

Snakes and Ladders

by mayfly

Twenty years later, and there's a new subversive threat to the wizarding world. Draco would rather not get involved either way, much less work with Harry Potter on the Ministry's behalf. Epilogue compliant.

part 1 of 3

Chapter 1 of 3

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Note: Written for k_krum for hd_inspired's Animagus fest. A whole mountain of thanks to my marvellous beta, Raisinous Fiending, not only for putting much needed commas into my text but also for helping shape the story into something presentable. I would also like to give a big big hug to dragon_charmer for being a wonderful mod and more.

The once lush garden was a blaze of red and yellow, of vibrant green rapidly turning to black. The fire seemed uncontrollable, jumping from tree to tree and bush to bush. Newly grown leaves shrivelled up and disintegrated under the onslaught. Brightly coloured flowers turned to ash in the blink of an eye. Ancient trees tried in vain to fight off the flames.

Draco Malfoy leaned against the second story window of his manor and gazed, entranced, at the destruction of his garden. Amongst the tall flames he could see the diminutive forms of house-elves trying desperately to put out the fire. They would win in the end, but there was no saving the rare gold-tipped rose bushes or the Blushing Begonias. Draco sighed; it had to happen just as spring was nearing, and the garden had started to bloom. His mother would be heart-broken when she returned. Fortunately the rear garden remained unharmed.

A piercing shriek cut through the air: one of the elves' ears had been badly singed. Draco mused that he really should go down and help. Nevertheless, he stayed transfixed in his safe vantage point. The bright flames brought back memories of a distant past, of a time when he was almost burnt alive. A shiver ran down his spine as the feeling of unbearable heat and flames licking at his feet washed over him. He shuddered and turned away from the window, hoping to banish the unwelcome memory. He would not be going near any fires, not today, not any other day if he could help it.

He had a letter to write. A letter he had been putting off writing for far too long.

Malfoy Manor stood tall and elegant in the cool light of early morning. The building itself was silent and restful, but the grounds were a hubbub of activity. A whole swarm of noisy Aurors were busy in the smouldering remains of the front gardens. So busy, in fact, that no one paid any heed to the two figures discreetly making their way to the front door. They quietly entered the house to follow a wizened old house-elf as he led them up the stately staircase and down a wide, well-lit hallway to the door of the master's office.

Draco had been once again at the window, observing the scarlet-robed Aurors at work in his garden, when Barter informed him that his visitors had arrived.

"Show them in," was all he told the house-elf as he turned from the window to face the door expectantly.

Two scarlet-robed figures entered, throwing back their hoods to reveal their faces: a tall greying wizard who carried himself with authority, Gawain Robards, the head of the Aurors, and a shorter wizard with messy black hair and vivid green eyes that Draco would recognise anywhere. It seemed like the Ministry had sent their best.

Draco smiled, pleased. "I'm gratified to see how seriously you seem to have taken my letter, Head Auror Robards," he intoned. "Welcome and good morning. Please take a seat. Would you like something to drink? Tea or coffee perhaps?" He gestured towards the comfortable furnishing of his office, almost all of his attention centred on Robards, the wizard with the most authority in the room, rather than the wizard he would *rather* be paying attention to.

Robards strode over to Draco to briefly shake his hand before sitting in a high-backed leather armchair. "Thank you, Mr Malfoy, but I won't be needing anything. I assume you know Mr Harry Potter."

Draco turned to look at the other man properly for the first time. Harry Potter stood by the door, leaning slightly against the wall, his arms crossed in front of him. The stance was casual, too casual actually, even bordering on insulting, but Draco barely noticed, taken in as he was by the aura of contained power and unrefined charisma surrounding the man. Almost as if the intervening years had never been, Draco felt himself fall into memories long forgotten, but suddenly so vivid. This was the man who stood up to Draco as a boy, who always managed to beat him where it mattered, who almost killed him, who saved his life. Potter met his gaze with an inscrutable unblinking stare, and nodded his greeting briefly.

Draco forcibly brought himself back to the present. "Of course I know Auror Potter," he answered the Head Auror, once more calm and contained, before turning back to Potter. "Good morning, Potter. I should have expected that they would send you. You are something of an expert on these matters, after all."

Draco's over active hands fluttered gracefully as he spoke, at odds with the formal tone of his words. His father had often told him off, urging him to be more economic with his gestures, but Draco couldn't help himself. It was as if his body was set on contradicting his carefully constructed turns of phrase, and exposing him for the over-dramatic queen that he was at heart.

Potter remained silent, his intense green gaze roaming over Draco and the room they were in; noticing, memorising, cataloguing. Draco felt a not wholly unpleasant shiver run down his spine. This older Potter, whom he had only met a handful of times in recent years, was nothing like the boy he had known at school, regardless of the torrent of memories that came rushing back. This Potter was taller, broader, and more mature, with an intoxicating air of efficiency, strength and just a touch of danger surrounding him. Draco just about restrained himself from licking his lips, whether from nervousness or excitement, he wasn't sure. This Potter was someone he would really enjoy getting to know.

Robards spoke again, breaking Draco out of his thoughts. "Mr Malfoy, we would like to hear everything you know about the organisation called the Sons of Merlin."

Potter snorted from his post by the door, and Draco had to agree, the name was rather cringeworthy.

Draco took a couple of fluid steps and daintily lowered himself into the armchair opposite Robards; the tale was not going to be short, so he might as well be comfortable. He Summoned his forgotten tea from the desk and arranged himself before proceeding to share his knowledge of the unsavoury group in question.

There wasn't that much to say. They were a vigilante underground group of pure-blood supremacists that seemed to have forgotten the lessons of the past. Draco guessed that they were made up of old Death Eater sympathisers that had kept their heads down and their noses clean during the last war, but now, so many years later, suddenly found the need to act, and young fanatics, too young to remember Voldemort, but not too young not to know better. The group had sent a number of manifestos to the *Daily Prophet* and had staged a couple of token attacks against Muggle-borns.

They were aware of the Malfoy family's affiliation with the Death Eaters and thus had sent a spokesperson, a well-spoken and well-dressed middle-aged wizard, to invite him to become a member of their group. Draco had politely declined; he had had his fill of extremist causes and mindless violence, and being a simple law-abiding (more or less) citizen suited him just fine. They had then sent a second spokesperson to persuade Draco that their cause was just, and he had a moral duty to lend his aid. The young wizard had made an impassioned speech, his eyes alight with fervour, but Draco was unmoved. He informed the young man that he refused to make the same mistake twice, seeing as last time it had almost cost him everything. And *then* they sent a coarse, burly wizard who tried to intimidate and threaten Draco into doing his *duty as a pure-blood wizard*. Draco had sneered and told him that he no longer acceded to threats and that he refused to let anyone dictate his actions again, before summarily throwing him out of his house and telling him not to come back.

Three days later his garden went up in flames.

Both Robards and Potter seemed to agree with him, that it looked like the Sons of Merlin were making good on their threats. What's more, they believed the group to be a real threat, and not just a noisy nuisance as Draco thought.

"I trust you understand the need for the utmost discretion in this case," Robards said, before going into details. "Anything said in this room stays in this room." It all seemed a bit paranoid to Draco, but that was Gryffindors for you; they did love their conspiracy theories.

Robards made a good case for the Sons being more dangerous than Draco had thought. Their attacks on Muggle-borns and the Ministry were more numerous than had been let on to the wider public. Even more importantly, the two Aurors believed the group not to be working alone, but to be part of a wider European network of groups, affiliated with Volfgang Varder's *Wizarding Pride* movement.

Draco gasped in astonishment. If that was true, then the Sons were more dangerous than they seemed. Varder was a Grindelwald in the making, and even though his movement originated in Eastern Europe, it was spreading like Fiendfyre through the entire continent.

"You see now why the Sons of Merlin have attracted our attention?" Robards concluded. "This time we will not be leaving the problem to fester until it's too late. This time we will nip it in the bud, and that's why we need your help."

"My help?" Draco exclaimed. Surely he had heard wrong. He had written to the Aurors *saying* they would deal with the problem. Long gone were the days when he let himself get dragged into this kind of thing. He looked at Potter for some sort of help, but Potter had hardly said a word during the whole meeting, and that wasn't likely to change now.

"Yes, Mr Malfoy, your help," Robards affirmed. "I do realise you are a civilian, and believe me we do not usually ask this sort of thing of civilians, but we are left with very few options. This group is *very* secretive and all our attempts to infiltrate it have failed so far. So much so that we have come to fear a leak in the Department *You*, on the other hand, have been invited to become a member."

Draco saw exactly where this was going, and he didn't like it one little bit. He shook his head defiantly as the words poured out before he could properly mould them. "No, no, no." He was up and pacing without even realising it, his hands dancing through the air with a life of their own, as if expansive theatrical gestures could persuade where logic and words failed. "You can't make me. I have rights. I'm sure it is one of my rights not to become an undercover spy if I don't want to. I'm perfectly happy with my boring *safe* life, thank you very much. Please feel free to find the first available Gryffindor to fill in for me."

He thought he heard Potter snicker, but when he turned to look his face was as impassive and blank as ever.

Robards, on the other hand, was looking very solemn and serious. "It's not our intention to *force* anyone to do anything. We are merely *asking* for your invaluable assistance, Mr Malfoy. The Ministry would be in your debt, and I'm certain you can see how *it would be to your advantage to help us*" The last few words were infused with the unmistakable ring of steel, and an underlying threat.

Draco clenched his jaw to keep from saying something he might regret and strode forcefully to the window. He turned his back on the pair as he tried to get his outrage under control. He *refused* to be intimidated and coerced; he *refused* to become a pawn in other people's power games again. As soon as he calmed down a bit, he would simply tell them that he would not do it.

He looked out the window, gazing at Aurors in his garden. They seemed to be doing a very thorough job, and he wondered what they would find, if anything. This brought his thoughts back to the matter at hand: he had to face the facts. Going against a disorganised group of vigilantes was one thing, and going against the Ministry was another. The truth was that he had a couple of embarrassing indiscretions in his past, and he had put his finger in a couple of pies he shouldn't have. Robards was not making an idle threat; he could make life very difficult for Draco if he wanted to.

Mind made up, he took a deep breath and turned around to face the two men. "Yes, I do believe you have a point, Head Auror Robards. There comes a time when a wizard, or witch, must overlook his own well-being and security in favour of looking at the bigger picture, and doing his duty for society and wizardkind. In spite of all the obvious dangers, I will help you." He couldn't help himself and gave a little ironic flourish of a bow at the end of that pronouncement. His father would have definitely disapproved.

A chuckle was heard from Potter's corner, and when Draco turned to look, he was given a quick grin and a wink.

"Mr Malfoy, you have our gratitude. Your efforts will not be forgotten," Robards told him, looking satisfied.

Of course they would not be forgotten. Draco didn't plan *on ever* letting the Ministry forget what he was going to do for them.

"We do realise the very real danger and difficulty of the task that is being given you," Robards went on. "That's why you will not be expected to work alone. Auror Potter will assist you."

"Assist me?" Draco asked, surprised. What would they spring on him next? "How can he possibly *assist me*? I doubt they will let me bring along *company*."

Potter cracked a small smile, and walked towards them. "I'm sure they will not be that intolerant of *all* company," he said smugly.

"Potter is right," Robards added. "Surely they will let you bring along a pet or a familiar."

Draco's mouth fell open as he looked between the two men. "No," he said. "Potter's not a... He can't be a..." He watched in horror as the two Aurors nodded their confirmations, Potter grinning so smugly Draco wanted to punch him, while Robards simply looked insufferably self-satisfied as if he had yet again pulled one over on Draco.

"No, no, no," Draco pleaded, forgetting all dignity and finely formulated turn of phrase, gesticulating wildly and slightly hysterically. "I can't have a big fluffy dog, or a squirrel, or tiger or whatever the hell Potter turns into as a *familiar*. No one would believe it and I would never live it down." Forcing him to be a spy was one thing. Scorpius might even be suitably impressed when he found out but this was simply intolerable. He refused to be embarrassed in such a manner.

If possible, Potter looked even more smug and Robards more self-satisfied and victorious. Draco was ready to tear out his remaining hair in frustration when Potter transformed.

Harry slowly slithered down the smooth warm surface of the large wooden dining table, enjoying the slight, or not so slight, flinches of the wizards and witches he passed by. There weren't that many people seated around the table, just seven not including the host, but Malfoy, *Draco* it was always Draco in his mind; it had been for a long time now had insisted that they use the small formal dining room. It was more comfortable and more proper, and Draco was nothing if not the perfect host.

Harry flicked out his tongue, trying to catch a scent in the air. The witch nearest to him gasped audibly. If snakes could chuckle, Harry would have. It never failed to amuse him how afraid people were of snakes. Even Draco had flinched and shied away in the beginning, despite knowing it was just Harry. Only with time and practice had he become accustomed enough to Harry's alternative form to be completely at ease. Now he was as amused as Harry by the others' instinctive fear and wariness.

Harry slowly slid further along the table, carefully taking in faces, voices and odours. There were five wizards and two witches. They all zealously pleaded the case of their cause persuasively enough to a greater or lesser degree. Nevertheless, they all seemed like followers to Harry, the sort of mindless sheep that were more or less harmless unless spurred into action by someone charismatic and masterful enough to become their leader. He couldn't complain; it would take lots of patience and planning for him and Draco to worm their way into the inner circle of the organisation. Then they would be able to take down the whole rotten house of cards. Harry grinned in anticipation. Strangely enough, it came out like an aborted hiss, and a short squat wizard actually jumped in startlement.

Harry continued creeping closer to his blond partner. He had to hand it to the man: despite his initial refusal and misgivings, he had adapted to their task of subterfuge, persuasion, and double talk like a duck to water. The way he had acted out slowly coming around and reconsidering his "hasty and ill-considered" refusal of their invitation had been masterful. At the present moment he was being charming and eloquent, espousing their ideals completely and putting down his earlier "hesitance" to fear, which he was now "ready to overcome with their guidance".

Harry basked in Draco's honeyed voice. It sent shivers down his long spine and made a tendril of heat curl itself inside the elongated stomach of his cold-blooded form. He felt the need to be near the other man, and in his animal form his more primal instincts and desires were closer to the surface, making it much easier to simply act without thinking.

He quickly reached Draco's left hand, where it rested on the table, and twined himself around the delicate wrist. He felt the other man twitch and look down in surprise, before his lips turned up in a smile upon seeing Harry. He was enjoying having a deadly snake as a familiar far more than Harry considered proper. He fairly radiated smugness while the others looked at him in awe as Harry slowly slithered up his arm to curl lazily around his shoulders. Harry was long enough to be able to loosely wrap himself around the other man's shoulders twice. He wrapped his thin tail around his middle to stabilise himself and lifted his triangular head up till it was sheltered under Draco's chin. He looked around the room from his new vantage point, and then down at himself. He looked like a beautiful yet deadly adornment, his body sleek and pitch black with bright yellow zigzags down the side. The blackness of his scales made the pale goldenish colour of Draco's skin look even paler. He lowered his head to rest it against the other man's breastbone.

Once in place, Harry immersed himself in Draco's intoxicating scent and steady heartbeat. He knew that this meeting was important and he should pay attention to all that was said and done, but Draco was like a potent narcotic, one that Harry had been high on for the week or so he had been living at Malfoy Manor.

Robards had insisted that Harry stay at the manor during the time they worked together, telling them it was more "efficient" that way. Harry, heart lodged in his throat with the thought of sharing the same albeit large house with the man he had secretly been obsessing over for years had nodded his agreement, slightly dazed. Draco's eyes had widened in surprise before he shrugged casually, and told them he had plenty of rooms to spare.

Harry flicked his tongue out lazily, trying to ingest as much of Draco's scent as he could. It had taken them eight days, eight days of planning and waiting, to set up tonight's meeting. Eight days during which he had only talked to Ginny four times, and even that was only really so he could talk to little Lily, who had yet to go to Hogwarts with her siblings. Eight days of feeling constantly on the verge of exploding from repressed sexual desire and longing. It was one thing to lie in bed at night next to his estranged wife, the inches between them in actuality a wide abyss that had grown little by little as years passed and he had withdrawn from her, dreaming of Draco, an imaginary Draco that was little more than a fantasy figure pieced together from glimpses at public functions and articles in the gossip pages of the *Prophet*. It was quite another to eat breakfast opposite the authentic flesh and blood Draco. Reality proved much more genuine and heady, and it made Harry *feel* again. Feelings and desires he had tried to push aside and forget over years of denial reared their heads again and washed over him, in one giant relentless flood, till he felt helpless and drowning.

He remembered with painful clarity the exact moment, almost a decade ago now, when it all had started. He had been sitting opposite Ginny, sipping his tea and nibbling

on a piece of toast. The early morning light fell across the wooden kitchen table in one long pale stripe. The motes of dust danced in it. Ginny sipped her coffee, and he idly turned the page in that morning's *Daily Prophet*, and there it was. A large black and white photograph of Draco, his wife and his baby son, and underneath in bold writing, *Astoria Greengrass leaves Lucius Malfoy's son after finding him in bed with another man.* There followed an entire article with all the sordid details. Harry found that he couldn't drag his eyes from Malfoy's smiling face. Obviously the photograph was not a recent one. He felt angry, indignant, *cheated*. He himself, after years of belated realisations and soul-searching, had only just come to the painful realisation that he was in fact gay, and that it was too late. He had Ginny and James and Albus and another on the way, and there was no going back or changing things. He had his family, which he loved, and it should be enough.

But looking at Malfoy's face in the newspaper, he suddenly felt cheated and hollow. How could his old school rival be gay? He and Malfoy were nothing alike. The blond couldn't, *shouldn't*, share this one thing with Harry, this one thing that Harry hid from all, even his closest friends, and was his secret and his alone. Malfoy couldn't be having sex with other men something that Harry had never done, but only imagined and dreamed about in the safety of the dead of night as Ginny lay beside him fast asleep. Suddenly the other man's divorce seemed less like a catastrophe, and more like a regaining of freedom Harry would never enjoy. He closed the newspaper abruptly and picked up his tea to take a big gulp. Ginny looked up from her crossword and smiled at him. Harry forced a smile back. Malfoy might be regaining his freedom, but what Harry had was better; it was a life, a place to belong, a family to love.

Harry dragged his thoughts back to the present as Draco started speaking again, the vibrations of his voice travelling through Harry's snake body. Harry studied the others at the table; most were already won over by Draco's perfectly faked sincerity. He noted with amusement that one of the witches was looking at the blond, wide-eyed as she hung onto his every word, as if she and the entire wizarding world weren't aware of Draco's total lack of interest in witches. The society pages of the *Prophet* seemed as obsessed as Harry with Draco's private life and Harry eagerly devoured every line, every snapshot, every mention of the blond.

He lived vicariously through the other man, and a small uncomfortable ball which he eventually recognised as jealousy slowly grew in his stomach the more he read about the men Draco dated and slept with. Draco seemed set on sleeping with every single dark-haired gay wizard, and drinking and dancing his way to a scandalous old age, while Harry changed nappies, and healed scraped knees, and slowly drifted apart from his wife. Soon in Harry's late night imaginings, no longer did faceless men hold the starring role, but rather a slender blond with cheekbones as sharp as a knife's edge.

The English May was definitely not warm enough for sunbathing in the nude, but Draco wasn't going to let a little detail like that stop him. Ever since Astoria had outed his sexual preferences to the wizarding world before very publicly and messily divorcing him, Draco had decided it was time to stop conforming to what was proper and live a little. One of his smaller and perhaps sillier revolts against his upbringing was his resolution to become the first Malfoy with a suntan.

His mother had lifted an unimpressed eyebrow the first year he had tried and turned lobster pink but had refrained from commenting, just like she had on all his other "juvenile antics". After years of trial and error, and the use of proper sun-protection potions, he had conquered the art of slowly acquiring a discreet goldenish colour. It was by no means particularly impressive, or even obvious to those who didn't know him, but Draco drew satisfaction from his new reflection, one that barely resembled the gaunt deathly pale terrorised teenager he had once been. Plus Draco had found that the act of lounging naked in the sun was one that he found particularly enjoyable. It made him feel wonderfully decadent and sensual.

He was especially enjoying himself at present. The sun's muted rays caressed his back and buttocks as he lay on his front on a sun bed, his head resting on his folded arms. However, the chief source of his enjoyment was Potter, who was seated a mere few feet away, ostensibly engrossed in a book. But Draco could feel the other man's eyes on him, his scorching intense gaze concentrating on his bare arse. Draco felt like he was going to burn up under Potter's stare, go up in flames from the sheer intensity of it, and the sheer exhilaration it brought him.

Draco wasn't blind; he knew his own faults and foibles. He knew there was nothing he coveted more than the attention and gaze of other people; it made him feel important and wanted. What's more, Potter had never been *other people*; Potter had always loomed larger than life and more real than anyone else in Draco's conscience. And now that he had the whole of that formidable attention focused solely on him, Draco felt like he was going to burst with the force of the feeling. He felt so intoxicated, that if he just let himself go he was sure he would simply float out of his body and disappear into the cloudless sky.

Draco slyly lifted his head and glanced at Potter from under his fringe. He just about caught the tail end of the dark-haired man's furtive stare before he buried his nose back in his book. Draco bit his tongue to contain the moan of satisfaction and arousal that threatened to escape. He discreetly wriggled a bit to alleviate the slight throbbing of his half-hard cock and sighed softly. It had been a little more than a month now that Potter had been staying at the manor, a month that Draco enjoyed more than he ever would have imagined.

During that month they had had three meetings with representatives of the Sons of Merlin and exchanged numerous missives with them. It was slow work, but Draco was in no hurry. The longer it took them, the longer Potter would be around. Draco had been slowly getting to know the other man all over again, and coming to realise how the adult Potter of the present was very different from the boy he had been at school, and yet strangely similar. Potter had actually been one of the first boys Draco had ever had a crush on. He had hated it at the time, having a crush on an insufferable prat and hopeless Gryffindor, but hormones were hormones, and there was no fighting them.

Now, so many years later, Draco had found it ridiculously easy to develop a new attraction in a surprisingly short time. Only now he was no longer an insecure and repressed teenager, and he had no trouble flirting outrageously with Potter. Potter looked surprised, and on a couple of occasions actually blushed, but at no time did he react violently or rebut Draco, like he was half afraid he would. Actually Potter seemed oddly accepting of Draco's flirting and... *pleased*. Draco was beginning to seriously suspect that the Man Who Vanquished the Dark Lord was not nearly as straight as he made out. The thought was warm and comforting and made a small bubble of hope well up inside Draco. After being exposed to Potter and his many infuriating qualities, Draco was sure he had been spoiled for all other men. After you have known the hero, how can you settle for anything else?

Draco rolled over to lie on his back, the weak sun feeling glorious on his naked chest and cock; he heard a harsh intake of breath and a clatter of noise as Potter stumbled from his chair, tipping it over.

"I've got to go," Potter said hurriedly. "I've... um, got things to do. Inside. Yeah, inside. Important things. Can't wait. I'll see you later. Not so much of you of course, but... um, yeah, see you." And with a shuffling of feet, and the crash of the French doors slamming, Potter was gone.

Draco smirked to himself as he lazily trailed a hand down his torso. He wondered whether Potter was going to take a cold shower, or wank. He hoped it was the latter. Draco's hand finished its journey as it came to wrap around his hardening cock. He knew for a fact that Potter's bedroom offered a clear view of the back garden and the sun bed he was lounging on.

part 2 of 3

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Harry was wrapped securely around Draco's arm, all his senses alert. Their perseverance, and Draco's talent for persuasion, had finally paid off. Draco had proven his sincerity and devotion to the cause satisfactorily and had been invited to a meeting of the "inner circle" of the Sons of Merlin. Robards had been particularly satisfied with their progress when they informed him and was expecting a detailed report of the meeting.

Harry looked around, curious. They were in a dark, overgrown garden belonging to a typical, large, overbearing, country house. An emissary had been sent to Side-Along Apparate Draco to the secret location of tonight's high-profile meeting. Harry flicked out his tongue, tasting the chilly night air and analysing their location. He tried to guess where they were, but to no avail. All he could tell was that they were now further north, and there was a distant smell of the sea.

"This way, Mr Malfoy," the bearded wizard informed Draco before starting down the garden path.

He led them all the way to the large, square, country house. It was built in roughly hewn country stone and had wide rectangular windows, which were all dark except for the western corner of the ground floor where they were headed. The wizard led them up a stone staircase to a large terrace. The soft murmur of voices could be heard from the interior, echoing out into the night through the open glass doors that led onto the terrace. They followed the sound of the voices into a spacious and comfortable room containing a number of people, seated around an ostentatious roaring fire on an assortment of sofas and armchairs.

The squat, bearded wizard cleared his throat to gain the attention of the seated group. "Mr Malfoy," he informed them, introducing Draco.

Harry studied the assembled wizards and lone witch. The witch was a regal looking middle-aged woman, perfectly coiffed and beautifully dressed with a string of pearls round her neck. She looked like someone's elegant wife, but Harry was not fooled, he could see the spark of sharp intelligence glinting in her eyes and the shrewdness hidden in the twist of her mouth. He hoped Draco didn't make the mistake of underestimating her, like too many men no doubt did.

Two of the seated wizards Harry recognised from the meetings at the manor. One was a young wizard barely in his twenties, a naïve young man blindly devoted to the cause, whose main virtue was the fact his father was a senior member of the Wizengamot. The other was an unremarkable wizard with a round face and a shiny bald patch who held a middle level position in the Department of International Magical Co-operation.

Draco smiled pleasantly at all those assembled and performed a gallant bow in the direction of the sole lady. One of the unknown wizards stood up to greet him. The man was handsome but unassuming and shook Draco's hand vigorously. "Welcome, Mr Malfoy." His voice was pleasant and smooth. He introduced himself as Plato Beaufort before introducing the others.

None of the names were in the slightest familiar to Harry. He did note, however, that the serious looking gentleman with the moustache and the military bearing was a foreigner. From the slight shifts in Draco's posture and heart rate, he could tell that most of the names meant something to his partner. That was just one of the many reasons why Draco was better equipped for this task than any of the Aurors they could have tried sending undercover in his place.

Draco took a seat on one of the sofas, and a house-elf immediately brought him a brandy. Beaufort offered him a cigar and expressed his admiration of the blond's familiar. Draco politely declined the cigar, but couldn't help preening in satisfaction as he showed off his brightly patterned and highly poisonous snake to the others. Harry tried, and failed, to roll his eyes in exasperation and flicked out his tongue in a hiss. He noticed that the foreigner remained as unmoving as a statue, whereas the other new faces were relatively successful in suppressing their instinctive flinches.

Easily enough the company fell into what superficially resembled an easy, casual discussion, but held many layers of hidden undertones. Harry realised early on that Draco had appreciated Lady Lennox's importance and was actively pursuing her good opinion and alliance. Harry observed, intrigued, as he masterfully charmed her. Even though she was obviously aware of being played, she seemed to appreciate his efforts and was visibly won over by the end of the night. This play was not invisible to all others present either. Beaufort, and Jarvis Hardcastle, a taciturn man who nevertheless seemed to share the unofficial leadership of the group with Beaufort, observed the proceedings with as much interest as Harry. As for the foreigner, Gyula Huszár, Harry found him impossible to read.

Harry quickly got tired of being wrapped around Draco's wrist. The blond's scent was so overwhelming and arousing that the effort of ignoring it was giving Harry a headache. He unbound his sleek body to slither down his host. He slid down Draco's leg on the way to the floor, trying his best to pay no attention to the proximity of the other man's groin; the image of that beautiful cock was burned into his retinas and haunted his waking and sleeping hours.

The snake's movement drew the attention of the company. Draco laughed away their worries.

"He's a very curious snake, far too fond of exploring and poking his nose in dark corners. There's no need for the slightest worry; he's very well behaved and doesn't bite unless I tell him to."

Harry slunk across the plush Persian carpets, trying to take in as much of the room as he could from his low vantage point, his eyes constantly on the lookout for possible clues. In the meantime the discussion continued, and Harry kept his ears open so as not to miss anything.

The consensus was that even though their agenda was similar to the Death Eaters', their similarities ended there. Their group was a co-operation of like-minded wizards and witches whose ultimate goal was the greater good of the wizarding world. It was a purpose that surpassed national borders which were mostly Muggle-imposed anyway and individual self-serving objectives. Their main aim was the accomplishment of a "gentle revolution", a smooth transition to a new, and better, world order, one where the Statute of Secrecy would become obsolete as the Muggle and wizarding worlds merged into a harmonious unity where everyone knew and accepted their place in the order of things, and their limitations and responsibilities.

Unfortunately, they explained, the movement was still fledging, and the world needed to be shocked into realisation and pushed in the right direction. That was why at present they were forced by circumstances to resort to vulgar violence like common Muggles. They hastened to reassure Draco that he need not take part in such distasteful activities, for they already had an efficient network for such work. Draco was being invited to be part of the public face of the movement. At least half the battle would be fought in the political arena. They planned on rising to power using legitimate avenues as an opposition party to the present administration. Draco was offered the position of figurehead of their opposition party. Though never stated, it was obvious that Draco would be accountable to the inner circle and take all his cues from them. Also left unsaid, but understood to everyone present, was that he was effectively being offered the chance to become the Minister for Magic in the brave new world they were working to bring into existence.

Harry could easily tell that Draco was honestly flattered, and he wondered if the blond would have been seriously tempted to accept if Harry weren't present. He curiously raised his head to look at the other man, only to see that a delicious, faint blush covered his cheeks, and he had his head slightly lowered. "You flatter me," he murmured.

The group hastened to assure him that he needn't be so modest; they had every confidence in his abilities and many reasons to prefer him for this position over others that might seem more qualified. He was a public figure from a family with a history of involvement in politics. He was a survivor of the previous war, and even though he had been officially on the "wrong" side, he had managed to salvage his reputation and become a respected and recognised member of wizarding society. There was a symbolic value, too, to his choice: he was a member of an old pure-blood family that was known to always support the old wizarding values. What's more, he was relatively young, but not inexperienced, and they wanted to show a contemporary and fresh public face.

The only problem was his unstable and highly public private life. Whereas they appreciated that his frequent appearance in the *Daily Prophet*, and the easy recognisability of his face were assets, they kindly requested he conduct his affairs with more discretion.

Draco agreed, saying that now he had been given a worthwhile goal, he no longer needed to immerse himself in frivolous distractions to such a degree. However, he

warned, he never would be an angel. The last was accompanied with a saucy wink in Lady Lennox's direction. She laughed delightedly and clapped her hands, declaring that she really liked this new addition to their little circle.

Quill and parchment were procured and heads brought together as they all began seriously deliberating who else would be an invaluable member of their soon-to-be formed opposition party.

Much, much later all the brandy had been drunk and all the lists completed and set aside. A new meeting at a later date was planned, and Draco rose to say his goodbyes and take his leave. Harry had been dozing on the warm granite hearth in front of the fireplace for the last half hour, letting the softly spoken discussion wash over him. Draco leaned over and gently picked him up to cradle him in his arms.

"Silly creature," he told the others fondly. "It seems like it's past his bedtime. It's about time I took him home."

He shook the wizards' hands and kissed the back of Lady Lennox's hand before letting Beaufort lead him back into the dark garden he had arrived in to Apparate home.

"You must excuse our insistence you join us. I'm sure we became insufferably rude and obnoxious, and for that I sincerely apologise," Beaufort told Draco, his well-modulated, pleasant voice breaking the not-quite silence of the slightly chilly night. "The truth was that in your person we saw a truly invaluable champion for our cause, and the only wizard we believed capable of leading our party to success. If you hadn't finally accepted I don't know what we would have done."

Beaufort was a nice enough bloke, and yet Harry could not help but feel some sort of instinctive wariness or dislike toward him. The man was far too friendly to Draco for Harry's liking. With his curly brown hair and finely chiselled face, he seemed like the exact type of wizard Draco preferred. And with his well-bred manners, smooth hands and vocabulary that put Harry's to shame, Harry was sure that if it came down to a competition for Draco's interest the other man would surely win. Harry's stomach began to clench uncomfortably as the familiar feeling of jealousy bloomed once again.

Draco, as polite as ever, thanked the other man for his vote of confidence and gripped Harry harder as he Apparated them back to the manor. As soon as they blinked back into existence in one of the manor's less formal drawing rooms, Draco set Harry on the floor.

Harry transformed back into his human form instantaneously, propelled by a sense of exhilaration and accomplishment from the meeting's success, but also a feeling of uncomfortable resentment, bordering on irrational anger from the easy camaraderie Draco had developed with Beaufort. He stood in front of Draco like a tightly wound spring, ready for action and vibrating with pent-up energy.

Draco smiled at him, a brilliant, wide smile showing off his perfect, white teeth. He looked so pleased and victorious it took years off his age and he almost looked boyish again. He threw his arms wide in one of the ridiculous over-the-top gestures he favoured, and Harry secretly found adorable.

"Admit it, Potter, I'm brilliant. I'm brilliant and they want to make me Minister for Magic! Too bad I'm going to have to disappoint them."

Draco radiated so much good cheer and excitement that it fairly melted away all of Harry's residual resentment. Harry couldn't help but gaze, enraptured and besotted, at the glowing man that filled his daydreams and haunted his slumber.

Draco grasped Harry by the elbow. "Come on," he ordered, "let's have a celebratory drink. What would you like?"

You, thought Harry and without even knowing what he was doing he grabbed Draco and pulled him into a crushing kiss, holding him in place with one hand at the small of his back and the other at the nape of his neck.

There was a strange ringing in Harry's ears and his brain was filled with loud static that drowned out all thoughts and any possible voice of reason. All he could feel was the rapid beat of Draco's heart under his fingertips and the soft velvet of his lips against his own. After stiffening in surprise at first, Draco eventually melted into Harry's embrace and wound his arms round his neck, opening his mouth to let Harry in. Lights flashed behind Harry's closed eyelids, and he could no longer feel the floor under his feet. Draco's warm, hard body, as it wound itself round Harry like a vine around a tree, was the only thing anchoring him in place.

Harry opened his mouth as wide as he could, twining his tongue round Draco's, delving into all the corners of his mouth, trying to taste as much of him as he could, trying to taste his very soul. The hand behind Draco's nape was like a vice keeping him in place as Harry devoured him hungrily. Their lips kneaded against each other, breaking apart only to gasp a common breath. Draco tightened his hold on Harry, almost crushing him, as he let out a series of pathetic-sounding whimpers and moans.

It was all too much for Harry; he felt like he was going to short-circuit any moment. He wanted to break away, to get his breath back, to let the wild beating of his heart subside, and yet he never wanted to stop what he was doing. He slid his wet mouth over Draco's face, tasting his left cheek, the side of his nose, his pointy chin, his Adam's apple, the side of his neck where the chord of muscle was pulled taut. He flicked his tongue out, tasting the other man's skin and sweat and trailed it all over Draco's neck and into the dip at the base of his throat, trying to sate his ravenous hunger. Draco's moans had become hoarse and broken as if his throat was raw and painful, and Harry realised distractedly that the other man was grinding his clothed erection against Harry's thigh in small, desperate circles.

Harry blindly searched for Draco's mouth again. He felt dizzy and disorientated. He wanted so much. He wanted everything Draco had and more. He clasped Draco to him possessively as he tried to tell the other man with his lips and tongue what he wanted.

"Sirs, please, sirs! I'm sorry, sirs! Mr Robards is here, Master. He wants to see you and Mr Potter, sir. What do I do?"

The high pitched plaintive voice cut through the haze in Harry's mind, bringing him back to the present like a bucket of cold water. He sucked in a long gasp of air and jumped away from Draco.

The blond was flushed and rumpled and looked just as disoriented as Harry felt. Draco combed a shaking hand through his tousled hair and glanced at the trembling house-elf who was busy wringing his hands and pulling his ears.

"Yes, I see," Draco said, his voice only slightly hoarse. "Escort him to my office and tell him we will be right there."

The house-elf disappeared with a pop, and Draco looked at Harry, eyebrow raised in question.

Harry flushed and looked away. "We really should go and find Robards," he said.

"Let's go then," Draco answered and swiftly smoothed himself down before turning towards the door.

Harry trailed after him, feeling awkward and guilty. *What have I just done?* his conscience wailed.

The salmon was cooked to mouth-watering perfection, the steamed vegetables were exactly as he liked them not too soft and not too hard and the wine was one of his favourites. In short, the meal was exquisite, and yet he was not enjoying it. How could he with Potter's morose face opposite him, eyes intent on his plate as he decimated the beautifully presented meal with his fork, turning it slowly into mush? Potter was enough to turn anyone off their lunch.

Draco elegantly speared a bite-sized piece of courgette and popped it into his mouth. He closed his eyes and tried to savour his mouthful but it was hopeless. He could still feel Potter opposite him simply *radiating* standoffishness and discomfort and all other manner of unpleasant feelings. It made Draco want to scream in inarticulate frustration and disappointment. Instead he carefully modulated his voice to polite blandness before speaking.

"This evening you will be dining alone. I have an engagement."

That got Potter to lift his eyes from the carnage on his plate. The frown marks between his dark brows deepened into an expression of wary curiosity.

"Don't wait up for me either. I expect I'll be late," Draco added.

"Is it a date?" Potter ground out, his voice vibrating with a repressed emotion which Draco couldn't pinpoint but which made him smirk in satisfaction nevertheless. "Is it another Quidditch player half your age?"

Draco smiled smugly. "He's a Chaser, actually. And yes, he's delightfully young."

He gave Potter a meaningful look, insinuating all the things he planned on doing with the gorgeous brown-haired Chaser before the night was over.

Potter glared menacingly. "And what about your promise to the Sons of Merlin that you were going to stop being so shamelessly promiscuous?" he growled.

Draco bit his tongue hard to stop himself calling the other man a frigid, hypocritical prude, like he'd been wanting to for two weeks now, ever since the morning after the kiss. Instead he took a deep, calming breath.

"Actually, I only promised them to be discreet. We can't all be virtuously celibate. Don't worry, I'll be very proper while we're in public. For afterwards I know a couple of very good silencing charms, so we won't be disrupting your sleep."

Potter growled low in his throat and viciously stabbed a carrot with his fork before violently shoving it in his mouth.

The rest of the meal was passed in chilly silence. Draco prayed for the fortitude to put up with the insufferable Potter, while the dark haired Auror viciously mutilated his meal.

It was all Potter's fault anyway. He deserved to suffer, to suffer as much as humanly possible. That kiss had been wonderful, mind-blowing, so much better than Draco had imagined it would be. Potter had been perfect: strong, powerful, demanding and yet strangely gentle and unsure. The kiss had been so overpowering that Draco had been left in a staggering daze in its wake, scrambling to pull himself back together after completely flying apart at the seams. He had thought of the kiss as a promise, a promise of the wonderful things to follow. He was sure that Potter had felt the spark as much as he had, he had initialised the kiss after all.

And yet, as soon as Robards left, Potter had disappeared into his room so fast Draco was left reeling. Next morning, with an over-abundance of stammering, humming and rambling syntax, Potter had given an incomprehensible speech that boiled down to the kiss being a terrible mistake. The flushing man had said that he hadn't been thinking and it would never happen again. He was very sorry.

For the two weeks after that, Potter moped about the manor, awkward and moody, hiding in his room, escaping to the garden in his Animagus form or being silent and uncommunicative over meals. Whenever Draco tried to light-heartedly flirt with him, he either silenced the blond with a quelling look or else left the room. Now Draco had gone beyond confusion and disappointment. He was angry and frustrated. How dare Potter take it back?

In any case, Draco was certainly not going to sit around pining over the other man. He was free, thanks to an ill-thought-out indiscretion a decade ago, and he had a very healthy sex drive. And, unlike Potter, he never much fancied repressing his desires. It wasn't hard finding a date. Despite the receding hairline, he was still in very good shape and definitely attractive enough. For tonight he had found a good-looking young man he had been out with once before. Like all Quidditch players, for whom Draco had a penchant, he was fit and athletic, but most importantly, gratifyingly eager and irrepressibly horny.

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The dinner had gone well, all things considering. His companion may not have had much of interest to say, but he more than made up for it in good looks and a pleasing eagerness to go along with whatever Draco proposed. Thus once Draco had finished the last of his panna cotta and paid the bill, he proposed they return to his manor and take advantage of his large double bed. His companion agreed immediately. Draco loved getting his own way. He loved it almost as much as he loved getting laid.

As soon as they reached the restaurant's foyer, Draco put his arms around his companion's waist and Apparated them into the drawing room he favoured. Once they were in the safety of the manor, he tightened his arms around the slim young man and began kissing and nipping on his neck. The other man hummed in satisfaction and bent his head to offer Draco better access. Suddenly Draco felt the body he was flush against stiffen but he paid no attention, beginning to earnestly nibble his way down the delicious throat.

"Good evening." The sound of Potter's voice suddenly echoed through the room.

Draco stiffened and stopped what he was doing. He didn't lift his head, however, but left it buried in his companion's neck, his arms still wrapped around the defined torso.

"Mr Potter..." the silly star-struck youth stuttered.

Draco tightened his hold in annoyance. Did everyone have to worship bloody Potter? All he needed now was for his date to ask the Saviour for an autograph.

"If you don't mind, I would like to speak to Mr Malfoy alone," Potter demanded without preamble.

Draco finally lifted his head, outraged. "Yes, we bloody well do mind! You have nothing to say to me."

He observed that Potter sat sprawled in a large armchair, a glass of amber liquid in his hand. On the small table beside him sat a bottle of one of Draco's finest Firewhiskys, more than half empty.

"Will you please excuse us?" Draco sneered. "We have pressing business elsewhere." He went to leave the room, his hand gripping the Chaser's wrist like a vise.

"Draco," Potter ground out in his most authoritative voice, and Draco could barely suppress the shiver that went down his spine. "We have to talk. Tell your *friend* to go home."

Draco spun around, eyes flashing, ready to tell Potter off once and for all, when his date spoke. "Actually, Draco, I think I really should be going. I'm sure you and Mr Potter have important business to discuss." His words tripped over each other in his rush to get them out. "Umm... Owl me sometime." And with that, he extricated his wrist from Draco's grasp and bolted, leaving Draco alone with Potter.

Draco advanced towards the other man, so angry his vision was blurring around the edges. "This better be good, Potter, because you just wrecked what started out as a very promising evening."

Potter put down his glass and stood up. "Why do you waste your time with boys like that, Draco? It's not becoming."

"I can waste my time however I see fit. And for your information, most people do not find sex a waste of time, but rather an enjoyable experience. You had your chance, Potter, if I recall, and you turned it down. You were the one who didn't want to sleep with me, not the other way round. So you can just..."

Draco was just getting into his stride when suddenly a warm, demanding mouth was crushed against his own. Potter's hands came up to grab Draco's arms in a painfully tight grip. "Shut up," Potter growled against his lips and then forced his tongue into Draco's mouth.

The kiss quickly turned violent and almost painful. Somehow one of Potter's hands found its way to Draco's arse, where it cupped round one cheek possessively, while the other twisted into his hair, using it to bend his head back to give Potter better access.

Draco felt like he was drowning. Potter was overwhelming him with the sheer intensity of the kiss, and Draco was left scrambling not to fly apart but somehow to regain some sense of self under the onslaught. He battled Potter's determined tongue as best he could and slid his hands under his shirt to let them roam over smooth, hot skin. He explored each joint in Potter's spine all the way up to the nape of his neck and all the way down into the dip over the swell of his arse. He slipped curious fingers under the waistband of Potter's trousers and the other man broke away from the kiss gasping, his forehead leaning against Draco's, their noses touching. Draco breathed in the same air, moist with Potter's exhalations.

"Potter..." he began shakily.

"Harry," he was corrected in a husky undertone.

With an effort Draco forced his mouth to form the unfamiliar sound. "Harry..." he began again, the 'h' coming out like a breathy sigh.

He never managed to finish his sentence because Potter, Harry, crushed his mouth against his own once again, stealing his breath and making his knees tremble. Draco couldn't remember the last time anyone had kissed him like this. Potter kissed passionately and thoroughly and slightly desperately. He kissed like he really meant it.

After what felt like an eternity Potter broke away once again, burying his nose in Draco's tangled hair, and held him close in a crushing grip. Draco felt the familiar squeeze of his insides and the even more familiar disorientation of Apparation, and with a sharp crack Potter had relocated them to the guest bedroom he was using.

The dark-haired man, his face a mask of desire and determination, grabbed hold of Draco's robes and with a swift violent movement, and the sound of fabric tearing, pulled them over Draco's head and threw them into a messy pile in the corner of the room. The slightly chilly air of the room suddenly hit Draco's exposed chest, and he felt himself goose-bump. Before he could react, Potter had shoved him forcefully backwards until he was sprawled on his back on the bed in nothing but his shoes and boxers. Potter stared at him, eyes wide, cheeks flushed and chest heaving, as Draco yanked off his shoes and socks and threw them across the room.

The blond spread himself on the bed in an inviting pose, shivering slightly from the chill. Potter smiled predatorily as he toed out of his own shoes, and with a gleam in his eyes he pounced on Draco like an attacking lion or tiger, or perhaps better a springing cobra. And then Draco was no longer cold because Potter was burning hot as he covered him, determined to touch every inch of Draco's body, first with his hands and then with his tongue.

After exploring and laying claim to Draco's mouth yet again, he tasted behind his ears, down the side of his throat, along the slightly darker skin of his shoulders. He scarcely paused for a breath before continuing to Draco's heaving sternum, his right and then his left nipple, which had pebbled tight first with cold and now with arousal. Potter slowly explored each of Draco's ribs with the same attention and almost reverently traced the faded line of the silver scar that slashed a diagonal line down his chest and side.

Draco had long given up any semblance of control and clutched desperately at Potter's thick hair, his hands twisted into the coarse strands. He arched his back and curled his toes, whining and whimpering pathetically as his assailant mouthed his flat stomach and belly-button. He yelped, high-pitched and desperate, when that hot tongue trailed ever so slowly over the quivering skin under his belly and just over the waist-line of his fine silk boxers. He wanted to push Potter's dark head lower till it reached the part of him that throbbed and ached and longed for that promising wet heat, but his hands felt like lead and he couldn't make them cooperate.

Suddenly Potter pulled away, and Draco was left cold and bereft. His hands slid out of the pitch-black hair to fall at his side and he looked down, a plaintive whine lodged in his throat. Potter was hovering over him, his hands at the waistband of his shorts, and his eyes big and green behind his glasses, looking unsure as he asked silently for permission. Draco suddenly realised that the other man had probably never done anything like this before, never kissed a man, never touched a man this way, never seen one completely naked from so close. Draco wordlessly jerked his head to signal his acquiescence, and Potter slid his final article of clothing down his slim hips, hands shaking slightly.

There was a lump Draco couldn't understand lodged in his throat and a strange fluttery feeling in his belly. He couldn't remember if he had ever been anyone's first before. He couldn't understand why Potter's inexperience affected him so.

Draco was finally completely naked, and the still clothed Potter had crawled back up the bed till his head was level with Draco's groin to stare wide-eyed, mouth slightly slack at Draco's cock. It stood erect and shiny with dampness as Potter stretched out a hand as if to touch, but let it hover, fingers only a hair's breadth away from Draco's burning skin. Draco squirmed and he felt his cock throb and jerk under all the intense attention. A small drop of precome squeezed out of the tip and sat there, glistening. He could feel Potter's soft puffs of breath as they washed over his hypersensitive skin and Potter's hand was so close, and yet so agonisingly far, that he could feel the ghost of a touch. The torture was too much.

"Please," he choked out, his voice breaking and splintering.

His torturer looked up briefly, face open and eyes wide and amazed, and *finally* touched him.

His touch was feather-light and unsure at first as he explored the new sensations. Soon, though, his grip tightened and he dipped his head to lick the groove where Draco's hip joined his body, and bury his nose in the wiry blond hair around the base of his cock. Draco arched his back, his fingers gripping the coverlet tight, and the muscles in his thighs straining. Potter was so close now; just a tiny bit more and he would be where Draco wanted him. Always wilful and contrary, Potter took his time, almost idly stroking the cock in his hand as he pushed his nose between Draco's balls and licked around each of them before licking one long stripe up the underside of Draco's cock. Draco cried out, first at the sensation and then at its loss. He opened his eyes, panting and desperate, ready to beg, plead and threaten.

Potter was looking at him again, gaze curious and intense. Draco was flushed and shaking; no one had ever made him feel this desperate and needy before. He opened his mouth to beg, but no sound came out. Potter smiled wickedly and bent his head again to mouth and lick at Draco's straining cock. Draco thrashed, drawing gasping, wheezing breaths, and filling the room with his inarticulate cries. He wanted so much more; Potter was so close and yet not there yet. When Potter's mouth finally, *finally*, engulfed Draco, he screamed in ecstasy and relief and almost came on the spot. Potter proceeded to bob his head, sucking and licking and occasionally breaking for breath. His rhythm was erratic and he was sloppy and inexperienced, but Draco didn't care, he hardly even noticed.

All he could think was that this was Potter. Potter's mouth sucking his cock, Potter's hands playing with his balls. Potter who had overpowered and overwhelmed him, who had made him give up control and turn into a quivering bundle of need. Potter who was the Ministry's best Auror, who was stubborn and capable, who was funny and talkative after a couple of glasses of wine over dinner, who avoided paperwork but adored flying. Potter who offered him advice about his son and how to stay on his ex-wife's good side. Potter, Harry, whom Draco had never realised that he had wanted so much and had never actually believed that he would get him into his bed. The combination was too much, the feeling of Potter's hot mouth and the knowledge of whose mouth it was, and with a violent explosion and ear-splitting scream, Draco came.

Potter was taken by surprise. He swallowed some and ended up choking and pulling away, getting the rest on his hands and face. When Draco came down from his high and looked at the other man, his vision clearing, he found him wiping his sticky hands on his shirt, a moue of disgust twisting his lips. Light-hearted and content, Draco couldn't help laughing.

"Come here, you," he said, snickering.

He pulled Potter up and used the soiled shirt to clean up the rest of the sticky liquid off Potter's face, and then removed it completely to drop it over the side of the bed. Potter had started to laugh softly too as he lay down beside Draco, draping an arm and a leg over the blond.

They turned their heads and kissed leisurely. Draco could taste himself on the other's tongue and could feel Potter's hardness through his jeans against his hip. Draco decided it was his turn to explore, and pushed the other man to lie flat on his back. As he kissed his way down the broad chest he couldn't help but notice how different Potter was to most of his youthful lovers. His shoulders were broad and his chest well-defined, but he had the fuller figure of a man approaching middle-age, the figure Draco tried hard to keep at bay. When he reached Potter's belly-button, the dark haired man began to squirm and his pants became harsher and louder. Potter was soft around the middle and had a small podgy belly, and yet, as Draco kissed the soft swell of flesh and heard the painfully sharp intake of breath from above him, he felt that Potter's body was more erotic than any of his perfectly sculpted Quidditch players.

Draco moved lower to rub his cheek against the large bulge in Potter's jeans. The material was stiff and scratchy, yet Draco could feel the warmth of the trapped cock under his cheek. Spurred on by Potter's soft moans and his own desire for more, he turned his mouth to cover the bump of Potter's cock through the unyielding fabric. He flicked his tongue out to stroke the warm material but all he could taste was damp denim. It was not nearly enough, and Potter seemed to agree, if the noises he was making were anything to go by.

Draco sat up to attack Potter's belt and make short work of his trousers, boring white y-fronts, and socks so he could finally admire the other man in his entirety. Potter's legs were beautifully well-formed and his thighs powerful and muscled, but Draco barely spared them a glance. All his attention was centred on the magnificent organ that rose, swollen and full, from the thick, wild thatch of black curls. It certainly wasn't the longest cock he had seen, and he was sure that he must have had thicker too, yet Draco thought that it definitely was a gorgeous sight and it made his mouth water as it stood in front of him, powerful and proud, like its owner.

Never one to deprive himself of anything he desired, he buried his face in the wiry hair around the base, mimicking Potter's earlier actions, to feel the amazing heat and damp that was the essence of Potter, Harry, and to inhale his very masculine smell. When he had inhaled his fill, he mouthed up the underside of the engorged cock, pressing his tongue against the thick pulsing vein as he went, to finally come to the wet domed head. He licked all around the head before taking it in his mouth and sucking. Potter floundered like a landed fish under him, releasing hoarse cries and moans. Draco was seriously considering deep-throating, when Potter gripped him by his upper arms and yanked him up till they were face to face.

"No, stop," Potter said, voice hoarse and pained. "It's too much. Can't last and I want... I want..." Potter gasped his words out, as if speaking were an effort.

"What do you want?" Draco asked him. He had an inkling of what it might be, but he wanted to hear the other say it.

Potter seemed to be fighting for the words. "I want. I want... me... in you. Can I? Will you... let me?"

Draco rubbed his thumbs across the little brown buttons of Potter's nipples and smirked as he observed his thin long-fingered hands against the other man's lightly haired pectorals.

"You want to fuck me?" he asked lightly, conversationally.

Potter shuddered and his "yes" came out as a strange cross between a hiss and a moan. It was definitely gratifying to be wanted so much, not to mention a powerful aphrodisiac. Draco felt himself slowly begin to harden again.

"Have you done it before?" he asked, still looking at his own hands as they played with Potter's chest.

"Once," Potter gasped. "With Ginny. She didn't like it much." The mention of the other man's wife left a sour taste in Draco's mouth and an annoying pinching feeling in his chest he chose to ignore. He looked into glittering green eyes hidden by glasses, and on a whim removed the round frames to lay them on the bedside table. Potter blinked at him myopically, the question still bright on his face.

"All right," Draco said. "I don't usually bottom to virgins." Actually he made a rule of never doing it. "We'll go slow and I'll talk you through it. Okay?"

Potter nodded wordlessly and Draco couldn't help himself, he leaned forward and kissed him. Their tongues tangled, mouths wide, lips sliding over each other. Eventually Potter pushed him away and looked at him pleadingly. Draco felt off-kilter and dazed. Potter was an amazing kisser.

"Do you want to prepare me or shall I do it?" he asked, his voice wavering slightly.

Potter's eyes dilated and he shuddered visibly as he licked his top lip. "I'll do it," he said, voice breaking.

Draco scrambled for Potter's wand amongst his discarded clothing beside the bed. Once he had found it, he opened Potter's palm and pointed the wand at its centre. Concentrating to cast with the unfamiliar wand, he mumbled a lubrication charm and Potter's palm was filled with a slick substance. Draco tossed the wand down and got into position, kneeling with his arse in the air and his head resting on his crossed arms. He moved his legs slightly apart and arched his back, enjoying the sound of Potter's ragged breathing as he displayed what he knew was a very good view.

Potter shifted closer and Draco could feel his hand ghosting over his back and buttocks, almost touching but not quite.

"Oh, Merlin," Potter whispered in an awed voice.

With one hand he smoothed over one of Draco's cheeks, stroking over the skin in a circular motion, softly at first and then harder as he grasped and kneaded the soft flesh. Draco bit the skin of his arm to stop himself from moaning from such a simple touch. Potter pulled the round globe to the side, exposing the valley in between. Draco could feel him leaning closer, could feel his hot breath against his flushed skin. Potter's nose touched the soft hidden skin as he inhaled, and his tongue furtively licked over the clenching pucker. Draco bit his arm so hard the pain shot through him, yet couldn't stop the needy, sobbing moan that escaped from deep inside. He turned his head to the side and forced the words out.

"Open me up with your fingers using the lubricant. Start with one first."

After the space of a breath, he felt one curious, slick finger start teasing his hole. The blunt digit rubbed around the sensitive, wrinkled skin there for a moment before squeezing inside, first just the tip teasingly, then more forcefully until it was eventually all in, and Draco could feel the other man's knuckles rubbing against him. Draco was on edge, he wasn't used to his lovers going so slowly and carefully. Potter took his time, exploring every single ridge and bump inside Draco before he added another finger.

"That's right," Draco breathed. "Stretch me as much as you can. Add another finger."

Potter's fingers twisted and turned. They scissored and bent. Draco could feel Potter's laboured breathing and could feel his exhalations as they washed over his exposed hole. He imagined Potter bent over, just inches from him, peering, near-sighted, at his own fingers as they disappeared into Draco's body, and he shivered in arousal, feeling more desirable than he had in a long time.

Potter had three fingers in him now and had moved to kneel over Draco. He brushed the damp hair off the back of Draco's sweaty nape with the back of his hand and laid a gentle kiss there before lapping at the skin. He moved his arm to circle Draco's chest and pull him up until his back was flush with Potter's heaving chest. Potter was roughly pumping his fingers in and out of Draco, causing Draco to shudder and yelp softly every time he brushed over the edge of his prostate. Potter worried the lobe of Draco's ear between his teeth for a while before letting go and whispering in his ear.

"Are you ready yet? I... I don't know how much longer I can wait. I really need..." He sounded desperate and in agony.

Draco bucked his hips, pushing the fingers even deeper inside him until he felt the definite spark of them touching his prostate. He swallowed thickly.

"Yes. I'm ready," he forced out. "Slick your cock with the rest of the lubricant and push in, *slowly*."

Potter turned Draco's head with a slippery hand, getting lubricant in the fine blond hair, and captured his mouth in another one of his breath-stealing kisses. At the same time he pulled out his fingers, leaving Draco momentarily empty and cold. And then, the blunt head of his cock was pushing against Draco's stretched hole, and Draco was whining and arching his back impossibly to push back and take more in, and Potter was grunting as if in pain, clutching Draco to him and shivering. It seemed to take forever as Potter stopped and started, pushed and pulled, grunted and gasped. Draco's knuckles were white as he clutched the mangled coverlet and his arms shook under him as he held himself up.

He held his legs open in an awkward angle, trying to open himself up as much to the intrusion, and his spine hurt from the painful angle he was twisting himself into trying

to push back onto the thick cock pushing in. His back was wet and sticky where it was glued to Potter's chest and his ear burned from Potter's scalding breath as it blew against it. Potter's grunts of effort reverberated through his whole body, and drops of sweat rolled off Potter's forehead to land on the coverlet in front of Draco. Yet there was no place Draco would rather be and no one he would rather be with. And when, eventually, Potter was fully seated, and he could hear and feel his shuddering deep breaths of effort and exultation, Draco felt so light he could fly.

Once Potter had got his breath back, in a move Draco didn't anticipate, he knelt back and pulled the slighter man into a sitting position until he was forced to lean forward slightly to grasp the headboard to keep his balance as he sat straddled over Potter. Potter moulded his front against Draco's back once again and licked the side of his throat and along his jaw-line. One of his hands went around Draco's middle, holding him in place like a band of iron, and the other started fondling and twisting a nipple.

"Move with me," he commanded in a voice that reverberated with hisses and growls, and pulled slowly out part way to slam back into Draco.

Draco yelped, caught off guard. Next time however, he was prepared and gripped the headboard, in a grip so hard he thought it might dent the wood, using it as leverage to grind himself downwards as Potter pushed up. Draco thought Potter was very good for practically a virgin. He let his head fall back to rest against Potter's shoulder and the dark haired man took advantage to suck at his Adam's apple. Potter thrust up into Draco at a steady, forceful rhythm and Draco ground down, twisting and turning to find the perfect angle. He needed, he needed... *that*. Potter's cock hit his prostate, and Draco let out a victorious cry as stars sparkled behind his closed eyelids. The other man seemed to understand as he began moving at a punishing pace, hitting Draco unerringly at every other thrust in exactly that spot. Draco felt almost as if he was ready to dissolve into a million different particles and leave his body completely as his yipping cries filled the whole room, drowning out his companion's lower-pitched groans. He barely noticed it as the hand round his middle moved to comb through his pubic hair first and then grasp his cock in a firm sweaty grip. Potter's thrusts had become erratic and violent as he began to swiftly pull on Draco's weeping cock.

Draco was so immersed in the feelings coursing through him, and the relentless tide of ecstasy he could feel growing in him all the way to the tips of his hair, that when his lover came violently and relentlessly inside him, biting down painfully on his throat and filling him to overflowing with thick, viscous fluid, he was taken by surprise. He pushed down onto Potter, feeling on a knife's edge and wanting badly to fall over the other side.

Potter had barely recovered when he began to jerk Draco off with a punishing and determined tempo. He continued to thrust into Draco with his slowly softening and spent cock and blindly searched for Draco's mouth with his own. Draco turned his head to help and when Harry's hot, demanding tongue was plunged once more into his mouth, he sagged against him and came in sharp jerks as he felt like he was ripped apart at the seams and flung out of his body.

Once he had come, Potter, Harry, finally, gave way under him and collapsed into an ungainly and exhausted heap, dragging Draco down with him. Draco wriggled around till he was more comfortably arranged and tucked his head safely against the other's shoulder, his nose mashing against the hard sweaty skin.

Harry's arm came to wrap around him in a warm, comfortable embrace, and Draco slowly began to return to his body, feeling tired, sated and yet incredibly elated. His limbs felt heavy and unwieldy, and his head fuzzy and confused, so when weariness overcame him, he didn't fight it and gently nodded off, feeling safe and content.

part 3 of 3

Chapter 3 of 3

Twenty years later, and there's a new subversive threat to the wizarding world. Draco would rather not get involved either way, much less work with Harry Potter on the Ministry's behalf. Epilogue compliant.

Note: A whole mountain of thanks to my marvellous beta, Raisinous Fiending, not only for putting much needed commas into my text but also for helping shape the story into something presentable. I would also like to give a big big hug to dragon_charmer for being a wonderful mod and more.

The silvery light of the three-quarter moon fell across the bed in a wide stripe, and a pleasant cool breeze wafted into the room through the half-open window. Harry lay in an awkward tangle of sheets, wide awake and uncomfortable. Next to him, Ginny lay sleeping peacefully.

Harry sat up and untangled himself from the sheets, straightening them out and covering Ginny properly before once more lying down. It was impossible! He couldn't sleep next to her. Not after Draco and the past month and a half. Unpleasant feelings of unease, guilt and a deep sense of wrongness churned inside him. How could he go back to sleeping and living and laughing with his wife as if nothing had happened, nothing had changed?

Harry tossed and turned for a couple of minutes longer before giving up and transforming. Maybe as a snake it would be easier. Maybe the simplified and distanced perspective that the snake's consciousness afforded would help.

It didn't. The scent and presence of Ginny grew stronger and wronger. It was the familiar scent of someone beloved and dear, but it wasn't the scent he craved, the scent of his lover. In the snake's mind, all his logical explanations and reasons started to feel trivial and circumstantial. The snake felt restless in this place he no longer belonged.

Harry slithered up the bed's headboard to the windowsill. Following a whim, he slid out the window and wound his way down the flowering wisteria till he reached the cool damp grass of the garden. His sensitive senses were assaulted by the smells and sounds of the summer night. The garden was beautiful and familiar, and almost as dear to him as the people sleeping in the house. A strong wave of melancholy stole over Harry. Even the snake seemed to be in a thoughtful and introspective mood tonight.

Hogwarts had broken up for the summer holidays, and earlier today he had joined Ginny and an exuberant Lily at King's Cross to welcome James and Albus home. He had seen Draco further down the platform with his ex-wife, as he too waited for his son. It felt strange, returning to the old distance between them. It had seemed like a parody of the previous September, when they had stood in almost exactly the same positions. Everything seemed to be the same, and yet it was not and never would, could, be. Harry, no matter what Draco said, could not return to his old life.

And now Harry was once more home. Once more back with his wife and children. But home was no longer a place he felt like he completely belonged. The nagging feeling he'd persistently ignored for the last decade, that all was not well, was now a glaring certainty. No matter how much he loved his children and didn't want to let his wife down, he found that he no longer had the fortitude to return to the numb incomplete life of before. The past few months at Malfoy Manor, he had been confronted with what he desired but had given up hope of ever attaining. Now that he felt whole and completely alive again, he found that he was greedy and selfish. He wanted it all: a lover he desired, the love of his children, and the friendship and understanding of his wife.

Harry sighed; the snake hissed mournfully. All the time he had spent at the manor he had been plagued by desire, both for the man who obviously wanted him and for the chance to finally experience what he had only covertly dreamed of for so long, and by a heavy sense of duty and trust that commanded him to be strong and not to give in to fleeting sensual pleasures. But he was only human, and he had not been able to resist stealing a kiss. Stealing a kiss that had turned his world on its head, because he found that he would gladly break promises and betray trusts for another kiss like that.

It was with great difficulty that he had fought the losing battle of not giving in. He had been torn apart by longing and guilt until he was confused and delirious, until it had

been too easy to fall. Each night he had dreamt of Draco, and each morning he had remembered Ginny. And then, with a few well-placed words, Draco had made him more jealous than Ginny ever had. After that he had lost the battle; seeing Draco with another man had only been the final straw. He had let himself drown in the unknown bliss that was Draco; sleeping with Draco, waking up with Draco, laughing and talking with Draco. Harry hadn't felt so carefree and happy and satisfied in too many years to count. And yet, whenever Draco wasn't there, he was wracked with uncertainty and guilt, but still he couldn't stop what he had begun, he couldn't give up what he had found.

As they managed to properly infiltrate the group and collect all the needed information and names to completely expose them, they knew their comfortable time of living together at the manor was coming to an end. Draco, ever the practical one, had been the first to speak of the matter.

"Harry, you do realise this has to eventually end, don't you?" he had said. "When we are finished with this business, you will leave and return to your wife. And we will be over."

Draco had said he didn't want to become the 'other woman', not for Harry, not for anyone. Harry couldn't argue, it seemed reasonable, the sensible thing to do. "Go back to Ginny, and think of me as a pleasant interlude," Draco had said. "Otherwise things will end in tears and harsh words and maybe in the irreparable. You don't want to end up like me, do you? All alone in a big old house, with only my own mother for company when she isn't travelling the world, that is."

Harry wasn't so sure that things had turned out as badly for Draco as he made out. He was now on friendly enough terms with his former wife, he had a very good relationship with his son if the frequency of owl post to and from Hogwarts was anything to go by and if he didn't want to be alone, then he shouldn't waste his time on frivolous relationships with shallow young men. Harry remembered seeing Draco wrapped around the attractive young Chaser and scowled. How soon would the gossip columns once more feature Draco and his latest conquests? Harry hissed, suddenly very angry at the thought, and looked around for something to attack or bite.

Harry slithered around the garden, trying to cool down. He climbed up a slender pear tree and wrapped his sleek body round one of its thin branches. He spent a couple of moments simply contemplating the quiet view of the garden, the silent house, the hills in the distance, the thin gauzy clouds that moved slowly across the night sky. The moment of stillness was only short-lived. His thoughts, overflowing and irrepressible, came crashing over him once again.

He thought of Lily, bouncing with anticipation to see her brothers again after so many months, of Ginny, holding her daughter's hand tightly and smiling softly, and somewhat wistfully, as the Hogwarts Express came into view. He thought of Albus, running out of the train, almost forgetting his trunk in his hurry, eager to see his parents again and tell them all about how great Hogwarts was, and James, trying to act grown up and old, but failing spectacularly, as he too was bursting with stories to share. And then there was Draco, out of the corner of his eye, hugging his son who both blushed and grinned before turning to his mother to be hugged and kissed again.

And yet, and yet, Harry was a father and a husband, and had been for years, but being with Draco had only just reminded him that he could also be a lover and a man. How could he give that up again? How could he give the other up either?

Harry looked towards the bedroom window, where Ginny lay sleeping. Whenever he thought of Ginny, it was with a sick feeling of guilt twisting in his stomach. The guilt was not new; it had been festering for years now, ever since he had realised that, try as he might, he could never be a proper husband to her. The interlude with Draco had only entrenched the guilt further. Now he was not only guilty by thoughts and omission, but also by actions. He had long thought that Ginny deserved so much better than he could give her. Often he had wondered if she too felt how hollow and perfunctory their marriage had become. If it bothered her that they had become friends rather than lovers. She had married a hero, but had ended up with an indifferent, distant husband. Didn't she feel cheated and angry? He had caught her looking at him wistfully, or even questioningly, but he had never found the courage, and the words, to ask her how she felt, if she was happy, if she could forgive him for letting her down.

He wound up the tree to reach the very top and escape the self-accusatory and maudlin thoughts that plagued him. He turned his thoughts to Draco instead, to how his skin glowed in the moonlight, how the sweat that pooled in the small of his back tasted, how at home he felt wrapped around him.

Draco slowly sipped his drink in the pleasant cool air of the late June evening.

"Draco, you know the Notts, don't you?" asked Beaufort from his seat opposite Draco.

"I went to school with their son. Smart as a whip, but a loner. If you're thinking of getting Theo to join the cause, forget it. He's not a team player," Draco answered. He certainly didn't want to get any of his friends mixed up with this group.

They were gathered on the veranda of the country house that was the usual location of their meetings the country house that Draco only recently had learnt the exact location of. They were drinking martinis and enjoying the rolling view of the lush countryside as they worked on how to take over the wizarding world.

This is the life! Draco thought. *Being a spy is much easier than my day job* He was almost ashamed at how much he enjoyed these meetings. The inner circle of the Sons of Merlin were his kind of people: rich, educated, pure-blood, privileged, and Slytherin to the core.

Truth be told, he would miss the Sons of Merlin once it was all over. He got on like a house on fire with Lady Lennox and, even though he knew that she was a dangerous woman, in his heart of hearts he half hoped that when it came to it, she would find a way to worm herself out of trouble. She certainly seemed capable. Hardcastle was an all right sort, but he wasn't so keen on Gyula Huszár. Then again he never really got on with foreigners. As for Beaufort, he was the sort of man Draco would have fancied, if it wasn't for Harry making all others seem lacking by comparison. Beaufort was definitely interested and their sophisticated flirting was very enjoyable, made more so by the way Harry's grip around his arm or shoulders would get tighter in warning as he hissed his all too obvious jealousy. These were the sort of people Draco usually socialised with, not gauche Gryffindors like Harry, and if things had been different, Draco could very well have seen himself as a true member of the group. That's why it felt so unreal that soon they would all be apprehended and the group disbanded, and it would all be due to Draco's duplicity. Sometimes he actually felt guilty.

With a drink in one hand and Glaucus, as he called Harry as a snake, comfortably wrapped around the other wrist, he felt marvellously content and at ease with the world, as he discussed dirty politics with this dangerous, subversive band of pure-blood supremacists. When he was young, this had been how he had imagined the Death Eaters would have been.

It was hard not to get slightly maudlin thinking how the end was drawing near: for his short career as an undercover spy, his meetings with the Sons, and most of all his time with Harry. There was a reason he preferred the young and shallow for his brief, enjoyable, but ultimately meaningless, dalliances. Harry, as always, was different; he had got attached to Harry and let him get closer than he had let a lover get in a long time. He had known from the beginning that he was making a mistake, but reason and logic had never stopped him from playing with fire before, even though he invariably got burnt more often than not.

Losing Harry was going to hurt. Already, sending him home to his wife now that Hogwarts had broken up and the children returned had left an unpleasant, sour taste in his mouth. Losing Harry could even prove to hurt as much as losing Asteria had.

It was odd how much losing Asteria had hurt. She had been the safe, sensible choice, the picture-perfect wife and mother: beautiful and smart, personable and well-bred. He had been very fond of her when he asked her to marry him, but during their brief marriage he had grown to love her, in his own peculiar way, and count on her to be part of his life. He certainly hadn't meant to be caught with his trousers down and wreck it all.

And yet, he wouldn't have been able to repress himself and do without, like Harry had apparently done. Draco knew very well how weak and selfish he was. If he were given the chance, he would have begged and pleaded with Asteria. He would have promised to give all aberrant philandering up and be true, if she would forgive him and stay. Only Asteria was too smart and knew him too well; she hadn't given him the chance because it would have been a lie. He wouldn't have stopped sleeping with men; he would have just become more careful.

And so it had ended, publicly and painfully and acrimoniously. Draco had learnt the hard way that if he had thought it had been difficult to please a wife, it was even more so to please an ex-wife. It had taken years for her to forgive him for his betrayal and the embarrassment he had caused her, and still caused her every time he made the society pages with one of his new conquests.

Draco swallowed a large sip of martini and only half-listened to the conversation going on around him. Glaucus seemed to be dozing, his body wrapped around Draco's lower arm and his head rested on the pulse point of his wrist.

Draco assumed that in a way, he deserved to be alone, rattling around the large empty manor house with only the occasional company of his mother and son. Harry, however, didn't deserve it. Harry was a better man than him, he knew that one couldn't possibly have one's cake and eat it too. As much as he didn't want to, and every selfish molecule of his body protested against it, he had to give Harry up for the other man's own good. It seemed that some of Harry had rubbed off on him after all. He looked down at the brightly coloured snake affectionately.

"Stop admiring Glaucus," Lady Lennox chided him good-naturedly, "and come to my aid. These two brutes believe that we can get away with simply blackmailing a couple of lower-level Ministry quill pushers. But you and I both know that more subtlety than that is required, don't we, darling?"

Draco turned to look at her and give her a charming smile.

"My dear, dear Lady Lennox," he told her, "never listen to those two, they would take a sledgehammer to break an ice cube. Your instincts are, as per usual, impeccable. As an expert in such matters, I can safely inform you..."

Without even trying, all the speeches and lectures his father had ever given him on political manipulation came to mind, like they invariably did during these meetings, and Draco had no difficulty whatsoever repeating them almost verbatim. Glaucus gave a soft hiss and gently squeezed his wrist, reminding Draco that *he* wasn't in the least fooled.

The room was dark and the smell of sex and sweat permeated the air. Harry wrapped himself around Draco's slim body, feeling sated and content.

"I think Glaucus' habits are rubbing off on you," Draco drawled softly. "You seem to want to wrap around me in whatever form you are."

Harry lifted his head to look at his reclining lover.

"Sometimes I think you prefer him to me!" he joked. "Should I be jealous of that slippery snake?"

Draco looked for a minute like he was giving it some thought.

"Well," he began. "I *am* very fond of Glaucus. We get along just fine. He usually behaves himself and is very easy to please. All he needs is a warm shoebox to sleep in and a mouse a week. Not to mention how good looking he is. *And* he apparently dotes on me." Draco paused to smirk. "Sorry, Harry, but if I had to choose, it looks like you'd lose."

Harry put on his best mock angry expression. "If that's how it is," he said before transforming.

Draco gave a yelp of surprise upon finding an adder curled up on his torso. Harry uncurled himself and started exploring the naked man under him in his snake form. Draco gasped and giggled.

"Stop," he pleaded breathlessly. "Stop, I'm ticklish!"

Harry came to settle across Draco's chest and lifted his head to look at his prey. Draco was smiling.

"Sorry, Glaucus," he said, "but I prefer Harry in bed. He is warm and comfortable and has the delightful habit of shagging me."

Mischievously, Harry stretched out his tail and wrapped it around Draco's soft cock to give it a squeeze while lowering his head to flick out his tongue against a delicately pebbled nipple.

Draco squeaked. "Harry!" he forced out. "Stop. You win! Just stop."

Harry transformed back to lie on top of the blond, his arms crossed under him and rested on the other man's chest, their legs entwined. He winked at Draco while grinning smugly.

"You are one perverted snake, you know that?" Draco informed him.

Instead of answering, Harry wrapped himself around his lover once more, burying his nose in the tousled, sweaty hair.

"Has Robards told you when they are going to make a move yet?" Draco asked suddenly.

Harry buried his face deeper into the blond hair. "No," he mumbled indistinctly.

"But it should be soon. Our mission is completed, we've got him all the information he needs," Draco continued. "It's only a matter of time," he added, sounding wistful.

"It sounds like you are actually going to miss that group of elitist prigs!" Harry accused him.

Draco shrugged and Harry could feel the smooth movement of muscle beneath silky skin under him.

"I am an elitist prig," he retorted. "Some of them are actually quite pleasant."

"Like Beaufort?" Harry growled. "You are entirely too chummy with that wanker."

Draco laughed. "Beaufort is a charming bloke," he corrected. "Darkly handsome and witty. If he weren't on his way to Azkaban, I would seriously consider breaking my Quidditch player tradition for him, now that the two of us are finished."

Harry lifted his head to stare at Draco. Draco's handsome, angular face was open and unapologetic.

"Now that the two of us are finished?" Harry asked in a low, demanding voice.

Draco sighed. "Harry, we've been over this. We are over. It was wonderful while it lasted, but I told you that once we'd completed the mission you would return to your wife and this would end."

"What if I don't want us to be over?" Harry demanded.

"I don't care what you want. You will go back to your wife and *will not* be your bit on the side," Draco said forcefully, his voice rising. "Tonight shouldn't have happened. It was a mistake." The blond sighed again. "You really should go home," he continued in a softer voice. "You will be missed."

"I told Ginny that the meeting would drag until very late and that I probably wouldn't make it home," Harry said. "Let me stay the night," he added in a whisper.

Looking defeated, Draco acquiesced. "All right. But this is the last time. It will not happen again."

"That's what you said last time," Harry retorted as he happily wound himself around Draco once more. "Go to sleep now."

"This time I mean it," Draco answered, always keen to have the last word, and then fell silent.

After a while Harry felt Draco's heartbeat slow down and heard his breathing even out and deepen as he fell asleep. Eyes open in the darkness, Harry stayed awake, thinking and feeling. He felt more at home in Draco's sumptuous king-sized bed in the manor than he did in his own at home. He didn't want to lose this, but he didn't seem to have a choice.

The sun was low in the sky, filling the garden with warm reddish colours. Draco lounged on one of the hard antique benches one of his ancestors had installed and admired the beautiful view he had inherited. His mother had finally returned from her extended trip and was currently pottering around in the house. Scorpius was in the far end of the garden, playing by the lake. It was nice to have a full house. It might not be as full as he would like, but it would have to do. It had only been three weeks since Harry left and Draco found that he missed him.

With his children home and the mission drawing to a close, Harry had returned home, as was only logical, and Draco's life had returned to normal, or an approximation of what was normal.

Their mission had almost been completed, and the Aurors were in the process of apprehending the lower level members who had been responsible for all the attacks, without blowing Draco's cover. Draco was actually rather impressed by the Ministry's efficiency and discretion. No one from the inner circle of the Sons of Merlin had yet suspected him in the least. But Robards had still not informed either him or Harry when the final sting operation would take place, when all the members of the inner circle would be arrested in one impressive swoop.

Despite the arrests and the impending doom of the group, the meetings went by surprisingly smoothly. No one seemed to suspect that they were actually harbouring two vipers. It was all very anti-climatic. Draco wouldn't have been so unwilling in the beginning if he had known that it would be so easy being a spy. Somehow he suspected, though, that it had been harder for Severus Snape.

About once a week he was invited to a Sons of Merlin meeting, and Harry came with him in his snake form. That was three times so far. Three times he had seen Harry since the night he'd told the other man it was over... Three times he had given in to temptation and let Harry insinuate his way into his bed again, even though he had strictly told himself that it was for the best to end their affair. Three times he had told Harry so far that this was the absolute last time and it would, could, not happen again.

Draco couldn't help himself; Harry always wrecked his carefully laid plans and cut through all his logical arguments and determination with his own irrepressible stubbornness and wilfulness. Whenever he pitted himself against the other man, Harry always won. Even now, when he knew that if they kept this up it would only end badly. If *he* hadn't managed to keep it a secret from Asteria, how would Harry manage to keep it a secret from his own wife? He had never wanted to become the third party, he still didn't, but he didn't have the strength to push Harry away even if he knew it was for his own good.

Draco looked at the wispy pink clouds that streaked the sky. He knew he had to eventually find a way to end it once and for all, but in truth he didn't want to. In a few short months the other man had wormed his way into Draco's life and affections. Draco had got used to him and he liked having him around. He found that Harry filled a gap in his heart that he thought would never be filled again. Draco shook his head ruefully; thoughts like these were only idle daydreams and wishful thinking.

With a muted pop Barter appeared next to him. "Master Malfoy, sir. Harry Potter is here. He is wanting you."

Draco frowned, perplexed. The next meeting with the Sons of Merlin was two days away and he had expressly told Harry not to visit him, especially when his mother and son were home.

"I'll meet him in the garden," Draco answered brusquely. "Show him the way."

When Harry came round the garden path into Draco's view a couple of minutes later, Draco noted with surprise that he had brought one of his sons with him.

"Hello," Harry greeted him cheerfully. "This is my son, Albus."

Draco returned the greeting somewhat stiffly. Albus had to be the younger of the sons; he seemed the same age as his own son. He had a bright, eager face, dark hair and his father's eyes, complete with round glasses.

"Albus has come to see Scorpius," Harry said, as if that explained his own presence.

"Scorpius is down the end of the garden, by the lake. You can go and find him, if you want," Draco told the boy.

With a hasty thank-you and the typical exuberance of a twelve-year-old, Harry's son pelted down the garden path, his bellows of "Scorpius!" filling the garden. Draco watched him go, wondering when the awkwardness with Harry would start.

"Did you know our sons were friends?" Harry asked conversationally, coming to stand behind Draco, so close that Draco could feel the other's body heat.

Draco did know, of course, but he failed to see how that was relevant to their situation. "Harry, why are you here?" he asked roughly, moving away from Harry and turning round to look at him.

Harry combed his hand through his perpetually messy hair and for a moment looked uncomfortable and at a loss for words. "I talked to Robards last night," he said finally.

He proceeded to explain that the Head Auror had been in contact with the Heads of various other European Wizarding Law Enforcement agencies about the matter of the potentially dangerous underground groups affiliated with Wolfgang Varder's *Wizarding Pride* that sprung up all over the continent. It seemed like the British weren't the only ones to have an undercover agent within one of the groups, but Draco's success was singular.

"They have a joint international operation planned," Harry said, excitement shining in his eyes, "to uncover the hidden knot of wizards behind all the other groups, the ones organising and coordinating the whole movement. And we are to be their star agents!"

They were to wrangle their way up the hierarchy until they managed to get an interview with the innermost circle itself and find the names of all the other masterminds beside Wolfgang Varder himself. They were to have the support of all the other co-operating Ministries and their secret agents to complete the task.

"Won't it be exciting?" Harry asked, looking like a little boy rather than a grown man. "We will get to go to Europe as super undercover spies."

Harry would be the most undercover of all. He would go in his Animagus form. No one but Draco, Robards and the other Heads would know, not even the agents they would be working with.

Once Draco had got the hang of it, he found that he enjoyed the intrigue and underhandedness of being a spy. The Sons of Merlin were nothing like the Death Eaters had been in sheer paranoia and sadistic brutality. Comparatively, they seemed almost like a gentleman's club. Most importantly of all, there was not a Dark Lord of Voldemort's calibre in sight, and he doubted Wolfgang Varder would come near. And even if he did, Draco had the ultimate Dark Lord Slayer on his side. What Harry was talking about *did* seem like an exciting adventure, and what's more, it would mean spending lots more time in Harry's company.

It all seemed so perfect, so *easy* and perfect. Too much so to be true. Draco let the images of the possible future grow in his mind, bright and promising, like iridescent soap bubbles, before he resolutely burst them. He turned his back on Harry.

"You know I can't accept this offer, tempting as it is. I told you that we are through. Working together so closely again is hardly a good idea," he bit out as he turned away.

Harry laid a warm hand on his shoulder.

"I asked Ginny for a divorce," he said quietly.

Draco willed himself not to turn around and stared resolutely ahead instead at the tiny forms of their children silhouetted against the pinking dusk sky as they played, trying not to tremble.

"I didn't do it for you," Harry continued. "I did it for me, and for Ginny. We couldn't go on like that any more. It wasn't fair to either of us. She wasn't happy. She said she had been afraid for years that it would come to this."

Harry took a deep breath and tightened his hand on Draco's shoulder, bringing himself even closer, until his chest brushed against Draco's back.

"I didn't do it for you," Harry went on, "but I won't deny that I was thinking of you. I know it won't be easy: the divorce, the children, people finding out, but still I want to try. I want you, Draco. Could we make a go of this? Could there be an us? What do you say, Draco, will you give us a chance?"

Harry's grip had become so tight it was almost painful and Draco's trembling had become obvious, as his mind was a maelstrom of confusing thoughts and emotions. He hardly knew what to say because he hardly knew what he thought or what he wanted. He clenched his hands together until his knuckles turned white.

Harry pulled him back into an embrace and moved his hands from Draco's shoulders slowly down his arms, till they encircled him, resting on his clasped hands. Gently, Harry loosened them from their painfully tight hold and took them in his own warm, calloused ones.

"Please," he whispered against Draco's ear, his breath warm and dear, before dipping his head slightly to kiss Draco's neck gently, tenderly.

Draco was lost. Harry won.

"Okay," he breathed, voice weak and shaky. "Okay," he repeated, a bit more steadily, as if to confirm his decision to himself.

He let himself fall back into Harry's solid embrace. The man behind him continued laying soft, little butterfly kisses along his neck and under the lapel of his robes.

A childish scream of merriment cut through the peaceful evening atmosphere as the sky continued to darken.

"Harry," Draco hissed urgently. "Stop! The children will see us."

Harry laughed, low and rich, the rumble in his chest a deep, comforting feeling against Draco's back. He wrapped himself even more securely around Draco and transformed.

Suddenly Draco found himself with a brightly coloured adder wrapped around his shoulders. Harry was large for an adder, and just the perfect size to wrap around Draco's shoulders. Draco thought he made a very beautiful snake; he was a deep black with bright, golden yellow zigzagging markings, a dainty, pointy head and glittering eyes that betrayed a singular intelligence. The adder flicked out a thin forked tongue to lick the dip of his throat, and Draco's startled and joyous laugh echoed into the twilight. The cool, sleek weight of Harry-the-snake around his shoulders felt as comfortable and comforting as the warm, hard form of Harry-the-human wrapped around him.

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