit.

"If you want me to continue to teach you, you'll have to do as I say. That's all there is to it, really. I'm sick and tired of fighting and you're way too worked up for a lesson."

In response, Draco went still and seemed to focus. Harry knew what he was doing, or was about to do...show Harry who was boss by throwing around some wandless magic...so Harry rose and closed the distance between them. He grabbed Draco by the shoulders, startling him out of his concentration.

"Unhand me, Potter," Draco snarled. He looked less in control of himself than Harry had ever seen, perhaps with one vivid, school time exception.

Beneath Harry's hands, Draco's muscles were bunched and tight, his shoulders drawn up protectively. He looked furious.

"You need to calm the fuck down," Harry said, patience at its end. "I've listened to your insults against me for long enough. Even you have to say I've been very patient with you."

Draco's cold, biting eyes told Harry that he would admit no such thing.

"But this is enough. You know why it has to be me. I'm not only the only one who *can* teach you and protect you at the same time...and don't make that face, you *do* need protection...but I'm also the only one willing to. So give it a rest. I'm all you've got."

Draco jerked away from Harry's hold, crossing his arms over his chest. He probably thought he looked standoffish, but Harry could only see him as vulnerable and frustrated at himself over a lack of progress.

Instead of apologising, which Harry wouldn't hold his breath for unless he ever gave up altogether and decided to end it all, Draco said, "Let's get back to the lesson. I think you've wasted enough of my time."

Knowing by now that Draco didn't actually *mean* a good chunk of the rude things he said, Harry let it go. "No way. No more lessons for you until you can relax and give yourself a break."

"I've had a break," Draco insisted. "A very refreshing one."

Harry had to chuckle. Of course it had been refreshing for him...he'd done nothing more strenuous than berate Harry without end. Harry, though, was mentally exhausted.

"Well, then I need a break," he said. "I'm going to play darts in the game room." He made no comment as to whose head he'd be picturing the dartboard as.

As Harry began to walk away, Draco harrumphed behind him. A moment later, Draco was walking beside Harry, arms still folded in front of him.

"You know, a wizard invented darts." Draco paused, obviously waiting for some disbelieving interjection from Harry, who gave him no such satisfaction. Undaunted, Draco continued, "But the inventor, a friend of the Malfoy family as a matter of fact, had a Squib brother who stole the idea and brought it into the Muggle world, where he took all the credit. Disgusting, isn't it?"

It would be disgusting, Harry thought, if it were true. But he never knew with Draco what was truth and what was said just to make him look or feel better. So Harry only nodded, glad that, if nothing else, Draco wasn't pushing for more lessons at the moment.

Once they'd meandered their way to the game room, Draco went and opened the cupboard that housed the dartboard and darts. With chalk, he drew a quick scoreboard, with the titles 'Draco M' and 'Visitor' across the top. With a quick smirk over his shoulder at Harry, Draco gathered the darts and went to stand back beside Harry, clearly intending to go first.

"House privilege," he said, handing Harry a set of white-feathered darts while he kept the black ones for himself. "Same wager as before?"

Harry gave an easy shrug. He didn't want another massage. Not when he had something better in mind...something that would take Draco down a peg or two, hopefully making him more bearable. And it would be good for Draco, too. He was too tense for his own good, and that made him less controlled when it came to lessons, which in turn made him more frustrated. It was an unending cycle that had to be nipped in the bud.

Draco took his shrug as acquiescence and the game began. Harry had only played darts in bars while waiting for drinks or food to arrive, but he'd always been a natural. Draco was good, too...his posture was straight, one foot angled forward precisely, his eyes narrowed on the board as he tossed, his follow-through flawless as the dart pierced the outer bull's eye ring. Draco stopped chalking in the scores as Harry's grew higher and higher.

They played for almost an hour, but no matter how serious Draco took the game, no matter how learned his stance or how intense his concentration, he couldn't beat the casual throws that ended up winning Harry the game.

With a sigh of defeat that sounded just the tiniest bit forced, Draco rolled his eyes. "I suppose you'll want that massage now." He shuddered, but again, his actions didn't quite match the way he couldn't seem to look away from Harry.

Harry fingered the hem of his jumper before deciding to let Draco in on his true intentions. "A massage *would* be nice, but I'm actually still quite relaxed from last night." He rolled his shoulders decadently to demonstrate. "But *you* seem like you could use a good massage. So I think that's what I'll do." He waited for Draco to process the words, which seemed to take quite some time.

"I don't think that's a good idea," Draco said very slowly. He took a step back.

Harry pursued. "Well, I've never yet heard you say I had a good idea, so I suppose that's to be expected. Stop delaying and take off your shirt."

Now Draco was fiddling with the cuffs of his rich blue oxford shirt. He shook his head.

Then Harry had an idea. "Another wager, then."

Draco looked interested.

"I'll use wandless magic to unbutton all..." He counted. "Ten buttons on your shirt. You use your wandless magic to button them back up. If I can get your shirt totally unbuttoned in two minutes, you have to let me massage you. If I can't..." Harry knew he had to give Draco something good in order for him to risk the bet. "I'll let you dictate your own terms for the next three lessons."

First Draco counted the buttons on his shirt...eight down the front, one on each cuff...and then he narrowed his eyes at Harry. At first, Harry thought he was contemplating all the ugly and violent ways he could reject Harry, but then Harry saw the first and then second button on his shirt squirm through their holes. Draco then squinted, and the buttons flew back through the openings, sealing the shirt shut once again.

"I accept," Draco said, a smug smile on his face. He obviously felt his little practise attempts made him ready to go against Harry.

Harry smiled. "Ready?" Draco nodded. "Okay. Go!" Immediately, he unbuttoned the first button. Almost as soon as he did, Draco buttoned it back. Then Harry did one cuff button and rapidly moved to the bottom one in the row. Almost as fast as Harry undid them, Draco wandlessly set them to rights.

Harry let the game go on for over a minute. Then he upped the ante, using his wandless magic to undo two and three buttons at once. Draco tried to keep up, but he was soon five buttons behind, then six, then seven.

As the second minute approached, Harry went for broke. He let Draco catch up and secure every single last button; he looked so very victorious that Harry almost wanted to let him have the win.

Two seconds before the time ran out, Harry wandlessly undid every last button...and just to cement his win, he also unbuckled Draco's belt, opened his trouser clasp, unzipped his fly, untied his shoelaces, and loosened the watch around his left wrist. Draco scrambled to catch his trousers before they fell to his ankles.

"You cheated!" Draco cried, fighting between fastening his trousers again and stomping toward Harry, almost tripping on an errant shoelace. He put one finger in Harry's face. "You hustled me."

Harry shrugged, unapologetic. "You let yourself be hustled. Now stop buttoning your shirt...I want it off."

With slow, almost timid movements, Draco let his shirt fall from his shoulders. Any hesitation he showed was contradicted by the fierce glare he was treating Harry to whenever their eyes met.

"Over on that sofa," he said, pointing to the one he'd lain across the night before. A strange thrill coursed through him at the thought that Draco's bare chest was touching the very same spot his own had...and maybe Draco's erection would dent the same place as well.

Once stretched out, Draco seemed more relaxed. He hadn't fought as much as Harry'd predicted he would, and for that, Harry was glad. He wasn't in the mood to coerce Draco, though he would have to get his way.

"Open your legs a bit," Harry said. Draco threw him a look of such disdain that Harry just shrugged and grabbed the leg closest to him and yanked it outward, creating a space on the sofa between Draco's slender legs. Harry half-knelt there, one knee sinking into the couch, bracketed by Draco's thighs, the other foot braced on the floor. He leaned over Draco's back and started the massage.

He knew he wasn't as good as Draco had been. He was made for rougher things, like darts and Quidditch and videogames. He wasn't good with his hands. His massage was really more like foreplay, he mused...all caressing and soothing and not really much more. Draco didn't protest, so Harry didn't let it bother him.

Draco's body. What was there even to say? He was pale, almost strangely so. Not a single freckle or mole graced the entire expanse of his back. The knobs of his spine protruded gently, and Harry traced each and every one as he learned the feel of Draco's body. Draco's skin was cool...or maybe Harry's was just too hot.

When Harry's hands moved to Draco's lower back, Harry's mind was overtaken. *This*, he thought as he gripped Draco's waist, *this is how I would hold him to fuck him*.

As Harry was trying to erase that unwelcome thought...and accompanying imagery...Draco moved. His hands were holding the arm of the sofa, and he used them to hold his upper body still as he stretched and rolled his lower body. There was a satisfying crack somewhere in his spine, but Harry barely heard it. The languid movement pushed Draco several centimetres down the sofa, bringing Harry's knee directly between his legs and *against* some very important body parts.

They both froze...Harry's hands on Draco's side, gripping; Draco's crotch pressed against Harry's knee. The strangest urge to slide his knee against Draco's groin hit Harry, and the wind left his lungs in a rush.

Before he could act on...or run from...any such desire, Draco was, with the grace of an erumpent, climbing over the arm of the sofa and away from Harry. He stood, his face and bare chest flushed, the bulge in his trousers unmistakable. He looked angry as hell as he snatched up his shirt and donned it, leaving it untucked to hang over the front of his trousers.

Before either could speak, Peachy the house-elf popped into the room. "Dinner is ready, Master Draco. Peachy is made it to your *exact* specifications." She gave Draco a wide-eyed look, seemingly waiting for dismissal, and when it didn't come, she looked to Harry. Her eyes became rounder still, and Harry almost worried they'd fall right out of her head.

"Thanks, Peachy," Harry said when it looked like Draco couldn't form words at all.

With a nod, she popped out of the room, taking with her some of the tension. "Dinner, then?" Harry asked, hoping to completely ignore everything that had happened...at least until he was alone in his rooms amidst his trusty Silencing Charms.

Draco waved at him, and Harry took that to mean he was to go ahead. He hesitated a moment, wanting to ask if Draco was okay or if he planned on committing some dramatic form of pure-blood hara-kiri as soon as Harry left. But Draco didn't look suicidal, just massively confused. Since Harry was feeling the same thing, he decided to leave Draco to his own thoughts.

He managed to make it to the dining room in much less time, now that the way was becoming familiar. He was disappointed to see Lucius seated at the head of the table, with Harry on his left and Draco to his right. Harry sighed. Gone were the days of rearranging the plates to create a friendlier atmosphere.

He nodded at Lucius and took his seat, sipping water from a goblet as he hoped against hope that Lucius would remain silent until Draco came to take the focus off Harry.

Of course, Lucius had no problem with making Harry uncomfortable. "Another one of your games?" he asked, a quirked eyebrow aimed at Harry.

It took Harry a moment to realise he was talking about what they'd been doing in the game room. He nodded. "Darts."

"Ah," Lucius said, inclining his head. "Invented by a wizard, you know?" He proceeded to tell Harry the story, ending it with, "Disgusting, no?"

Harry wondered how much of Draco was Draco and how much was Lucius.

In response to Lucius, Harry only nodded. Then, "How do you like being back in England?"

Lucius' upper lip twitched. Apparently he didn't like being reminded of his exile. "It is preferable to be on one's home soil," he said stiffly.

Harry snorted. "I bet it is."

There was only silence after that, until finally Draco entered the room, looking as put-together as he ever had. There was no evidence of the charged moments between them...unless you knew where to look. And Harry did. As Draco sat, he tugged on one of his sleeves, something of a nervous habit with him. Harry watched as Draco realised the button there was undone. His face blushed a hot red as he fiddled with the button, unable to thread it through.

Harry cleared his throat to stop Draco, and then used his wandless magic to send the button smoothly through the hole. Draco's eyes met his for the briefest moment before flying down to his empty plate, his cheeks still full of colour.

Lucius looked between the two, seeming to want to ask a question...or perhaps make an accusation...but Draco wouldn't look up, and Harry wouldn't look away from Draco.

Not until dinner was served, anyway.

To Harry's shock and unmitigated delight, a thick, juicy hamburger took centre stage on his plate, surrounding by crisp, thick-cut chips. The same food graced both Draco's and Lucius' plates. Harry laughed out loud, knowing this was in reaction to his telling Draco that food didn't always have to be gourmet. Draco smirked at him.

"What in the world is this?" Lucius demanded, a confused frown on his face. His eyes narrowed as he called for Peachy.

Harry snatched up a few chips and ate them quickly, in case Lucius had the amazing food thrown out. He groaned with delight...they were the best chips he'd ever had.

He looked up and saw Draco spear a chip on his fork and lift it tentatively to his mouth. He took a nibble, seemed to find it acceptable, and bit off a larger portion. Harry met his eyes, knowing his own had to be dancing with mirth.

Draco offered him a very small smile in return, shaking his head as he finished off the fry.

Peachy popped in, wringing her hands at Lucius' frightening visage. But Draco spoke first. "Just try it, Father. If you don't like it, send it back. But Potter and I are eating this."

Lucius did not try his hamburger and chips. He had Peachy take it away (Harry stopped her and asked her to wrap it up for him for later, to Lucius' vocal disgust) and replace it with sole and rice pilaf.

Draco followed Harry's lead when it came to eating. He put down the fork and started munching on the chips by hand, as they were meant to be eaten. At that point, Lucius threw down his fork in disgust and rose, claiming he could not sit idly by and watch his own son devolve into heathenry.

It was obviously the moment for Draco to put down the chip and call in Peachy to replace his own meal. That was what Lucius was waiting for.

Draco seemed torn for a long moment. He looked between Lucius and his plate as if the decision was life altering. Harry wasn't certain he understood the nuances of what was happening. Then Lucius turned and left the room without looking back.

With Lucius gone, Harry dived into his hamburger with gusto, convinced he'd never eaten anything so brilliant. He knew Draco was upset over something, but he didn't feel it was his place to say anything...and he knew Draco would just brush him off if he did.

Harry was just about to mention that the burger was getting cold when Draco picked up and knife and fork and sliced into it. He cut a tiny square out, eyeing it with distrust as Harry watched from beneath his fringe. He couldn't help but smile when Draco brought the morsel to his lips, biting it off the fork delicately. His expression didn't change, but Harry felt victorious when Draco cut off another piece, and another.

The best part of the evening, however, wasn't the hamburger. It wasn't even the chips. Nor was it...though it was a close call...when Harry's knee had grazed Draco's crotch. No, the best part was just after Draco polished off the last bite of his hamburger and said, "That wasn't nearly as bad as I was expecting." Then he smiled at Harry, who had to laugh...it was all so absurd. Then Draco was chuckling, too. The best part was when they laughed, without embarrassment, without history, without expectation, together.

## Chapter Sixteen

*Chapter 16 of 28*

After the war, Harry Potter is left with no one to save, no one to fight, and one extra wand. Draco Malfoy escapes punishment by leaving the country... or so he thinks. Seven years pass before they see each other again. Draco is no longer the master of his wand and a battle of talent and wills ensues. A story of a wand without a true master, and two men who fight to master each other... and themselves.

*This chapter was written by keppiehed.*

Chapter Sixteen

"Master Draco! Wake up! You is late!"

"Hhhmmpph?" Draco cracked an eye open. He could just make out Peachy standing over him, wringing her hands in apparent distress. She obviously couldn't bring herself to actually *shake* him, but her entreaties were getting more high-pitched by the minute. Draco winced as the meaning of her words finally trickled through his groggy brain. "What? Late for what? I don't have any appointments this morning."

"Master Malfoy be waiting for you in the parlour. He is been there for five minutes already! He sends me to remind you about your breakfast tea?" Peachy's eyes couldn't get any wider.

Draco groaned into the pillow. "Salazar on a saddle! I forgot." He sat up. "How does he seem to you? Is he ... *really* upset?"

"It is not Peachy's place to say," she began primly. Then she leaned in. "But he seem not as happy as he usually be. One eye be ticking."

Uh-oh. That did not predict good news. Draco got out of bed and searched for the nearest pair of slacks. He would just have to forego his usual morning shower. Desperate times called for desperate measures. Draco had a sense of being watched. "A little help, if you would be so kind?" he prompted the house-elf. He held out an arm and allowed himself to be dressed. It was so hard to find decent help these days, he thought to himself as Peachy buttoned his cuffs.

Between the two of them, they managed to get Draco presentable in a relatively short time. Draco made his way to the smaller dining room that they had been employing since their return.

Peachy cleared her throat. "Master Malfoy be in the parlour," she reminded him in a small voice.

"Yes, of course. Thank you." Draco pursed his lips and changed course. The parlour. That was never a good sign.

"The second parlour," she whispered when she saw him head in the wrong direction yet again.

Draco stopped dead in his tracks. The second parlour? That was really disconcerting. "Of course. I will see myself in. You may go," he said, keeping his voice nonchalant. It didn't do to let the staff see one's distress. But Draco was distressed. Very.

The second parlour was an unmistakeable sign of his father's displeasure. He only used that room to dole out punishments, decrees, and to establish dominance. Draco felt a fine sheen of sweat break out on his forehead. The dungeon was preferable to the second parlour, as far as he was concerned.

Draco made his way to the room in question and knocked on the door, as etiquette demanded. He might as well follow all the dictates, not that it would save him now. He didn't want to take a chance and further enrage his father by brazenly flouting tradition. Draco waited in the hall. He felt about eight years old.

"You may enter," came the response from behind the door.

As Draco went in, a wave of revulsion swept over him. The peach décor brought back a flood of memories, none of them pleasant. He schooled his features to betray none of his emotions, instead giving a terse nod. "I apologize for my tardiness, Father."

Lucius was seated on the white loveseat, a cup of tea in hand. He returned the nod. "You are excused. I indulged in a cup of tea, due to the lengthy wait, but the rest of the refreshments await you. I trust you are rested?"

Draco took the seat opposite and poured himself a cup of tea. "Again, I find myself in the unenviable position of having to apologize twice. It seems that I had ... misremembered the occasion of our meeting. I have restructured my summer schedule."

"Indeed?" Lucius took a sip of tea. "And to what benefit, might I ask?"

Draco swallowed. "Oh, my hours are just different now. So, my mornings begin later than they have in the past."

"I see." Lucius sat forward.

"I find it invigorating," Draco offered.

"Indubitably," Lucius said. He let the silence stretch out.

Draco tried not to fidget. Even the damned little cherubs bedecking every surface seemed judgmental.

"Draco, there is a matter of some delicacy I wish to discuss with you." Lucius began.

"Yes, what? Is it your trip? Do you want to go over the holdings in Italy, or perhaps some of the investments? You know you can trust me to take on more of those things," Draco said. He was hoping that finances were what his father would consider a 'delicate' subject.

"I was thinking of something more in the personal sphere. As I have resumed residence, I really see no reason to have Potter here. I commend you for a job well done, but the necessity of his presence here is clearly at an end." Lucius set his teacup down in his saucer, his eyes penetrating. "It is now your duty to ask him to vacate the premises. If he requires compensation, you may negotiate it."

All of the air in the room seemed to leave with those words. Draco had been about to take a sip of his tea; with that proclamation, his hand paused midway to his mouth. He froze, his lips puckered in readiness for the rim of the china. He knew he must look silly, but he couldn't seem to make himself do anything other than sit there in shock. Why had this never occurred to him? That Potter would have to leave, that his father would ask Draco to make him go...To pay him off, even? Why did it make him feel so sick? That was the Malfoy way, after all. It was what they did for everything, and this was no different. Payment for a service rendered. Simple.

Not so simple.

Draco didn't want that. He didn't...couldn't...stop to consider the dread rising in his gut. He pushed it down, as frantically as he now set down his cup of tea. It sloshed over the rim, spilling out onto the saucer. Draco didn't care. He felt a wildness rising, and he clung to it, clung to anything that allowed him not to think, not to consider what he might be feeling ...

"Draco! Mind the china." Lucius was frowning at the harsh treatment of the cup.

"I can't! He can't go!" He blurted the words before he had a thought about what he was saying.

"Ah." Lucius took a breath. "I thought as much."

"I ... what?" Draco frowned. "You knew all along?"

Lucius gazed at him. "I had my suspicions. I was waiting for you to tell me yourself."

"Oh, Father! I didn't want to let you down. I didn't want to tell you until I knew for sure." Draco suddenly felt such relief. "I wanted to be able to *show* you, and not have to hide anymore. I just want you to be proud of me. I am so tired of messing it up!" Suddenly Draco realized how much he had said, and fell silent.

Lucius couldn't meet his eye. "Draco, you know I am not as good at these kind of things as your mother was. But I hope you never doubt for a moment how much I love you, or that I am always proud of you. No matter what you choose to do, or whom you choose to be with. If you and Potter are ... friends, then I am just happy that you're happy."

Draco looked up. "Thank you, Father. I appreciate that. But I wouldn't say that Potter and I are friends, exactly."

"Well, whatever you call it." For the first time in...well, possibly *ever*...Lucius looked like he might be blushing. "I can respect that."

"I'd say it more like student and teacher, but don't tell *him* that. He has a big enough head about it as it is. He thinks he knows *everything*! He won't give me credit for being a quick study," Draco said.

If Lucius wasn't flushing before, he certainly had a bright red cast now. "Er, yes. I don't believe I need to know the particulars. In fact, I'm sure I don't. I'll thank you to keep those sorts of details between the two of you. It's enough to know that you have my support."

Draco was puzzled. "You don't want to know about the lessons, then? Now that things are progressing, I thought you might even want to sit in on one."

Lucius nearly choked. "No! Gods, no, Draco! I don't know what gave you that idea, but absolutely *not*."

Draco hadn't ever seen his father so flustered. He looked like he might have an apoplexy.

Lucius took a moment to compose himself and then continued as if nothing awkward had transpired. "Another matter that has not escaped my attention is your employment. Or lack thereof."

"Yes, well, you haven't seen how much effort I have put into finding a job. There's nothing out there, Father. I've tried, I really have!" Draco regretted the whine in his voice, but he was really at his wit's end about this whole ridiculous situation.

Lucius pinched the bridge of his nose between his thumb and forefinger. "I suppose your Mr. Potter is just fine with you being without a vocation?"

"I don't give a good Galleon about what he thinks about anything. Honestly, Father, why would you even mention him?" Draco huffed. He felt his temper slipping out of control.

"Language, Draco. How many times have I told you that swearing is for the lesser man? It is the opiate of the vocabulary. Honestly, you are going to pot, straight to pot these days." Lucius sighed. "I suppose this is *his* influence."

"Why do we keep talking about *Potter*?" Draco glowered. "We were talking about my job."

"You don't have a job," Lucius pointed out. "You are, apparently, content to remain a spoilt playboy for the rest of your days. Have you *nothing* to show for your efforts, Draco?"

Draco crossed his arms. "I got one response, but that's it. And I'm not doing it."

Lucius sat up. "What is it?"

"I'd sooner die."

"That can be arranged," Lucius said with a touch of asperity. "From whom? What is the position?"

Draco didn't meet his father's eye. "It is for a freelance writing position, one that could become a staff position after a time. At *The Quibbler*."

Silence.

Draco looked at his father. He had a blank face. "Why did you apply there?" he finally asked.

Draco nudged the rococo table with his shoe. "I didn't. Luna heard that I had been applying. Stupid bleeding-heart sent me an owl with the offer."

"You'll take it. Immediately."

"What?" Draco looked at his father in disbelief.

"Mark my words, Draco. If you've looked as hard as you say you've looked, then this is the last offer you'll be receiving. You shall respond in the affirmative, or I will on your behalf. It is your choice how this happens, but you shall take that position post haste. Now," Lucius stood up. "I have another appointment. I bid you good day."

Draco watched as Lucius left him sitting there, mouth hanging open.

He had to take a job at *The Quibbler*? The multitude of cherubs all over this cursed room seemed to be laughing at him now. He'd be damned if he was going to sit here in this hellhole that masqueraded as a parlour a minute longer! Draco stormed out of the peach torture chamber and down the hall. He wasn't watching where he was going, and he nearly knocked Potter down somewhere near the indoor fountain.

"Draco! I'm glad to see you." Potter pushed his glasses up on his nose. "Last night your father invited me to tea, and I can't seem to find the room." He grinned apologetically. "Just how many parlours do you have around here, anyway?"

Draco was not in the mood to be polite. "Tea's done. You missed it," he said shortly. "Let's just get on with the lesson, shall we?" He strode out the front door, not watching to see if Potter was following.

"Whoa, Draco!" He could hear Potter calling from behind him. "Slow down, would you?" Potter ran to catch up. "You're a little worked up. You need to calm down before we begin any lessons, or you won't be able to harness your magic reliably. You know that."

Draco rounded on him. "Great Merlin's Ghost! I don't need another person telling me what I can and can't do! In fact, Potter, I'm getting awfully tired of *you* trying to always be in charge. I think it's high time we had a duel, don't you?"

"A ... what? A duel?" Potter was flabbergasted. "Draco, what's your problem? I showed you very clearly last night that you aren't ready to beat me. You're making fine progress, but there's still a lot left for you to learn."

"Then *teach me*. And stop with these games!" Draco shouted. He was aware that he was breathing heavily, and that he was standing too close to Potter.

His words rang out in stillness of the yard, the echoes carrying and finally dying out.

Potter looked at him and held his hands out in a placating gesture. "Okay, Draco. I will. I am. What do you want to learn?"

Draco paused. "What do I *need* to learn? Something more than buttoning up my shirt and starting fires, surely?"

Potter thought a moment. "I suppose we can move on to offensive and defensive spells."

"Yes, fine. That sounds good. I'll take the offense," Draco stated.

"You usually do," Potter remarked with a suspicious smile.

"What's that supposed to mean?" Draco was instantly rankled. He wasn't in the mood for joking.

"Nothing. Just ... calm down, will you? Okay, you're going to be trying to break past my defences. Which are many and tight." Potter cocked his head.

Draco nodded. "Got it. What do I have to do?"

Potter spent a few moments giving directions, and just as they were about to get down to the business of practice, Draco caught sight of movement behind Potter's left shoulder. Someone was approaching over the lawn. Someone wearing a red skirt.

"Hold on," he said, stopping the lesson.

Potter turned when he saw the direction of Draco's glance. "Who ...?"

They both waited until the figure got closer. It was Pansy.

"Hey, Draco," Pansy started. She ignored Potter. "I tried the house, but Peachy said you were out here on the South lawn. I thought maybe we could have a picnic lunch?" She held up a basket with one finger.

"We're in the middle of something here," Potter growled. "If you hadn't noticed."

"I'm sure it'll keep," Pansy said sweetly. "This, however, won't. Draco?"

Draco shrugged. "Sure, why not?" At Pansy's simpering smile and Potter's sharp intake of breath, he added "But Potter's right. We are in the middle of something here. So I'll have to join you later." There. Let Potter try and act like he was boss. Draco would make his own schedule at his own discretion.

"Fine, I'll just watch you, then." Pansy picked her way over to an unobtrusive knoll. "I didn't think to bring a blanket, though." She pulled out her wand. "*Scourgify!*"

The patch of grass she had been aiming at curled back and left a patch of dirt where once had been flawlessly seeded sod. Pansy stared in puzzlement.

Potter snickered, the bastard.

Draco just sighed. "Sit on the grass, will you, Pansy? It will be fine."

"That's rich coming from you," Potter remarked.

"What?" she gasped. "You want me to sit on the *ground*?"

"You can bugger off." Draco sneered. "It's *my* grass, after all. I'll invite whomever I want to sit on it."

"Right." Potter seemed to sober up. "If that's how you want to play it. Parkinson can't be here during the lessons, anyway. You won't concentrate. It could be dangerous."

Draco felt the noose of authority tightening around his neck. Everywhere he looked, someone was trying to tell him what to do, and he wasn't going to have it. He put on his most imperious stare, squared his shoulders and said, "You have no authority in this matter. She's my guest, and if I invite her to stay, she will."

Potter seemed to grow an inch as well, Draco noted. He had a brief notion that that may have been the wrong tack to take, as the other man stepped forward. "Don't play Lord of the Manor with me. It won't work. Not now. You know it. So get off your damned high hippogriff and see reason, Draco. Pansy can't stay. And that's that."

At the mention of her name, Pansy piped up, "You can't boss him around, Potter! Who do you think you are, anyway? You're no better than some ... employeee!"

At that, all of Draco's anger evaporated. He felt a certain cringing embarrassment, in fact, to even be associated with her. *When had that changed?* In the past, Pansy's support had only proved that he'd had enough of a loyal following to be popular. Now, the very sound of her voice was grating on his last nerve. He found he didn't agree with a single thing she said. When *he* said it, it was one thing. But coming out of her mouth ... well, that changed things. What was more, when he looked into Potter's eyes and saw the hurt there, hurt that he recognized as such, he wanted to punch Pansy in her pug little face.

"Oh, really?" Potter said. His voice had lost all its heat. His shoulders had a curious sort of slump to them, as if he had given up.

There was a prick of surprise that Draco wanted Potter to fight back, to find the flash in his eyes, to make a bitter retort. Why was he disappointed when Potter was turning away?

"Wait!" Draco called.

Potter didn't wait.

"Draco!" Pansy called. "Just leave him. There's only enough for two, anyway."

Draco ignored her. He ran after Potter, who was already a few steps away.

"Wait, Potter," he said. "Listen, that was out of line. I don't think of you like that. I just ... wanted you to know that."

Potter didn't break his stride. "You know what, Draco? I don't really care. Go back and have your lunch. Your girlfriend is waiting for you." He picked up his pace, the meaning clear that he wanted to be left alone.

Draco stood on the lawn, an alien feeling in his gut. It was a mixture of unease and ... sorrow? *Was he sorry?* He was halfway between Potter and Pansy, when he couldn't ignore her calls anymore.

Draco swallowed hard and turned to face Pansy. It was going to be a miserable afternoon. He was going to have to choke down a lot more than finger sandwiches and polite conversation. This feeling in his gut was threatening to overwhelm him, and he didn't know what to do about it. Draco sat on the grass, ignoring Pansy's surprised expression, but his gaze was fixed far away, on the figure of a man retreating.

How could he make this right? Why did he want to? Draco had a sinking feeling that it wasn't going to be anything in the Malfoy coffers this time that would make a bit of difference.

## Chapter Seventeen

*Chapter 17 of 28*

After the war, Harry Potter is left with no one to save, no one to fight, and one extra wand. Draco Malfoy escapes punishment by leaving the country... or so he thinks. Seven years pass before they see each other again. Draco is no longer the master of his wand and a battle of talent and wills ensues. A story of a wand without a true master, and two men who fight to master each other... and themselves.

*This chapter was written by literaryspell.*

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Harry walked away from Draco...and Pansy...without looking back. He forced his footsteps to be even and precise. He didn't want to storm. Not *with*er watching.

Why the hell would Draco pick her over him? Harry was actually *teaching* him something, doing him a bloody favour, and Pansy was nothing but a airheaded attention whore stupid enough to blow a hole in the ground instead of conjuring a blanket to sit on. Not that Draco hadn't made the same mistake...but for some reason, it was a lot more annoying when Pansy did it.

Deciding he had to get out of the manor, Harry didn't stop walking until he was almost at the Malfoys' Apparition point by the front gates. To his dismay, Lucius Malfoy was there are well, straightening his cravat, his beringed pinkie finger held aloft.

"Ah, Mr. Potter," Lucius said, glancing up briefly before continuing to fiddle.

Harry didn't bother telling him that no one knew how to tie a cravat in the first place, so no one would be able to tell it was imperfectly done. "Lucius," Harry said, crossing his arms over his chest. He was ready for a fight...and he hadn't been able to get one from Draco, so he'd settle for Malfoy Senior. He couldn't understand why he was so upset that Draco hadn't banished Pansy in favour of their lesson. As mad as he was, though, he was a tiny bit appreciative that Draco had told him he wasn't merely an employee...even though at times he felt more like a slave.

"Peachy informed me that Miss Parkinson arrived. I must say, their... friendship at times confounds me, given what I know about Draco." He raised an eyebrow as if to suggest Harry should know what he was referring to.

Harry frowned, but he wasn't in the mood to decipher Lucius' riddles. "Friendship?" He scoffed and shook his head. "I dunno what he even sees in her," he mumbled.

"Well, you needn't be concerned," Lucius said, finally satisfied with the swath of material at his throat. "Draco seems to have made his choice."

Despite Lucius' meaningful...meaningless, to Harry...look, Harry just rolled his eyes. "Yeah, I know he did. He let her interrupt our lesson...she walked right in."

Lucius' jaw tightened for a moment. "She walked in on a... lesson?"

His anger reigniting, Harry threw his arms up. "Right when we were about to start something really important, she jut waltzes right in and starts a picnic."

"A picnic?" Lucius looked aghast before he seemed to collect himself. "In any event, I'm certain he meant you no slight."

Ignoring him, Harry went on. "I try so hard to teach him everything I know...which really isn't a lot. We're flying blind a lot of the time, to be honest. But don't tell him that...he needs to trust me, and I think he's only just beginning to. If he knew I was almost as clueless as him, I'm sure he'd be much more wary about putting himself in my hands."

Realising who he was talking to, Harry cut off his tirade. He didn't need to talk to Lucius Malfoy about Draco. He needed to talk to his friends.

"Yes, well..." Lucius looked a little dazed, a small frown creasing his brow. "Just be certain that you take especial care of my son, Mr. Potter. Malfoys are fierce in both love and hate."

With that, Lucius Disapparated, leaving Harry to wonder why in Merlin's name Lucius wanted him to *take care* of Draco...and why he was talking about love.

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"Anyway," Harry said around his corned beef sandwich, "the minute she shows up, or owls, or whispers in his direction, Draco goes running." He got up and refilled his glass with pumpkin juice from Ron and Hermione's fridge before sitting back down at the table. It was rare that they were all able to get together for lunch, and Harry was relishing the opportunity to vent. And vent. And vent.

"He's bloody whipped is what he is," Ron said, taking a swig of his butterbeer and looking to Hermione for confirmation...possibly before realising Hermione wasn't likely to agree.

Indeed, Hermione seemed to be concentrating on Harry and not listening to Ron at all. "He blew off a lesson, just like that?"

"Like I'm his personal valet or something, sent away when someone more important shows up. What could be more important than winning his wand, his magic back?" Harry couldn't be sure why the whole situation was bothering him so much. Draco was an idiot if he thought Pansy was good company. And if he didn't want his wand back, well, maybe Harry was just wasting his time anyway.

"Who does he think he is?" Ron commiserated, though he seemed to be only half paying attention, so involved was he in his own sandwich.

Hermione picked at her food, popping bits of bread and meat into her mouth as she worked through whatever was happening inside her brain. Finally, she said, "I don't think Draco likes Pansy."

Ron scoffed. "Likes her well enough." He gave Harry a leer as if to say he wouldn't mind a bit of Pansy *if you know what I mean*. He then looked fearfully at Hermione, but she either hadn't interpreted Ron's knowing look or simply didn't care. Harry rather thought it was the latter, because there was nothing she couldn't interpret.

"I don't know, I'm just not getting the impression, from what you've said, that he really likes her. I mean, they're both pure-bloods...if they were going to marry, they would have done so already. And they aren't even betrothed."

Harry couldn't explain the relief he felt from her speculation, but then he had to wonder what marriage had to do with any of it. "What do I care if he marries her or not? I just want my bleeding life back!"

"Oi, mate, and Robards has been saying the unit's a lot quieter without you. They paired Neville with this tosser fresh out of Durmstrang. Just while you're on the Malfoy assignment, see."

"They gave my partner a new partner?" Harry narrowed his eyes. Draco wasn't just wasting his time and increasing his blood pressure...he was taking over Harry's entire life. "Bloody fuck."

"It's just temporary," Ron said quickly, seeming to realise how upset Harry was getting.

"And in any case, Harry, you've said Draco's lessons are going really well," Hermione said, finally taking a real bite of her sandwich. He waited for her to swallow and continue. "When are you going to let him fight you?"

"And where can I buy tickets?" Ron added, a gleeful look in his eyes.

Harry sighed and shook his head. "He wanted to fight me today and I almost let him, just to show him what an arse he is. But if I embarrass him, he won't want to try again."

"When do you think he'll be ready?"

"I wish I knew. I'm teaching him as much as I can, as fast as I can, but when he chooses Pansy fucking Parkinson over me...over the lessons, that is...I don't know what else I can do." Harry had a flashing vision of what might happen if Draco couldn't manage to beat him, or to even come close. The true weight of Draco's need for him made Harry straighten in his chair. Here he was, sulking to his friends, when he really should be with Draco, preparing him...whether Draco like it or not.

Harry stood, stuffing the last of his sandwich in his mouth. "I'm gonna get going," he garbled around the food. He swallowed and flashed a smile at Hermione, who was rolling her eyes at him. "Thanks for lunch."

"You're welcome anytime, Harry, you know that."

Harry nodded. It occurred to him how seldom he saw his friends outside of the Ministry or the pub. He would have to remedy that.

He Apparated into his old flat, making sure his wards hadn't been touched. Knowing, as he hadn't the last time he'd left, that he'd be staying at the manor for a significant length of time, Harry packed up more clothing, some of the detective novels from Hermione, and his own pillow...the one in his room at the manor was too fluffy.

Once he arrived back at the manor at the Apparition point, he walked around the side of the house to see if he could spot Draco and Pansy *picnicking*. Harry sneered. As far as he could tell, however, they weren't outside. He let himself hope that Draco had told her off, sent her home, but he knew that was unlikely.

As he made his way to his bedroom, he desperately hoped that Draco and Pansy weren't ensconced behind Draco's bedroom doors. Absolutely not interested but curious in the worst way, Harry paused outside Draco's room, listening. No sounds came from within. He breathed a sigh of relief...one that was quickly stolen from his lungs.

"Not very Gryffindorish, spying," Draco said in a musing voice, to Harry's left. He walked down the hall, a sardonic lilt to his lips.

"I wasn't spying," Harry said, too fast. He moved away from Draco's door to open his own, clutching his pillow to his chest like a teddy without realising it.

"Standing outside my door, eavesdropping...Potter, if you weren't spying... *what were* you doing?"

Under Draco's words were a silken suggestion...Harry didn't think he was hearing things, but he decided not to follow his instincts. Pansy's smug face was too fresh in his mind. "You're right," he said. "I was spying. Good job, you caught me."

Draco crossed his arms over his chest, but Harry didn't give him an opportunity to say *anything*. He opened his door and slipped inside, shutting it behind him, on Draco. He wasn't sure why he was so out of sorts...all right, *pissed the bloody fuck off*...but he *did* know it was Draco's fault. Who else had ever had that sort of power over Harry, the ability to make him see red without even trying?

But why, Harry wondered, was *he* hiding? This whole thing was Draco's fault, right down to losing his wand. If he hadn't been on the wrong side to begin with, Harry never would have taken his wand and *nothing* that followed would have happened.

He tossed his things onto his bed and stormed back to the door, yanking it open. Draco was still standing there, looking almost puzzled, and the unexpected glimpse behind Draco's mask melted some of Harry's ire.

"Lesson?" he said, making it more of an order than a suggestion.

Draco just nodded, and then followed Harry when he walked past, determined to regain the upper hand and forget about how Draco'd made him feel by ditching him earlier. To Draco, he was expendable, regardless of what Draco himself might have said. Harry had to remember that.

Harry led Draco through the manor, outside and across the manicured lawns to the centre of a decent-sized field...still on Malfoy grounds but far enough away that it didn't get the same attention as the rest of the lawn.

Neither spoke a single word until Harry chose his spot. Then Harry spun, facing Draco, and held out his hand. *Avis!* A flock of bird appeared in front of Harry's hand. *"Oppungo!"* They dived at Draco in a single line.

"Potter!" Draco shouted, dodging the kamikaze birds. The first three missed him, but then two made contact, thudding against his stomach and chest, beak first. Draco cried out as the birds that had missed him circled back and resumed their attack. Soon, Draco was being pecked and prodded by five birds.

Harry wanted to laugh...it was funny; immature, but funny...but the humour was dimmed by the fact that Draco had no wand and didn't seem to know how to defend himself.

Finally, Draco stopped and focused, despite the birds that had moved to the bare skin at his hands and neck, avoiding his face only by Harry's design. A torrent of water fell from the air a few feet above Draco's head, drenching the birds but avoiding Draco entirely. The birds vanished under the water spell.

"Wow, Draco, I'm impressed..."

Draco strode forward, the space between them a fond memory. He grabbed Harry by the throat, bringing their faces close enough to...well, close enough.

"Next time, Potter, a little warning would be nice," he hissed.

Harry didn't respond except to say, *"Deprimo."* He smirked as an intense wind battered Draco about, whipping his hair and robes around him. Draco's grip on Harry weakened and the wind slammed him onto his back. Harry could hear him struggling for breath.

"I'm saying the spells out loud," Harry said, standing over Draco. "That's warning enough."

Draco glared up at him...Harry could see the exact moment he stopped thinking of humiliation and started thinking of revenge. His eyes narrowed and Harry could see him forming a spell in his mind.

The only warning Harry had was a slight breeze...he looked down and saw that his robes were unbuttoned, from neck to hem, gaping open so that his red boxer-briefs were on display.

Harry laughed at the weakness of the spell...though it wasn't lost on him that he'd used a lesser version of the same spell on Draco's shirt during their contest in the game room...but Draco wasn't finished. The back of Harry's robes flew up and over his face, tangling him. He couldn't see...without using magic, Harry got himself free and straightened his robes. Draco was standing now, menace in his pale grey eyes.

Using the reverse of the spell Draco had, Harry buttoned his robes...leaving a few at the top and some at the bottom opened for more freedom of movement.

Deciding to fight clothing-removal curse with clothing-removal curse, Harry held his hand aloft and said, *"Diffindo!"*

Draco's robes sagged across his body, Harry's spell having shredded them. Harry could see Draco's pale skin through the gaps. Harry walked forward, wanting to suggest Draco try offensive spells, when Draco threw up his hand. His chest was heaving, his cheeks bright red.

Obviously outraged at what had been done to his no doubt expensive clothing, Draco put the force of his frustration behind his next spell. Harry guessed it to be the Impediment Curse, for he was forced to stop in his tracks.

"That's very good, Draco," Harry said honestly. Draco was progressing leaps and bounds beyond what Harry had expected from him during their first intense session.

Draco looked surprised at the praise, almost like he'd forgotten it was a lesson and not a real duel. He nodded his acceptance of Harry's praise, letting his guard down...

...Harry, of course, took advantage.

*"Immobilus,"* Harry said, smirking in victory. Draco wouldn't be able to counter it without a wand, nor would he be able to free himself.

Draco went stiff but managed to stay on his feet. There was a panic in his eyes that didn't quite match the spell. Harry didn't understand. He walked closer, making sure Draco hadn't been hurt, but there was nothing visibly wrong with him except that he looked frightened. Terrified, even.

"What's wrong?" Harry asked, forgetting that Draco couldn't answer. "It's just an Immobilisation spell, Draco, calm down...you'll hurt yourself."

Harry had never seen anyone struggle without moving, but Draco was doing just that. Deciding it was enough, Harry lifted the spell...as soon as he did, he realised why Draco had seemed so scared.

The image of Draco, completely still, on his study floor, frozen by his own wards... The only memory that paralleled its horror was Draco, completely still, on a bathroom floor. "Draco, I'm sorry, I didn't think..."

Draco was gasping in his breath, clutching his stomach as he bent over.

Uncertain what to do, Harry rubbed Draco's back for all of three seconds before Draco lifted his head and glared at him through shining eyes.

"Don't touch me."

Harry bit his lip, shamed. "I really didn't mean to..."

"Of course you meant to." Draco rose, looking for all the world like he'd simply stepped through a Floo a little too abruptly, not had a horrible memory forced upon him. "Shall we continue?" Without waiting for a response, as Harry supposed was fair, Draco lifted his arm at Harry.

Nothing happened, no spell was cast.

Draco tensed and his eyes turned to slits. Harry could tell he was trying again. His lips bared...trying again. He threw his hand out violently...another try, and another. Again and again. Nothing was working for him.

"It's okay, we'll just take a break," Harry said, trying to sound soothing.

"I don't want to take a fucking break!" Draco shrieked. He tried one more spell, seemed to really be throwing his entire being into it, but Harry was unaffected. Draco made

a sound of disgust and stomped away.

Harry watched him go, wearing his torn clothing like he couldn't have cared less that his arse was showing through a rip in the back. Draco wore briefs, Harry noted, watching until he disappeared into the manor. Harry had no idea why Draco's magic had come to an abrupt halt, but he had to find out. Draco would never beat him unless he couldn't control it *at all times*. For the second time that day, Harry wondered what would happen if Draco never beat him.

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When Draco finally came out of his room, Harry was waiting.

After the duel, Harry hadn't found Draco anywhere. Even Peachy didn't give him a clue. He couldn't get into Draco's bedroom, so he had to assume Draco was holed up inside. He knew Draco would have to leave eventually...though after about seven hours he began to doubt that. Draco had to have an en suite bathroom and Peachy would be more than happy to bring food up for him. He could probably exist there forever.

However, the door finally opened, setting off a flashing light in front of Harry's face, a spell he'd concocted for just such an occasion (though he usually used it to tell him when his tea was ready).

Harry jumped up from his desk where he'd been writing down the details of the duel and ran to the hallway.

"Draco!" Harry said, stopping him mid-step.

Without turning, Draco said, "What is it, Potter?"

"I just want to talk about the lesson. You know it's important."

Draco sighed. "Fine. Come with me to the kitchen. I'm famished." With that, he walked off, forcing Harry to follow him just as he'd forced Draco to follow him to the duel.

Once in the kitchen, Harry watched in silence as Draco made himself a sandwich. It was such a simple, ordinary thing to eat that Harry had to smile. It was just good to know that Draco ate sandwiches for some reason.

Draco sat on a high stool at the island, but Harry didn't take a seat. He didn't want to encroach in case Draco was still pissed.

"We need to talk about your magic," Harry started, "but I also want to apologise for using *Immobilus* against you. I should have realised..."

"I don't expect you to cater to me," Draco said. He sounded cool but there was something about his posture, the way he held himself, that made Harry think the spell had affected him more than he was willing to let on.

"And I won't," Harry agreed. "But it was stupid to use that. It would be like using *Sectumsempra*. It has a history for both of us, so of course it shouldn't be used." *Immobilus* carried bad memories for Harry, as well. There was no satisfaction in seeing Draco helpless like that.

Draco looked guilty, which wasn't something Harry had expected to see.

Then it dawned on him. "Oh, my god, you tried to use *Secumsempra* on me, didn't you?"

"Not at first!" Draco pushed his plate away, half a sandwich remaining. He looked queasy. "But when nothing else was working..."

Tamping down the horror that rose in him at the fact that they would *always* hurt each other that way, Harry said, "What spells did you try first?"

Draco sighed. "*Incarcerous. Locomotor. Obscuro. Petrificus Totalus. Stupefy. Confrigo. And Defodio.* Then *Sectumsempra*. Then..." Draco coughed and looked away. "*Imperio.*"

Harry leaned against a wall, dumbfounded. Draco certainly wasn't messing around. If *any* of the spells had worked, Harry would have been in trouble. And an Unforgivable?

"Before you say anything, Potter, just listen. I knew they weren't going to work."

"How did you know?" Harry said, swallowing hard.

"I tried a couple offensive spells first. After you attacked me birds..." Draco gave Harry a look that said *really, Potter? Birds?* "...I tried *Serpensortia*. When you tore my *favourite* robes, I tried *Rictusempra*." Draco sighed and looking down at his hands, folded on the marble countertop. *Nothing worked*. I can't use offensive spells against you. I used the others out of desperation, knowing they wouldn't work."

"You couldn't have known for sure," Harry said, still feeling short of breath at how close he'd come to his death at Draco's hands.

Draco nodded. "I did. I could feel it in me. When I cast the spells that landed, I could *feel* my magic inside me, warm and familiar and *there*. When I try a spell with the intent to hurt you, I feel nothing."

Harry had an idea. He drew his wand from his robes pocket and held it in a tight grip.

Draco seemed to think it was a threat, and stiffened, astonished eyes meeting Harry's.

"I just want to try something," Harry explained. "Try to disarm me. Use *Expelliarmus*."

Draco looked at Harry for a long moment before closing his eyes and taking a deep breath. When he opened his eyes and focused on the spell, Harry felt his wand twitch in his hand. He gave Draco a nod of encouragement, and Draco tried again. More than a twitch this time, Harry's wand slid two inches, almost escaping his grasp altogether.

"Again," Harry said, excited. Once more Draco focused, and, Harry's wand went flying across the room, skittering over the marble floor before smacking into a wall.

A laugh, clear and unselfconscious, met Harry's ears. Harry looked at Draco and couldn't help but laugh himself. It had worked! So maybe Draco couldn't do offensive spells...yet...but he could disarm Harry and *that* was worth celebrating.

"I disarmed the great Harry Potter," Draco bragged, but it wasn't arrogant, it was teasing, his smile wide and only a touch smug. He held out his hand and the wand flew to him.

Draco held out the wand and Harry took it. "You can do Summoning spells now," he said, a note of awe in his voice.

Draco nodded, gleeful. Then his features turned down. "But no offensive spells," he lamented, obviously eager to do damage to Harry.

"Not yet," Harry said. In a sterner voice, he continued, "And no more fucking Unforgivables, Draco. I mean it. If you manage to follow through with one, you'll be arrested."

I'm a bleeding Auror, for Merlin's sake."

Draco looked chagrined. "You're right. Next time I won't get caught." He chuckled.

Fed up, Harry lunged at Draco, eager to teach him a lesson, but Draco skittered away from his grasp and then Harry's wand went flying away again, landing in the same place.

"Handy trick, that," Draco said. He brushed past Harry, who was too shocked to stop him, and went back upstairs. "Good night, Potter," he called, voice full with self-congratulation.

Harry *Accio'd* his wand back and sat down at the island. He grabbed Draco's sandwich and finished it...no sense in it going to waste. He'd have to keep a better grip on his wand, because he had the feeling Draco wasn't going to sparing when it came to his wandless magic.

## Chapter Eighteen

*Chapter 18 of 28*

After the war, Harry Potter is left with no one to save, no one to fight, and one extra wand. Draco Malfoy escapes punishment by leaving the country... or so he thinks. Seven years pass before they see each other again. Draco is no longer the master of his wand and a battle of talent and wills ensues. A story of a wand without a true master, and two men who fight to master each other... and themselves.

*This chapter was written by keppiehed.*

Draco stared mournfully at his crêpe. It didn't have any answers, it just sat there in an unappetizing lump on his plate. In retribution for its ignorance, Draco dragged his tines through the Béchamel sauce and watched the whole thing bleed cheese and creamed spinach in an obscene slog all over his plate.

"Not hungry, son?" Lucius asked, pulling him from his distraction.

"No," Draco said. He speared a chunk of sausage with more savagery than was strictly necessary for a breakfast meat.

"A shame. You might have ordered the Piperade. The Serrano ham is exquisite." As if to demonstrate its succulence, Lucius took a bite. After he had finished chewing, he spared a glance for Draco. "I needn't point out the necessity of your partaking in the morning meal today. Unless you are nervous? Don't forget to have Peachy wrap your lunch for you, especially if you aren't breaking your fast."

Before Draco could think of a snide remark that he would have to stifle anyway, the doors to the breakfast room flew open. Potter came stumbling in. "Morning," he said. "Am I too late? It's still breakfast, right?"

Draco stiffened. Potter had never before joined them for breakfast. He seemed to prefer rising later, and their schedules had adjusted accordingly. It appeared that Potter had made some sort of special effort to stagger out of his bed this morning. He was dressed, but it was a clearly haphazard effort. Even more so than usual, Draco thought to himself. He was wearing those damned denims again and a plain white tee-shirt that looked as though it had been around since Hogwarts had been founded. That made it thin from the repeated washings. It looked really soft, and nearly see-through...

"Yes, it is breakfast. I would be delighted if you would join us," Lucius said in formal invitation.

Draco swallowed. What was going on here? Why was his father being so gracious? Usually he preferred his routine at breakfast, and it didn't include inviting Harry Bloody Potter to eat with them.

"Er, okay." Potter came in and took a seat across from Draco. Peachy stood by, ready to take his order. "Can I just have an omelette?"

Peachy nodded. "Florentine?"

Potter stared. "Whatever is easiest."

Lucius made a choking sound.

"What?" Potter asked, his eyes narrowed, ready for a fight.

Lucius reached for his water glass. "Pardon me. I must have swallowed wrong." He took a sip.

Draco could tell that the idea of food being "simple" was one that his father disagreed with. Why, then, was he backing down, and from Potter, of all people?

Peachy continued. "Do you prefer Brie or Feta, and do you want Hollandai..."

"Just, whatever, Peachy. I don't really care. A plain omelette, that's all I'd like. If I wasn't rubbish in the kitchen, I'd crack the eggs myself." Potter bestowed a grin on Peachy that lit up the whole room.

Surely that last remark would be the thing that would bait Lucius into some sort of fight. Although the Malfoys had, of course, maintained their own household in exile, they didn't like to speak of menial labour habits, especially at the table. Lucius, in particular, considered it terribly gauche. Draco waited in anticipation of the inevitable dressing down. Not that he wished Potter ill, of course. It would just be nice to see the arrogant twat put in his place, especially since he was so free with his smiles for the staff, and all ... Clearly he needed a lesson in manners. Draco waited.

Silence continued to reign as Lucius ate without causing incident, seemingly oblivious to the irritant seated directly to his right.

Draco frowned. Something was going on here, and he didn't like it one bit.

"What's the problem, son? You haven't touched your *espresso*. Don't let nerves get the better of you," Lucius advised.

"I'm not," Draco ground out. He felt his face flush. He didn't relish Potter hearing his business, especially from his father. Had the world gone mad? Why was Lucius being

so chatty?

"Nervous?" Potter ripped a roll in half and began to butter it. "What do you have to be nervous about, Draco? You want me to promise to go easy on you today?" Potter laughed.

Lucius choked on a sip of his coffee. "Too hot," he managed.

Draco felt his ire rise at the taunt, even though he knew it was meant in sport. "Don't think I couldn't take all you have to dish out and hand it right back to you, Potter. Anytime you're ready."

"Boys, please!" Lucius said, a bit desperately.

"I think we've already established that you can't," Potter said from across the table.

"Don't you remember the kitchen? I've been practicing," Draco shot back. "Bring it on."

"The kitchen?" Lucius echoed weakly. "Not a lesson there?"

"Yes!" Draco and Potter snapped in unison. "Listen, it just sort of happened, we didn't plan it," Draco explained. "But I came out on top that time, you must admit." He couldn't help the pride that crept into his tone when he remembered Summoning Potter's own wand from his grasp.

"Yes, Mr. Malfoy, he did well," Potter admitted. "Don't worry, we don't normally do it in the kitchen. Or indoors at all, actually. We prefer to go outside. We get a lot of practice out there."

"You ... go ... outside? Where people can see you?" Lucius sounded strangled.

Draco looked at his father. His face was a shade of green he had never seen before. "Don't be alarmed, Father. No one has witnessed us in action."

"Except Pansy," Potter put in. He sounded put out.

"Yes, well. I can't very well help that. She didn't even want to watch, she just wanted to stop us altogether, so you needn't be concerned, like I said," Draco finished, pleased with his logic.

"It isn't as if it's ever that exciting," Potter chimed in. "There were a few incidents involving water, and a flock of birds, but that's about as carried away as it has ever..."

"It is his first day!" Lucius all but shouted.

"Huh?" Potter asked, confused.

Draco scowled.

"Draco's first day. Of work. That's why he is nervous," Lucius said, flustered. He took a bigger bite of his Piperade than he might normally have and made a show of being consumed with chewing.

"Draco?" Potter turned to him from across the table. "When do you think you might have mentioned this little detail to me?"

Draco could feel Potter's accusatory gaze boring into the top of his head as he studied the wreck of a crêpe on his plate. "It's none of your business, Potter, that's why." He couldn't meet the other man's eyes.

"Not ... my ... business?" Draco could almost *feel* the incredulity radiating off of him. "You keep me here as a virtual prisoner, at your beck and call, and then you go and get a *job* and you don't bother to mention it? What am I supposed to do with myself all day while you are playing Mr. Work-a-day?" Potter was shouting.

Draco took a breath. The thing of it was that he didn't want this job in the first place, so it was hard to justify. But he couldn't let Potter see that. It was his obligation to fall in line with his father's wishes, even if they weren't what he wanted. It wasn't his place to disobey or question them, and certainly not in front of company. Draco had a duty to be loyal to his father's command, even if he would rather stay here and have lessons with Potter. His personal feelings on the matter didn't signify. He didn't want to look weak or confused, especially in front of his father. Draco quashed anything resembling his own desires and held his head up to stare directly into green eyes. Draco saw an ill-disguised feeling of betrayal looking back, but he pushed back his guilt and in his frostiest voice said, "I don't give a fig what you do, Potter, but when I get back, I expect you to be waiting for me. That's what you are here for, after all. You are here for me."

Draco could see the disgust harden on Potter's face, and they both sat there, unmoving, for a moment more before Potter pushed away from the table. It took all of Draco's will not to wince at the slamming of the door.

"You call him Potter?"

Draco blinked. He couldn't get the look on Potter's face out of his mind. "Hm? Yes, of course."

"But why? Isn't that a bit ... formal, to call him by his surname?"

"No, it isn't. Why, what does it matter, anyway?"

"Nothing, never mind. I really don't want to get involved." His father fell silent, then spoke up a moment later. "It just seems odd. He calls you by your given name, after all."

"Father!" Draco said, exasperated. "If he chooses to annoy me, that is his business. I prefer to keep things professional."

"Professional? What are you saying?" His father seemed shocked.

"Yes, I am looking at this whole thing like a business transaction. I would think that you would prefer it that way. You are the one who suggested we pay him for services rendered," Draco pointed out.

"Surely you realize that that was before I was apprised of the ... current situation!" His father was aghast. "Draco! I am not so heartless as that."

"What does heart have to do with a goddamned thing?" Draco asked.

"Draco Malfoy, I admit myself appalled. I know that you had a certain reputation at school, but I had no idea that you were so jaded. Your mother and I did not raise you to be so callous in regards to matters of sentiment. I find myself at a loss, and I must excuse myself from your company before I say something permanently detrimental to our relationship. Have a good day at work, and we shall discuss this further when I have calmed down." Lucius got up from his chair and walked stiffly across the breakfast room. Just before he reached the door, he turned. "And Draco, don't you *ever* speak to me with that filthy mouth again. You may choose to indulge in profanity, but I will not tolerate it. If you choose to converse with me, you will have some respect. Do you understand?"

"Yes, Father." Draco felt as chastened as a schoolboy.

"Good day." With that, the elder Malfoy made his exit.

A churning rose in Draco's gut. This had to be the worst morning he had ever had.

"Master Draco? Where be Master Potter?"

Draco looked up from his plate. Peachy was standing there with an omelette.

"Gone," he answered.

"Oh." She looked confused. "Is you staying home, then? You was supposed to be at work an hour ago."

Draco cast a charm to tell him the time, and he groaned when he saw the lateness of the hour. It seemed his terrible morning was about to get a whole lot worse.

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The gates of Malfoy Manor had never looked so good. Draco stepped away from the Apparition point, eager to be within in the confines of his own land. He wanted to forget that this horrendous day had ever happened. It was hard to believe that he would have to get up and do the same thing again tomorrow, and the next and on until ... whenever his father relented and took mercy upon him. He thanked Merlin that he came from money and wouldn't have to do this indefinitely. How did regular people do this every day? How could they stand it? The thought was both frightening and a little awe-inspiring.

Draco couldn't wait to take a nice, hot bath and go to bed. He didn't even care about supper, he just wanted to lie down somewhere and relax. The effort it had required for him to be civil all day had worn him out. He had also been keenly aware of the contempt of his co-workers, and though Draco was inclined to write off their remarks as a result of jealousy...because to be honest, they had a lot to envy, poor sods, he had to give them that...by the end of the day his tolerance for even that was wearing thin. He just wanted things to go back to the way they had been, and he was beginning to suspect that might never happen. The panic that thought inspired was something he didn't want to examine, now or possibly ever.

The front hall was dark, as were all of the rooms Draco wandered through. Irrationally, though he had just a moment ago craved solitude, it irked him now that there was no one home to see how his first day went. Didn't anyone care how he was doing? Evidently not. The urge to kick something overwhelmed him, and he delivered a punt to the nearest object, a cherry wood *fauteuil à la reine*.

"Nice. What did that poor chair do to deserve your tantrum?"

Draco jumped. He hadn't seen Potter there in the darkened room with him. The idea that the other man had witnessed him kicking a chair was embarrassing, but he shrugged to hide it. This was *his* home, after all. He was free to kick any damn thing he wanted. "It's just a Louis XIV. Things from the Rococo are notoriously sturdy."

"Oh, excuse me. Next time I get pissed I'll remember that and come kick an ottoman."

"What are you doing lurking here in the dark, anyway?" Draco reached over and turned on the lamp. Light flooded the room, and he could see Potter now, sprawled out on one of the small couches.

"I dunno. Waiting for you, I guess." Potter sounded pensive.

"Funny way to show it. I might have walked right past you. Anyway, I don't want a lesson. I've had a long day; you have no idea how exhausting it has been!" Draco could feel a headache starting.

"What? That's rich coming from you! Can you hear yourself?" Potter sat up from his recumbent position.

"What?" Draco rubbed the back of his neck. What was Potter so fired up about? It wasn't like *he* had spent all day at a job he never wanted, being completely humiliated. He had always had everything handed to him on a silver platter. The Boy Who Lived, that had been his epithet since he had been old enough to talk. And it had opened every door for him. What did he have to be so upset about? Why was he looking so resentful? Suddenly the injustice of it burned Draco like a brand. "What the hell is *your* problem, actually, Potter? You have it pretty good, if you ask me!"

"That's the thing; I *didn't* ask you. I was fine in my life until you mucked it up." Potter jumped up and ran a hand through his hair. "I had a job I liked, and you've led me around enough. What the *fuck*, Draco?"

"Oh, your life was so bloody *perfect*, right?" Bitterness welled up, and he could taste it on his tongue. "Well, don't let me keep you from the trough. I don't need you, anymore."

"Like hell. But I've had enough of this shit. You want your wand back, take it." Potter paused in his pacing.

Draco stilled. "So, you are ready to duel?" He couldn't believe it.

"I've *been* ready, Draco. It's you who isn't, but you won't see it. I've had enough, though. Take out your wand, if you think you deserve to try for it." Potter looked tired.

Draco paused. He had always pushed people. It was just how he was. It was in his nature to see how far he could go, but invariably he went too far. He had that feeling now. Standing there with Potter, he didn't feel victorious, he felt ... empty. That he had badgered him into getting his way didn't feel as good as it should have.

There was no choice now, though. Potter was just standing there with his wild hair and his stupid denims, looking for all the world like some lost kid. Draco swallowed and withdrew his wand. "Why do I have to have my wand? I thought we were doing this wandlessly?"

Potter sighed. "The wand won't work for you. But in the actual duel, it must be present. You have to be ready for anything from your opponent, remember, whether it be magic cast with a wand or otherwise. You can't always distinguish the source of the magic coming at you. That's my final word of advice." Potter withdrew his wand, and performed the formal salute signalling the beginning of a Wizard's duel.

Draco's blood raced like it used to so long ago. He had always enjoyed duelling; the quick wits it required had always appealed to him. He had been a frequent winner in the past, but never had he played for such high stakes. He returned the salute.

They both stood there a moment, unmoving. Then Potter cast a *Lumos*.

Draco wasn't distracted by the simple light. He wanted to save his strength for what was sure to be a long fight. He concentrated on throwing a trip jinx.

Potter started dancing. His feet and legs moved in parody of joyful abandon. Draco realized he must have cast *Tarantallegra* by mistake.

Potter nullified it and Draco felt his tongue curl back. He recognized the relatively harmless Tongue-Tying Curse and almost laughed. But as he was busy thinking the counter-agent to it, Potter dazzled him with three such simple hexes in quick succession: the Jelly-Legs Jinx, Jelly-Fingers Curse and *Densaugeo*. When Draco felt his teeth start to grow, he remembered how silly Granger had looked back in their fourth year and he panicked. All of his concentration scattered like a handful of marbles on a parquet floor as his horror grew.

Potter stood over him as his teeth extended at a steady rate. Draco was aware of several things: if this were a *real* duel for his life, he would be dead. His vanity was killing him. He had to concentrate and get it together, or he was going to lose everything, and he'd never be able to look Potter in the face again. He had to stop thinking of how

stupid Granger had looked, and how ludicrous he must appear right now, and *do something!* Time was running out.

The weight of the teeth was making Draco's neck hurt, but he had a flash of insight. It would take him too long to nullify all three curses, and while Potter stood over him he could just cast more. As distracted as Draco was, he had to attempt an offensive spell. A non-harmful one. He had to concentrate. As his head weighed down and fell to his chest, he couldn't even see his opponent. He had one shot. He had to get it right. He thought as hard as he could. "*Incarcerous!*"

Thick vines sprouted from the floor and bound Potter. Draco didn't have time to be surprised that it was foliage and not ropes that he had conjured. In his excitement, his magic was a little off target. He worked feverishly to *finite* the spells that had been placed upon him, and it wasn't a moment too soon that his knuckle joints realigned.

"*Defloresco*," Potter said, and looked at Draco with special purpose. Draco felt his whole world turn upside-down. He was dangling from his heels, the blood rushing to his head.

"*Liberacorpus!*" he shouted. He could feel his magic unlatching the lock that bound him, but wasn't ready for the fall in his excitement to trap Potter. At least the Blue Room was carpeted.

The curses flew fast and heavy, mostly in silence. Potter used both his wand and his mind and Draco could feel a sheen of sweat breaking out on his brow. This was hard work. Potter didn't give an inch, didn't cede a spell. For every small victory, he was there, ready. He didn't seem tired or stressed. He was a relentless opponent. Draco's frustration began to mount as he saw the impassive face in front of him, an unchanging wall. Potter had become a foe he had never met before: he countered each charm and then threw a hex, he met each challenge and tossed a jinx, as if he didn't have to even look for the riposte. A tendril of fear uncurled in Draco's breast. Potter had been right. He wasn't going to win. Potter was too strong.

Just as he had that thought, Potter looked at him. As if someone had cast an *Aresto Momentum*, Draco had a feeling of surreality. Time seemed to slow to a stop as they stared at each other. Draco could see Potter standing above him, so nonchalant, as if he had just stepped into the room. Draco was in the middle of rising to his knees from where he had fallen from their last confrontation. Draco didn't like the feeling of failure, of loss, of powerlessness. He knew he was beaten, and he couldn't accept it. No, that wasn't true; he didn't want to. He didn't want to submit to this man. But neither did he want Potter to see any of his own struggle.

Draco stayed, frozen, as Potter approached. With what he knew to be his very last effort before he was bested, tried to bring forth a curse, any curse ... but his mind was a blank, and he could only think of one thing, to his shame. As he watched Potter looming, he closed his eyes as his mind was filled with the most ridiculous thing. He needed to think of a spell, but he could only think of their first lesson together, when Potter had told him to try to move that damned feather quill, to imagine tickling his lover's body with it. The blush bloomed on Draco's cheeks when he thought of that memory, of exactly what had been in his mind, and with Potter nearly there to finish him off, it was all he could do not to throw the thought right at Potter. He was overexcited, and he couldn't reign in his magic.

The sound of Potter's helpless laughter made him open his eyes. Potter fell to the ground, clutching his sides and writhing in helpless torture. He was laughing, but it looked more like a punishment than anything enjoyable. What was going on?

"Stop, stop!" Potter gasped, tears leaking from his eyes. "You ... win ..."

Draco heard the words, but he didn't believe them. "What?"

"Draco!" Potter was gasping. "Stop!"

Draco realized that Potter's laughter really was serious. He couldn't get his breath. "What? Tell me what to do!" He felt a panic rise like he never had before. His veins were coursing with worry. What should he do? What if something happened to Potter because of this stupid duel? Then he calmed a moment and thought of *Finite Incantatum*, the save-all for everything.

Potter fell limp and took a deep breath.

"What? What did I do?" Draco asked. He couldn't believe his good fortune, but he was still too bewildered to even try and cover it up. He had to know.

"*Rictusempra*," Potter said from the floor. "You won the duel." His head hit the floor with a thunk.

Pride mixed with the fear that had been flooding Draco's system to create a heady mix akin to drunkenness. "I won the duel," he said in disbelief, gazing at the wand still clutched in his hand, as if it were an afterthought. "I won the duel!"

"So it would seem," said Potter from the floor. "Congratulations."

## Chapter Nineteen

*Chapter 19 of 28*

After the war, Harry Potter is left with no one to save, no one to fight, and one extra wand. Draco Malfoy escapes punishment by leaving the country... or so he thinks. Seven years pass before they see each other again. Draco is no longer the master of his wand and a battle of talent and wills ensues. A story of a wand without a true master, and two men who fight to master each other... and themselves.

*This chapter was written by literaryspell.*

It was, Harry now reflected, a very foolish thing to do, telling someone he'd won a duel when he hadn't.

It was foolish and cruel and absolutely bloody fucking thoughtless, but Harry hadn't known what else to do. He prided himself on being good under pressure, but he'd never faced anything like Draco Malfoy and his slightly out-of-control magic and his stupid, confusing pale eyes.

Eyes through which Harry had read, just for the briefest moment, that Draco wasn't capable of beating Harry. Not only because he wasn't ready, which he wasn't...but also because Draco didn't believe that he was good enough. He had enough bravado to fill the room with hot air, but that meant nothing when it came down to two wizards fighting for supremacy.

The smart thing to do, after Harry had half-inadvertently slipped into Draco's mind, would have been to finish Draco...cast one final spell to end the charade of a duel, and

then continue with the lessons until Draco *was* ready. Yes, that would have been the right thing to do, the thing that made the most sense.

But even at that moment, with Draco pausing in his gloating only to announce that he had to tell his father, Harry knew he would have done it the same way. Draco wouldn't have beaten him if Harry hadn't thrown the fight. Defeated by *Rictusempra*...really, Draco shouldn't have believed him in the first place.

As long as Draco's magic felt Draco won the duel, everything would be okay. And Draco*had* won...the concession of an opponent was still a win. Draco's magic would return, and everything would be back to normal. Meaning Harry could go back to his job and his life, and Draco could go back to doing whatever it was he did with his time. Poke small Muggle children with sticks or something. Harry ignored the unhappy knowledge that the issue bringing them together was solved.

Harry spotted Draco striding from the room, evidently fed up with Harry's lack of reaction to his win. Since Lucius wasn't at the manor at the moment, Draco had no one else to talk to. Harry narrowed his eyes. Unless he planned on owling Pansy or maybe Flooding her. That would be totally typical of Draco...use Harry to his own ends and then celebrate with *her*.

Catching up with Draco in an attempt to waylay that potential development, Harry patted him on the shoulder, smiling broadly even if he didn't feel it.

"Really, Draco. Great job back there."

Draco looked at him sideways. "I don't remember you being this good a loser at Hogwarts."

Harry shrugged. "No one likes to lose, but I can admit when I'm bested." Worse than bitter, the words tasted like a lie. And for good reason, since Harry hadn't even been close to giving up when he'd allowed Draco the win.

Draco grinned at him. "Glad to hear it, Potter, since you'll be admitting it again and again."

With nothing to say to that, Harry just stood there. Things were awkward between them, but Harry couldn't quite decipher why. Draco was looking at him in a way Harry hadn't seen before...almost grateful...and stranger yet, Draco didn't seem to realise what he was doing.

"So I suppose I'll be going, then?" Harry said, the words forming a question even when he wanted them to be assertive.

Draco nodded. "I'll help you pack."

Upstairs, Draco opened Harry's bedroom door and stepped inside. He took a moment to cast a derisive glance over the mess...it was quite impressive, Harry admitted, for having been there such a short time...and then pulled out his wand.

"Pack!" Draco said in a loud voice, pointing his wand at Harry's shambles of belongings.

Harry wanted to vomit when nothing happened.

Undeterred, Draco shook his wand out, took a deep breath, narrowed his eyes, and repeated the command. Not a single item danced itself into Harry's duffle.

No longer light-hearted, Draco set eyes so furious on Harry that he actually took a step back before planting his feet. The air in the room tasted like a storm. Harry had never seen Draco so angry, and he'd had many opportunities to witness Draco's displeasure.

"What did you do, Potter?" Draco said. His voice was low and dangerous, and he advanced on Harry, closing the distance between them like Harry was dinner and Draco was *starving*.

"Nothing," Harry said, too quickly. "I don't know why it isn't working. Try another spell."

Draco's hands clenched into fists at his sides. "I can*feel* that it isn't going to work! My magic is still gone,*and it's your fault*." His lips twisted into a snarl. "Tell me what you did!"

Harry glared at him, unwilling to take abuse from someone he'd sacrificed so much to help. "It's not my fault you can't learn anything! Maybe you didn't even lose your magic. Maybe it ran away!" Harry strode forward and pushed past Draco, leaving the room. He didn't want to deal with the fight he knew was imminent.

Draco was on his heels, demanding that Harry tell him what, exactly, had gone wrong. Harry managed to ignore him until they were in the entrance foyer...he tried to open the front door but Draco wouldn't let him, putting himself between Harry and his exit.

"All right, fine!" Harry shouted. "You want to know what I did, Draco? Are you so desperate to hear it that you'll let me say the truth?"

Draco said nothing, only waited with eyes flashing venom.

"I *let* you win." Harry paused and waited for that to sink in. "I let you fucking win!"

"No," Draco said, a deep frown creasing his forehead. "No, that was real."

Harry sighed. "You weren't ready, okay? There was no way you were going to beat me. And you knew it, too!" Harry didn't mention the fact that the surety of Draco's defeat had come from Draco's own thoughts. "So I let you win, hoping it would end all this."

"Potter, I will *kill* you..." Draco broke off, a struggle on his features. He looked torn between lunging at Harry and running from the room.

"I honestly thought it would work," Harry said, trying one last time to settle the issue.

Something in Draco seemed to snap. With a growl...a *realgrowl*, Harry was alarmed to note...he closed the distance between them and slammed his hands against Harry's shoulders, pushing him hard against the foyer wall.

Harry meant to fight back, he really did...he had no intention of letting Draco best him *in any* way without defending himself this time. But Draco was breathing hard against Harry's mouth and his breath tasted like some fancy imported breakfast pastry, and his eyes were flashing hateful silver and Harry couldn't control himself.

Without a single thought in the head on his shoulders, he pushed against Draco's hold until his mouth met Draco's lips. He got at least three good seconds out of the kiss...and one shocked slide of lips from Draco...before Draco tore his mouth away, looking angry enough to spit.

But that wasn't what he did at all. Harry gasped when Draco slammed him once more against the wall, pinning him. Draco followed and the lines of their bodies connected, not a centimetre of space between them, which seemed to be Draco's intent.

There was no hiding Harry's arousal...he couldn't be certain when it had started, but seeing Draco in a fury made him react in the most inappropriate ways. He didn't even have time to be embarrassed or laugh it off, however, because Draco was pressing his own suddenly insistent erection against Harry's hip, sliding a long leg between Harry's roughly enough to make him lose his breath when it connected with his balls.

He meant to object, to snap and snarl and tear himself from Draco's hold, but he couldn't get his brain to stop long enough to devise a proper sentence or escape plan.

Then Draco was moving his leg in an infuriating way, teasing and drawing out a reaction, one that Harry willingly and immediately gave. He groaned deep in his throat, confused and a little appalled at the turn of events but not in any way objecting. Draco pressed closer, his cock grinding against Harry's hip in sharp thrusts, obviously driving himself toward climax mindlessly.

Harry let his head fall back, eager to allow orgasm to take away all of his concerns. He'd never let himself think what might happen if he ever gave in to his strange desire for Draco...he certainly never would have predicted that Draco would be the instigator. He could only imagine all the ways Draco would hold this against him when he came back to himself afterward. Harry was almost looking forward to it, because no matter how Draco denied it, this was *all* him.

The contact wasn't enough anymore and Harry grabbed Draco's neck and hauled him in for another kiss...but Draco wouldn't allow himself to be pulled. He tugged out of Harry's grip, grabbing his wrist and slamming it against the wall, holding it there with more strength than Harry thought he should be capable of wielding.

Deciding that what Draco was doing with his hips was infinitely better than a kiss anyway, Harry allowed himself to be held, moving only to rock his hips forward, searching and finding the friction that would bring him off in no time.

Even though kissing was off the table, Draco seemed to have no problem with using his mouth. He bit at Harry's neck, the sharp stings rushing Harry along instead of holding him back. Every now and then he felt the slick warmth of Draco's tongue on his skin, almost as if by accident, but it happened too often to be unintentional. Knowing Draco's sanity was likely tenuous, Harry didn't say anything that would bring this strange pleasure to a disappointing halt.

Draco's movements became more furious. His rough, insistent pressing made Harry's breath catch, hard thrusts that were reminiscent of violence and not sex at all...at least not any sex Harry'd ever been familiar with. Despite the strangeness of it all, Harry was going to come...and soon.

His free hand reached for Draco's shoulder, and his fingers dug in as Draco's thrusts changed back to grinding, and it was enough. The easy friction and the frantic, half-dazed look on Draco's face brought Harry off, and he groaned as his climax tore through him...torn from him by Draco. He dropped his head and panted through, barely able to hold himself up.

Harry's sensitive and sated cock was grateful that Draco came right after. He buried his face in Harry's shoulder and grunted under his breath, as near to silent as possible. They breathed together, their bodies pressed tight.

Uncomfortable stickiness made Harry laugh breathlessly. "I haven't come in my trousers since about third year," he said, shaking his head.

Draco went stiff for a long moment before pulling back, trying to arrange his clothing in a more dignified manner, but his silk shirt was irreparably creased, and his trousers showed a telltale stain. He took a deep breath, looking anywhere but at Harry. Despite the fact that he'd just had an orgasm, Draco still looked angry as hell, and the glare he levelled on Harry brought him from his post-coital bliss much too quickly.

Harry raised his hands up in front of himself. "Hey, don't look at me. You started it."

"Potter, you absolute cretin..." Draco couldn't seem to imbue in his words the traditional venom. It didn't help that his cheeks were pink and dewy, and his lips as bitten as Harry's own neck.

"Draco..." Harry wanted to tell him not to freak out, a reaction that seemed inevitable. He wanted to say that he *wanted* what had happened, exactly as it had happened. He wanted Draco, and as confusing and barmy as that was, he couldn't help it. Draco was so... so fucking unexpected. "Don't," was all he could say.

"Shut up," Draco snapped. He seemed to realise he was still holding Harry's wrist against the wall. He snatched his hand back and wiped it on his trousers. Harry didn't bother hiding how insulted he was at the gesture. "Just shut up. Don't you dare speak to me."

For a time Draco just stood there before Harry, trembling...with rage or passion, Harry couldn't tell. It was possible there wasn't a difference between the two when it came to Draco. It was true that whenever Draco was around, Harry had a hard time telling desire from disgust.

Then Draco turned on his heel, and with more dignity than a man with spunk in his pants should be able to muster, swept from the room without a glance over his shoulder.

Grateful for the wall supporting him, Harry stared at the doorway Draco had exited through for a long time before reaching up and burying his hands in his hair, tugging on the messy, slightly damp strands. What had he done? What had *they* done? Why was he so bloody drawn to someone he was pretty sure he couldn't stand?

What was it about Draco?

Harry was at a loss as to his next move. Even ignoring the urgent frottage, there was still the issue of Harry letting Draco win. Had that set them back when it came to Draco getting his wand back? Would Draco *ever* be capable of beating Harry fairly? Most important, Harry supposed, was whether Draco would want him around to continue to practise.

Harry grabbed his wand and spelled away the come in his pants. He realised he should have done the same for Draco...it was only proper. But Draco had rushed out before he'd had a chance, and Draco didn't have magic to clean it up so he was probably in the shower at that moment, washing away every trace of Harry from his body. Harry was decidedly *not* disappointed at that idea.

Malfoy Manor was doing strange things to him. He had to get out, get away from Draco and his confusing *everything*, away from the black hole of a house that he'd been unwillingly sucked in to.

Harry quickly made his way to the Apparition Point by the gates and spun on his heel, ending in Hogsmeade in front of the Three Broomsticks. He'd been pretty successful at cutting back on his alcohol intake since he'd drunkenly kissed Draco, but if ever there was a time for a drink, it was now.

He nodded to Rosmerta as he passed the bar and took a table in the far corner of the room. Thanks to the early time, the place was empty enough, and no one gave him a second glance.

After his mead arrived, Harry nursed it, determined to order only the one. He could feel Rosmerta's eyes on him, and he knew she was checking to see if he needed another. That even she knew he tended to drink too much embarrassed him.

When Luna Lovegood walked in the tavern, Harry was grateful because it meant a distraction from his depressing and circular thoughts. "Luna!" he called, waving her over.

She turned and smiled brightly when her eyes landed on him. She placed her order with Rosmerta and approached Harry's table, her sunny yellow robes drawing the bleary eyes of the daytime crowd.

"Hello, Harry!" she said, sitting down next to him. "What brings you here all alone?"

"Malfoy," he said without thinking. Well, there went the distraction.

"Oh, are you meeting Draco?" Luna checked the door as if he'd walk in that moment, but of course he didn't.

"No, trying to escape him, more like."

She looked quizzical. "Why would you want to? I thought you two were getting along these days. You live together, after all."

Harry looked at her sideways. "We don't live together..."

"Yes, you do," she insisted. If she hadn't looked so adorably clueless, Harry would have thought she was having him on.

"No, I mean, yes, technically. My temporary living space happens to be in his house, but it's not like we go grocery shopping together or anything." The very idea made Harry smile; he just couldn't picture Draco counting out exact change to pay for toiletries.

"Well, give it time," she advised, giving him a gentle smile.

Harry frowned. She seemed a little confused as to what his and Draco's relationship was, exactly. Not that he could blame her...he wasn't up to date himself on what they were now. Just the thought of Draco's hand on his wrist, his body against Harry's, hard and demanding... Harry coughed and looked away from Luna lest she somehow divine the inappropriate direction of his thoughts.

"So, how's Draco doing at The Quibbler, Luna?" Harry asked, half to change the subject and half because he was genuinely curious at how Draco was managing to keep a real job.

Luna waved her fingers around in a way that Harry couldn't decipher. "He's learning. It's a lot for him to take in, you know. I don't think he gets enough credit."

Harry rolled his eyes. The last thing he wanted was to hear someone extol the virtues of Draco Malfoy at that moment. "So he's doing well, then?"

"He is managing. He isn't the easiest person to know, though, is he?"

Laughing, Harry shook his head. "Not at all. In fact, I think he's one of the most confusing, infuriating people I've ever met."

"That's very interesting. He said something quite similar about you when I asked him how he liked having you live with him. He also made a big fuss about how you two *weren't* living together." She tilted her head to one side as she examined Harry, seeming to want an answer to her observation, but he didn't know what to say.

"Well, it's no surprise that he can't stand me as much as I can't stand him," Harry said, scratching the back of his neck.

Rosmerta came by with Luna's order...some sort of fish on rice that looked surprisingly appetizing. "Another, Harry, love?"

Harry looked down at his empty glass. "No, thanks, Rosmerta. I think I have to be heading out."

She gave him a quick nod and returned to the bar. Luna gave Harry a most approving smile, and Harry reddened.

"Anyway, I don't think Draco can't stand you." Luna flipped the fish off her rice and kept the two very separate as she ate. "I just think you're both very confused."

Harry dropped his head into his hands. Confusion was the mode of the day. "You're telling me," he groaned. He needed to talk to Hermione and Ron. Luna was great but he needed real answers, not more questions. He decided to head back to his flat...he hadn't been there in some time...and see if he could catch either of them on the Floo. If not, an owl would have to do.

"Enjoy your lunch, Luna. I've got to run."

She nodded. "Tell Draco I say hello."

Harry shook his head. "It's likely you'll see him before I do."

"Oh, I don't think so..." Luna smiled, this time to herself, and speared a chunk of fish.

Feeling he'd been dismissed, Harry left the Three Broomsticks. Whether or not Luna was right, it was Draco's move now.

## Chapter Twenty

### *Chapter 20 of 28*

After the war, Harry Potter is left with no one to save, no one to fight, and one extra wand. Draco Malfoy escapes punishment by leaving the country... or so he thinks. Seven years pass before they see each other again. Draco is no longer the master of his wand and a battle of talent and wills ensues. A story of a wand without a true master, and two men who fight to master each other... and themselves.

*This chapter was written by keppiehed.*

There were curves and white skin flashing at him. Draco couldn't make out any more than that, but it was enough. He didn't care who he fucked, he just wanted to bury himself in someone. A wrist was in his hand and he raised it, slamming it against a wall. Somehow, that made it more exciting. The control. He was hard and ready. He didn't know who he was with, or when this had started. He dipped his head and tasted the breasts, nibbled the neck. Someone was writhing, a face kept turned from him. No matter. He didn't need to see a face to find his satisfaction. Draco pounded into the silken entrance that was waiting, the wet heat too much for him. Between his own bucking movement and the twisting of the person he was with, he could feel his completion approaching.

*Who was she?*

A sense of unease descended. He hadn't cared, but now he wanted to know. Draco checked for her eyes, but it was too dark. All he could see was black hair. *Pansy?*

Draco grabbed the jaw and wrenched it towards him. Green eyes, a beacon cutting through the gloom. *Potter!*

The shock wasn't enough to stave off the pleasure. Draco watched Potter's face dissolve into bliss, and the knowledge that he had brought his enemy to climax pushed Draco over the edge into his own.

He woke from the dream still panting and covered in his own come.

A misery blanketed him that was so vast and heavy he thought he might be sick. If he hadn't already been in bed, he would have fallen to his knees. For the first time ever in his life, he didn't know what to do. This was ... too much. Normally when something overwhelming happened that he couldn't handle, he simply didn't deal with it. The pretence of dignity had always been amazingly effective in the past. However, this situation was too big to be ignored. He had fucked Harry Potter, for Merlin's sake! Tears welled up in his eyes, which made his stomach roil. And now he was crying about it! Was he a pouf? How could he not have known it? This was the worst thing to have ever happened. How could he tell his father? It couldn't be true. He just couldn't live this way. Besides, it didn't seem fair that if he was gay, other men got to enjoy him, but he had to live with lesser fare. He was doomed to a life of inferiority!

*Wait!* Draco sat up. It *wasn't* true...of course it wasn't. He was merely on edge and confused. The dream proved it. He had been thinking about sex with *avoman*, it was just Potter's face that got muddled around there at the end. And he hadn't actually *fucked* Potter, he had just sort of ...*leaned* up against him when he was standing there. And *that* was understandable, because Draco was severely in need of sex. In fact, he had been saying that for a long time now. Everyone knew that a build-up of sex hormones made a person crazy. Hell, he might have had sex with anything last night, he was so hard up for it by now! Draco nodded, pleased with his logic. So, he was absolutely not gay. Right. Relieved, he took a big breath. Now he just had to prove it.

Draco frowned. That last thought made his stomach drop a little. Why had his mind run ahead of itself? Well, no matter. He wasn't gay, so he should have *no problem* having sex with a girl. None at all. In fact, he couldn't wait. That sounded like so much fun. Too bad he didn't know any girls. It would just have to wait.

He knew Pansy.

Damn it! Draco wanted to smack himself.

He had a point, though. Pansy was a girl. He could do this. He *would* do this. "Peachy!"

The house-elf Apparated almost before he finished calling her name. "Master Draco?" She was good enough to keep her face blank. Or maybe house-elves just didn't have the facial muscles to facilitate looking suspicious.

"Owl Miss Parkinson and see if she is free tonight."

Peachy frowned. Apparently they were capable of conveying disapproval, at any rate. "Miss Pansy be a good girl, but Master Draco should..."

"Peachy!" Draco glared. If he was losing his authority even over simple house-elves that were on loan, it was all over. "Must I remind you of your place? It is not for you to decide what I should do. It is for you to carry out my wishes. Owl Miss Parkinson and ask her to ready herself to receive me at eight o'clock this evening, sooner should time permit."

Peachy nodded, her eyes wide. "Yes, Master Draco." She stared at him with her unblinking eyes until he dropped his gaze. He didn't have to answer to anyone, least of all a servant.

"You are dismissed."

She didn't make a sound when she Disapparated, but he could feel the weight of his own presence in the room when she was gone.

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"How was dinner?" Pansy asked. "It was going to be the Chateaubriand, but I know how partial you are to salmon, so when I heard you were coming, I had them change the menu. We import ours from Scotland. Only the best, you know."

Draco nodded and contemplated his wine. The cut crystal caught the flickers from the candles, the only light the room provided. "Only the best," he echoed.

"What's the matter, Draco? Was it the fish? Was it overdone? I am going to flay Dinky alive..." Pansy was fairly seething at the thought of unpalatable salmon.

"No! Put it from your mind. It was superb." Draco forced a smile and suppressed a sigh. How did he keep finding himself in the same situation? Pansy was supposed to be his friend. Why was an evening spent with her so torturous? He could hardly bear to contemplate the reason for his visit. If he couldn't even stand the fish course, how could he sleep with her? Draco took a swig of the Pinot Noir and cracked his neck. This had to be done...there was no other way.

The truth was, everything was grating on his nerves. The endless pleasantries, the talk about which wine went with the cheese. He knew that this was what they did, what they had always done, but for some reason he was ... bored. Did it matter? Did any of this really matter? Draco looked around the room and saw the same furnishings that decorated his home, but it all seemed so meaningless. He could have just had a burger and spared them all the trouble. It would have tasted just as good, and then they could have done something other than debate the merits of asparagus as a side dish or an appetizer, or whether the Minister of Culture was a fan of the double-breasted robe or the single.

"Draco, you seem upset about something." Pansy stood up and came around the table. "Tell me what's wrong."

Draco gritted his teeth. There was nothing that he wanted to do less than talk to Pansy about anything. Why had he come? This seemed more like a bad idea by the minute. But the bottom line was if he didn't sleep with Pansy tonight, then ... he couldn't bear to think of the alternative. He *had* to do it. Draco slammed back the last of the wine.

When he felt hands on his shoulders, he nearly jumped out of his skin. Pansy had come up behind him and was attempting to give him a backrub. "You're so tense," she murmured. "No wonder you're upset. Let me take care of you."

Her words made him stiffen even more. Her hands were all wrong. He wanted to shake them off. They were too soft, too small. She was pinching rather than massaging. Everything about her irritated him. He'd had much better backrubs ... Draco closed his eyes and remembered Potter's hands on him. Potter had known just how to touch, just where to...

Draco's eyes flew open. He couldn't let this happen! "Potter is the biggest arse!"

"What?" Pansy's hands stilled.

"I can't stand him! He's so annoying," Draco breathed, desperate to grab onto something that would give rise to his antipathy towards Potter rather than his ... rather than any other feelings.

Pansy didn't move. "I know. But you're here now. Let's just forget about him." She started rubbing again.

Draco couldn't stand it. Her fingers were attempting to caress him, but his skin was crawling. He blurted out the first thing he could think of to get her attention and divert her hands away from him. "He's the biggest liar!"

"Why are we always talking about Potter?" Pansy asked. She dropped her hands and came around to stand in front of him. "I know he's an arse, and so do you. But a liar? What did he lie about?"

Draco ignored the guilt that was worming its way into his gut. "He cheated in our duel. I'm sorry, Pansy. I wanted to make tonight about us. I'm just really upset about this

whole situation."

"Us?" A smile softened her face. "Of course you're upset. Tell me exactly what he did."

Warning bells were sounding in Draco's brain, but he forged ahead. "Well, Potter knew I wasn't ready to duel yet. I'm close, but he's been doing wandless magic for years. He's the fucking Chosen One, of course he has a natural advantage."

"Of course," Pansy cooed. She reached out and took his hand.

Draco worked to cover his flinch. *What had he been saying?* "Er, yeah. So, he manipulated me into duelling and then basically tricked me and told me I had won. My wand still doesn't work." Draco tried to work his hand away, but she had it in a death grip.

"What?" Pansy was outraged on his behalf. "That sneaky bastard! Why would he do that?" She began tracing circles over the back of his hand with her palm, in what he could only assume she thought was a soothing gesture. "We'll get him back for that deception, and it will be a payback so big he'll wish he hadn't tangled with us."

Draco felt beads of sweat pop out on his brow. He was distracted by her clutch on his hand, which was one of the most unpleasant sensations he had experienced. He had to concentrate on breathing and appearing relaxed because he sensed a panic attack was ready to burst forth any moment. Somewhere in the back of his brain, an alarm was going off, like a bird fluttering in a trapped room. It was hard to concentrate on anything with Pansy hanging all over him. He just wanted her to *let go!* "Potter isn't too bad," he managed, but that was all he could spit out. There were too many conflicting thoughts converging, and he was about to lose hold of some portion of his sanity.

"Not too bad!" There was an edge to Pansy's laughter; but then, there always had been. Draco was glad it wasn't directed at him. She would make a worthy adversary. "You are so kind, Draco. You give too much credit to everyone. Potter deserves to get crushed. And he will be." She narrowed her eyes. "But enough about him. You said this night was about *us*." Pansy slid forward and seated herself on his lap, facing him. She tucked his limp arms around her and leaned in until their breath mingled. "Forget Potter. It's me who's here with you now in your arms. And it's me who has waited so long for this. Kiss me, Draco."

Draco could hear the desperation and the longing in her voice. He was glad that he had the excuse to slam his eyelids shut so he didn't have to look her in the eye as he dreamed about green eyes instead of blue. He hoped that she blamed his lack of finesse on excitement instead of the exact opposite.

Revulsion and regret were entwined as he sat in the Parkinsons' dining room. He shouldn't have to think to tell his arms what to do, nor his lips. He shouldn't be panicked about how wooden he seemed, but he was. How long did he have to sit like this, a prisoner entrapped? How long did people kiss and cuddle together, locked in a lover's embrace? Draco couldn't risk opening his eyes. These things were supposed to unfold in their own time, but he was as lost as a blind man. He had never paid attention to this before. He had made love to women in the past, but it was as if he had forgotten whatever he had done in his school days, the exploits belonging to a past life or maybe a friend...memories recounted to him and not his own. He didn't know what to do now, other than to just sit there as if he had been hit by an *Immobilius* and hope it was all a bad dream. Maybe he was still in his bed in Malfoy Manor, and when he woke up he would find himself alone.

But what good would that do? He would still have to come here and sleep with Pansy, because he wasn't gay. He knew he wasn't, he knew he wasn't he knew he wasn't ... the words were a mantra in his brain, a fervent plea. He was running from the possibility, and this was the last chance for him to prove to himself that he wasn't. He couldn't fail.

"Draco, open your eyes. Look at me."

Draco heard the seduction in Pansy's voice. He heard her arousal. He had made his choice. He had to be here. He opened his eyes.

She unbuttoned her shirt, the catches falling open and revealing her breasts to him. She was wearing a lacy green bra, and there was uncertainty in her eyes. Uncertainty that was there because of him. "You've been with so many girls, I know I can't possibly ..."

The knife twisted in his heart and he leaned over and kissed her. This time, it didn't taste as bitter. Draco knew that she loved him, that she would never have bared her heart to anyone else. It had never been his intent to ruin her. They had been friends, after all. For so many years...he had to do this right. "I'm not going to take you on your parents' dining room table, Pansy," he said when he broke the kiss. "Can you show me to your room?"

Pansy smiled. "Follow me."

Draco followed her through the maze of the mansion. With each step, his trepidation grew. He felt like a virgin on his wedding night. When they got to her bedroom, a spectacle of Slytherin pride, Draco's nerves were frayed.

"You know, Pans, it's getting late..."

She pressed herself against him, snaking her hand down and boldly rubbing between his legs. "It is getting late. So don't waste any more time talking. Your reputation precedes you, Draco. I hear you are a man of action."

Draco swallowed. Her hand on his crotch, massaging, was not making this any easier. He felt that same sense of unease that he had with the backrub, like he wanted to jump away from her and put some distance between them. The pressure to get a hard-on was starting to build, but he felt nothing. Maybe he should kiss her? He leaned down and grabbed her wrists and kissed her.

There! A spark of *something*. When he grabbed her wrists, he could enjoy that. Draco concentrated on the feeling of power and tried to ignore the rest of the scenario: who he was kissing, the sensation of her soft lips, how tiny she was and how the mounds of her breasts pushed into his chest. He wanted something harder, more violent...but this would do for now.

Pansy growled in her throat, a low moan of pleasure. It broke the picture he was trying to create.

Draco pushed her over to the bed. "Take off your clothes!" he commanded. He didn't really want to see that, but it seemed like something he should *want* to see. And better have her do it than him.

Pansy scrambled to comply. She paused when she got down to her knickers. "Aren't you going to get undressed, too?"

"Er, yeah. Of course. I was ... enjoying watching you," Draco said. He unbuttoned his shirt and tried not to sigh. It was definitely going to wrinkle.

When they were both naked, Draco climbed atop of Pansy. He wanted to curse himself. It was as if he had suffered a brain injury in that fall from the *Liberacorpus* curse in the duel with Potter. He couldn't seem to remember how he had been so slick in the past, what had given him his reputation with the ladies. He remembered sleeping with plenty of girls, but he didn't remember thinking so much about things...about anything, back then. He just *did* it. Now, his head was stuffed to overflowing with too many worries, and nothing was as easy as it once had been. Although at the time, nothing had seemed easy, if he recalled. He thought he'd had it tough back then, as well.

Draco jammed his mouth down on Pansy's to try and get the rushing of thoughts to stop. He had an awful fear that he knew where all of this reasoning was going to end up, and he didn't like it one bit. His brain could think all it wanted, but that wasn't going to change the fact that he was going to fuck this girl. Right. Now.

Draco scrabbled for Pansy's wrists again and held them up over her head. That had seemed to work so well before. Maybe it would work now? He squeezed his eyes shut and imagined the body beneath his was more compact, broader ... He could feel himself getting hard.

Pansy panted and squirmed, her hip bumping against his budding arousal. He wilted.

No! Draco wasn't going to panic. He redoubled his efforts, pinning Pansy more firmly and grinding with purpose into her softness. It was just the exact opposite of what he wanted to experience. She was all jiggly, a cushion that moved. He wanted hard planes, unforgiving and punishing. He didn't want legs reminiscent of pillows and hips that would cradle him. Draco felt the sweat dripping off him as he tried to ignore the distinct lack of tingle anywhere in his body.

*I haven't come in my trousers since about third year..*

Those words bubbled up from his subconscious, like Potter had leaned right over and tickled his ear with them. Draco could still see his face when he said them, a little embarrassed, sated, too, like they had a secret. Happy.

Draco was suddenly as hard as he had ever been.

"Draco, ouch. You're hurting me." Pansy's entreaty brought him back.

She was spread beneath him, this girl who was his friend. Draco could see now that she could never be anything more. He felt himself going limp at the sight of her bare breasts and flushed cheeks. He let go of her wrists and sat back. His head hung in defeat.

"Draco?" She was uncertain. "I didn't mean it. I ... I can take it. Go ahead, you can do whatever. I liked it!"

"It's not you, it's me." Draco didn't want to look at her. He couldn't even do better than a lousy cliché.

Pansy hissed. "What? What are you saying?"

"Nothing." Draco slid off the bed and started getting dressed. He knew from experience in situations like these that it was of paramount importance to retain the upper hand. Never admit failure. "It just wasn't working for me, Pans. I think too much of you as a friend. That doesn't mean that you aren't an attractive girl; I just don't want to ruin our friendship this way. You'll thank me in the morning." He was cringing internally at his own verbal ineptitude.

"Draco, stop. Just be honest with me for once. What is it? Is it me? It's my boobs, isn't it? They're too small! Or I could lose ten pounds; I promise I will. I love you, Draco. I always have."

He could hear the tears in her voice, but he just kept buttoning his shirt. Merlin, she was going to make a scene. He supposed it was the least he deserved. What could he say that she would believe? "I love you too, Pans. That's the point."

Pansy jumped off the bed and stood in front of him. "No, not like that. *I really* love you. No more pretending."

Draco couldn't ignore her anymore. He let his hands drop down. He wanted to look away, but there was nowhere else to turn. He finally had to face her. And himself. He swallowed. "I think ... I think I might be ... gay, Pansy." He said it quietly, and he didn't waver. Malfoys were never cowards, after all.

Silence.

Draco waited. Pansy's face didn't change. The air grew thick with the tension. The weight of things unsaid pulled on Draco's nerves.

"I was honest with you. I think you might have the same respect for me, at least. Do you take me for a fool?" Pansy's voice was flat.

Draco didn't expect to voice his worst fear aloud and then be called out for a liar. "I am! I had sex with Harry Potter!" As soon as he said the words, he wanted to take them back. Why was he always so rash? Draco schooled his features. Don't let them see that you made a mistake, that was the key.

Pansy's jaw fell slack in a way that was less than flattering. She gaped like a large-mouth bass. "You're kidding me."

"Well, it wasn't the whole way. I mean, I don't know what you're thinking, but what I should have said was that we were intimate. Let's back up..."

"You ... bastard! You led me on!" Pansy's stunned moment was quickly evaporating under the force of her anger and turning into a firestorm. Draco could see the fury roiling off of her in waves. He took a step back.

"I didn't mean to, Pans. I didn't know it myself."

She was inconsolable. "How could you 'not know it'? You're a cheat and a snake. You're the one who is going to pay for humiliating me, do you hear me? Don't you think that I will let this one go, Draco Malfoy!" Pansy whirled and lashed out. Her arm caught the objects on her vanity, and the various curios swept into the wall in one sure motion. It was almost a thing of beauty, the way the shattering glass rained down in a destructive shimmer. Draco could only stare, transfixed, as the remnants of anything she could get her hands on met with a violent end. Pansy raged without regard to anything around her, a storm of naked force trembling and incoherent with wrath. Her arms bore the proof of her tempestuousness as little cuts began to form and drip. She looked like a wild thing, and Draco thought that perhaps she was.

"Pansy!" Draco's voice cut through the turbulence and Pansy paused, a jewellery box in hand, ready to throw.

"What?" she shrieked, half-mad.

"Stop this! I don't want to leave like this. I don't want to end it this way. I never meant to hurt you, or for this to happen. You are my oldest friend, and I hope that you can..." Draco paused, the truth burning his throat and his eyes. He continued, his voice breaking. "I hope that you can forgive me. For what it is worth, I do love you. Just not like you want me to be able to. But I can still be a friend to you."

"Get out!" Pansy was almost rabid in her furor. She was a sight to behold, and he hoped he never would have to again. She was close to bursting with the effort of containing the sheer force of her vehemence. "I will never forgive you for this, never!" she sobbed.

Draco backed out. The sound of the jewellery box hitting the door behind him where he had just stood rang out in the relative silence of the hallway. Her shrieks were reminiscent of a Caterwauling Charm and followed him down the long halls. She sounded like some feral thing caught in a trap, the yowls ceding to pitiful cries and whimpers that made him feel like a villain of the worst sort.

Sure, he had broken hearts before, but none like this. Never like this. This one he felt. He suspected he always would.

Draco sneaked back into his own home like a thief in the night. He avoided everyone. If he'd had a sense of foreboding the last few days, it was only intensified now. Beyond knowing he had lost a good friend, he had also made an enemy. And he knew from personal experience that there was nothing worse than a woman scorned. Draco ended the day as he began it, dreaming of Pansy. Only this time, his dreams had turned to nightmares.

# Chapter Twenty-One

*Chapter 21 of 28*

After the war, Harry Potter is left with no one to save, no one to fight, and one extra wand. Draco Malfoy escapes punishment by leaving the country... or so he thinks. Seven years pass before they see each other again. Draco is no longer the master of his wand and a battle of talent and wills ensues. A story of a wand without a true master, and two men who fight to master each other... and themselves.

*This chapter was written by literaryspell.*

Draco was squirming.

Harry only noticed because he'd never seen it before. Draco was usually stoic and smooth, letting nothing past his shields. Only Draco's eyes ever expressed what he was truly feeling, and even then it was hard to decipher. This, though...what Draco was doing now...was outside Harry's range of experience.

He didn't know what it meant and he didn't like that.

Even Lucius had picked up on it...and he had no problem calling Draco on his fidgeting. "What has caused this restlessness, Draco?" he asked, sounding like he feared the answer.

Draco looked up from his breakfast plate, startled. His grey eyes were wide for a moment before he blinked and his body stilled, face shuttered once more. "Just anticipating a productive day at work."

As Harry watched, Lucius gave Draco a long, searching look before nodding. "I'm pleased to hear you're getting along well at The Quibbler, Draco. You've done yourself proud."

Normally, Draco would have acted insufferably pleased at his father's words, his back straightening, chin lifting, haughty lips curling into a smirk. Nothing of the sort happened. Draco merely inclined his head and returned to his tea. He hadn't touched a thing on his plate.

Harry cleared his throat. "I'll be going out for an early dinner with Ron and Hermione today, so if you want to have a lesson it'll have to wait until after."

Lucius coughed and picked up the morning paper, hiding himself behind it completely.

"Oh, really?" Draco didn't quite meet Harry's eyes. "Yes, of course the lesson can wait."

Harry frowned. Something was definitely up. "You shouldn't be concerned, Draco. You've been improving greatly."

Lucius shook the paper vigorously and both Harry and Draco looked at him, but he remained hidden behind it.

"Yes, I know. Thank you." Draco hesitated. "I look forward to our lesson."

Shocked into silence, Harry could only nod.

"Have fun at dinner, then."

"I will," Harry said slowly. He was confused. Draco should have raised hell about Harry wanting to have some time to himself. At the very least there should have been snide commentary about his choice of company. He didn't quite believe that Draco had turned over a new leaf after what had happened between them, but just in case, he said, "Have a good day at work, then, Draco."

Draco gave a jerky nod and a strange, forced smile; he looked anywhere but at Harry. Lucius glanced between the two of them with interested concern on his face...but Harry could tell he was also wondering what had happened to the Draco they knew.

Harry stood, and as soon as he did, Peachy the house-elf popped into space beside him and set to clearing his dishes.

"Thanks," Harry said with a smile.

Her huge, watery eyes met his and she was midway through a grateful spiel when she shrieked and dropped Harry's dish on the floor.

"Peachy!" Lucius reprimanded, getting to his feet threateningly.

Peachy let out a wailing sob. "Mistress is wanting Peachy back! Mistress be calling her!"

"What?" Lucius demanded. He looked confused. "Well, then, you must go. Draco, do owl Miss Parkinson and make sure everything is all right."

Draco looked at Peachy for a long moment, and then stared at the empty space after she left. "Of course, Father," he said in a small voice. His face was whiter than usual and Harry noticed dark circles under his eyes.

"Are you all right, Draco?" Harry asked, unwilling to leave without at least making an effort.

Draco seemed to rally himself. "Of course, Potter. Whatever would be wrong? Now run along to your little friends and do be sure to shower before you return to the manor."

Even Lucius seemed taken aback by Draco's sudden harsh tone and abrupt turnabout...but Harry wasn't fooled. Draco was hiding something. Something big.

"Whatever, Draco," Harry said, pleased to get the last words even if they weren't his best. He left Draco and Lucius to their food and went to his bedroom.

The night before, Harry had received an owl from Hermione saying it was time they got together. Since all of his friends had real jobs, dinner was the only option. Neville and Luna were apparently going to try to meet them as well. Harry couldn't help but feel a little betrayed by Neville, not that it was *his* fault he'd been assigned a new

partner. Still, it stung.

With the entire day to kill, Harry did what any man with a healthy sexual appetite and an abundance of time would do. He wanked. His thoughts were unfocused, but there was a definite presence of blond hair and angry eyes. Catching sight of the finger-shaped bruises around his wrist was what brought him over the edge. Draco... had been an intense lover. Urgent, powerful, possessive...all things Harry fancied himself when it came to sex. Did that mean they were compatible or doomed for a violent end? Was this thing between them worth pursuing? Harry didn't know. Draco seemed content pretending nothing had happened...not that he did a very good job of that...but Harry was left wanting more.

The day went by interminably. Without Draco to entertain or frustrate him, the manor was boring as hell. He played darts in the game room for a while but had to leave because the memory of pressing Draco into the couch during his massage gave him an erection he couldn't will away. After yet another session of self-gratification, Harry decided to research wandless magic a little and see if he'd missed anything. He only worked on that for an hour before he gave up and practised his own wandless magic by rearranging all the furniture in his room just because he knew it would piss Draco off.

When it was finally time to meet his friends, he was thrilled for the distraction. He showered and dressed quickly before leaving the manor. They were meeting in Muggle London for a change, at an Italian restaurant Hermione had introduced them to recently.

He arrived early and the maître d' showed him to their table. Neville was already there, along with a man Harry faintly recognised but couldn't place. At once it hit him...this was his replacement.

Neville and the man both stood, Neville looking uncertain. The man put out his hand and said, "Harry Potter. I'm Mark Singer. I've heard so much about you."

Harry wanted to scoff. That was the understatement of his life. *Everyone* knew all about Harry Potter. Still, he was determined to be polite...or, he thought with an internal smirk, perhaps Draco's version of polite.

"Indeed?" he asked, not smiling. He shook the man's hand and broke it off a half-second early. He greeted Neville with more warmth and settled in to totally ignore Neville's new partner...despite the man's attempts to get to know him better.

He was beyond grateful when Luna showed up, because giving someone the cold shoulder just wasn't him. He couldn't keep it up, not like Draco could. In fact, Draco would probably just laugh at his pathetic attempt and make a point to show Harry exactly how a proper shunning should work. Harry's thoughts on Draco were almost fond...it was incredible what a little sex could do to improve a person's personality.

Harry tipped up his cheek for Luna to drop a kiss on it. She did the same with Neville and introduced herself to Mark, who listened with wide eyes as she told him he'd better be careful around crossroads as no one could know when Nargles would strike.

Hermione and Ron were late and flustered when they finally arrived.

"I'm so sorry," Hermione breathed, smiling at Ron when he pulled out her chair for her. "We had some trouble on the underground."

"What sort of trouble?" Mark asked, acting like an Auror even though he wasn't working. Harry glared at him.

Ron laughed. "Went in the out door, down the up stairs and everything else you can think of."

Hermione blushed and took a sip of the water waiting for her. "Are you all ready to order? We always get the same thing." With her husband she shared a sweet smile, and Harry suddenly missed Draco's sarcastic eyebrow lifts and mouth quirks because that was something *they* shared.

Their dinner was uneventful. Mark was polite enough...or smart enough...not to talk about work and Neville followed that lead. Hermione and Ron led the conversation and Luna chimed in with factoids whenever there was a lull.

The waiter had just cleared away their plates when Luna spoke up. "You will never believe the strangest advertisement that came in to the office this morning."

Harry perked up...Luna had a lot of great stories of the happenings at The Quibbler, and as a bonus, it might mean she would mention Draco. The idea of Draco not only working, but working at The bloody Quibbler gave Harry endless hours of glee.

"Oh, do tell," Hermione said, sipping her white wine.

Luna leaned forward. "Now, I know who sent it in but I can't tell you. However, as I told this person I would not be printing her ad due to legal purposes, I kept a copy... It's very interesting."

"Have you got it on you?" Ron asked, looking engrossed.

She nodded and reached into her huge rainbow-striped purse. After a few suspenseful moments of digging, she pulled it out and handed it to Ron, who was on her immediate right. He and Hermione huddled in to read it. Ron's eyes grew as wide as his grin but Hermione frowned and bit her lip. They said nothing when they were finished, only passed it to Neville, who read it along with Mark. Harry sneered at them, acting so partner-ish.

Finally the paper made its way to Harry. His heart did very unusual things as he read.

*Dear Public,*

*The information I am about to impart will shock and stun you. Please do prepare yourselves...be sure that you are seated, do not have heart problems, and will not be flying a broom for some time after, as you will be understandably upset.*

*Draco Malfoy, son of Lucius Malfoy and the late Narcissa Malfoy, is a flaming poof.*

*You have read that correctly. The confusion and horror you are now feeling is minute when compared to that which I myself faced when confronted with this irrefutable knowledge.*

*How do I know, you rightly ask? It is simple. I shall humiliate myself in order to enlighten you. I can only hope my grave sacrifice is appreciated.*

*Draco Malfoy and myself were intimate last night...the evening of August 29th. He was very much the man I thought I knew, at first: debonair, charming, and seemingly interested in the proceedings (as who wouldn't be?).*

*But that did not last long. Draco was not only forceful enough to bruise the delicate skin of my wrist, but he could not maintain his arousal. You've read correctly: Draco almost could not keep it hard for me, a beautiful and chaste pure-blood witch.*

*That is not the worst, oh no. Draco then confessed to me that he is, indeed, gay. Homosexual. Whatever those people call themselves.*

*One has to wonder who made Draco this way when only days before he was picnicking with me and speaking hopefully of our future.*

*Be warned, wizarding public. Draco Malfoy is gay and it is your right to know. Worry not about me...I will persevere as I always do.*

When Harry finished reading, every eye around the table was on him. "Er," he said, his mind not knowing where to settle.

"Can I have that back, Harry?" Luna asked.

Harry realised he'd crushed the paper in his fist. He straightened it and handed it back with an apologetic look. He couldn't smile, couldn't frown, couldn't brush it all off.

Draco had fucked Pansy. He knew without a doubt she had written the ad, of course. Who else had Draco picnicked with...what other 'so-called beautiful and chaste pure-bloods witches' did he consort with?

She'd said, *Draco could almost not keep it hard*. Which meant he had. Which meant he'd fucked Pansy Parkinson *the same fucking day* that he'd had Harry up against the wall.

Pansy wasn't half as humiliated as Harry was at that moment. He'd been *sostupid*, letting Draco in like that, thinking he might actually be decent, *begood* for Harry. What a fucking joke that was. Draco Malfoy had done nothing but ruin Harry's life since they'd been eleven years old and Harry was *done* with it.

After Luna's revelation, the party broke up. Mark and Neville left, Neville promising to owl Harry and saying that he hoped Harry would return soon. Luna flittered off after giving Harry an apologetic smile. She'd said she couldn't run the ad thanks to libel laws, but was certain Pansy would rewrite the ad without names and submit it once more.

Harry followed Ron and Hermione out...he wasn't quite capable of finding his way out himself.

"All right, mate?" Ron asked, clapping Harry on the shoulder.

All Harry could think was, *He bruised her just like he did me*. "Sure, Ron." To Draco, Harry and Pansy were the same: bodies to get off with and discard. He'd never felt an affinity with Pansy Parkinson but at the moment he knew exactly what she'd gone through. Draco had used them both.

"Oh, Ron, I think I left my agenda on the seat inside. Do you mind...?" Hermione smiled at Ron, who went back into the restaurant before she could even finish. She didn't waste any time. "Harry, I know this is upsetting..."

"Why on earth would I be upset?"

Hermione paused. "I'm one of your best friends, Harry...and I'm the one who notices these things. Just... promise me one thing."

He looked at her, wary. "What?"

"Don't jump the gun on this one. Hear Draco's side first. You never know..."

Harry laughed...it was a hard sound. "No, Hermione, sometimes you do know. And sometimes it's exactly what it looks like."

Hermione didn't try to convince him further. She pulled him into a hug that he just couldn't bring himself to return, even though he wanted to. He wanted to fall into her embrace and let her talk out his problems for him. He wanted her and Ron to invite him back to their flat and ply him with tea and biscuits until he confessed his feelings for Draco...whatever they were...and let them comfort him. He wanted Luna to find some obscure law against what Pansy had done and set the Aurors on her. And speaking of Aurors, he wanted Mark demoted to the owl room and he wanted his fucking job back!

More than anything, though, Harry wanted Draco Malfoy punished.

When Ron came back out empty-handed and Hermione 'found' her agenda in her purse, they left him standing in front of the restaurant after he'd convinced them he was fine. And he was. Because he'd just realised that the power to punish Draco was in his hands.

Harry had tried to get Draco his magic back. That had only lost him his job, his partner, his personal space, and his pride. Now, Harry would make sure Draco never learned wandless magic, never defeated Harry, and never got his magic back.

Draco Malfoy was going to be sorry he'd ever fucked with Harry Potter.

\*

Harry poured himself another shot and glared at his television screen. He'd missed so much of his favourite shows, squirreled away at the manor like some concubine, that he was totally lost and had to resort to watching reality TV until he caught up.

There was a man on the show who looked a lot like Draco, and he was doing very poorly in whatever competition was going on. Harry'd lost the thread of the plot about ten minutes in and now he was just watching to see Draco get pummelled, which seemed to be the point of the show. He took a shot every time Draco fell or got hit with something or lost points. He was very, very drunk...Draco wasn't very good at all.

That was the problem. Real Draco wasn't very good. He was *bad*. He was a bad, bad person and Harry was a stupid, stupid person for falling for him *For it!* he mentally corrected himself, just in time. Falling for it...for Draco's charm and his eyes and his *need* for Harry to teach him.

Well, Harry could think of a few things Draco could stand to learn. Like how to be human. Harry laughed and downed his drink when the Draco on the television got smacked in the face with a ball of some sort. TV was so strange these days. He should have been giving Draco human lessons, not magic ones. What good was magic if you were a monster?

Hermione was Flooing him. He knew because her bushy face kept popping up in his fireplace. She kept saying she could see him, but he was sure she was lying...he was hidden by a dead plant and an awkwardly placed lamp. He ignored her and focused on refilling his shot glass, spilling some when he glanced up to see TV Draco take an ungraceful spill. Stupid TV Draco. Nothing like the real Draco, who would have risen from a fall with dignity and a sneer, not a bruised shin and mud on his helmet. In fact, Draco would never wear a helmet at all. Harry grinned, pleased to have made his point. He took another shot because he couldn't remember what the point was.

The point was, he reminded himself half an hour later, that Draco never get his magic back. Or at least that Harry not help him. Harry figured he wouldn't mind if Draco managed without him, but he would take no part in it. Draco was a lying, cheating cheater who lied. And Harry was better than that. Better than Pansy, at any rate.

Stupid Draco. Harry wiped his eyes on his sleeves. Stupid, stupid Draco and the stupid, stupid hold he had on Harry's stupid, stupid heart.

# Chapter Twenty-Two

Chapter 22 of 28

After the war, Harry Potter is left with no one to save, no one to fight, and one extra wand. Draco Malfoy escapes punishment by leaving the country... or so he thinks. Seven years pass before they see each other again. Draco is no longer the master of his wand and a battle of talent and wills ensues. A story of a wand without a true master, and two men who fight to master each other... and themselves.

*This chapter was written by keppiehed.*

## Chapter Twenty-Two

The sound of rumbling broke the silence in the Grand Salon. Draco blushed, embarrassed by the noise from his unruly stomach. Damn the absent Peachy!

Lucius didn't remark on it from his place across the coffee table, making Draco grateful for the small mercies of politeness.

"I can't help but note the time, Son. Weren't you supposed to be at work by now?" Lucius asked from behind the ever-present shield of his *Daily Prophet*.

"No, the staff meeting got pushed back an hour, and Luna gave us all a break this morning." Draco replied.

"How ... quaint of her," Lucius sniffed. "That's quite a different way to run a business, isn't it?"

"Yes, she's rather lenient with the staff. More so than I would expect, for one in charge," Draco mused. "She seems popular, at any rate."

"Popularity is hardly the most advantageous quality of a leader. No wonder the *Prophet* outsells *The Quibbler* at a nearly three-to-one ratio. The girl needs to focus on business strategy to succeed. Mark my words, Draco...you could be running that place in five years," Lucius asserted.

"Of course, Father." Draco ignored the sinking in his gut. It didn't matter that he didn't *want* to be running the place, not in five years or in twenty. He had been groomed for advancement, and that was his path...like it or not.

In fact, he was rather surprised that he was starting to enjoy just being a staff writer there. Luna had told him yesterday that he had earned a permanent position if he wanted it. Draco hadn't accepted it yet, but he was mulling it over. There was a lot that he hated about work, of course. It was, well ... *work*. He didn't like having to be there on time and stay all day. He hated having to talk to people and to get permission to do what *he* wanted to do. Everyone there was so stupid; their ideas were clearly inferior. Yet there was something undeniably satisfying about seeing his work turn out. At the end of the week, his words were there in print for anyone to read. It may be a tiny piece that he slaved over, but there they were. He felt a small flicker of pride, real and deserved, for the first time in his life, over something that *he* had accomplished. He couldn't deny that it felt ... well, kind of good. So maybe this wasn't such a bad idea after all. If he had the option to quit, he would, but since he had to stay, it wasn't such a bad gig, after all.

He just didn't want to be the boss. There, he wanted to just ... be. He didn't have the pressure of being Draco Malfoy, biggest wizard in the room. He was just another writer there, and it wasn't so bad. He needed to make his way, learn as he went.

Draco frowned as he realized that it was exactly what he wanted. He wanted to stay at *The Quibbler* and learn to write, get better at what he did. He thought that maybe he could make something of this job. The idea hit him like a Stunner.

"Oh, and I started a subscription yesterday. I don't know what took me so long, but the first edition is to come by owl post today, so I can see your work first-hand," Lucius said, finally flicking down a corner of the paper. "I *am* proud of you, Draco."

Draco coughed to hide both another errant rumbling of his stomach and his fool pride, which flushed forth onto his fair cheeks. He ducked his head. "Er, look at the time. I'd better be going."

"Draco?" Lucius put down the paper.

"Hm?" Draco froze. He recognized that tone. It didn't bode well.

"I was thinking that we could go over the latest edition of your paper tonight, together. When you get home. We could go over some strategies on what improvements could be made, suggestions for advertisements and layout that you could take back to Miss Lovegood."

Draco let out a breath that he had been holding. His father just wanted to spend time with him. Even if it was doing something he didn't want to do, a warm feeling filled out in his chest that Lucius would specifically seek him out. Why was he always so suspicious?

"Unless, of course, you are going to be with Mr. Potter. I completely understand." Lucius looked away.

The warm feelings got dashed by a shock of cold sick at his father's words. "Why would I be with Potter?" Draco demanded.

"Well, he didn't come home last night. I thought you might be concerned about his welfare ... or whereabouts." Lucius cleared his throat. "Not that I want to get involved in your affairs."

Draco's face flamed. Did his father have a suspicion about what had happened between him and Potter? No! There was no way! "Potter is free to come and go as he pleases," he choked out, hoping that he sounded more normal than he felt.

"Of course." Lucius nodded. "Draco, you know that I have a hard time talking about things of this nature, but I hope you know that you can always come to me if you ever need to discuss matters. I may not seem like I understand, but ... I do. More than you know." Lucius fixed him with a knowing stare.

Draco couldn't keep the look of horror off his face at the idea that his father could be referring to him ... and Potter ... ? Surely his father had the wrong end of the stick! He didn't know what he was saying. Mortification more acute than any he had ever felt rained down upon him until he felt drowned in it. Never in his life had Draco felt such burning humiliation as he did right now, at the thought that his own father could think that he was *gay*!

Draco's mind skittered back over all of the conversations that they'd had, all of the breakfasts and the teas, where Lucius had been so odd and stilted, and it suddenly made sense. The scenes clicked into place, and Draco felt sick that his own father had thought he was gay for so long. Before he had been, of course. Was it that obvious to everyone? Was Draco the only one not to have seen it? Er, he and Pansy, of course.

The air in the room didn't feel sufficient to keep breathing; he thought he might collapse. It was only the idea that it was the gayest thing he could do, to actually faint in front of his father, that kept Draco on his feet. He stumbled blindly for his briefcase, and hoped he was headed for the door. *Why was the Grand Salon so damned huge?* He made...or thought he made...some weak excuse or goodbye, but he couldn't be sure. He heard his father calling to him, but he couldn't make out the words, nor did he care to. Everything was a swimming muddle, words and images were too much to comprehend, and he just wanted *out*. He felt as though his world had been suspended in motion, that everything was encased in a fluid film for him to view through a filter of surreality. Why was this happening to him?

Draco shut the front door behind him and breathed until his heart rate returned to normal. Beads of sweat...*sweat!* The indignity!...dotted his forehead, and he was forced to blot himself with a handkerchief. It wasn't even nine in the morning, and he was already soiled for the day. Draco smoothed his hair back, the strands wet against his palms. He just wanted to get to work, where he could focus on something that didn't involve anything personal. He laughed bitterly. The day he thought he would yearn to go to work was as pathetic a day as it was unforeseen. Draco pulled himself together and made ready to start his day and work on forgetting it all.

\*

The whispers had started as soon as he had entered the building. Draco hadn't taken three steps before he had become aware of the buzz surrounding his appearance. He held his head high and ignored it, accustomed to creating a stir wherever he went...he was a Malfoy, after all...but this sort of attention seemed of a different calibre than the celebrity he had enjoyed in the past. He had always fallen into one of two categories before: reviled villain or pursued status symbol. Draco was uncomfortably aware of a change in tone, and he clenched his teeth to keep from showing his distress. He had never been an object of foolishness before. He didn't know what was going on, but he was about to find out.

By the time he got to his own floor in the building, the stares and whispers had turned to outright laughs, and Draco's already frayed nerves were about to give. Just before the thread snapped, a wizard he recognized from Accounts Receivables chuckled a little *too* audaciously for Draco's taste, and Draco felt his temper slip. He dropped his briefcase and lunged at the wizard, pushing him against the wall.

The office went silent, all eyes on the exchange.

"Care to let me in on your little joke?" Draco snarled.

The wizard smirked. "Little, indeed. Nice choice of words for the man who can't keep it hard for a witch."

Draco blanched and reeled, the whole world tilting. He clutched at the wizard's robes even tighter. "What's that supposed to mean?" He could only see the other man's face through a long tunnel of red mist, and for the first time ever, he thought he might have it in him to kill someone.

"Oh, you'll find out soon enough. Pansy-boy." The wizard winked and jerked away.

Draco could hear laughter all around. His fists clenched the air, grasping at nothing.

"Draco, please, come with me."

Draco felt himself being steered into an empty office. He didn't know how long he stood there before he realized he and Luna were alone, away from prying eyes ... and ears.

"It's a shock to you, a terrible shock. I can't help but feel responsible. This ad came into the office yesterday, and it was leaked." Luna handed the crumpled paper over to him. "Of course, you know she sent an edited version this morning for publication, just in time for press. The damage is done, Draco. I'm so sorry. I *knew* it was going to be a bad day when I got a double yolk in my egg; a very inauspicious sign!"

Draco read the words with trembling hands, the vitriol in Pansy's heart making him sick. Their Slytherin ways had never before troubled him; hell, he had always been party to it before. Retribution, elitism, self-promotion ... those had always been the causes of the day. Now that he was on the receiving end of some of that, he wasn't so sure it was the way to go. *Flaming poof ... could not maintain his arousal ... gay ... homosexual ... those people ... who made Draco this way..* He closed his eyes and let the paper flutter to the ground.

Draco felt a hand on his arm. "Listen, there is going to be a meeting about harassment. I have a zero-tolerance policy for this ..."

*Could not maintain his arousal...* Draco swallowed over the lump in his throat. "My father is a subscriber. He is going to get a copy today."

Luna bowed her head. "Draco, I am so sorry. There is nothing I can do about the ad. But I'll do everything I can to support you here, you have to know that. I'm so glad that you're going to be writing for us..."

"Writing for you?" Draco laughed. "I wouldn't work here if you were the last place to give me a job! I don't need you to give me charity employment. I quit!"

"Draco, please don't..."

*who made Draco that way...* Draco shook his head, trying to dismiss the thought and Luna's concern at the same time. None of it was real. *...who made Draco that way...* Why was that phrase from the letter stuck in his brain? "Potter! Where is he?"

Luna wrung her hands. "The Black Bear. A bar on the south side. You'd better go now. He needs you."

Draco was running before the scoff was finished forming and out of his mouth.

\*

The taxi dropped him off in a section of Muggle London Draco had never been before. When he stepped through the bar door, he knew why. It was a place you only went for one reason: to forget about where you were, or who you were.

The place was worse than any seedy tavern he could've conjured up in his worst imaginings. And Draco had some pretty strong stereotypical ideas, so that was saying a lot, he thought. It had the requisite sticky floor, the dank air and the overwhelming gloom of a place that was there for the business of breaking dreams ... one drink at a time. When Draco opened up the door, he provided the only stir of fresh air the place had doubtless seen since the last blurry drunk had stumbled in the night before. The reek was putrid. A man would have to be deep in his cups to bother with this place. Draco figured that Luna had given him the wrong name when he caught sight of a familiar shag of dark hair in a corner booth.

Draco stepped fully into the bar and frowned. Potter was here, getting soused. Or had been. He appeared to be passed out on the table, drink still clutched in his hand. Draco walked to him. Potter didn't move. No one did, not one of the passed-out patrons, nor anyone minding the bar. It was an empty shell of a place, somewhere that provided the poison for a price. Draco's lip curled back in disdain. He needed to get Potter out of here and take him home.

He shook his shoulder, but Potter didn't stir. Draco furrowed his brow. Potter needed help, it was clear. This day had been a spectacular failure. He had to do something right. He leaned down and slid Potter's arm around his own and started to lift. *Merlin, Potter was heavier than he looked!*

Just as Draco had him out of the booth and was about to take his full weight, Potter jerked to awareness. "Wha ... ? What's going ... Draco?" He seemed confused. "Put me down!" His voice was too loud in the dingy bar.

Draco winced, sympathetic to the headache that Potter surely had, but he let Potter slump back into the booth. "It's okay. We're going home." He couldn't help but feel awkward. He wasn't used to comforting anyone.

Potter laughed. "Home? Like you would know anything about what that means, you bastard. If you think I am going *anywhere* with you, you've got another thing coming." Potter slid bonelessly into the booth. "Go back to Daddy, Draco."

Draco frowned. "What's your problem, Potter? Had too much to drink? Becoming a bit of a problem for you?"

"Actually, I haven't had enough to drink, not by a long shot." Potter picked up the half-empty mug and took a swig.

"Potter!" Draco was actually shocked. He knocked the mug away, shattering it against the wall. "You're a mess. Stop it...can't you see yourself? Where are your friends? Why did they let you get like this?"

The hatred in Potter's green eyes was so intense that Draco took a step back. He had never seen that look on Potter's face before. "You like being brutal, don't you? Shoving people, telling them what to do?" Potter stood up and took a step forward. "Well, your days of ordering me around, of getting to tell me what to do are over, do you get it?" He leaned into Draco's face, the stale fumes spilling over. "I'm not yours anymore. And as far as friends go, you don't have a single friend in the world, so don't talk to me about *friends* and how they act!"

Draco felt a stirring in his groin at the suggestion that Potter might have been his, now or ever. "What's the problem, Potter? What has changed since yesterday?" He cleared his throat, the admission so big it almost choked him. "Maybe we could ... make something work?" He couldn't look at Potter. His shame was too great. By Merlin, he *was* a flaming poof!

Potter stepped away, a little unsteady. "I wouldn't have you if you were the last man in England."

Shock hit Draco at his flat rejection. "What?"

"You heard me," Potter spit, the venom glittering in his eyes.

"But ... why?" Draco couldn't understand it. Well, he might be able to guess, if he really thought about it, but he didn't want to think that even Potter knew about the article in *The Quibbler*.

"For fuck's sake, Draco, if I have to tell you, then you are even more of a lost cause than I thought you were," Potter bit out in disgust.

Fury and desperation and grief ... yes, grief ... roiled together in the pit of Draco's gut to create an infected mix that threatened to burst forth from every pore in his being. After this day, with every blow, it was all he could do not to fall to his knees.

Draco watched Potter run a hand through his hair, and that gesture, that simple motion that was so Potter ... it triggered something in him, and he felt a dam burst inside of him. He just wanted to disappear, right now. He had let everyone down, had made such an irreparable muddle of everything he had ever touched. He couldn't face knowing that he was a constant failure. His magic swelled up and burst forth. The force of his bitter disappointment turned inwards, his magic picking up on his wish to obliterate himself. It was conflicted, and in the confusion the only emotion that came through was negativity. The air in his lungs turned poison, and he couldn't get his breath. Once the action was started, he was powerless to reverse it, and he could only curse himself and his rashness once again. Could he do *nothing* right? He couldn't harness his magic, he couldn't save Potter ... he couldn't even keep his dignity at the end of things.

Draco was aware that he was on his knees in a filthy Muggle *bar*, of all places, and then he panicked. He couldn't clear the foam from his lips, couldn't get free of the fog of venom in his chest. A vice was tightening across his sight, and the last thing he saw before he went down was Potter's back. He didn't even turn to watch Draco fall, and Draco didn't know whether to be glad or whether to mourn the fact that Potter really didn't seem to care at all.

## Chapter Twenty-Three

*Chapter 23 of 28*

After the war, Harry Potter is left with no one to save, no one to fight, and one extra wand. Draco Malfoy escapes punishment by leaving the country... or so he thinks. Seven years pass before they see each other again. Draco is no longer the master of his wand and a battle of talent and wills ensues. A story of a wand without a true master, and two men who fight to master each other... and themselves.

*This chapter was written by literaryspell.*

Harry forced his eyes to open, thinking that it really should come naturally and not be something that had to be forced at all. The light that streamed through his window was malicious, announcing that it was midday without regard to the fact that Harry hadn't gone to bed until morning.

There was a haze in his mind. He threw his hand over the side of the bed and felt around until the neck of the Firewhisky bottle he'd left there brushed his fingers. He grabbed it and brought it up. It wasn't like him to drink so early in the day, but since he was 'between jobs' he really didn't see the harm. He took a long swig and hissed at the taste. The haze cleared in minutes, replaced by a number of bodily faculties asking for assistance in one way or another.

Deciding to skip a shower, Harry used the loo and made a utilitarian breakfast. He sat at his kitchen table, alone. This wasn't where he'd seen himself being after Hogwarts. Where was his important job...where he was needed? Where was his family, his husband or partner or whatever? He sighed. He hated getting maudlin and the only way to avoid it was to drink until things looked cheerful again.

So he did.

\*

"Harry, mate, come on," Ron said, speaking through green flames.

Harry shook his head. "Not feeling up t'it."

"You're making Hermione worry, and you know what she's like when she worries."

Harry knew Ron was actually saying *he* was worried, though he didn't doubt Hermione was as well. Why, he didn't know. Harry was perfectly capable of taking care of himself. He was only taking the week off before going back to Robards and getting his job back. He smirked. He hoped Marcus wasn't getting too comfortable working with Neville.

"Is just..." Harry swallowed and paid more attention to his words. It was three in the afternoon and he was sloshed. If Ron heard him slurring, his little pity party of one would get gate-crashed. "It's just that I'm feel a little... anti-social. Okay?"

"Well, you should at least cut it with the drinking, Harry. It's really not good for you and you want to be in top form for when you come back to work."

Harry raised an eyebrow, or tried to. Really, he thought, he should leave things like that to people like Draco. He just looked silly when he did it. "I'll be fine, Ron."

"I know you'll be fine." Ron seemed to be trying to force his voice into lightness, but Harry could hear real concern there, and it made him a little angry. If he wanted to exist in a stupor for the next little while, that was his business. Ron had never said anything before...why was he starting now? "You're always fine. We just, you know, want you to be actually happy...not just fine."

"I am happy, Ron." Harry raised his glass and gave Ron a wide smile. "See?"

Ron sighed and Harry knew it was coming.

"We've been meaning to talk to you about this for a while, mate. It's just... it's hard to know where the line is between having a few drinks, a good time, and having a... a problem. And I just want to make sure you're... okay." Ron looked woefully ill-prepared for his speech, and he was looking at Harry like he was worried a hex might come his way.

Harry put his glass down. "Look, I appreciate your concern. Really, Ron. And tell Hermione the same. But it's just not about that. I've been having a rough few days and I just want to forget everything for a while. After the weekend, I'll get back to work and everything will be fine. I swear." Harry felt accomplished after his speech. He'd barely mumbled and he'd kept his train of thought the entire way. Now he just wished Ron would leave so he could get back to searching for Draco look-alikes on the telly.

Ron sighed, so heavily that ash from the fireplace scattered over the books and files piled there. "You just can't let this whole Malfoy thing get to you."

"What're you talking about?" Harry said. He took a sip from his drink...in a glass, this time...and rubbed a hand over his weary eyes. He wished he could go to bed.

"Malfoy being gay. You didn't make him that way, you know."

"Er, yeah, Ron. I do know." Harry was confused and couldn't help showing it. Then he remembered Pansy's little exposé and how it had posed the question of who had made Draco gay. Honestly, he'd love to be given the job of educating the daft bint. He could think of a great many lessons that would improve her state of being.

"I mean, maybe it's a little weird. He was straight, wasn't he? Dated birds and everything? Well, I guess he's just figuring his shit out a little later than most."

"Seriously, Ron, I'm not worried that I made Draco gay!" As soon as he said the words, though, Harry's drink-addled mind started to wonder. After all, Draco hadn't made any advances before that day when he'd pushed Harry against the wall and...

Still. If anything, Draco made Draco gay. Harry was content in the knowledge that Draco was just kind of crazy. Nothing Draco did surprised him anymore.

*"Maybe we could... make something work?"*

"What did you say?" Harry demanded, shaking his head to clear it but only managing to make it worse.

"Just that it's probably better that you don't try to help him anymore. You did the best you could. The next thing you know, he'll be getting all clingy because he's gay and you're gay, and..."

Harry had the impression that Ron didn't really have a good handle on what being gay was about, but he didn't bother setting his friend straight...or gay. Whatever. He'd probably only end up confusing Ron worse, seeing as how Harry felt rather confused himself at the moment.

It didn't help that he had Draco's voice in his head...Draco saying he wanted to make things work.

"Ron, I've got to go. I have... an appointment... or something."

Ron was unconvinced and tried to stop Harry from ending the conversation, enlightening as it hadn't been, but Harry just left the living room and waited in the kitchen until he heard the Floo call end.

Draco. Why was Harry so bothered about him? He shouldn't even care...Draco had shown him that time and again. What was that saying...if someone shows you their true self, believe them? Well, Draco had shown his real self and Harry would just have to believe it. Whatever Harry had thought...had hoped...Draco might have been, he just... wasn't.

\*

*There was anger on Draco's face. Then again, when wasn't there when Harry was around? Harry's thoughts were focused on the man in front of him. Draco had come for him. To save him? Did he need to be saved? Why was Draco here, in a Muggle bar, asking to go back to the way things were?*

*When had everything changed... again?*

*He had to get away. The look on Draco's face. There was anger, yes, always that...but something else, and Harry didn't know what. He couldn't read Draco. He'd never had that ability, even when it seemed like Draco knew every emotion of Harry's, down to the smallest one. He always felt bare around Draco, stripped, and not in a way he enjoyed.*

*Harry left through the bar's back exit. He didn't look back; he didn't want to see Draco realise how vulnerable he was, because then Draco would pull himself up tall, shutter his eyes, and fire barbs at Harry until he was forced to relent. This time, he wouldn't wait for that to happen. He made a hasty Apparition home...he was in no condition to do so, but he trusted his magic to the job.*

*Somehow, inexplicably, Draco was in his bed, waiting for him. He touched Harry, fingers soft even if his intent wasn't. They kissed. It was... everything.*

Harry gasped himself awake...the tail end of his climax rattled through him like the Hogwarts Express and he could only wait it out, panting. When it was finished, he buried his face in the pillow. He hadn't had a wet dream since his first years at school. He tried, but couldn't recall what the dream had been about.

Reaching for his wand, he spelled the mess away. As the cleaning charm abraded his sensitive skin, he cursed losing Draco's more precise wand. It wasn't like Draco was using it, anyway.

When he finally lifted his head from the pillow and made to get up, he noticed his room was clean. He glanced down beside his bed...yes, the bottle he'd placed (or dropped) there the night before was gone. All his clothes were out of sight, his drawers pushed in, even the bed looked like it had been made around him.

On his nightstand was a folded note. Harry groaned, hating the thought that someone had been in his house, in his room, without him knowing. He wasn't worried, as he trusted his wards, so he knew who it had to have been.

When he opened the note, which bore two simple words...*Jove, Hermione*...and a business card fell out, Harry grabbed it up. It was for an addictions counsellor.

"Wow, very subtle, Hermione," Harry groused before Banishing the card. He put the note in his drawer.

The rest of his flat was clean to Hermione's exacting standards. He was a little embarrassed that she'd been inside for what must have been a very long time and yet he hadn't woken at all. He wrote her a quick note thanking her for her work...his flat had been a mess even before he'd gone to the manor, and since he'd returned, it had only gotten worse...and tossed it through the Floo. Either she or Ron would get it when they got home from work.

Harry disabled the Floo and went to the cupboard where he stored his liquor. He was running low. He grabbed the last full bottle of Firewhisky and sat on the couch. It was going to be another long day and Harry just... didn't want to be a part of it.

\*

"Mr Potter! This is the height of indecency. To be standing at your door like a hired hand or delivery person. Outrageous."

Harry woke to the sound of very vocal grumblings in a familiar aristocratic voice.

"Wha' you want?" Harry tried to shout. Fuck. He was still drunk.

"Open this door now or I shan't be held responsible for the terrible things that will occur."

Deciding it was worth it to stop the voice from going on, Harry aimed his wand at the door. It took more than one try but it opened eventually.

He groaned when Lucius Malfoy strode into his living room, looking like he wished there was more room to flounce about in.

"You look terrible," Lucius said, shaking his head. The moue of disgust on his face made Harry want to punch something, but Lucius was too far away and the couch wasn't satisfying enough so he let it go.

"Feel terrible," Harry slurred. He narrowed his eyes at Lucius until there was only one and he'd stopped spinning. "Why're you 'ere?"

"This is about Draco."

At his words, Harry leaned forward, but was assaulted by a queasy sensation in his stomach and he figured he was probably going to vomit.

"Drink this," Lucius said, handing Harry a vial.

Harry laughed. "As if I would."

"It's a sobering draught, Mr Potter, and Draco brewed it himself. He told me I might need to bring it, were I to see you."

"You take some firs'," Harry said, crossing his arms over his chest. He swallowed against the bile that rose in his mouth, but the immediate need to purge abated.

"I am quite sober enough," Lucius said with a sneer. Then, seeming to understand that Harry wouldn't take any unless he did, he brought the vial to his lips and sipped some back. After a few moments, Harry held out his hand.

"Fine."

Lucius passed it to him and Harry drank it, sobering much too quickly. His feeling of lightness, the lack of pain, the pleasant warmth...all were gone in an instant. He mourned the loss but made himself focus on Lucius.

"Now, listen, Mr Potter. I don't know what kind of relationship you have with my son...in fact, I doubt you two really know, either. But this is a delicate situation and I fear I might be overstepping my bounds with my son, who can be, as you know, rather... protective of his dignity."

Harry fought the urge to scoff and gestured for Lucius to go on.

"He's in St. Mungo's right now."

Harry shot to his feet. "What? Why? What's happened?"

Lucius lifted one hand. "He is all right. There was an incident three days ago. His magic... well, not even he knows exactly what happened. But he was hurt and he's been recovering in hospital ever since."

Three days before... Harry closed his eyes and struggled to remember. His days were blurred together and he only remembered today's date after a long moment of pondering. Still, he knew that it had to be the night in the bar. Draco hadn't seemed himself then, less in control than he usually was...but Harry could only remember snippets. Draco'd been in St. Mungo's that long? Harry rubbed his eyes with his fingers, guilt welling up inside him. He'd been so ready...eager, even...to let Draco fend for himself without magic. He thought he'd given up on him. This was proof, though, that he couldn't.

"Damn it," he muttered. "But he's all right?"

"Very weak, though he wouldn't want me saying so. I am worried for him, or else you can be assured I never would have sought you out in this manner."

"Of course." Harry rolled his eyes. "All right. I'm going to have a shower and then I'll go see him. Did he... I mean, he didn't ask for me, did he?"

Lucius shook his head and eyed Harry knowingly. "No, not specifically, but I know my son. He would want you there."

"I don't know if I believe that," Harry said. "Well, thank you for telling me. You can see yourself out, I assume?"

"Yes, I do believe the three meters between the door and where you...*entertain* guests shan't prove unnavigable."

Harry left him to it. "And take your bloody Malfoy sarcasm with you," he said under his breath on the way to the shower. He was rank and while he was sure to insult Draco with his mere presence, he didn't want smell to be on the list of things Draco railed against. Once he was finished he actually began to feel human once more. He did make himself another drink before he left. The sobering potion had rattled him and things were a little *too* clear.

He Apparated right into St. Mungo's, perk of being an Auror, and asked the desk witch how to find Draco. She'd directed him with a rote response, and Harry took the lift to the fourth floor, Spell Damage, and found Draco's room.

Outside the door, he hesitated. What was he planning to say to Draco? How could he even talk to him after what he'd done with Pansy? Maybe what they'd shared hadn't been some romantic tryst in the moonlight, but it still meant something to Harry. And maybe that was the problem. Maybe it shouldn't...maybe it was just sex. That must be how Draco saw it, so for the sake of his sanity, Harry decided he'd go that route as well. It was just... sex.

Harry knocked on the door, uncertain of the etiquette when it came to things like this.

"Come in," came an exasperated voice, as if Draco had been asked that a hundred times that evening.

Harry pulled open the door and stepped inside. He thought he heard a sharp intake of breath, but it could have been the door whisking shut.

"Heard you're having a bit of a go of it," Harry said, standing halfway between the bed and the exit.

Draco glared, but wearing what Harry knew to be a rough cotton hospital-issue gown, it didn't hold much weight. "And I suppose I have my father to thank for that."

Having no compunction about ratting Lucius out, Harry nodded. He sat in the chair beside the bed, feeling a little more confident when Draco didn't lash out at him.

"Told him not to," Draco grumbled. "What do you want, Potter?"

"Was it your magic, Draco? That did this to you?" In truth, Draco didn't look like death was nigh, but he certainly lacked the fire that usually warmed a room. He was paler than usual and even his hair looked lank.

"Who can know these things?" Draco asked rhetorically. He swept his hand about in the air. "Certainly not the Healers, incompetent swine."

Harry pursed his lips, ire already flaring within him. "Just be straight with me for once. What the fuck happened?"

"I don't know, all right?" Draco sighed and let his head fall onto the pillow. "One minute I was... perfectly fine, and the next, not so much."

"But it's not a physical thing, right? It's your magic." Harry was certain of it and he knew Draco knew as well.

"So what if it was? What's it to you?"

"Christ, Draco, can't you ever just... stop?" Harry ran his hand through his hair. He wished he'd had more than one drink before coming. When dealing with Draco, a proper buzz was necessary for survival...his *and* Draco's.

Draco didn't say anything. After a long moment he sighed, and Harry took that as a sign that he was willing to try.

*Make things work.*

Draco's words. Harry nodded to himself, his decision made.

"Do you feel comfortable continuing in your life as it is? Without magic?"

Draco looked out the window, facing away from Harry. "I haven't been comfortable in seven years."

"Do you feel safe to practise it on your own?"

"Are you trying to make me say *I need* you or something?" Draco scoffed. "You can stop right there if you are."

"What's so bad about needing someone, Draco?" Harry asked, wondering if Draco could even give him an answer, let alone a real one. "What's so bad about being needed?"

"Malfoys do not *need*."

Harry laughed. "Wow, did you think that one up all on your own, or what?" Draco scowled and Harry immediately felt bad. Here he was, chiding Draco for being difficult, and then he went and goaded him right after. "Listen, I... can help you. I know I can. We were almost there."

"And I can get the rest of the way myself."

"And kill yourself trying?" Harry paused. "Don't put that on my conscience. I have enough."

For the first time, Draco met Harry's eyes. "I don't know what you even want from me."

"Just... shite, try to help me help you. Maybe it's cheesy, but there it is. Don't be such a sodding prat all the time. Make it easier on both of us, yeah?"

Draco closed his eyes. "Maybe I'll make more of an effort to be sensitive to your plebeian needs...if you stop drinking."

"I'm not drinking," Harry said immediately, forced into the habit from trying to hide the problem for far too long.

Draco gave him an incredulous look. "And I'm lounging between Egyptian cotton sheets at the manor. Don't lie to me."

"I'll..." Harry swallowed. "I'll try."

"I need more than that. I don't want to see you sloppy and half in the bag anymore. I don't want to wor..." Draco broke off and his face went blank in seconds.

Worry. Draco had been worried. Harry felt like he could breathe again. He wanted to press Draco to finish his sentence, wanted to make him spell it out, but he knew Draco wouldn't. He couldn't...he wasn't ready. But it was the first time, ever, that Harry actually had a sliver of hope that they could make something out of the moments between them, the fury and the flame, the things that hurt and the things that almost didn't. It made him want to change.

"Okay, Draco. I'll quit drinking...at least, I promise you that I will do my very best. And I won't lie to you."

Draco nodded. "Then I, in turn, promise to... do whatever it was that you said."

Harry laughed and to his shock, Draco threw the tiniest of smiles his way.

"We'll make it work, then," Harry said. Hope was threatening to spill from his very pores but he forced it back, knowing it would scare Draco...hell, it scared *him*.

The choice of words wasn't lost on Draco. He swallowed, and nodded, and looked back at the window. They fell silent, and Draco was asleep in moments. Harry finally understood something that hadn't occurred to him at all: Draco Malfoy trusted him. Trusted him to bring back his magic, trusted him to keep his word, maybe even subconsciously trusted him to keep him safe while he slept. So that was what Harry did.

# Chapter Twenty-Four

*Chapter 24 of 28*

After the war, Harry Potter is left with no one to save, no one to fight, and one extra wand. Draco Malfoy escapes punishment by leaving the country... or so he thinks. Seven years pass before they see each other again. Draco is no longer the master of his wand and a battle of talent and wills ensues. A story of a wand without a true master, and two men who fight to master each other... and themselves.

*This chapter was written by keppiehed.*

Draco clutched his wand so hard he thought it might break in his fist. He didn't have his magic back, he knew that, but he felt more connected to it now than he had in years. He could feel the power running through it, like sap runs in a maple right before the spring. They were drawn by a thread now.

He wasn't thinking of that now, though. The bite of the wand in his hand was nothing. He gripped it harder, almost willing it to break. All of this, for nothing. Draco let his forehead rest against the marble. The fight had gone out of him. The cold wasn't soothing...it chilled him and reminded him of how empty he really was.

"You'd be so ashamed. Everything I have become, you'd hate it." Draco said the words aloud, his voice echoing in the sepulchre. "I would say I'm sorry, but that doesn't mean anything. I tried so hard to avenge you. I worked to get my magic back, and I'm almost there, Mother! But it's all changing around and falling apart. I would give this wand to you, lay it right at your feet to bring you back. I wish it would." Draco's head swam. He wanted to blame it on his recent illness, but the truth was, he was heartsick. He had put off a visit to his mother's tomb for far too long, and now that he was here, he was steeped in regret. She didn't live to see this day that her son was a failure in every way, but she could surely see him from a better vantage point now, and she must be disappointed in him. Tears clogged his throat. He hated himself. He had let her die because he'd been powerless, he couldn't win back his wand, and now he had fallen for Harry Potter, of all people. The utter shame of his situation, of what he had allowed himself to become, washed over him, and he bowed his head and let the tears fall.

"I'm so sorry, Mother. I know it doesn't mean anything. I know you would regret having me for a son...I failed you. I didn't know I was this way. I would change it if I could, but I can't. I would change so many things ..." Draco sobbed, the floodgates finally open. He hadn't been able to cry for her, for himself, for so long. Everything had always been locked up in an icy numbness in his chest. To sit by her grave and tell her ... it might not solve anything, but he couldn't fight it anymore. With no one there to witness his contemptible weakness, he let himself pour out his heartache and just cry.

He didn't know how long he sat there on the cold stone floor on the Malfoy family crypt, but when his pent-up emotions had run their course, he was exhausted. The air was cold and his knees numb. He slumped and sat with his back to the grave.

Draco soaked up the stillness. He had never let himself mourn his mother before. It was as if he had held a sliver of her death in his heart ... and coming here took the thorn out. It still hurt...he knew it always would...but he started to let go of grief he hadn't even known he'd had.

After the tempest of his melancholy passed and he was able to just sit in the silence, the air moved in the subtlest of shifts. Draco would have missed it if he hadn't been attuned to the quiet. Then he felt her there with him, even though he had never believed in such a thing. He didn't have to; it was as simple as the smell her perfume. No one had a scent like his mother. She was known for her prized jonquils, a breed of hothouse amaryllis that was her namesake. As a result of working with them so closely, she always had a unique blend of hyacinth and jasmine that made him think of deep green calm and the myths she would tell him while she stroked his forehead with her cool fingers. Draco felt her so strongly just then that he turned his head, expecting to see her. Her presence was everywhere, and he felt love, only that and nothing else. He closed his eyes, feeling her, remembering her ... and then she faded. He could tell when she was gone...like a candle had snuffed, her glow was extinguished. He knew that it was the end; she had said her goodbye to him. She had been waiting for him to come, and now she was gone.

Tears pooled again in Draco's eyes, but he felt a weight lift. She wasn't angry with him, or disappointed. She loved him. The liquid spilled over onto his cheeks as he got to his feet. Those were things that he felt about himself, but his mother had forgiven him, if indeed she had ever had cause to be upset in the first place. Draco had to do the same. It was time to leave this place and work on his future. He had to stop clinging to the past and to old hatred...of others, and of himself. He could see that now.

When he stepped outside of the mausoleum, a ray of sunshine nearly blinded him, and he was glad to step out into the world again from the dark.

\*

Draco stared out of the windows of the solarium and watched the rain sheet against the glass. An inauspicious day to begin their lessons again, to be sure. At least they wouldn't have to go outside. Although, truth be told, after the first atrocious incidents involving ruined merino trousers, Draco was starting to enjoy his time out of doors. Not that he would admit it, he thought hastily. He didn't want to turn over that leaf too far, too fast. Pretty soon he would be a person of unrecognizably lax morals, running around in cut-off shorts and lounging around on the grass as if he hadn't a care in the world! Draco shuddered at the thought of daisies in his hair.

"Are you sure you're okay?"

Draco whirled at the sound of Potter's voice behind him. "I'm no invalid!" he snapped, more sharply than he had intended in his surprise. To cover his embarrassment at being ruffled and at his unintended gruffness, he said the first thing that came to mind. "You look like the sick one, in fact."

Although it was true, Draco instantly regretted his words. Potter was clearly battling some sort of indisposition, but Draco could guess that it wasn't the flu. However, he wanted to start fresh and not mention the past. He cleared his throat and made an effort to calm down. Why was he so on edge?

"I'm fine," Potter replied. The dark circles under his eyes seemed to belie his words, but both men just stood there, neither willing to contest the fragile untruth.

Draco ran a hand through his hair. "We can't go outside." He wanted to cringe at his overstatement of the obvious. Where was his verbal facility? Had his glibness deserted him so quickly? When had Potter ever made him nervous? Draco squared his shoulders. This wouldn't do!

Potter gave a half-smile. "I thought we both might want to ease into this lesson. I ... er, don't have a schedule, though."

Draco scowled. "Are you poking fun at me?"

"I wouldn't poke ... fun, that is." Potter smirked.

Draco sucked his breath in at the implication. Was Potter *flirting* with him? Draco couldn't bear to meet his gaze and find out. Suddenly the stakes had changed; the game was a new one. Draco was on uneven playing ground, and he had no idea what to do. In the past, he had always been the aggressor. He'd been suave and sure. Now, he felt skittish and completely out of his depth. In fact, Draco felt almost ... virginal. The thought pushed itself into his mind, unbidden and unwelcome, and Draco's face flamed. Where had that come from? He was no virgin!

Potter tried to hide a smile, but Draco could see it, and it raised his ire. Was Potter laughing at him? "Poke away, Potter. I can take it." Then, realizing what he said and how it sounded, Draco was horrified. "Fun, that is. Poke fun. I can take it. All the fun you want. Because I can take it, and hand it right back. And then we'll see who can take what, where." Draco wanted to smack his own babbling face. Why wouldn't he shut up?

Potter seemed more amused than necessary. "Hm. I guess we will. But before any poking and handing goes on, why don't we try to get a lesson in, okay?"

Both men fell into awkward silence. The word 'lesson' had a charged meaning, now that they were aware of what Lucius thought they had been doing all this time during them. Draco's mind spun out, his imagination conjuring all sorts of wild scenarios that his father had contemplated he and Potter in. It was both alarming and strangely ... arousing. Draco was horrified to feel a stirring in his groin. He coughed and choked.

"Are you okay?" Potter walked over and pounded him on the back.

Draco danced away; Potter's touch was a brand he could feel through his light sweater. He swallowed, trying in vain to regain his composure. What was his problem? His forehead beaded in sweat, further distressing him. He was completely discombobulated. By *Potter*, of all people! It was unacceptable. He had to regain control of himself...and of his thoughts.

Potter's eyes were wide behind his glasses, and he put up his hands as if he were dealing with a wild animal or a deranged person. "It's okay, Draco. Let's just take it slow."

"Don't condescend to me!" Draco's temper snapped, and he felt more himself. Relief flooded through him. *This*, he could relate to. He had never been in the position of liking someone before...

It hit him like a bludge to the brain. He fancied Potter! Was *that* what it felt like to nurse a crush on someone? He had always been on the receiving end of them before, of course, but never reciprocated. He was used to manipulating the tender feelings of others' regard, but having his own object of affection was a different story entirely. Draco chanced a glance at Potter and felt something wrench in the area of his chest. He found that he didn't like the feeling one bit. Potter couldn't find out exactly what effect he had...no doubt he'd hold it over Draco's head.

"Are you sure you're ready for this? We can wait, if you aren't rec..." Potter bit off what he was about to say, which Draco could tell was 'recovered'. "Ready."

"I'm as ready as you are!" Draco shot back. "Let's begin."

Potter sighed. "You just seem a little ... worked up. Don't forget that you need to be calm. So, concentrate on your breathing. It's been a while since we've had a lesson."

Draco tried not to blush. He closed his eyes and breathed. His mind wouldn't clear, though. All he could think of was the man standing just across from him. He could reach out and touch him, he was that close.

"Are you ready?"

His voice, so husky ... Draco nodded. Ready for what, though, he couldn't say.

"Okay, here is what I want you to do. Think of your..."

A pop distracted them both. Draco's eyes flew open, and he was shocked to see Peachy standing in the solarium.

"Peachy? What are you doing here?" Draco frowned. This didn't bode well. Draco was sure that Pansy hadn't had a sudden change of heart for no reason.

If it was possible for Peachy to look more miserable than usual, she did. She was cringing, her little fists clutched and her arms drawn into herself as if she were in pain. Draco had scarcely seen a more wretched looking creature. She said something, but it was inaudible.

"Huh?" Potter said, looking confused.

"Speak up!" Draco said. He didn't have time for this.

Peachy hunched over. "I be coming to say that Miss Pansy be needing back the lock of hair she give you as a sign of her affection." Peachy spoke to the floor.

"What?" Potter gasped.

"What the fuck are you talking about?" Draco thundered. "You aren't making sense!"

Peachy cowered, clearly unhappy about her task. It took her several starts before she could get the next part out. "Miss Pansy be saying that she give you a token of her esteem, and it be disgraced. She be demanding it back, and says it can't stay here in this ... house of sin." Peachy flinched.

"I don't..." Draco was about to throw the father of all tantrums when a memory tickled the back of his brain. He vaguely remembered Pansy pressing a locket on him back when they were sixth-years. He hadn't given it any thought at the time. He didn't even know where it was. This was just Pansy being a bitch. "You can tell Pansy to shove that locket right up her..."

"Tureen!" Peachy blurted.

"What?" Draco blinked.

"Miss Pansy also be wanting back her family's heirloom soup tureen. She says it's Wedgwood, and you have it."

Draco sighed. "*Accio tureen...*" He winced. The motion was automatic. Nothing felt more ridiculous than waving an impotent wand around. Draco turned to Potter. "Er, do you mind? It would speed things up here considerably."

Potter was standing with his arms crossed over his chest. "Do I mind collecting all of your girlfriend's stuff for you?" His eyes were narrowed.

Draco had a feeling he may be treading dangerous ground, but it was too late. "She's not my girlfriend. She's a friend, who's a girl."

"Thanks for that distinction," Potter said. He whipped his wand out. "*Accio Pansy's shit!*"

Things were crumbling out of Draco's hands faster than he could hold onto them. "She's not even a friend, as you can see." He didn't like this feeling of apologizing for something when he wasn't quite sure what he'd done wrong.

"I can see just fine what she is," Potter grumbled.

Peachy was making little whimpering noises, looking back and forth between the two of them. It was only a moment more of awkward silence until the big piece of china flew through the air. Potter caught it with one hand. The locket came in short order, followed by three pictures and a trinket box.

"There!" Draco said. He didn't need to feel guilty, just because Pansy had shoved some junk on him and she was trying to make trouble with her house-elf. "Take your mistress' stuff and get out. I'm changing the wards, so don't try to pop back in unexpectedly."

Peachy nodded dejectedly. "Peachy be understanding. But Peachy wants Master Draco to know that she likes you. And Master Harry." She sneaked a glance up.

"Thanks, Peachy," Potter said.

"Just ... go," Draco said.

The house-elf gathered the items and was gone in a flash, her regret nearly palpable.

Draco turned to Potter. "Okay, I was all set to concentrate. I think I'm ready."

"Well, too bad," Potter said, his voice flat. "Because I sure as hell am not ready. What, you're just going to ignore that, pretend it didn't happen?"

"What?" Draco had, in fact, been hoping for just that.

"That's so *typical*, Draco!" Potter clenched his fists. "How can we get anywhere if you keep ignoring everything?"

"What's so important? Pansy is just trying to make trouble, that's all. I can't see how that has anything to do with us." Draco wanted to cringe at the unintended intimacy of his own words. They just hung there ... *anything to do with us ... with us...*

Potter must have thought so, too, because he paused a moment before he responded. "I'm not going to ignore the fact that you have a fuck-buddy on the side, Draco. I'm not that kind of guy. Just so you know."

"A ..." Draco's mouth fell open. Potter thought that he and Pansy ... A swirl of conflicting thoughts jammed up his brain. He was overjoyed that Potter's problem was jealousy, but less so that he had to admit his ... shortcomings. "Er, we aren't. That. So ... not a problem." Maybe that would do?

"Don't lie to me, Draco." Potter pocketed his wand, clearly at his limit. "I *saw* the article in *The Quibbler*, just like everyone else. I know exactly what you two are to each other!"

Draco winced. "We aren't!" Draco could feel an uncomfortable sliding in his stomach. He wanted his way without having to tell the truth. How could he get around it? "I ..." One look at Potter's face, and he saw that he was hanging on by the thinnest of margins. One false step, and it was over. Was his pride worth it? Draco took a breath and came clean. "I went to see her, but I couldn't do it. I thought of you the whole time. Okay? Are you happy?" Draco had never been so embarrassed. Well, he had, but this was a close second.

"Actually, yes."

Draco looked up to see all of the anger had ignited into something different. Potter's eyes, which a moment ago had been simmering with heat of one kind, were now smouldering. A jolt of passion went straight to Draco's cock.

Draco didn't think about it. He didn't know who made the first move, and it didn't matter. His last conscious thought was taking a step towards Potter, towards salvation, and that was it. Potter was there in his arms before he had a chance to say no, to think about all the reasons why it was a bad idea. The heat of Potter's mouth on his seared his thoughts, and all he could do was *feel*. Like he'd never drawn breath before that moment, and someone gave him life; Potter was in his veins, flowing, a part of him he hadn't known he was missing. He couldn't get enough, never wanted to go without him again.

Draco had never felt such a frenzy before, a mad desire to meld with someone. What were these clothes, these barriers? He yanked at his shirt, heedless of the cloth, just wanting free to quench this fire. He was the tinder and Potter was the spark. All this time...was it like this for everyone, or were they the only two who felt this way? He didn't care, he just wanted more.

Potter was making those little gasping moans, the kind that had driven Draco to such frustration behind his bedroom wall. The memory of that time, listening to Potter touch himself, only made Draco even harder now. His iron control was shattered. He was going to come, if they didn't go faster. "Hurry," he breathed, not recognizing his own voice, as close as he would ever come to begging Potter for anything. Although, in this moment, he thought he might reconsider that.

Potter's glazed eyes were nearly his undoing. "Do you have lube with you?"

"Huh?" Draco was distracted by Potter's lips, which were deliciously swollen. He wanted to bite them.

"*Accio lube*," Potter murmured. "You can't know how long I've imagined this. Being inside of you."

It took a second for Potter's words to trickle into Draco's overheated brain, but when they got through, they had the effect of a cold *Aguamenti*. "What?"

Potter nibbled on his earlobe. "We'll go slowly. I won't hurt you, you can trust me."

Those words in the same sentence, hurt and trust, set off a warning bell. Draco pulled away. "What the *hell* are you talking about?"

Potter frowned. "Well, I just assumed that you... but listen, it's okay. If you want to top, we can do that. Just relax."

"Top?" Draco ran his hands through his hair. The whole scenario was sounding really unpleasant.

Potter took a big breath. "Okay, whoa. Let's take a step back. Top, bottom? I figured you'd thought about this a little more. You just seem like such a natural bottom, but you don't have to be..."

"What?" Draco screeched. He hadn't even heard the term before that moment, but he was insulted. He had a pretty good idea what it meant, and he was no *bottom*! "Well, I don't know what you *thought*, Potter, but Malfoys don't *bottom* for anyone!"

Potter cocked his head. "You just might change your mind about that one day. And I don't know what you thought, either, but I can assure you that this Malfoy..." he pointed a finger at Draco's bare chest, "does a lot of things that other Malfoys don't."

Draco sucked in a breath. Oh, *Merlin*. Potter was right! His lifelong philosophy was shot!

"And I said I would bottom, so calm down." Potter smiled. "Let's just talk about what you had in mind. I don't know if you are ... prepared for this, exactly."

Draco's mind was spinning. What *had* he thought? Actually, he didn't know. But the idea of top, bottom...of something being shoved somewhere, of the need for *Accioing lube*, for Merlin's sake...it was all too much. Draco jumped up, his panic finally overwhelming him. "I have to go, actually. I have an ... appointment. Elsewhere." Draco couldn't bear to look at Potter's face, but he had to get away. He didn't care where he went, as long as he left. He ran out of the solarium in blind flight. It was a testament to his distress that he left his sweater lying crumpled on the divan in his wake.

# Chapter Twenty-Five

Chapter 25 of 28

After the war, Harry Potter is left with no one to save, no one to fight, and one extra wand. Draco Malfoy escapes punishment by leaving the country... or so he thinks. Seven years pass before they see each other again. Draco is no longer the master of his wand and a battle of talent and wills ensues. A story of a wand without a true master, and two men who fight to master each other... and themselves.

*This chapter was written by literaryspell.*

Sunlight eased through the trees and tickled the tall windows of the solarium. It was a peaceful place, Harry reflected; somewhere to clear your head or perhaps talk yourself out of a raging erection.

Harry sat carefully in one of the chaises, groaning at the tightness of his trousers. How many times had he watched Draco run away from him? How many more times would it happen? Couldn't anything just be easy with them?

So Draco obviously wasn't ready for sex. Harry could respect that. It was a big step, especially for someone who hadn't even realized he was gay until the latest possible moment. Harry thought back to his own first experiences...with Justin. He'd been fumbling and self-conscious, and Justin had talked him through it, albeit with that little smirk that Harry had come to hate. Harry supposed he shouldn't have moved so quickly with Draco, but he made it impossible to take things at a normal pace.

One moment Harry was flirting (or trying to) and the next Draco's mouth was under his and ~~God~~, the taste of him. It was unlike anything Harry had ever known. His control had spiralled in seconds...the weight of Draco's hands on him, the need that was so obvious between them. Before he'd known what he was saying, he was asking about lube.

A particularly punishing stream of light broke into the room...Harry winced. It reminded him of Draco: bright and golden but capable of burning; annoying when it got in your face but still something you want to see when you first woke up.

"Damn you, Draco," Harry muttered. Why did he always have to run? Why did it feel like Harry was always running after him? Even as he thought that, however, a voice in the back of his mind...Hermione, again...reminded him that Draco had sought him out at the Black Bear. Draco had tried to reach him through his drunken stupor; Draco had wanted to *work things out*.

Draco was like glass and Harry's grip was just too fucking tight.

Harry stood. "I need a drink," he said under his breath. He was halfway to the Malfoy's dining room sideboard when he remembered he'd promised Draco he wouldn't drink. *Well*, he mentally amended, *I promised to try. But surely this is an occasion for a drink? Draco will understand...* Then Harry laughed at himself. Yes, because Draco was so very *understanding*. It wasn't worth the fight, the way Draco would turn cool and distant, like he'd expected nothing less of Harry, yet in his eyes would be disappointment. Harry's hand shook as he drew it through his hair. For the first time, it occurred to him how difficult it would be to stop drinking, how much of a crutch it had become over the years and even more so once he'd been taken off as an Auror.

He'd been relieved of his duties so he could give Draco his full attention and he hadn't done that. He'd retreated to drinking and acting like a child because it was easier, it was what he was used to. No more, Harry decided. He'd made a promise to Draco, but it was time to make a promise to himself. He would stop drinking. He wanted his old life back, the life where he turned to his friends for help when he needed it instead of taking it all into himself, the life where people had admired him for his competence and not just his name. And maybe a part of that life could contain Draco...Draco who deserved a teacher who was sober and in full control. Draco who deserved a lover who didn't jump right into important decisions just because it was what he was used to doing.

Always the type to feel better after making a decision, Harry gave one last look at the bottles lined up and walked out of the room. He wasn't certain where Draco had gone, but his room was a good guess.

Harry knocked on his door but there was no answer. He considered leaving Draco to himself but decided that wasn't in keeping with his new attitude. He opened the door and froze when Draco left the en suite bathroom at the same time. His cheeks were flushed and there was a languid grace to his movements.

"Oh," Harry said, unable to take his eyes away. He knew like he knew his own name that Draco had just finished wanking.

"Potter! Since when are you welcome in my bedchamber?" Draco didn't quite meet his eyes, instead walking over to his desk and randomly arranging papers.

"Maybe I'm hoping to change that."

Draco threw him a sharp glance. "Why would you think that's something that can be changed?"

"Because of the way you kissed me." Harry took a few steps into the room, feeling confident...if not totally certain...that Draco wouldn't throw him out.

"You kissed me," Draco said weakly.

"Are you sure?" Harry pressed. He couldn't rightly remember himself, but he couldn't help pushing Draco's buttons.

Eyes narrowed, Draco didn't respond. He crossed his arms over his chest and looked pointedly at the door.

"I'll leave," Harry said. "When you make me."

Draco scoffed. "I don't have to make you. I'm telling you to get out."

"Since our lesson was cut short, I think we should pick up where we left off."

"We are *not* doing *anything*... like that... again, Potter," Draco said in a low voice. He did meet Harry's eyes and Harry had to wonder at how expressive Draco's features could be. He thought he was hiding everything behind layers of ice and stone, but even in his forced indifference Harry could tell he very much wanted them to kiss again...he just couldn't say it.

"I meant the lesson, actually," Harry said with a chuckle. "But I'll keep that in mind."

Draco's cheeks flared with red and he seemed speechless...but that only lasted a moment. "So I make you leave and the lesson's finished?"

"If you can make me leave, using magic, then I'll consider it a complete lesson and you'll have the night to yourself."

"Fine." Draco cast his eyes about the room as if searching for ideas of what spell to use.

After a moment, Harry's feet felt warm...then hot. He smiled at Draco's ingenuity but cast a counter-spell to whatever heat hex Draco was using. Then a strong wind assailed his chest and propelled him a long stride backward before he planted his feet. Harry frowned, displeased that Draco had even pushed him that far. With a wave of his hand, he redirected the wind into the wall. A painting of Malfoy Manor from centuries before crashed to the ground, and Harry fixed the dented frame before Draco could hurl abuse at him for destroying an heirloom.

Draco paced back and forth at his end of the bedroom. Every now and then Harry would feel ticklish or freezing cold or, and...he had to give Draco credit for this one...the immediate need to use the loo, but Harry countered them all easily.

Even so, it was a step forward. Draco was now casting, without a wand, offensive spells. They were weak, unfocused, and temporary, but there was no doubt he was improving.

Harry was about to tell Draco to just give up and relent to a real, full-length lesson when a sensation of pleasant warmth stole over him. He furrowed his brows. Why was he in Draco's room? He looked around. Draco was standing by his desk, staring at Harry with an intense look in his eyes. Harry rather liked the look, but he didn't like not knowing what was going on.

"What am I doing here?" he asked.

Draco smirked. "You were just leaving."

"Oh." Harry nodded. "Well... sorry to bother you." He turned and left the room, throwing a glance over his shoulder at Draco, who seemed to be trembling with the effort of... something. He frowned again and shut the door behind him.

As soon as he did, the knowledge of what had happened hit him like...

...hit him like a fucking Confundus.

Harry turned on his heel and threw the door open. Draco was standing where he'd left him, clutching his sides and laughing his bloody arse off.

"You Confunded me!" Harry cried, appalled that it had been that easy.

"And it was beautiful! You should have seen your poor, confused face." He broke out into renewed laughter.

Despite his embarrassment at being so easily defeated, the enormity of what Draco had accomplished was too much to overlook. "Draco... you did it. You cast an offensive spell that worked *perfectly*."

Draco's eyes widened as if he himself hadn't considered the impact of his accomplishment beyond humiliating Harry. "I did," he said, sounding awed.

Harry strode forward. He only meant to shake Draco's hand, to congratulate him, but he found himself pulling Draco forward by the shoulder and kissing him, hard.

Draco opened to the kiss, which was Harry's first surprise. His second was Draco taking control, his hands bracketing Harry's face and directing him as their mouths moved together. The first time they'd kissed, Harry had been arse-up drunk; the second time, they'd come in their trousers together; the third time, Harry'd scared Draco into running.

Harry was determined that none of these outcomes would occur this time...not even the second, as pleasant as it had been. He broke the kiss slowly, going back for two more, shorter kisses, part of him unable to believe he was stopping the kiss on purpose. They breathed each other's air for a moment, and for the first time Draco didn't seem ready to fall apart or face a crisis.

"I know you'll probably take this the wrong way, but I'm proud of you, Draco."

Draco looked away but his lips curled the  *tiniest*  bit, and Harry knew his words were welcomed.

"You've come so far. And your determination is really admirable."

"Well, I suppose the teacher must be credited if the student excels."

Harry was taken aback. That was almost a thank-you. That was almost Draco saying Harry was good at teaching him. He closed his eyes against the sudden warmth inside him. Validation, no matter who it had come from in the past, had never felt so damn *earned*.

"I appreciate that," he said instead of voicing his more intense inner thoughts.

Draco nodded, and then they were separating. Draco straightened his robes and Harry mussed his hair. Had they just kissed and nothing bad had come of it? Had they just complimented each other without provoking an apocalypse? It was almost too much to contemplate.

"So I suppose you're free for the evening, seeing as you definitely got me out of your room."

Draco was silent for a moment. Then, "I rather feel like continuing. That is, if you're willing."

"Draco." Harry smiled and touched his arm. "I'm willing. Just say the word." He tried to infuse his multiple meanings into his words, and he knew Draco was more than smart enough to pick up on it.

Draco cleared his throat. "I see. Well, shall we continue with the lesson, then?"

"Sure."

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Draco declared the lesson finished a few hours later. He hadn't been able to recreate the strength of his Confundus, but he'd managed a few other lesser offensive spells, and it had been, overall, a very productive lesson.

"I'm starving," Harry said after his stomach announced that very fact by gurgling. "Must be time for dinner by now."

Draco checked an antique pocket watch. "Perfect timing. Let's go down."

They descended the stairs together, and Harry was struck by the easy camaraderie they shared. Could it be like that most of the time? he wondered. Or were those moments the exception to the rule of fighting and frustration?

Harry's eyebrows shot up when he saw Luna Lovegood, looking spectacularly out of place, at the bottom of the stairs. She was chatting with Lucius, who eyed with distaste her bright purple robes adorned with bells on the sleeves...bells that jingled quite vociferously, as Luna tended to gesticulate when she was interested in something.

"Harry!" she cried when she saw him, and Harry could tell she'd interrupted Lucius mid-sentence because his face went a humorous shade of red and the snapping of his jaw was almost audible.

"Luna, how are you? What are you doing here?" He hurried to hug her, and her bells chimed as she returned the embrace.

She looked between Harry and Draco, a glimmer in her eye. "Mr. Malfoy invited me. You can imagine my reluctance, but he was quite persistent. Seems he didn't like something we printed in the recent edition of *The Quibbler*."

Harry glanced at Draco, who went pale, his eyes fixed on his father. Lucius didn't seem to notice and simply nodded.

"I take issue with malicious gossip being spread about my family," Lucius said, nose high in the air.

"No names were used, Mr. Malfoy. No one was identified until you owled me."

"I just want confirmation of who wrote the letter, Miss Lovegood. And in the meantime, we shall have a lovely dinner." With that, Lucius turned and exited, leaving Draco, Harry, and Luna to look at each other rather uneasily before following him.

"I can't tell him it was Pansy," Luna whispered to them as they walked.

"I know," Harry said. "Don't worry about it. He has to know already, right, Draco?"

Draco, looking peaky, nodded. "I don't have many female friends. Not to mention the fact that Pansy took Peachy back around the same time. I have no idea what he's really after."

The look of worry on Draco's face made Harry react. He put his hand on Draco's back, trying to reassure him. But Draco didn't respond, only sped his gait until they were all in the dining room.

"This looks lovely," Luna said, beaming as she took in the repast. "Did you know duck is the main food source of Spinnergrins? I feel like I should be twirling around before we eat."

Draco and Lucius looked at a loss but Harry just smiled and pulled out a chair for Luna, who did, indeed, spin once before taking her seat. Harry sat beside her, across from Draco, and Lucius sat at the head as usual.

"So, Miss Lovegood, tell me. How has *The Quibbler* been getting along without Draco?"

Draco groaned, very softly, and speared his duck. Harry tried to offer him silent support, but Draco wouldn't meet his eyes.

"We're doing well, but the truth is Draco truly was an asset." To Draco, she said, "We'd love to have you back."

"I am simply not the right fit for such a position," Draco said stiffly.

"Meaning you're too good for it," Harry mumbled, annoyed. Why couldn't Draco ever get off his high horse long enough to mingle with the regular people? It would always frustrate him that Draco thought he was too good for such work because it meant, in effect, that Draco was too good for the likes of *him*.

"Meaning," Draco said, his eyes narrowed at Harry, "that I was not the right fit."

Luna just smiled and pushed the rice on her plate away from the duck. "Well, the job will be waiting for you. Or another one. If you change your mind."

"I won't," Draco said.

After that, the conversation was stilted. At first, Lucius attempted to engage Luna in conversation, and he was actually charming...or his rendition of it, anyway. To Harry, it only seemed smarmy. But Luna was in her own world as always and could only be bothered to respond to Lucius' actual inquiries half the time. The other half she would pose a question of her own or offer up an imaginative factoid...both responses causing Lucius to become more and more unimpressed with her.

Harry thought Lucius should be grateful that Luna had even considered his request, given that Luna had been a victim of his during the war...and the manor itself could not be a pleasant place for her to return to. But Luna was made of stern stuff, Harry knew, despite her outward appearance.

Draco was quiet, picking at his food and not adding much to the conversations around him. Harry took the rare opportunity of Lucius' focus being off his son to study Draco. He did seem tense; the line of his shoulders was straight and his movements were too precise. When he was relaxed, his natural grace shone through, making each gesture seem easy and elegant. When he was upset or nervous, however, he became stiff, as though he was thinking about each action before he did it.

Only once did Draco glance up and meet Harry's eyes. He lifted an eyebrow and Harry smiled in response. Draco held his gaze for a long moment, seeming to search for something in Harry's face. Whatever he saw or did not see, Harry didn't know. Draco eventually looked away, down to his plate, and continued eating.

Luna was the last to finish eating, and waiting for her to take the final bite was agonising. She would lift the fork halfway to her mouth before answering Lucius or addressing Harry, and Harry saw Draco's eyes on the morsel of food as well. At long last she ate it and wiped her mouth daintily with a napkin.

"Miss Lovegood, are you of a mind to talk business with me? I shan't keep you long."

Luna smiled and rose. "Of course. It's good luck to talk business on a full stomach."

Lucius nodded indulgently and they retired to Lucius' study.

"I'm for bed," Draco announced.

"It's still so early. Did the lesson wear you out?" Harry didn't want Draco to leave just yet. Sure, Draco annoyed him and could be a git, but Harry still wanted him. Maybe it wasn't even despite his flaws...Harry was beginning to suspect it was *because* of them. Draco was an amalgamation of things that Harry didn't like, but all together it made a fascinating sum, and Harry didn't want that sum to go to bed.

"Perhaps. I think it was more my father, to be honest. He can be... tiring."

"I've been saying that all along," Harry said. He walked beside Draco as he headed to the stairs. "Well, I'll walk to you to your room."

"I assure you, that is quite unnecessary. I've found my way there countless times over my life. Never lost my way once."

Harry chuckled. "I'm not worried you'll get lost."

Draco looked at him from the corner of his eyes, then just as quickly looked away when Harry caught his gaze.

"Then what is the purpose of this?"

Shrugging, Harry nudged Draco with his shoulder. He fully expected Draco to shove him away, but he absorbed the contact and kept going. Harry smiled to himself.

Progress. "Maybe I'm not as eager as you are to say goodnight."

Draco said nothing...and he didn't smile or otherwise give away that he was pleased, but Harry fancied he could sense Draco's... maybe not happiness, but contentedness. At least he wasn't angry.

"You're not going to bed, then?" Draco asked. Their steps slowed once they'd gone up the stairs and began to make their way down the hallway.

"I think I should stay up and make sure Luna gets home all right."

"You don't have to protect her from my father, Potter. He's not going to lock her in the..." Draco's steps faltered as he seemed to remember Luna's previous history with Malfoy Manor. He shook his head, looking awed. "She's very brave, I'll give her that."

"She is," Harry agreed. "And she's right about the job, Draco. You should take it."

"I don't want to talk about it." Draco stopped in front of his door and turned to Harry. "Good night."

Harry smiled. He wanted to lean in and kiss Draco like they'd just gone on a date. No, more than that, he wanted to follow Draco into his room and do things together that would horrify and appal the portraits that littered the manor. He didn't, though. He was determined not to move too fast for Draco this time. He couldn't stop himself from reaching out and touching Draco's hand...a quick brush, a caress that was difficult to end.

"Good night, Draco."

## Chapter Twenty-Six

*Chapter 26 of 28*

After the war, Harry Potter is left with no one to save, no one to fight, and one extra wand. Draco Malfoy escapes punishment by leaving the country... or so he thinks. Seven years pass before they see each other again. Draco is no longer the master of his wand and a battle of talent and wills ensues. A story of a wand without a true master, and two men who fight to master each other... and themselves.

*This chapter was written by keppiehed.*

*Maybe I'm not as eager as you are to say goodnight ...*

Draco punched the pillow in frustration, hoping to find a spot that would allow him to fall into sleep. Try as he would, there didn't seem to be a place on it that stilled his thoughts of Potter's brilliantly green eyes...brighter than any eyes had the right to be behind lenses as thick and unfashionable as he sported...as he gave a sidelong glance to see if Draco had noticed the companionable bump he'd given him in the hallway. Draco had. Of course he had. As if Draco were not attuned to every nuance that Potter made.

*Good night, Draco ...*

Draco sighed. The remembrance of where Potter had brushed his hand was still burned into his brain. It had taken all of Draco's self-control to affect nonchalance, but he was paying the price for it here and now, all night long, as he replayed the memory of Potter walking away and into his own room. How long had Draco stood there in the hallway, watching Potter's closed door and rubbing his hand absently, before he'd come to his senses and gone to bed, only to search in vain for elusive sleep? Sometimes he wondered what he was fighting against. Everything was muddled in his head, when he used to be so sure.

Draco turned over onto his back and stared into the darkness of his room. There were no easy answers floating above his head to be seen, but in this case, he was sure a good wank couldn't hurt.

\*

"Draco!"

Draco came to wakefulness through the gray layers of sleep. He hadn't been dreaming; it felt like he had just closed his eyes, in fact, and now *someone* was shaking his arm. He was swimming up through the transparent veils of slumber and closer to awareness. Subconsciously, he tried to stay immersed in the peaceful blank, where nothing could harm him, but whomever was shaking him was more insistent than he could be, and he opened his eyes a second later. He was staring at Potter.

"I didn't think you were the type to be such a heavy sleeper," Potter mused. "That's ... interesting."

Draco blinked before the full import of what was happening occurred. He was speechless. *Potter* was here in his *bedchamber* waking him up! The nerve! "I'm not!" was all he could sputter, struck by the utter ludicrousness of the entire situation. Even his own parents hadn't seen him in bed since he was a child! He'd had servants to help him rise. He had the sudden urge to clutch his bedcovers to his chest. Then he thought of his hair and wanted to pull the sheets all the way over his head.

"I beg to differ," Potter laughed. "I just spent the better part of ten minutes trying to wake you up."

"I was tired," Draco managed. He was aware that it was a less than stellar response, but the idea that Potter was seeing him ungroomed was giving him an apoplexy. "I didn't sleep well."

"I gathered that," Potter said.

Draco frowned and sat up. The damage was done; at least he was wearing fine pyjamas. Maybe Potter would see that he had on silk charmeuse and be distracted by the rest of his general dishabille. After all, he was the hallmark of high fashion even in bed...surely that was worth something? "Why are you here in my personal chambers? I thought we discussed this last evening."

"Chambers?" Potter had the audacity to laugh. "Who says that? Anyway, we *did* discuss it. And I respect your space, I do. But it isn't a museum, Draco. I knocked, and you didn't say 'stay out' or anything. You didn't answer at all. So I knew you were in here, and I came in to get you."

"So I have to reply in the negative to keep you out of my room? Aren't the wards enough for you to get the picture that I prefer my space? And why didn't you just let me sleep?" Draco felt his frustration level rising. He wasn't even out of bed, and they were fighting. Why did Potter always make him feel so unsettled?

Potter cocked his head. "The wards let me walk through. I didn't have to dismantle them. And we had a lesson today. In fact, an hour ago. You slept through breakfast."

"What?" Draco bolted out of bed. He hated being caught off-guard. He didn't usually rely on the house-elves for their service, but occasionally they had come in handy for times when he was particularly stressed and missed his wake-up call. Now he felt adrift, and he didn't like looking weak in front of Potter, of all people. As if he *needed* him for help getting ready in the morning. The very idea. "What time is it?"

"Eleven."

"*What?*" Draco screeched. He had never slept this late before. He unbuttoned the silk top, mindful of the delicate buttonholes. As he folded the shirt in haste, he was aware of being watched. Potter was still in the room, his eyes decidedly *not* on the admirable hem job. Draco felt heat shoot to his groin at the idea of being watched, and he angled himself away to hide his burgeoning erection, which the silk wouldn't cover. He cleared his throat. "Do you *mind?*"

"No." Potter folded his arms over his chest. "Not a bit. You can keep going; it doesn't bother me at all."

Draco gritted his teeth. "I *meant*, could I have a bit of privacy, if it isn't too much to ask. Or even if it is, get the hell out."

Potter had the audacity to grin...the cheeky bugger...before he sauntered out. "I had no idea you were so modest, Draco. I'll meet you in the game room in an hour. Get some lunch...I don't want you to be hungry. Well, hungry for food, anyway," and he ducked out.

Was he so obvious? Draco was glad that Potter couldn't see the telltale blush staining his cheeks. He had to get more control of his emotions. Draco hurried into his clothes and went in search of some food. He had to calm down before the lesson.

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Draco's improvised *tempus* spell told him he was right on time. He had attempted to cast the simple time-telling charm, and it appeared to be working. Pleased, he headed off down the corridor that would take him to the game room, but as he neared his destination, his trepidation grew. The source of his nerves was easy to guess: this room, unbeknownst to Potter, held special meaning for him, and he was reluctant to face Potter at the disadvantage of being distracted. Potter couldn't know that ever since their first encounter here, this setting had played a big part in his fantasies. In his mind, he had gone over and over the backrubs that had sparked his fascination with Potter, the feel of the other man's muscles under his hands ... just the thought alone was enough to give him that familiar zing below the belt, and Draco had to draw a unsteady breath to try and control his already raging lust. He didn't want to give away his attraction to Potter; the other man might have guessed at it, but he needn't know the extent of his ... infatuation.

Draco opened the door to find the room empty. He released a breath he hadn't realized he'd been holding and the pent-up tension drained from him. Why did he let Potter get to him so much?

Draco walked around the room, letting his eyes fall on the various objects meant for amusement. It seemed that Potter had taken his offer to come here seriously, as the furniture showed signs of being moved, and Potter wasn't as meticulous about putting things away as Draco would have been. A corner of Draco's mouth lifted in a smile as he traced the strap of a Wii controller that hung off the edge of the table, ready for the next use. He couldn't help but remember their wager, and how much fun that night had been. It was the first time in their lives that he and Potter had played together instead of just competing. Draco wondered if it could be like that again, the easy camaraderie between them. He yearned for that, suddenly, and the ache was a squeezing in his chest. He hadn't even known how much he had missed just having fun and talking with someone. How long had it been since he had been comfortable with another person? Had he ever been? Draco couldn't remember. He let the controller strap fall back into place and he walked away, unsettled.

The bright colours of the dartboard caught his eye. His own handwriting still adorned the chalkboard: *Draco M.* and *Visitor*. Draco remembered writing that; it seemed so long ago, and yet it had only been a few months. He remembered his smugness and surety of winning, but it hadn't quite turned out that way, had it? Draco approached the board and erased *Visitor*. He started to write *Potter*, but he stopped himself. Why was it so hard for him to get close to anyone, to simply acknowledge another person's simple wishes? Draco erased the name and started again. *Harry P.* There. That wasn't as difficult as he was making it out to be.

Draco stared at their names side-by-side in stark relief, the tally marks of their scores too numerous to bother counting. They were well matched. On the chalkboard, anyway. In life, not so much. Draco selected a dart and stepped back; he threw it and hit a perfect bull's eye.

He threw a few more, but he remembered Potter's technique. He looked like he had learned in a more authentic way, as if he had picked up the game in a bar while talking with friends over some butterbeers. Draco closed his eyes and tried to imagine himself being so loose and free. It just wasn't his style. He lifted his arm, and knowing there was no one around to watch him fail, he allowed himself to break his stance. He kept his eyes closed and let his magic take the dart and guide it to where he knew the target was. He pictured Potter throwing it so easily, and he copied it with his magic, allowing the dart to be an extension of his reach.

"Wow, that was amazing! You're really coming along."

Draco's eyes flew open. Potter had sneaked up on him! "How long have you been there?"

"Just long enough to watch you try throwing the dart with magic. You're really making progress. That shows incredible control," Potter said. He went over to the dartboard and pointed to the target.

Draco could see that the dart hadn't hit centre. "It wasn't a bull's eye."

"Still, that's admirable. You have to be close to ready for a duel." Potter pulled the dart out and gazed at it, seemingly lost in thought.

Draco realized that Potter might see how he had changed the name above the dartboard. He didn't know if Potter would even remember what it used to read, but he was overcome with self-consciousness, as if that simple act showed too much. He walked over to the couch on the other side of the room and threw himself down on it to draw Potter's attention away. "I'm tired," he announced.

Potter set the dart on the table and came over. "How can you be? You just got up."

"Well, you woke me from a restful sleep," Draco accused him.

"Well, lucky for you, I'm a little tired, too." Potter grabbed his ankles and lifted them up, manoeuvring himself onto the couch into a sitting position with Draco's feet on his lap. "Shove over and quit hogging the couch, will you? And maybe we can just skip the lesson for today. You're doing so well that a little slacking off won't hurt, anyway."

Draco had been sprawled out, and he grew warm at the intimacy of this new position. It wasn't in any way sexual, but it was cosy, as if they were friends or long-time lovers and comfortable with each other. Draco tried not to betray his satisfaction. He wanted to seem neutral...enough distance so that Potter didn't know he really liked this, but not stiff enough to put him off.

"You know, watching you with the darts right now reminded me of this one Quidditch practice. You had the same look on your face. You probably don't remember it, but we were playing in the rain, and it was a terrible storm, and we both saw the snitch at the same time..." Potter was smiling, but he seemed to be trying to hide it.

Something jarred loose in Draco's memory, and the image flooded back, as clear as if he'd been there. "Yes! I do remember! It was the last game of the season, and I was

determined to get that snitch." He couldn't help but laugh now, although at the time, it hadn't been funny. He remembered hating Potter. Or more accurately, being drawn into an intense rivalry and just wanting to beat him at everything and show him how much better he was.

Potter laughed too, and his hand fell on Draco's foot. "We both took a trip to Madame Pomfrey's, didn't we? That was the longest night of my life, I swear. You were such a crybaby."

"I was not! You talked in your sleep, anyway. I was never so glad to be healed." Draco groaned. "That woman was a tyrant. With all of those empty beds, why did she put us right next to each other?"

"Maybe she knew something we didn't," Potter suggested. He gave Draco's foot a squeeze.

"Ha! Yeah, right, Potter. She was just a sadist, pure and simple." Draco snorted, trying to ignore the growing coils of warmth in his belly ... and points south.

"Do you remember that time in Potions when we had to stay late for detention?" Potter asked.

Draco nodded. "I'd say I'll never forget it, but first I'd have to ask you which time. It seems like we were always in trouble for something or other."

"I was thinking of when we had to re-do the Amortentia Potion."

"Ha. Yeah. Sometimes Snape was such a hard-ass. He knew we could do it; he just gave us a girly love potion to add insult to injury." Draco put his arms behind his head. He never thought he'd be able to laugh about his school days, especially not with Potter. In fact, Potter had been the source of so much angst for him that he seemed to be the overwhelming motivation for him getting through school. Draco sifted through his memories, and he was shocked to discover that nearly every one involved Potter in one way or another, since he was a child. He and Potter fighting, or studying, or on the Quidditch pitch, or in competition, being punished, Draco scheming against him ... Draco sat up. He was dumbfounded to realize that almost every moment of his formative years had Potter in it. Potter had been a part of who he was since before he'd even known it. He looked at the man across from him with eyes that were opened. Potter knew him better than anyone because he'd been there throughout all the years of Draco's life. He knew him better than his own parents. The thought was a revelation that stopped his breath.

And maybe *he* knew *Potter* better than anyone.

It couldn't be true, Draco thought. Potter had friends that he was close to. He didn't need someone like Draco. He had shared himself with others before.

"What did you smell when we brewed the potion?" Potter asked.

"What?" Draco blinked, his train of thought derailed. He didn't want Potter to know that he'd been thinking anything so serious. "I don't remember," he lied. "It's been years." He remembered all too well, though at the time he hadn't known what it meant. Or hadn't cared to acknowledge it.

"I do. Don't you want to know?" Potter's gaze was unwavering.

"No. Probably something Weasley," Draco temporized. "It could have been anything."

"But it wasn't," Potter persisted. "It was mint. And rain. Salmon and shoepolish. The hint of a good red wine, from the Bas region of Nizerand River. Although I didn't know what that was, at the time." Potter flashed his lopsided smile.

"Well, we know the Weasleys don't have that kind of good taste," Draco joked. "But really, anyone in the moneyed class has a penchant for those things."

"There is only one person I know of who smells like that," Potter said, apparently refusing to be sidetracked. "And I knew that all those years ago, I just didn't want to think it could possibly be true."

The time for truth was at hand. Draco couldn't deny it any longer, but neither was he ready to admit that maybe he and Potter could make something work, that they were meant to be together. The very idea made him feel skittish and restless, that anyone would choose to be with him forever. That was a fairytale, and he knew better than anyone that fairytales ended with childhood. When you grew up, there was only loneliness and loss. Now that he might have something worth hanging onto, he couldn't bear the thought of losing it. Instead of admitting out loud what he suspected to be true anyway, he gave into what had been simmering just below the surface. Draco leaned over and kissed Potter.

The unexpected action was not unwelcome. Draco took advantage of his position of *not* being shocked for once to take immediate dominance of the kiss. He may not have experience with men, but he had plenty of experience in the bedroom, and he put his famed skills to use, grateful to finally not feel lacking.

Potter recovered from his surprise and allowed Draco to take control. He relaxed and reciprocated, his tongue eager but compliant. Draco felt the heady rush of being in charge flood his veins as he recognized Potter allowing him to take the lead; he always had with women, of course, but nothing was quite as arousing as knowing he could dominate *this* man. He knew that Potter could fight back, but he wasn't...he was submitting and allowing Draco to dictate the pace, and something about that set a fire through Draco's veins that flared almost out of control.

Before he knew what he was doing, Draco had moved from his position next to Potter and was straddling him. The simple kissing had quickly changed to something more. How did Potter excite him so fast? He always kept a tight rein on his emotions...just included...but Potter fanned the blaze past anything he was able to control. Draco was helpless in the face of the burn and just wanted to let go and see what would come of it.

They were ripping at each other's clothes until nothing mattered...not modesty, not their past or future, not even the control that Draco valued so much. All that mattered were the sounds that Potter was making, and that he keep making them. Because of what Draco was doing.

And then Draco was desperate to participate in this act. He *wanted* this, he was sure now. It wasn't his raging libido...though that was extreme...it was the fact that he wanted to be a part of someone. He had waited for this forever, it seemed. And now the wait felt silly. Why had he run from this for so long, when it was clearly so right?

"Please, Potter. Harry," Draco moaned. He didn't recognize his own voice, and he didn't care.

Potter froze, and Draco stilled, as well. *Had he done something wrong?*

"What did you say?" Potter sounded hoarse.

Draco blushed. "Please. I'm not sure what to do."

"No. After that." Potter was staring at him.

"Oh. I said Harry." Draco tried to shrug it off, but Potter wasn't having any of it.

"Say it again."

"Harry."

Potter breathed in. "I never thought you'd do it. What made you change your mind?"

Draco swallowed and tried to redirect. "Was it worth the wait?"

Potter laughed. "Definitely. You deserve a reward. Are you sure you're ready for this, Draco?"

Draco nodded. "I am. Harry."

"So you won't freak out if I *Accio* the lube this time?" Potter grinned.

Draco concentrated. "*Accio lube!*" When the tube came flying from a nearby table, he couldn't help looking smug. "You aren't the only one who can do that now, you know. How's that?"

Potter grinned. "I guess you're as ready as you'll ever be."

Draco wasn't sure how to go about this next part. Although in theory it should have been easy to figure out, it seemed a lot more complicated than it ever had been in his previous experiences. Just as he was about to say something, though, Potter seemed to sense his discomfort and took over. It was a wordless communication that reassured Draco...he could never get past how it would be awkward with two men in his head, but in reality it was nothing like that at all. It was like nothing he had imagined, because he hadn't imagined how he would feel as he was doing it. He couldn't have known just how much tenderness he would have for this person, and he never would have suspected how aroused the little things Potter was doing would make him. In his fantasies, it was stark images and pictures devoid of feeling, but here, he could see the expression changes and hear the little groans that Potter was making. All of that added up to something he never could have dreamed of, and the reality was far better than any fantasy.

Potter was guiding him without force, telling him without words what he needed to do, and Draco didn't feel any pressure at all. He just knew that this was right, and that he could do this. All of his fear fell away, and insatiable want replaced any doubt that might have held him back.

For all the time spent leading up to it, Draco couldn't believe when Potter was prepped and ready and Draco was pushing into him. It was all too quick for this moment to already be upon them. They were face-to-face, and it was the most natural thing in the world, this feeling of being inside of him. It was exquisite, and Draco was overwhelmed with sensation. He was humbled by the fact that Potter would so willingly give of himself what he, Draco, could not...that he would allow himself to be penetrated so selflessly for Draco's pleasure was an act that he would never forget. It was so tight, the ring of muscle squeezing him past all reasonable endurance, that Draco had to stop so he wouldn't come like a thirteen-year-old boy. Never had anything felt so good, not in his whole life. He was sure of it. He was staring into the eyes of the man whose face had haunted his dreams for years, for his life, and this was finally right.

Potter was panting like it was good for him, too, which was an even more arousing. It was all Draco could do to stave off his impending orgasm. He had the sudden urge to mark Potter, so that if ever anyone else would see this sight, they would know that he belonged to Draco, that Draco had claim. Draco didn't know where this primeval streak in him came from, but he had been holding off too many other things...he couldn't resist this. He leaned over and bit Potter's shoulder, hard enough to leave a mark.

"What the *fuck*, Draco?" Potter panted. "Ugh ... don't stop ..."

Draco pumped in and out, encouraged by a particularly feral-sounding groan when he angled differently. Draco knew he couldn't last much longer. This felt too good. "Come for me, Harry," he begged. "I can't take much more of this."

Draco felt the moment Potter went over the edge; it must have been the sound of Potter's name on his lips that had triggered it. Potter locked eyes with him, and then Draco felt the incredibly erotic sensation of Potter's cock spurting. It was caught between them, and Draco could feel every jerk of it. Potter's arse tightened with his orgasm, and all of those things, knowing that he had sent Potter into that kind of pleasure merely by saying his name was enough to send Draco to his own climax. The waves of pleasure seemed endless as he thrust into Potter's body, the intimacy heightened by the fact that he came while he looked right into green eyes. Normally he turned his head away, but this time, he wanted to see everything. He wasn't disappointed by the intensity on Potter's face.

It was in that moment, just as the afterglow of consummation was beginning to descend, that Draco felt a tingle. It had nothing to do with sex. It felt like magic flooding his veins. Draco blinked and flexed his fingers. The tingle of magic was pouring through every cell of his body; he recognized its return as clearly as if he could see it. He jumped up off the couch and stood up straight, oblivious to his nakedness.

"*Accio wand!*" he shouted. In the time it took for his wand to make it from its custom-made case on his dresser all the way to the game room, he performed a quick *Geminio* on the nearby chessboard. Although he was aiming to duplicate the board, an enormous amount of chess pieces piled up, too many to fit on the board. A spill of black and white marbled figurines hit the floor with a clatter that made Draco wince. There had to be hundreds of them...way more than he had intended, but enough to prove that his magic was back. And stronger.

"Did you see that?" he shouted at Potter, too excited to bother hiding it.

Potter didn't move.

His wand flew through the air, and Draco caught it. He could finally feel the magic thrumming through it. It wasn't closed off from him anymore; he could tell right away that he had access, although he had a feeling that he didn't have complete control yet. He tried a spell that was harmless. "*Lumos.*"

A strong beam of light shone out the end. Draco grinned and countered it with an effective *Nox*, then tried for an *Orchideous*. One sad little flower wilted at the tip. No matter, practice would make perfect. The important thing was that he had his magic back!

"Potter, are you seeing this?" Draco turned to gauge Potter's reaction, but the other wizard hadn't moved. In fact, he was eerily still exactly where Draco had left him when he'd jumped up.

"Potter?" Draco leaned over him.

Potter was entirely stiff, not blinking or even taking in a breath.

"Potter!" Draco panicked, trying to think of what would have caused it. Was it his magic again? Draco racked his brains. If it was an unintentional *Immobulus* or *Petificus Totalus*, he could just counter those. Please, Merlin, don't let his lovemaking have been too good for Potter to handle!

Draco went through the counter-spells in his head, and it was only a second before Potter took in a breath and looked around as if he'd been Stunned.

"Look!" Draco brandished his wand. "I got my magic back, can you believe it? Watch! Avis!" A flock of flamingos appeared and began prancing around the room. Draco frowned. He had been aiming for a simple robin, but birds were birds, he supposed.

"I *know*. I could see while I was *Petrified*," Potter said.

Something in his voice gave Draco pause. "What? Aren't you happy? This is what I've been working for. What *we've* been working for, actually."

Potter just stared at him. "Happy? That you used a spell we'd both promised we'd *never* use on each other? At a moment like that? No, Draco. I make myself vulnerable for you, and you just..." He broke off and got up, gathering his clothes. He tried to get dressed while avoiding the roving random pink birds. "I guess that's where trusting you gets me every time. Used. Well, I won't make that mistake again." He zipped up his trousers and shrugged his shirt on. "I hope you're happy with your wand. I guess you deserve to have it...but you didn't need to whore yourself out for it. You could have earned it fair and square. You had the talent. But you and your cheating nature aren't my problem anymore. Goodbye, Draco." And he left the room.

Draco didn't know how long he stood there, naked, with his wand in his hand, after he watched Potter walk out. A welt had risen on his heart that wouldn't let him move or

speaking, even to banish the ridiculous flock of flamingos that had taken over the room. All he could hear were the echoes of goodbye in his head, and how different they sounded from when Potter had said the same words last night.

## Chapter Twenty-Seven

*Chapter 27 of 28*

After the war, Harry Potter is left with no one to save, no one to fight, and one extra wand. Draco Malfoy escapes punishment by leaving the country... or so he thinks. Seven years pass before they see each other again. Draco is no longer the master of his wand and a battle of talent and wills ensues. A story of a wand without a true master, and two men who fight to master each other... and themselves.

*This chapter was written by literaryspell.*

*Note: This chapter explores Harry's perspective of the previous chapter's events. As such, there will be some overlap, but I think I've kept it interesting enough that you won't want to skip it. ;)*

The second thing Harry saw when he entered the game room was that someone...it had to be Draco...had written his name on the darts scoreboard. That damn 'visitor' label had haunted him every time he'd been in that room. He couldn't begin to fathom what had prompted Draco to change it, but he knew it could only be a good sign.

The first thing Harry saw, of course, was Draco, perfecting his form as he prepared to launch a dart through the air. Harry could see his concentration...could almost sense the gathering of his magic at his fingertips...and he exhaled sharply when the dart hit its intended target, aided by magic.

"Wow, that was amazing! You're really coming along," Harry said, moving closer now that all the pointed objects were safely away.

Draco's shoulders jumped a little, and Harry had to smile. It still gave him perverse pleasure to see Draco out of sorts.

"How long have you been there?" Draco demanded.

"Just long enough to watch you try throwing the dart with magic. You're really making progress. That shows incredible control." Harry was certainly impressed. He didn't know if Draco was ready to beat him, but he would have a fighting chance.

"It wasn't a bull's eye."

Harry fought the urge to roll his eyes. "Still, that's admirable. You have to be close to ready for a duel." He tugged the dart from the board and rolled it between his fingers. He wondered if it had felt almost like a wand in Draco's hands.

Draco flopped down on the couch, looking for all the world like a weary traveller. "I'm tired."

Harry chuckled under his breath. "How can you be? You just got up."

Draco narrowed his eyes at him. "Well, you woke me from a restful sleep."

"Well, lucky for you, I'm a little tired, too." Feeling bold, Harry took Draco's legs and sat beneath them, replacing them on his lap. He waited a half-second for outrage, but none seemed imminent. "Shove over and quit hogging the couch, will you? And maybe we can just skip the lesson for today. You're doing so well that a little slacking off won't hurt, anyway." The truth was, Harry was perfectly content to remain where he was.

Draco shifted but said nothing, so Harry continued. "You know, watching you with the darts right now reminded me of this one Quidditch practice. You had the same look on your face. You probably don't remember it, but we were playing in the rain, and it was a terrible storm, and we both saw the snitch at the same time..." He bit back a smile. He didn't have many fond remembrances of their time at Hogwarts, but there was no denying Draco was a competitor.

"Yes! I do remember! It was the last game of the season, and I was determined to get that snitch." Draco's laugh had Harry enthralled...embarrassingly so.

He covered his lapse by resting his hand on Draco's foot, the strong but somehow delicate arch warm beneath his fingers. They continued to talk about their time at Hogwarts, and Harry was amazed that when he thought back on those days he didn't feel near-overwhelming animosity toward Draco. They really had just been children.

When Harry confessed to Draco what he'd smelled in the Amortentia potion, he could sense things between them changing. Draco was looking at him, really looking...like he hadn't seen Harry before. Harry waited; he was determined to be patient while Draco sorted out his issues.

He couldn't be sure what was going through Draco's mind, but it no longer mattered, for Draco moved in and placed a kiss against Harry's lips. Harry returned the kiss, amazed and strangely honoured that Draco had made the first move, that he took control to show he was sure about his decision.

Draco's kiss was careful, measured. He straddled Harry's lap and settled, and Harry's hips jerked up of their own accord. Draco's body was so warm, so uncharacteristically welcoming. When he felt Draco's hand on his belt, it was all he could do not to throw Draco to the ground and rut against him like an animal. Instead, he used his fervour to strip Draco, who did the same in return.

The first touch of Draco's bare skin was a revelation. Harry sucked in breath through his teeth, marvelling at the almost unnatural smoothness. Then Draco was kissing him again, hard and fast, like he was *wild*, and Harry struggled to keep up but eventually settled for just letting Draco do what he needed to.

"Please, Potter. Harry."

Harry couldn't move. He had to close his eyes. "What did you say?"

"Please. I'm not sure what to do," Draco said quietly, his cheeks pink though he refused to look away.

"No. After that." He needed to hear it again...suddenly, there was nothing more important.

"Oh," Draco said, seeming to understand. He swallowed. "I said Harry."

"Say it again," Harry urged, smoothing his hands over Draco's arms.

"Harry," Draco said against his lips.

Harry's smile split his cheeks. "I never thought you'd do it. What made you change your mind?"

"Was it worth the wait?" Draco was trying to appear nonchalant but Harry *knew* him...Draco wasn't a mystery to him anymore.

He laughed. "Definitely. You deserve a reward. Are you sure you're ready for this, Draco?"

Draco nodded. "I am. Harry."

"So you won't freak out if I *Accio* the lube this time?" Harry smiled but in truth he was worried. Draco's last freak-out over their kiss had been alarming. The last thing he wanted to do was push or pressure Draco. Though it was hard to argue against Draco's erect cock between them.

"*Accio lube!*" Draco said, grabbing it and wagging it in the air. "You aren't the only one who can do that now, you know. How's that?"

"I guess you're as ready as you'll ever be," Harry said, not even trying to hide his happiness.

He could see Draco falter a little with the lube, so he took over, shifting a little awkwardly until he was on his back on the couch and Draco was above him. He raised his face for a kiss, which Draco gave without reservation. Harry drew his legs back and slicked his fingers with the lube. The back of his hand pressed against Draco's cock and sac, and Draco ground down into it...the action pushing Harry's own fingers into himself. He groaned at the sensation. He hadn't had sex in a while and hadn't bottomed for longer, but he needed Draco inside him.

Draco's rocking hips drove Harry crazy. Deciding he was prepared enough, he withdrew his fingers and took Draco's long cock in his hand. Draco sighed and rested his face on Harry's shoulder, thrusting into Harry's loose grip for a moment before looking up and meeting Harry's eyes.

Harry watched Draco's face as he guided Draco's cock to his hole. There was certainty there, and it was what Harry had wanted to see. The stretch was uncomfortable at first but Draco urged forward, inch by inch, and when his balls pressed against Harry's body, the slight pain replaced by satisfaction...which was quickly overridden by pleasure when Draco pulled back and thrust.

Breaths coming short, Harry arched and encouraged Draco with his body. Draco's pace quickened, his thrusts going deeper and harder, and Harry could barely withstand it. Draco was *good*...he should have known but he hadn't guessed.

A sharp pain in his shoulder made him cry out. He'd been bitten. "What the *fuck*, Draco?" But then the pain transmuted to pleasure and Harry almost wanted to ask Draco how he'd done *that*, but the only words he could manage were, "Ugh... don't stop..."

Draco didn't. He shifted and the angle changed...*everything* changed. Draco's cock hit his prostate with startling accuracy and Harry's eyes rolled back. With the physiological sensation came an emotional one as well. *Draco*...

"Come for me, Harry," Draco begged. "I can't take much more of this."

Harry forced himself to look at Draco. He was distracted by the bare flesh of his chest, the inexorable pounding of his cock, the smoothness of his belly dragging over Harry's prick, the grey of his eyes, oh Merlin, his eyes...

It was so obvious, he realised, dazed. It was so, so stupidly obvious.

He was in love with Draco Malfoy.

Harry came, hard and unexpected, crying out with the intensity of it. His fingers dug into Draco's arms, wanting to leave his own mark...but he didn't think Draco noticed as he was coming himself. They rocked together as they finished, neither wanted to end the spell.

Harry opened his mouth to voice the foolish but undeniable truth he'd only just realized, but then Draco was pulling...too fast...from his body and jumping to his feet. Harry winced, certain Draco was going to run scared, as he was so fond of doing. He couldn't even begin to decipher his emotions when Draco Summoned his wand.

While waiting, he threw a wandless spell at the chess board...magic exploded into the room...and Harry was frozen.

He couldn't move. The chess pieces replicated exponentially.

Panic set in immediately. What had Draco done? What had Draco's *magic* done? He'd obviously cast *Immobilus* or another spell that prevented him from moving. How had he even managed? Or had he done it one purpose? Was he keeping Harry in place to make sure he saw that Draco's magic had returned...that he didn't need Harry any more?

If he'd had only his wand *on* him, he would have been able to break the spell. But no...it was in his denims, which he'd let Draco tear off of him so violently, so passionately. He felt sick to his stomach as he thought about how close he'd been to telling Draco his true feelings.

Now all he could do was watch Draco explore his power until he deemed it time to release Harry. The powerlessness, the hated vulnerability ate at him, and he seethed inside.

Draco turned to Harry, panting and naked. "Did you see that?" There was a near-manic gleam in his eye.

Harry could only stare at him. He shouldn't be surprised, he told himself. He shouldn't even care.

The wand smacked into Draco's hand with a sound like a door closing.

"*Lumos*," Draco said, his voice determined. And the resulting light was brilliant.

Harry waited, growing more furious with each spell Draco cast.

"Potter, are you seeing this?" Draco asked, voice tinged with glee. "Potter?" When Harry didn't...couldn't...answer, Draco began to look concerned. "Potter!"

Harry watched, unblinking and devastated, as Draco ran through counter-spells. At last the *Immobilus* was lifted. He sucked in a sharp breath and moved his limbs, heartily relieved to have regained his agency.

"Look!" Draco crowed. "I got my magic back, can you believe it? Watch! *Avis!*" True to Malfoy form, the room swarmed with flamingos.

Harry was shaking with anger. "*I know*. I could see while I was *Petrified*."

Draco stilled, his face falling a little. "What? Aren't you happy? This is what I've been working for. ~~What~~<sup>We</sup> we've been working for, actually."

Harry couldn't believe his self-absorption. Or rather, he could believe it only too well, as much as he'd hoped Draco had changed. "Happy? That you used a spell we'd both promised we'd *never* use on each other...at a moment like that? No, Draco. I make myself vulnerable for you, and you just..." It was all he could think to say. Yes, ages ago they'd made that promise, but Harry couldn't care less about that. He felt like a total fool. He'd been used...for Draco to get his magic back, and for Draco to fuck. Those goals accomplished, Draco obviously had no use for Harry.

He avoided the ostentatious fowl while dressing. He couldn't seem to stop talking, his words bitten out through tight lips. "I guess that's where trusting you gets me every time. Used. Well, I won't make that mistake again. I hope you're happy with your wand. I guess you deserve to have it...but you didn't need to whore yourself out for it. You could have earned it fair and square. You had the talent. But you and your cheating ways aren't my problem anymore. Goodbye, Draco." There was no hope of regaining his dignity. He doubted he'd ever see it again. And this time, he didn't want a drink. He didn't want revenge. He just wanted to get as far away from Draco as he possibly could.

\*

"It's good to have you back, mate," Neville said, clapping Harry on the shoulder as they entered their office.

"It's good to be back," Harry said. He tugged on the sleeve of his crimson Auror robes, more content than he would have thought to be back in uniform after so long. There was no questioning the sense of satisfaction and even importance he got from knowing he had a job to do. Knowing he was needed.

"Here he is!" Ron burst through the door wearing a wide grin.

"Here I am," Harry said, rolling his eyes. Still, he couldn't help but beam a little when Ron pulled him into a one-armed hug. "Surprised to see me?"

"Thought Robards was taking the piss. How come you didn't tell us you were coming back?"

Harry scratched the back of his neck. "I didn't really know until I walked through the doors. Didn't think Robards would put me back in right away."

"Yeah, turns out Singer wasn't right for ol' Neville here after all."

Surprised, Harry turned to Neville. "That so?"

Neville shrugged. "He's no Harry Potter," he said with a wry grin.

Ron laughed. "Got that right. Now, you better be coming over for dinner tonight, Harry. Hermione will want to know what's new. You haven't been around much lately."

"Yeah, I know." Harry sighed. He didn't want to talk about Draco but he could barely keep from thinking about him...and he knew Hermione would be drilling him about that exact topic. "I'll be there, Ron."

The next hour was spent with Neville catching him up on some cases and Ron filling him in on the office gossip...though he didn't use the word gossip. He insisted he was just keeping Harry informed.

When it was time to get to work, Ron squeezed Harry's shoulder. "Really is great to have you back. And it won't be long before we cure you of that mopey look you're sporting. Forget about him, mate."

"Can't, Ron." Harry just shook his head. "He's not the one you forget about. He's the one you remember."

Ron seemed to see Harry wasn't ready to talk about it in any detail. He nodded and left Harry and Neville to their work after making Harry promise that dinner was a go.

"Everything all right, Harry?" Neville asked later that day.

"Yeah. No." Harry took off his glasses and scrubbed at his eyes. "I don't know anymore."

\*

Dinner with Ron and Hermione was the same as ever, as if no time had passed since he'd last graced their table, as if they hadn't seen him mid-binge and at his very lowest. He loved them all the more for acting like nothing had changed...or least like he'd done nothing wrong. It occurred to him that maybe in their eyes he hadn't.

"That was amazing, Hermione, thank you."

"Well, it can't compare to whatever you've been eating at Malfoy Manor." Her tone was bright but Harry could tell she was probing, trying to see if he was ready to talk and how sore the subject was.

To Harry's surprise, it didn't hurt. "It does more than compare, it surpasses," he assured her. "Fancy food can be great but there's something to be said for dinner cooked with love."

"And lard," Ron piped in.

Hermione smacked Ron on the shoulder. "I didn't use lard!"

Ron shrugged. "Mum used to, it's not as bad as it sounds."

"Anyway," Hermione said, sounding fondly exasperated, "So I take it Draco mastered his wand?"

"He did," Harry said in a tight voice.

"What!" Ron exclaimed, looking appalled. "How did he beat you? How could he have?"

Harry knew he had to tell them. He needed to talk about Draco...he couldn't keep it in. And they would help him because that was what they did, what they'd always done. "He did it during sex. Just... one minute everything was..." Harry coughed and felt his face heat. "Everything was good. Then he was jumping up and I couldn't move. He Petrified me."

Hermione gasped and Ron looked a little ill and more than a little outraged. "So then you two are together?" he said after a pause, commenting on entirely the wrong part of the confession.

"No. Not really. Not anymore, that's for sure." He took a long drink of his tea. "I thought there was something... I mean, there ~~was~~ something. Definitely. But not anymore."

"I don't understand why he would do that," Hermione said, a frown marring her normally soft features.

"Because he's an arse, Hermione. I've been saying that for years and now you can all see what I see. He used Harry to get his bloody magic back and then he showed his true colours." Ron seemed to be working himself into a right fit, and Hermione put her hand over his. He took a breath but his face was still pink with sympathetic anger.

"There has to be more to it than that," Hermione said, looking to Harry as if he would think so too. "You wouldn't have slept with him if you hadn't thought there was something there. Right?"

"Well, what does it matter what I thought? I was wrong, really wrong."

"You're better off, Harry. Really." Ron looked a little awkward giving the best mate break-up pep talk, so Harry shot him a grin to let him off the hook.

Hermione still looked thoughtful. "So it was mid... mid-coitus?"

"You can say sex," Ron teased. "Or even fucking, if you're feeling brave."

Without acknowledging Ron's leer, Hermione waited for Harry's answer. Knowing she could outwait him, he sighed.

"It was right when we ca...climaxed." For some reason, talking to Hermione about sex was more awkward than talking to a doctor.

She nodded, her eyes narrowed in thought. "And what happened after? While you were Petrified?"

Harry forced himself to go back to the game room and the moment when everything had changed. "He kept casting spells... they were all sort of wild. Like he couldn't quite..."

"Control himself," she finished for him. "Yes, I see. Did he say the spell to freeze you?"

Harry shook his head. "It just happened." He laughed, a bitter sound. "Just as I was thinking that maybe he was something special. I feel like such an idiot."

Ron looked rather like he wanted to agree, but he said nothing.

"You love him," Hermione said, her eyes wide as if everything had fallen into place...when Harry felt the exact opposite.

"Oi, don't say stuff you can't take back," Ron said quickly, glancing between Hermione and Harry.

"Of course I bloody love him, why else would I have gone back there time and again to fix up his sorry arse? Why else would I put up with his drama and his bullshit and his snootiness and *everything*?"

Hermione waved him off. "That's great, Harry. No, really, it is! See, the rules about mastering a wand aren't hard and fast, as you've both figured out. Draco never would have beat you in a wizard's duel...not without magic to begin with."

"If you knew that, why was I even bothering?"

"Well, I didn't know for sure. There was always the chance he could have won by fluke, and I will admit he advanced further than I could have anticipated."

"What are you saying, then?" Harry asked, trying to follow her train of thought, even though he didn't even know what station she'd boarded at.

She leaned forward, looking a little too eager for someone talking about Harry's sex life. "I'm saying, Draco's magic knew he couldn't win in a real duel. But sex... that's like a duel. It's like a fight, even more so, I imagine, with the two of you involved."

A twitch of a smile touched Harry's lips. "I guess you could say that."

Ron groaned.

Hermione continued. "So, he won. He beat you...you had sex, you thought about being in love with him, and he won."

"That's not how it works," Harry protested. "Right?"

"Well, I wouldn't have thought so, but the evidence is right there. He has his magic back and it happened while you two were intimate." She looked pleased with her conclusion and sat back in her chair, nodding.

"Doesn't change anything," Harry said. "He could have warned me, could have said something. He didn't have to be such a prick about it."

"No, no," Hermione said, drawing closer once more. "He didn't know! He didn't know what was happening, what he was doing. It was all his magic, securing his victory."

"All because I thought about being in love with him?" Harry wasn't sure if he could believe that. It seemed too easy, too clean. Had he grown so used to twists and turns with Draco that he couldn't accept what seemed like a reasonable explanation? Did it even matter anymore, when he'd already moved on?

Though of course he hadn't moved on. He'd wanted to, been desperate to, but Draco was stuck in his head, in his life.

"In a way, that's a victory. It's very Slytherin, if you think about it, even if Draco didn't really have anything to do with it."

"Sneaky fucker and his sneaky magic," Ron said, shaking his head. "So what now, Harry?"

Tangling his hands in his hair, Harry groaned. "I don't know. I really don't."

Hermione patted his hand. "You'll get it sorted, don't worry."

He smiled at her. No, he didn't know what he was going to do about Draco, if anything...but he did know he was ready to make sure he never lost himself again, never exiled himself from life. "Thanks, Hermione, Ron. I'm so lucky to have you both. And I have a favour to ask."

"Anything, mate," Ron said, smiling. Hermione nodded.

"I think it's time I got the information for that addictions counsellor."

## Chapter Twenty-Eight

After the war, Harry Potter is left with no one to save, no one to fight, and one extra wand. Draco Malfoy escapes punishment by leaving the country... or so he thinks. Seven years pass before they see each other again. Draco is no longer the master of his wand and a battle of talent and wills ensues. A story of a wand without a true master, and two men who fight to master each other... and themselves.

*This chapter was written by keppiehed.*

"Colloportus." Draco took aim at the door from where he was draped with savage insouciance on the couch. The click of the lock could be heard in the otherwise silent game room. Draco sighed. "Alohomora." The door, predictably, unlocked, as it had the last three times he'd cast the set of spells. Draco decided to change it up and throw a colour-changing charm. The door turned bright purple. Draco cocked his head. It wasn't an improvement on the décor. He waved his wand and returned the door to its original teak finish.

Draco turned his attention to the pile of chess pieces that he hadn't bothered to Banish yet. He'd been forced to *Evanesco* the damned flock of flamingos... somehow their mindless preening had added insult to injury... but as for the rest of the evidence of his ... thing ... with Potter, he couldn't quite bring himself to get rid of anything. He couldn't understand his motivation, but after Potter left him, he'd been drawn to this room every day... a room he'd previously had no use for... and he'd just ... sit here. Doing nothing. Every day. It was boring, and Merlin knew he had no tolerance for ennui, but he couldn't seem to shake himself out of this melancholy. He didn't know why he felt like this; it was as if he had a sickness. He didn't want to eat because the food had no flavour. He was tired all day, but as soon as he tried to sleep, he could only think of *him*.

Draco had his wand back, but in truth, he didn't care about that, either. He'd been so focused on getting it back, on winning, that he had never considered what he'd actually *do* with it after that. He'd lived so long without it that he didn't really *need* it as much as he'd thought he did. He had only wanted to get it back for pride and as a matter of principle. But what principle? And what pride? Draco couldn't even remember what he'd set out to prove anymore, or to whom. Only one thing seemed important now, and he was gone.

But Draco had his wand.

"*Waddiwasi*." Draco watched with disinterest as a chess piece launched itself through the air and hit a sconce on the wall. The sound of marble shattering the glass woke him from his apathy, and something wrenched free in the area of his chest. He couldn't cry; he wouldn't! Desperate to forestall the sudden tide of loss and grief that welled like a dark bubble in his gut, Draco craved destruction. "*Expulso! Flagrate! Incendio! Diffindo!*" Draco let fly the most damaging hexes he could recall, wanting to whip up a maelstrom to match what he felt inside. The release of energy distracted him as he aimed at every object in his vicinity without discretion. Draperies tore, vases shattered, the Muggle device called the television was obliterated in an explosion that rocked the room. Draco relished the pain of glass shearing his skin, although he hoped it wouldn't scar. Then he hoped it would, because it would serve Potter right to feel bad the next time they met to know that Draco had been injured because of *him*. Then he changed his mind and hoped it really *wouldn't* leave a mark, because damn, he was too good-looking to ruin with a scar, no matter how upset he was at the moment.

Draco had paused with that train of thought, the idea of Potter and his own scar pulling him into the mire of sorrow again. Why did everything, no matter how far removed, come back to Potter? Draco would never be free of him; it was as if that man had imprinted himself into every line of memory, every code of thought, past and future, so that Draco would always be led back to green eyes no matter how far his thoughts roamed. This idea might once have intrigued him, but now it only brought a fresh weal of pain, and he looked for something to break, to destroy as he felt destroyed. His gaze fell to the dartboard, the only thing left untouched by his rampage. Somehow it had escaped his wrath, and it mocked him with their names side-by-side in his own hopeful handwriting. A stab of something dark went through him... was it sadness? It had to be anger!... and Draco took aim at the proof of his naiveté. "*Confri...*"

"Draco ... Malfoy."

The sound of his father's voice, uttered with such authority, stayed his hand, quieted his storm, and stilled him in his tracks.

"What in Merlin's name is going on in here? What's gotten into you?" Not much ruffled Lucius Malfoy, but he appeared shocked at the scene of utter devastation he now beheld. "Is that a *fire* on the billiards table? *Aguamenti!*"

Draco stood in shame as his father mended the evidence of his heartbreak. He didn't lift a wand to help, but as the last *Reparo* was uttered, he knew he could put off the inevitable no longer.

"Draco. Son." Lucius gestured, but seemed at a loss for words. After a few false starts, he crossed the room and pulled Draco into his arms.

Draco stiffened. Was his father *hugging* him? Malfoys didn't *hug*! What were those hands stroking his head? Was this comfort he was receiving?

"I'm sorry you're in pain, Draco. I can see that you're suffering. My boy, my boy ... if I could make it better, I would. You know I'd give you the world; I'd make it right. I'm so sorry ..."

The sound of his father admitting weakness, defeat, emotion of any kind ... it was too much. The dam that had held everything at bay crumbled and great shuddering sobs burst forth. Draco didn't recognize his own voice as he howled his pain, more animal than man. "He's gone. He left ... he left me ..." They were the only words he could choke out, and he said them over and over again, as if by repeating them he might be able to understand the truth of them.

"I know. I'm sorry. He was never right for you. He wasn't one of us, Draco," Lucius said.

"No!" Draco sniffed and pulled away, the realization hitting him like a bludge to the brain. "That's not true; he *was* right for me. He's been the best thing that's happened to me in ... forever. I was just too ... I don't know. Scared, or something. I couldn't see it, and now I've fucked it up. Sorry, Father. I mean, I've ruined it, just like I ruin everything."

Lucius was silent for a moment. "You really believe that?"

Draco stared at the floor. "That I'm a failure? How can you deny it?"

"No, no," Lucius waved a hand impatiently, "that Mr. Potter is the one for you? That he is the best thing to have ever happened to you?" Lucius stared at Draco, his gaze piercing.

Draco chewed his lip. "I don't know why I didn't see it before," he said, his brows knitted in thought, "but yes. I can't explain it..."

"You don't have to!" Lucius broke in. "Really. That's all I wanted to know. This isn't the man I raised you to be, Draco."

"I know, Father." Draco felt the shame wash over him, but he stood straight. "But this is who I am."

"You're a man who gives up what he wants? You don't fight for yourself and your life, your family? Come now! That's not how a Malfoy behaves!" Lucius couldn't help hiding a little smile.

"What? I thought you meant ..." Draco frowned.

"I know what you thought, Draco. That's what I'm telling you. Sometimes it's easy to misinterpret, even with those closest to you. So you have to talk things out. Let's not repeat the mistakes of the past. Malfoys learn from their mistakes. He learns to be better, so that he may overcome. And he does not lie in a depressive slump, *Incendiating* things when he should be out fighting for what means the most to him." Lucius folded his arms across his chest. "Are you a Malfoy?"

"Yes!" Draco's lip quivered. He'd never loved his father so much as he did at that moment.

"Then go be one. And go get what means the most to you. Don't let not knowing how stop you. Don't let anything in this world stand in your way." Lucius put a hand on Draco's shoulder. "If you need help, ask it. And Draco, don't ever let a day go by that you don't tell your loved ones that they are loved."

"Father?" Draco leaned in for a hug. "I love you." It would grow less awkward in time, but now it only mattered that they attempted it at all.

"As I love you." Lucius released him.

"And Father?" Draco steeled his resolve. "I need your help."

"Then you shall have it."

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"You'd better eat something. You don't want to faint when you go in today. And you know you are prone to attacks of the vapours, Draco, don't try and deny it."

"I am not!" Draco scowled at his father over the breakfast table. He was too nervous to eat, and he supposed it showed. He was unused to dealing with emotional issues in his business affairs. As with any sane wizard, he preferred to keep the two separate. "Besides, I didn't make anything this morning. And you're obviously sitting here, so I can see that there is no breakfast to be had, unless we suddenly acquired a new..."

As if on cue, the door to the dining room burst open, startling Draco. Peachy the house-elf bustled in, bearing a steaming platter larger than herself. It had to be part of her magic that allowed her to carry such a burden, Draco marvelled before he snapped his mouth shut and regained his lost wits. "What are *you* doing here?"

"Peachy be so sorry! Peachy not mean to be late for breakfast, but Peachy be making the *soufflé* with cheese that Master Draco likes so much..."

"*Au fromage*, Peachy. We've been over this before. Culture, the last bastion of civility, or there is nothing," Lucius sighed.

"Peachy be sorry, Peachy be remembering that. *Soufflé au fromage*. And for Master Malfoy Peachy be making..." The house-elf broke off and looked at her hand, where she had a notation written. Lucius rolled his eyes skyward. "*Profiteroles au chocolat*." She giggled. "Master Malfoy has a sweet tooth!"

Draco swallowed. "Can someone please explain what the fu...er, what is going on?" He hated being out of the loop!

"Peachy be working for you now! This is all she ever be wanting, and she be so happy! Peachy have a nice, new home at Malfoy Manor with Master Malfoy and Master Draco and Master Pot..."

"Thank you. That will be all. Please confine yourself to the kitchen for the duration of the meal." Lucius gave a nod. One of the dismissive, curt ones.

After Peachy popped out...'no fighting in front of the help' fell under that 'last bastion of civility' notion...Draco stood up. "I thought we weren't going to keep secrets from each other any more?"

"Now, Draco. Where would you get an idea like that? When would I *ever* say such a thing?" Lucius picked up his fork and stabbed at his *profiterole*. "I said we needed to talk things out to avoid misunderstandings. I'm sorry if you ... misinterpreted that to mean that we should share everything. Merlin, no. The things I've done in my time would ..." Lucius laughed, and Draco felt a little sick, before his father seemed to remember the conversation. "Apologies. Gods, no. The very idea. And I, of course, do not need to be apprised of *every* aspect of your ... situation. Simply put, we shouldn't feel as though we can't speak about things that bother us. We are a family, and I am here for you. That being said, we now have a house-elf." Lucius took a calm bite of pastry.

"I *noticed*. When were you going to mention it?" Draco's frustration level grew.

"Don't shout at the breakfast table. I hardly needed to mention it. Your own powers of observation are intact and quite keen. You were able to observe for yourself."

"Father ..." Draco threw himself in his chair. The *soufflé* *did* look good. No sense letting it go to waste. Draco tasted a flake of the crust and sighed. "When are you going to stop treating me like a child and tell me what's going on?"

"Oh, I think it's so much more fun this way, don't you? All in good time, Draco. You'll find out when you're meant to. Now, hurry up and eat that. Everyone knows that *soufflé* is a dish best served hot." Lucius' lip twitched, and he picked up his newspaper. He had switched to reading *The Quibbler* exclusively.

"Why isn't it considered rude for *you* to re..." Draco stopped mid-complaint as his eyes fell on the headline: *Parkinson Patriarch Convicted in absentia For Multilevel Blackmail Scheme*

Draco gasped. Pansy's father, a blackmailer? But why? Draco couldn't wrap his head around the idea. "Father, may I see the paper?" he croaked.

"Sudden interest in politics? The sports page, perhaps? I hear the Kenmare Kestrels are favoured to win this season." Lucius smirked.

"Just hand me the damned front page!" Draco shouted. "Er, please."

"As you wish." Lucius handed the section over.

Draco scanned the words, hardly believing what he read:

*Parkinson Scion Convicted in absentia For Multilevel Blackmail Scheme*

*by Luna Lovegood, senior staff writer*

*Penstemon Parkinson was convicted in absentia today for crimes against many high-ranking officials in positions all across wizarding society. Indisputable evidence was provided by a reliable witness in forms of written transcripts, Pensieve archives and other items that cannot be disclosed to the public at this time. The evidence shows that Parkinson has been blackmailing wizards and witches for many years...some as long as several decades...and that he has been using insider knowledge to influence anything from Ministry business to access at Gringott's private accounts. His crimes are many, and it will take years to sort through the extent of the damage he has caused.*

*Upon the decree that all personal property and liquid assets are to be relinquished to the control of the Ministry, frozen and held until they can be appropriately redistributed, Parkinson chose to become a fugitive from the law. He and his family...including his wife, Primrose, and his daughter, Pansy...are now officially labelled*

*"Undesirables" and as such, should be considered dangerous to society. If anyone has any knowledge of their whereabouts, you are under duty to contact an Auror immediately. Anyone harbouring them will face a stiff penalty.*

There was more in the article detailing the nature of the crimes and the trial, but Draco let the paper drop through nerveless fingers. "Did you have anything to do with this, Father?"

"Ask me no questions and I shall tell you no lies, Son. Now, business awaits you." Lucius stood. "I wish you luck in your endeavour."

Draco took a shaky breath, still uneasy about their possible role in the Parkinsons' downfall. "I'll need it."

\*

Draco was glad for all the years of practice he had at concealing his emotions. He presented a picture of cool elegance to the world as he made his way through the lobby of his former employer's building, but inside he was as nervous as he had ever been. The elevator ride to his floor seemed endless, and he didn't know if he had it in him to follow through with this next task. This was a whole new world for him: one of feelings and vulnerability, and Draco wasn't sure he could find the strength he needed to do what he had to. What if people laughed at him? They were going to, he knew it. This was his worst nightmare...everyone knowing his deepest secrets and ridiculing him for it. He had no defence now if he went through with this. Cold sweat broke out on Draco's brow.

Then Draco thought of the alternative: life without Harry. Life as it had been in the last few weeks at the Manor. Him, alone. Knowing that he hadn't even *tried*. Was his pride that important to him?

When the bell chimed, notifying him of his destination, Draco squared his shoulders and stepped out of the elevator without fear. He'd lost everything there was to lose. What was there to be afraid of now?

"I'm here to see Luna," he told the secretary, who eyed him with professionally cultivated disinterest. He could see the excitement behind her glasses, but she pressed her lips together to hide it.

"Of course, Mr. Malfoy. Your appointment was ten minutes ago. *Miss Lovegood's* been expecting you." She narrowed her eyes in chastisement of his tardiness and lack of professional address.

"Then I'll just show myself in." *Bitch*. "I know the way."

She'd been standing to let him in and seemed disappointed to miss a moment of the action. "Of course."

He smiled at her and went through the doors to Luna's office. It was too small for someone of her standing at the paper, in his opinion. Luna wasn't behind her desk, but tucked in a corner chair with her feet curled under her. She waved him over to a matching overstuffed sofa.

"Draco! Come join me here. I find that I get the most work done when I can be free from the confines of the desk. Don't you just love to let your mind wander while you work? I have a view of the sky from here, and sometimes you can even see the diricawls flying, if it isn't too cloudy. They like to fly pretty high, you know, so you have to keep an eye out."

"What?" Draco found it hard to keep on the topic of conversation with Luna. "No, I didn't know."

"Oh, you should look for them! Lovely sight, so relaxing. You look like you could use a little bit of stress relief. Have a seat. Not there!" Luna laughed to soften her rebuke. "Sorry, I thought I saw a chizpurfle there this morning."

"A chizpurfle?" Draco echoed.

"Yes, that's right. Don't worry, I have someone coming to do an inspection later today, but you know they aren't catching. I just wouldn't want your magic siphoned, not so soon after its return!" Luna smiled. "Please, sit here. And can I offer you some asphodel tea? You know, most people don't think that you can drink it, but I was just experimenting with..."

Draco felt lulled into a pleasant stupor of confusion. He liked Luna, but listening to her talk always had this effect. Everything either seemed to make perfect sense, or it didn't in the least; you had to decide which one and go with it. Either that or the third option, which was to interrupt her and get to the point, or you might just fall into a sort of waking dream and listen to her forever. "Er, Luna. Thank you, no. I just came from breakfast, so no tea is necessary. I don't mean to be rude, but I am ... apprehensive about the reason for this visit. Could we discuss it?"

Luna blinked. "Of course. What can I do for you, Draco?"

Now that the time for decisive action was at hand, Draco lost his nerve. He swallowed and cast about for something else to help him get up his courage. He just needed time! "Actually, Luna, there was something else I meant to ask you about," he hedged.

"Yes?"

"I saw your headline this morning...well done, by the way..." he figured a little well-placed flattery never hurt, "and I was just wondering if ... Well, did my father have anything to do with Pansy's father's trial?" Draco picked at the fabric on the chair. He couldn't meet her eye.

"Draco, you know I can't reveal my sources," Luna said gently.

"But you can't print lies! Where did you get your facts from?" he burst out before he could stop himself.

"Draco." Luna sighed. "Let me say this, and you can do with it what you will. I received a tip from my source. Not about the information in the article. You're right, that would be unsubstantiated claims, and I couldn't print that. But the source turned in their evidence to Ministry officials and then told me where to be. In essence, the source gave me exclusive rights and I was there for the only press-release of information. So my information comes not from the source, but from the Ministry and Gringott's, and from all of the official places you read about. My source only told me that he was going to turn it all in, and just to be there to catch the fallout."

"He?" Draco perked up. "But why? Why you?"

"Because I imagine this person had this information for years. And for some reason he had a personal motive for turning in his friend now. And he wanted the press to be there to catch wind of it. Hm. I wonder why what could be, don't you?" Luna tilted her head. "There were no laws broken by my source. He did nothing wrong, so that need not be a concern. He merely brought a criminal to justice. And he helped this paper in the process. He could have sold the scoop to anyone...but he didn't."

Draco was silent.

"That isn't why you're here, Draco. What can I do for you?" Luna asked. She took a sip of her tea and curled her hands around the mug.

"I have something I'd like for you to print. On the front page. I know it isn't hard news, but I think it will sell plenty of papers just the same." Draco couldn't conceal the trembling of his hands as he withdrew the paper from his attaché case and handed it to Luna.

"Draco, we've been through this. You know I can't print ..." Luna trailed off as she read what was on the page. "Oh."

Draco didn't feel embarrassment like he thought he would. He didn't want to run anymore, or hide. He only knew hope, hope that this would work. Because he couldn't bear it if it didn't. He cleared his throat. "So, Luna ... you still see Potter, right?" He tried to sound nonchalant. "How is he these days?"

"Oh, fine," Luna hadn't looked up from the page yet. "He's good."

"What!" Draco frowned. "Er, I mean, of course he is. That's great. Good. I'm glad that he's good." *Was he so forgettable, then?*

"Hm? No." Luna pulled herself from her distraction and looked up. "It's not like that, Draco. He's good in that he's getting on with things. He's back to his job, which is nice to see. He is so talented at his chosen profession; I'm glad to see him doing what he's meant to do."

Guilt washed over Draco. He'd kept Harry from doing what he was supposed to be doing. From his own life.

"He got help for some of his problems. I wouldn't be saying this to anyone except you, but I think you know that he had a bit of trouble with drinking. Well, he is seeing to that, and he is a changed man. I haven't seen him this content in years. It is such a relief." Luna gazed into space, apparently picturing a happy Harry.

Draco's gut lurched. He was glad to hear that Harry was getting himself together, but changed? What did that mean? He felt a hand on his arm.

"He misses you, Draco. Anyone can see it. He's just ... ready, now." Luna patted him and then stood up. "I will be willing to print this for you. As for your fee ..."

Draco stood up as well and rummaged for his chequebook. "Please, tell me how much. As you know, money is never an object."

"Oh, your fee is not one that you can pay with a cheque."

Draco didn't like the sound of that. "What? What are you saying?"

"You have to know that money can't buy everything. I have all the money I need," Luna said.

Draco scowled. "No, you don't. You can always use more. You aren't rich!" He winced at his own indelicacy. "Er, are you trying to gain assets? A merger? What sort of proposal are you hinting at? I warn you..."

Luna held up her hands. "Stop, stop! I'm not threatening you! I'm telling you that I need something I can't buy. Good staff writers. You. In short, if you want me to publish this, you have to take your job back."

"Are you blackmailing me?" Draco bristled. "I'll have you know that that is against the law!"

"Actually, in this case it's extortion, which you ought to know. And yes. It is." Luna folded her arms against her chest. "But I'm pretty comfortable with that. So, what's your answer?"

Draco tapped his foot. The thing was, he'd been getting bored around the house, and he'd been missing the feeling of usefulness he'd had at *The Quibbler*. He just didn't like being outwitted. Although he'd been regretting his hasty decision to quit his job, it didn't sit well that Luna had played him so easily. Although he didn't have much choice now, it seemed. "This is all so very Slytherin of you, Luna," he complained.

"You've rubbed off on me, what can I say?" She stuck out her hand to shake. "It's good to have you back, Draco. Your desk is waiting for you. I'll see you here on Monday morning."

It wasn't until he was out of the front door that he realized that maybe he'd been lucky to have her for a boss...and a friend.

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It didn't take long for Draco to settle back into the routine at work as if he'd never been gone. It was easier than he would have thought to sit at his desk and do the things he'd always done...it didn't feel as much like swallowing his pride as he thought it might. Draco suspected he had Luna to thank for that, as well.

Draco counted down the days until the paper was due to print his article. He timed his lunch break carefully; he couldn't afford to be off by a minute or his plans could go awry. As he left the building, Draco knew it wasn't his imagination that there were chuckles and eyes watching him, but no one dared say a thing to his face. He didn't know if Luna had sent around an inter-office memo, but whatever was responsible for the relative cap on the expected tidal-wave of teasing, he was grateful. He found that he didn't much care anymore what people thought of him, and that was a freeing feeling. Let them talk, let them judge, let them say whatever they wanted to or about him. For once in his life, Draco had more than his appearance on his mind.

Apprehension gnawed at the pit of his stomach for more important things than the opinions of the public. The very real concern about what Harry might say about his grand gesture began to percolate through him, but it was too late to turn back now. The wheels had already been set in motion, and this was going to happen, mistake or not. Draco strode through the doors of the Ministry building where the Aurors worked.

"Sir? Sir! You can't go through there!" the receptionist called after him.

Draco ignored her and kept going. He'd been in this building enough to know where the Aurors were. He took the stairs, grateful for his effortless athleticism as he vaulted them two at a time. The girl in the atrium was making a fuss, and he would no doubt be apprehended by security in a few minutes. He only had a short time to get to Harry and make his case.

Draco made the most of his time, finding his way to the offices of the Aurors, and it was too soon that he was in the maze of cubicles that held his fate. He'd waited for this moment, and now his heart was thumping its protest. He wasn't ready! But he had to be. This was his last and only chance. He had to take it.

Draco ran a hand through his hair. What would he say? Why hadn't he planned this better? Now that the moment was upon him, all words ran dry. He felt like he was back in school, as if he were about to take an exam he hadn't prepared for.

Draco was only dimly aware of the commotion his presence was causing as he ran through the aisles, searching. People were jumping up, aware of the alarm that had started to sound, and when they saw him in their midst, an outcry had begun. Everyone was following him on his mad dash through the office, but he had eyes only for...

*Harry.* There he was. His back was half-turned, so he didn't know Draco was there. Draco skidded to a halt. Papers were flying, people were shouting, it was a tornado of mass chaos, but there were just the two of them there in that moment. Draco drew in a breath to speak, to announce his presence, and then he saw what Harry was holding. The paper. He could see that Harry was reading it, and Draco had never felt so vulnerable as he remembered what he'd written. His declarations, his deepest feelings right there in black and white, spread across the front page for the whole world to read. There was no hiding who he was. He didn't want to. Not from himself, and not from Harry. Not anymore. They'd had too many misunderstandings for Draco to take a chance on more.

His stomach dropped out. He had hoped to get here first. To be the one to show him. To explain...

"Draco?" Harry had caught sight of him, the confusion writ large on his features. He blinked, as if waking from a dream. He looked around, and seeing the pandemonium around him, held up a hand. With hardly a whisper, he breathed "*Silencio*," and all was still. The crackle of his powerful magic could be felt in the air.

Draco shuddered a little as the hair on his arms stood on end. There was no denying that Harry was a powerful wizard. This was not even a tenth of what he could do.

"Why are you here, Draco? What's this all about?" Harry seemed resigned.

"Oi, who cares what it's about, Harry? Hasn't he proved that he's a worthless git?" Ron said from a neighbouring partition. "Don't listen to a word he has to say!"

Neville shook his head. "Hear him out. He's come all this way. Then he can go."

"I'm here for *you*." Hearing the words aloud gave Draco courage. "I don't know what happened that day, Pot...Harry. I didn't mean for any ... misunderstandings between us. I have always been afraid to say what I feel, what's in my heart, but now I'm not. Not anymore."

"What's changed?" Harry cocked his head. "How do I know I can trust you?"

"How do I know I can trust *you*?" Draco burst out. "I don't. But I want to try, because trust has to start somewhere. Here's what I know: I've never felt this before. I didn't know until you left just what you meant to me. I've been ... I've been *sad* without you, damn it! I know we'll fight, but that's okay. Because I am done with running from my problems. I want you in my life, because I know now that I can't stand things without you there. You make everything come alive for me, Harry. The good, the bad ... everything is better when you're there beside me. And I am tired of running from that; why would I want to? I took out a front page ad in the goddamned paper to show you that I am not hiding it from you, or me, or from anyone else in the world. I finally know what I want, and it's you. I love you, Harry Potter!" Draco felt like he had been through a war. He couldn't believe he'd said the words. He'd never said them to anyone else before, and he knew them to be true. "I don't know if you love me back, but that's how I feel about you."

Harry sucked in a breath. "I feel like I've waited forever for you to say that. But how do I know that you won't just run away again? It took everything I had to walk away that last time, because when I commit to something, I give it all I've got. If I do this, I'm in it for the long haul. I'm a one-man guy, Draco. I play for keeps, and all of this ... drama ... it's too much. I don't want my life to be like that. I can't live with uncertainty and fighting and you running away every time you get scared. I want someone inside and out, and I know that's a lot to ask from someone like you. I love you, but I am not strong enough to watch you leave me all the time. I'd rather be alone." Harry looked broken when he admitted that.

"You love me?" Hope flared in Draco's chest.

"Of course. Why else would I have put up with your shit all this time?" Harry allowed a little smile to break through. "But that doesn't change anything."

"Yes it does! Because I know that no wand, no magic...nothing that I have been trying to find can make me happy. It's you, Harry. It's always been you. I just never knew it until now. All this time I've wasted...I've been so stupid ... I can't promise you that we won't have problems, and I know there will be drama, but I *can* promise you that I won't ever let fear drive me from the best thing that's ever happened to me. I'm not blind anymore, and I am asking you for this chance. I thought you were the one leaving me last time, and I have never been so empty. I don't ever want to be like that again: without you." Draco got down on one knee. "Will you please come back home?" Draco held his breath. Harry had to say yes!

"No."

Draco's heart fell, and there were gasps from the assembled group, who'd been hanging on every word. Draco didn't think he could take in another breath.

"But I will find a new home with you. One that we pick out together. Malfoy Manor is great, and your dad is fine, but I think we need to begin again, just ourselves. What do you say, Draco? Are you ready for a fresh start with someone who loves you, too?" Harry held out his hand and pulled Draco to his feet.

Draco didn't care who saw the kiss that they shared; he didn't even hear the mixed snuffles and cheers of the crowd around them. All he could feel were the arms of the man he loved around him, and the lips under his that brought him the most joy he'd ever known. Draco never thought this lightness could exist, or that someone like him could have it. Now that he had it, he intended to hold on with both hands and never let it go.

Draco looked down at entwined their fingers. Nothing had ever given him such bliss before as seeing their hands meshed together as one. He could feel Harry's pulse, the beat of his heart right there in his hand. Draco knew he'd never forget this moment, not as long as he lived. "Yes, Harry. Yes."

The End