

With a Little Help from His Brother

by mayfly

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Features meddling!Ron, oblivious!Percy, shy!Oliver, unabashed feel-good happy-end, frequent mentions of drunkenness.

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Chapter 1 of 2

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Years later, when asked to describe his memories of the day, Percy will scrunch his forehead and open his mouth, only to snap it closed again, realising he is at a loss for words...a very rare occurrence indeed. He will remove his glasses to rub at his eyes, then he will politely, but firmly, say that he would rather not talk about it.

But what *does* Percy remember of that day? What does he remember of the Battle of Hogwarts? The day Voldemort was killed for the last, irreversible time?

He remembers the noise - the blasts of spells, the screams of the wounded and the acrid smell of dark hexes and choking smoke, but most of all he remembers the dust. The air is thick with the dust from the fallen rubble, so thick with it that he almost could believe himself to be in the desert.

He remembers rushing to the castle, propelled forward by an irrepressible determination and exhilaration, coming from the certainty that he's finally doing the right thing. This is the first time in what feels like years that he's absolutely, irrefutably, sure he's making the right choice.

The exhilaration he feels is unprecedented and overwhelming. It propels him through the Hog's Head and into Hogwarts without a backward glance. It urges him to blurt out the apology to his family he had sworn he'd never give. The feeling of euphoria and purpose only grows as his mother hugs him, and he joins the twins out in the fray of the battle.

There is noise, and bright flashes, and moving bodies, as the fight swirls around them and engulfs them. Percy feels a laugh bubbling up, because for the first time in their lives, he and his brothers are on the same team. They move together, almost dancing, as they weave through the chaos, and Percy feels free and weightless for the first time in so, so long.

Percy makes a joke. Fred laughs, bright and carefree. George's eyes twinkle, warm and accepting. There's a bright green flash, an ear-splitting howl and then silence. As Percy looks down at his brother's still and crumpled body, he sees the dust motes dancing in the air, and smells the acrid stench of an Unforgivable Curse. The sounds of

the battle and the sobs of his other brother melt into a distant background rumble he can barely hear over the buzzing in his ears.

Percy doesn't remember much after that. He remembers the spreading numbness and the strange buzzing that won't go away. He remembers casting spells and watching Death Eaters fall. He remembers being told they had won, and wondering how they could have won when it was plain to see that they had lost. He remembers dust in the air, and he remembers glimpses of familiar faces. He remembers the dirty smudged face of Oliver Wood staring at him over a fallen Death Eater. He remembers thinking that that couldn't be Oliver Wood; Oliver never looked so sombre nor so serious.

Actually Percy remembers much more than he would like about that day, but when asked all he will say is that everything changed after the Battle of Hogwarts. The Wizarding world changed, his family changed, Percy changed.

Sometime in between the seemingly endless funerals that followed the Final Battle, Percy decided it was time he stopped hiding and started living. The Battle of Hogwarts and its aftermath put everything in a different perspective. He promised himself that from now on he'd do things differently. He'd try to take more chances. He'd finally be honest about himself. He'd listen to others' opinions more, even if they belonged to his brothers. Who knew? He might even break a couple of rules. Well, maybe just some small ones.

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The Hog's Head was crowded and stifling. Some sort of rhythmic music was blaring in the background, but not many people were bothering to try to dance. Most were drinking with the reckless abandon of those eager to forget. Percy understood them completely as he made slow, winding progress towards the bar.

It had barely been three months since the Battle, and people still weren't sure if they should celebrate their victory or mourn their losses. So far, Percy's family had been gravitating more towards the mourning, but tonight was the thirty-first of July. Harry Potter and Neville Longbottom had decided it was time to end the mourning and were using their birthdays as an excuse for a victory celebration.

Percy slowly sipped his Blackberry and Firewhisky as he looked out at the desperate merrymakers. He suppressed his instinctive shudder; this was the sort of function he normally hated. Ordinarily, he would have just shown up early in the evening to pay respect to the hosts, and left as soon as it was polite. But that was the 'old' Percy; the 'new' post-war Percy was going to stay at the party. The 'new' Percy tried to socialise. The 'new' Percy was probably going to get very drunk.

"Hullo, Percy."

Ron knocked into him clumsily, and drunkenly leaned onto the bar counter to order another lager. Percy took a large gulp of his drink, wondering if he should exercise his big brotherly duties and stop Ron from drinking any more. Looking around, Percy spotted a tipsy Charlie flirting outrageously with Lavender Brown; a distinctly soused Bill was twirling Fleur energetically as her tinkling laughter echoed through the pub; in the corner George was slowly and methodically getting plastered as Angelina Johnson looked on. He decided against saying anything and took another large swallow of his rapidly disappearing drink, hoping that the following day's hangover would drown out his twinging conscience.

Ron propped himself up next to Percy and took a large slurping sip of his lager, spilling some over himself. Percy winced.

"Percy, I've got some information that might interest you," Ron slurred.

"Oh, yes?" he answered, eyeing Ron apprehensively.

"Yup."

Ron looked remarkably self-satisfied, which didn't bode well for Percy.

"Finch-Fletchley's a poof!" he exclaimed victoriously, almost spilling his drink.

"Uh huh," was all Percy could ineloquently reply.

He should have known that coming out to his family would be fraught with dangers, being set up with random gay Hufflepuffs, for one.

Ron took another long slurp of his beer and grinned drunkenly.

"He's rather pretty for a bloke, don't you think? You do like blonds, don't you? Of course you do, who doesn't?"

Percy shrugged helplessly. Sometimes there was no reasoning with a sober Ron; a drunken Ron was simply hopeless.

"Anyway, you're in luck. He's single! I asked. He's also quite fond of red-heads. I asked him that too. I'm not so sure about the glasses. But you could always take them off..."

As Ron rambled on inanely, Percy looked around desperately for some sort of salvation. He had no desire to hit on Finch-Fletchley, no matter how blond, pretty or available he was.

Spotting Hermione coming their way, he energetically waved her over.

"There you are, Ron! Hullo, Percy."

She looked uncharacteristically bright-eyed and giggly. Percy idly wondered if his brother might be getting lucky later tonight, even though with the amount of beer he had consumed, Percy sincerely doubted it.

"Have you seen Harry?" Hermione asked.

Ron shook his head, and Percy saw his escape.

"You sit here with Ron, and I'll go find him," he said cheerfully, and disappeared into the crowd before they could argue.

He headed straight for the door, eager to get outside for some much needed solitude and fresh air.

The night outside was warm and peaceful, and the moon was large and bright, obscuring almost all the stars. Percy sat hidden in the shadows as he slowly finished the dregs of his drink. Soon he'd have to go back inside to get a refill.

The door opened, spilling noise and light into the night before closing again. A male figure stepped out. Light glinted off round glasses, and Percy recognised Harry. Harry slowly and carefully walked towards a tall oak tree. As soon as he reached it, a tall, slim hooded form stepped out of the darkness. The stranger drew back his hood, and Percy recognised Draco Malfoy as his impossibly blond hair glowed brightly in the light of the moon.

"It took you long enough," Malfoy drawled reprovingly.

"I'm here now," Harry responded easily. "You could have always come in, you know."

Malfoy stepped closer to Harry and lowered his voice to a soft murmur before answering.

Something about their closeness, and the intense way they seemed to be looking at each other, made Percy suddenly feel as if he were intruding on a private moment. Discreetly, he slid back into the stifling interior of the pub.

As soon as he was once more safely ensconced at the bar with a new drink in his hand, he was accosted by a jubilant Kingsley Shacklebolt. As the tall black man flashed Percy his perfect white teeth, Percy mused that Shacklebolt was more his type than Finch-Fletchley, and it was a dreadful shame he was unrepentantly straight.

"You're just the man I've been looking for," Shacklebolt informed Percy as he firmly clapped him on the shoulder.

Percy almost choked on his drink.

"Oh, yes?" he managed to wheeze out.

"I know this is not really the time to talk shop," Shacklebolt explained in his deep rumbling voice as he leaned closer to be heard above the din. "It's rather late, and I'm sure you must have drunk at least as much as I have, but I have a business proposition that couldn't wait."

That got Percy's attention.

"Really?" he asked, curious.

"I know things didn't run smoothly for you in the Ministry in the past, and I'm aware that you have tendered your resignation," Shacklebolt began smoothly, after taking a long sip of his drink. "But, as you know, I have been appointed interim Minister, and I plan to use my tenure to clean up and reorganise the Ministry as much as I can. Merlin knows it's a mess! I need young, capable wizards and witches I can trust to help me. I know all about your past, Percy, and I don't care. You came out on the right side when it mattered most, and I have it on good authority that you are very good at your job."

Percy was at a loss for words and said as much.

"You're offering me a job, Minister? I'm speechless!"

Shacklebolt laughed, a warm booming laugh.

"You don't have to answer now. Think about it and tell me by Thursday. I must warn you that it promises to be a long, thankless task, with long hours and piles of trying paperwork, but something tells me that that won't deter you!"

Percy laughed, surprised, pleased, and hopeful.

"Thank you, Minister. I'll think about it."

There was nothing to think about; he would accept. And Shacklebolt knew it as he left with a satisfied smile.

Someone came to sit on the stool next to Percy.

"I always knew you'd get friends in high places," he said jovially, bumping shoulders with Percy.

Percy turned to his neighbour and came face to face with a smiling Oliver Wood. Percy returned a crooked drunken smile of his own as his stomach gave an abrupt lurch; the night, and the alcohol, were catching up with him.

"So, what was that about?" Oliver asked with his habitual bluntness.

"I was just offered a job!" Percy answered, laughing goofily.

He really shouldn't have drunk so much.

"Want to have a celebratory drink... or two, with me?" Oliver asked, still smiling.

Percy didn't even think about it.

"Sure," he said, feeling suddenly impossibly light-hearted and light-headed.

The rest of the night passed in a blur of alcohol, and the heady feeling Percy always got in the vicinity of Oliver Wood. Merlin, had Percymissed Oliver!

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Percy retrieved another parchment from his overflowing inbox. He spent a couple of minutes looking it over before huffing exasperatedly, and deliberately dipping his quill into the red ink pot he kept on his desk, right next to black and the green ones. With a flourish, he wrote a couple of scathing lines, and tossed the parchment onto his outbox.

Minister Shacklebolt had been right: the job at the Ministry was difficult and tiring, and every day his desk was inundated by a ton of paperwork. Percy couldn't have been happier with it. He had been appointed to the board in charge of revising the Ministry Regulation Handbook, a job he found immensely interesting, but seeing as the administration of the new Ministry was still seriously understaffed, everyone was expected to do a bit of everything.

Percy picked up another parchment from his inbox. Every day from twelve till three had been officially declared 'paperwork time' by Percy. Percy kept to the newly imposed times religiously. After all, he had to give a good example, especially as most of his co-workers insisted on flaunting the regulations and calling him an 'unbending stickler who should learn to ease up'. Percy's brow wrinkled in concentration as he tried to make out the chicken scratches that passed as writing adorning the parchment he had just picked up.

A soft knock interrupted his work. He put the illegible scrap of paper down, and bid his visitor to enter. A head of sandy hair poked its way round the door, and Oliver Wood gave Percy a playful smile before entering the office properly.

Percy's stomach started fluttering uncomfortably.

"Hullo, Oliver," he managed, pleased to notice that his voice was reasonably even and normal, not betraying his sweaty palms or the butterflies that had risen and were trying to make their way out his throat.

Oliver ducked his head and gave another smile, this one smaller and almost...*shy*?

"I was in the Ministry," he said by way of explanation. "I was visiting, um, Katie Bell. Yes, Katie Bell."

"She's in Games and Sports, isn't she?" Percy said, feeling irrationally annoyed that Oliver hadn't actually come to the Ministry to visit*him*.

"She is? Oh, yes, of course she is," Oliver agreed and looked around the small office nervously.

"So, anyway," he went on, "I thought that since I was here, I might as well pop in and visit you too. It's been a while."

"Two weeks. Since the Hog's Head," Percy reminded him, hoping Oliver would not go into details.

"Oh, yes, the Hog's Head! That was a great party, wasn't it?"

No such luck. Percy's smile was more of a grimace.

"You must have had one hell of a hangover next day!" Oliver blithely went on. "I had never seen you drink so much!"

Oliver seemed exceptionally pleased with the memory as he bounced on the balls of his feet.

"Yes, well, we all make mistakes," Percy said looking down, embarrassed that Oliver had seen him in such a state.

"I am sorry, for you know... falling asleep on you."

Percy felt a hot flush rising on the back of his neck, and he lifted a hand to rub it.

Oliver looked amused as he waved it off with a wide expansive gesture.

"Think nothing of it! It was rather endearing, actually. Do you know that you mumble and drool in your sleep?"

Percy hung his head in mortification, his whole face bright red. Why did he have to get drunk and make a fool of himself in front of *Oliver*?

Opposite him, Oliver shuffled his feet.

"It's almost three," he said. "How about I treat you to lunch? We could catch up, sober this time."

Despite his obvious attempt at levity, Oliver's voice sounded oddly tentative.

Percy, feeling rather curious and surprised by the turn of events, looked up and gave Oliver a small smile.

"All right. I *am* rather hungry," he answered. "How about..."

He was interrupted by a sharp knock on his door. Before he had time to answer, Gwyneth Blake strode into his office in a fluster.

"Percy, we need your help," she began urgently. "Thaddeus was insisting that article seventy-five subsection twenty slash c should be completely erased *you know* how he gets but Lazarus was having none of it, and they were making a right fuss about it. Then Martha Morcombe came into it and said that if we scrapped article seventy-five subsection twenty slash c, then we would *also* have to completely revise articles seventy-four, seventy-three and seventy-two, and then what about the whole chapter on interdepartmental integration? Oh, Percy, it was such a mess! And now they want to hold an impromptu board meeting, but Pascal has gone home early, his wife is pregnant and was feeling poorly, and no one can find Janet. I told them to wait till tomorrow, I really did, but they wouldn't listen. Percy, you've got to come, they might listen to you..."

Finally Gwyneth ran out of breath and stopped gasping, instead turning a pleading and desperate face to Percy.

Percy looked at Oliver apologetically.

"How about a rain check?" he offered sheepishly.

The other man shrugged, looking just the faintest bit disappointed.

Percy loved his new job, but sometimes he hated it a bit too.

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Percy looked around his office, making sure everything was in order before he left for the evening. It felt strange, leaving the office while it was still light outside, but Shackbolt had made him promise to leave work every day by six o'clock.

"Last thing I want is Molly on my case for over-working her son", he had said half-jokingly.

Percy arranged one last pile of parchments and was about to get up when his fireplace flared green.

"Percy. Percy, are you still there?"

Percy let out a soft groan as he reluctantly kneeled in front of the fireplace. He was sure it wasn't going to be anything good.

"Ron, what do you want? Students aren't allowed to use the school Floo connection. You're still at Hogwarts, aren't you?" he asked, slightly exasperatedly.

"*Of course* I'm still at Hogwarts," Ron exclaimed huffily. "I'm allowed to use the Floo; eighth years get special privileges."

"Is that so?" Percy asked, unconvinced.

"Yes, it is," Ron insisted, before glancing away shiftily. "That's not important. I want to talk to you about Harry."

"Harry?" Percy echoed, perplexed.

"Yeah." Ron looked awkward and ill at ease for a moment before continuing. "Harry came out to us the other day. It seems like you two have more in common than we thought."

Percy felt his eyebrows rising in surprise.

"But that's not the problem. The problem is that he seems to be gay for *Malfoy*!"

Somehow Percy didn't find that too hard to believe.

"What has that got to do with me?" Percy asked reasonably, shifting a bit to kneel more comfortably. He had a feeling this would be a long fire-call.

Ron sputtered for a bit in indignation.

"You have to help him!" he shouted as if it was obvious.

"Help him?" Percy echoed. He had forgotten how overdramatic Ron tended to get.

"Yes, help him. You're gay too; he'll listen to you," Ron tried to reason, waving his hands frantically, as if that would help make his point.

Percy very much doubted it; listening to others had never been Harry's strong suit.

"Just tell him it's ok to be gay, as long as it's not with Malfoy. Tell him that mooning over pointy gits is against the Code of British Fags or something. Tell him there are plenty of other, nicer, rainbow-coloured fish in the sea."

Ron was getting out of hand. It was time Percy was strict with him.

"Ronald!" he snapped.

Ron stopped babbling and looked at Percy sheepishly, and not a little beseechingly.

"I will not be telling Harry any such nonsense," Percy informed Ron in his best head boy voice. "Harry is a big boy. He can moon over, or go out with, whomever he likes, pointy or otherwise."

"But, Percy..."

Percy rolled his eyes...now Ron was whining. He had to be firm.

"No! And that's final."

Ron sighed, sounding very much put upon.

"I was afraid you'd be like that. You never liked to do me favours," he said. "That's why I have a backup plan. I Owled Oliver and asked for three tickets to Puddlemere's next game. You can't get out of it," he added, with just the faintest malicious smirk. "I've already told Oliver you're coming with me and Harry."

Sometimes Percy honestly wondered if making up with his family had been such a good idea after all.

"How are you supposed to go to this match? Aren't you in school? Do you plan on skipping classes to sneak off? You know I will not be a part of such behaviour." Percy knew he sounded pompous, but someone had to be stern with Ron; otherwise, Merlin only knew what sort of trouble he might get himself into.

Ron rolled his eyes.

"The match is next Saturday. Special eighth year privileges: we're allowed to go home over the weekends."

"I still don't see how taking Harry to a Quidditch match is going to take his mind off Malfoy. You don't plan on setting him up with me, do you?" Percy asked with trepidation. Harry was all very nice, but certainly not his style.

Annoyingly enough, Ron laughed.

"Merlin, no! Of course not. Why would I want to set Harry up with *you*? After the match, we're going to meet Oliver for drinks."

"So?" Percy still didn't see where this was going.

"So, Oliver's gay as well. He came out in *Quidditch Quarterly* a couple of months ago. This being gay business seems to be spreading. Do you think it might be catching?"

That certainly was news to Percy.

"I don't read *Quidditch Quarterly*," he said dumbly.

His heart had started to beat in overtime, and he worried he might start to hyperventilate soon.

"Next Saturday at one, outside the stadium. Gate C. Don't be late!" Ron informed Percy before he finally left.

Percy sat heavily on the floor, feeling vaguely limp and light-headed.

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It was a beautiful sunny day, with fluffy white clouds in the light blue sky and a soft breeze blowing. It was a perfect day for Quidditch, and Ron and Harry had been in high spirits when Percy had met them outside the stadium.

The game had been a particularly good one. Harry and Ron had bounced excitedly in their seats during the whole match and had stood up to whoop and whistle and clap with the rest of the spectators when Puddlemere finally beat the Tornadoses 210-80.

When the cheering started dying down, Ron turned to his companions, eyes bright and cheeks red.

"Let's go find Oliver!" he exclaimed, exhilarated. Harry nodded in enthusiastic agreement.

Percy followed after them as they impatiently started to push through the crowd, eager to reach their goal. He had a slight spring in his step and a soppy smile that just wouldn't go away. Percy enjoyed a good Quidditch game as much as the next wizard and had always considered the sight of Oliver Wood on a broomstick as one of the undeniable pleasures life had to offer.

After a lot of determined pushing, they found Oliver with his teammates signing autographs in front of the door to the changing rooms. He caught sight of them and grinned widely, showing off his dimples. A couple of female fans swooned, and Percy felt a hot flush sweep over him as his heart started an irregular tap dance in his chest. Oliver looked delicious all sweaty and tousled from the match, and the last thing Percy wanted to do was help Ron set him up with Harry.

Oliver signed the last of his autographs and came over to talk to them.

"That was a great game!" Harry all but shouted, and Oliver's grin got wider.

"Yeah, mate, you did some brilliant catches there!" Ron agreed, just as keyed up from the game as his friend.

"Thanks, boys, I'm glad you came," Oliver answered, sounding very pleased with himself.

"Hullo, Percy," he said, turning to Percy. "How *did you* like the game?"

Percy felt himself getting flustered as Oliver started at him expectantly, his face flushed from the exertion of the game and his brown eyes impossibly bright.

"I... I liked it very much," he forced out. "Thank you for the tickets; I had a lot of fun. You in particular played very well," he added, just to see Oliver gift him with a grateful toothy grin.

Oliver suddenly stood straighter.

"Right," he said. "I'll just get cleaned up, and we'll can go for that drink. Right, boys... Percy?"

They agreed, and Oliver fairly bounced into the changing rooms.

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The pub Oliver took them to was clean and homey. They easily found a table, and before long they all had drinks in front of them. The others immediately started talking about Quidditch. Percy wasn't in the least surprised; he had expected as much. He didn't mind; it gave him the chance to sit back quietly and sip his drink as he surveyed his surroundings, all the while sneaking glances at Oliver.

Surprisingly enough, they actually finished their talk of Quidditch much sooner than Percy had thought they would. Oliver glanced over to where Percy was calmly sitting and suddenly looked very sheepish.

"That's enough Quidditch talk," he said, cutting Ron off and giving Percy an apologetic look.

Ron seemed to take offence that anyone, and particularly Oliver, could even consider that there was such a thing as enough Quidditch talk. Harry, on the other hand, shrugged easily.

"Okay, let's change the subject," he said affably.

"Got a boyfriend?" Ron suddenly blurted out, and Harry gave a sharp bark of surprised laughter.

Percy barely managed to avoid choking on his drink. Oliver wasn't so lucky. As Oliver hacked and coughed, his head bent, Harry hit him ineffectually on the back and chuckled.

Ron took the chance to start wagging his eyebrows and making a series of increasingly incomprehensible gestures over their heads. Percy assumed that the bizarre pantomime was aimed at him. He couldn't make heads or tails of it, but he could easily guess that Ron wanted him to find a way to throw the other two together.

While Percy had to admit that it was gratifying that his younger brother had so much faith in his abilities, he didn't much fancy playing matchmaker. He was very much against playing matchmaker for this particular couple, in fact. However, Ron was glaring at him and Percy had to seem to do *something* to get him off his back.

"So *are* you seeing anyone?" Percy asked Oliver again, once he had got his breath back.

Oliver turned to give Percy an intent look.

"No," he said, slowly and carefully. "I'm not seeing anyone at the moment."

Percy felt a pleasant frisson go up his spine, which was only slightly marred by Ron's pleased grin and unobtrusive nudge to Harry.

"What a coincidence!" Percy said with false cheer. "Harry's also single!"

Oliver looked perplexed, and Percy couldn't help cringing. He was definitely hopeless at this; he felt like a drunken hippogriff in a china shop.

Harry frowned.

"Actually..." he began to speak, but Ron talked over him.

"Yeah, he is!" Ron said, too loudly. "Isn't that good news?"

Oliver continued to look confused, while Harry scowled at Ron, annoyed.

"And you two have so much in common..." Ron went on, oblivious.

Percy wished he would just shut up. It had been a long time since he had last felt this mortified, and he was seriously considering Apparating away and never talking to Ron again. By the looks of it, Harry was having similar thoughts.

As Ron rambled and the rest cringed, Harry ostentatiously took out his watch and looked at the time. He cleared his throat loudly, temporarily silencing Ron.

"It was great seeing you and catching up, Oliver," Harry said, before adding as an afterthought, "You too, Percy."

He shrugged apologetically. "Unfortunately, I have an appointment, so I can't stay. Have fun, bye!"

Before he turned to leave, he gave Ron a stern look. "I'll be seeing you later this night."

As soon as Harry left, Ron slumped, defeated. "So much for that!" he mumbled.

Percy was still feeling mortified, but fortunately Oliver was now smiling at them, amused.

They sat for a while in companionable silence as they finished their drinks. Eventually Ron heaved a heavy, put-upon sigh and slammed his empty pint glass onto the wooden table.

"I guess I'll get going now," he said. "Percy, are you coming?"

Percy didn't particularly feel like leaving yet, so he was grateful when Oliver spoke up.

"I'd like another drink," Oliver said.

"Percy, would you like to join me?"

Percy smiled, more than happy to oblige.

As soon as they had sent Ron off, Oliver went to the bar to get them more drinks.

"Now that the boys are gone, what do you say to a more manly drink?"

Percy laughed and agreed.

"I take my Firewhisky with blackberry syrup."

Oliver smirked.

"Yeah, I remember."

Apart from the one embarrassing scene, which Percy was planning on forgetting as soon as possible, the day had turned out to be a rather enjoyable one. Percy mused that not all of his brother's plans were failures. Maybe he could be persuaded to join in on another one, if he could be guaranteed such good results.

Oliver's return put pause to Percy's musing, and they both got down to the serious business of drinking and having a good time. The evening passed in a pleasant haze of berry-flavoured alcohol and good cheer. Percy could hardly remember the last time he had had such fun. He told Oliver as much, receiving a brilliant heart-stopping smile in response.

All the Blackberry Firewhiskies seemed to finally catch up to Percy as he found himself grinning goofily and seriously considering leaning forward and kissing Oliver. Fortunately, he came to his senses in time and quickly leaned back, almost losing his balance on the chair...and most of the contents of his stomach.

"Are you all right?" Oliver asked, concerned.

"Yeah, fine," Percy answered quickly, before grinning sheepishly and amending. "Well... not so fine, actually. I think I drank too much. Would you mind terribly helping me home? I'm afraid I might end up splinching myself."

Oliver looked almost sad to call it a night before giving Percy another of his easy grins and helping him up and out the door.

Apparating when drunk was never pleasant. Even though Oliver tried to Apparate them as smoothly and steadily as he could, Percy still found himself swaying dangerously and desperately trying to keep his midday meal inside...at least until Oliver had left. Oliver grabbed hold of Percy with a strong arm, steadying him.

"Steady there," he said soothingly. "Do you want help getting to bed?" he asked.

All sort of lurid images passed through Percy's mind in response to ways Oliver could help him to bed, and he blushed as he shook his head jerkily.

"No, I'm fine," he said.

"Percy?" Oliver suddenly asked, looking strangely nervous.

"Yes?" Percy had noticed that Oliver seemed preoccupied by something all evening; maybe he was finally going to share it with Percy.

Oliver leaned closer with an intent look. *Maybe it's a secret and he wants to whisper it* Percy thought. Percy made an uncoordinated jerk forwards and turned his head to offer Oliver his ear. Oliver was taken by surprise, and they ended up bumping heads.

"Sorry," Percy laughed, feeling silly. "Did you want to tell me something?"

Oliver ruffled his hair and looked slightly flustered.

"It's nothing," he said. "You better get to bed."

Later, as Percy lay in his bed, detachedly watching his bedroom spin around him, he wondered what Oliver might have wanted to tell him, and if it were important.

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Percy softly hummed under his breath as he strode briskly down Diagon Alley. It was Saturday, and Saturday was Percy's shopping day. After a late breakfast, while reading the morning's paper, he would Apparate to a quiet spot in Diagon Alley. First, he would visit Gertrude's Dispenser of Fine Quills and Parchments to stock up on ink, quills and parchment...all on his Ministry expense account. Then, a quick trip to Eeylops' to pick up treats for Hermes and window-browse the owls...what Hermes didn't know couldn't hurt him. Afterwards, he would take a quick look at the Quality Quidditch Supplies window; he might not be a sports fanatic, but he admired a well turned out broom as well as the next wizard. He would invariably always end up at Flourish & Blotts to check out their latest stock. Percy was nothing if not regular and predictable in his habits.

It was a lovely day, a perfect day for shopping. By the time Percy reached Flourish & Blotts, he was in a very good mood, his earlier purchases safely shrunken and tucked into his pockets. Percy's mood got even better upon spotting the new comparative study on Muggle and Wizarding administration he had been eager to read, prominently displayed in the New Arrivals section.

It didn't take him long to see that the book lived up to its promise. Percy tucked it safely under his arm; there was no question about it, he was buying it. He wondered, however, if he should put it on his Ministry expense account or not...the book was as much for personal pleasure as it was for work. As he slowly made his way towards the till, all the while pondering his dilemma, he caught a glance of a familiar face.

"Oliver?" he asked, perplexed, turning round fully to look at the other man. The annoying butterflies were back again.

Oliver grinned awkwardly...which was strange in itself.

"Hullo, Percy. Fancy seeing you here."

"You can always find me here Saturday midday," Percy answered, distracted by the bigger question. "You, however... I don't think I've ever seen you here since you finished school. What are you doing here?"

Oliver looked apprehensive for a minute, as if he had been caught out doing something he shouldn't, and then smiled charmingly.

"I was looking for a book," he said with a lazy one-armed shrug.

"A book?" Percy repeated, raising his eyebrows.

"Yeah." This time Oliver sounded less sure of himself. "A book... on Quidditch."

Percy frowned.

"Doesn't Quality Quidditch Supplies have a comprehensive selection of books on Quidditch? I believe it even has a couple of books on other eccentric games, such as quodpot or football."

Percy watched, fascinated, as Oliver flushed, just the faintest bit.

"Yeah, um..." he said. "They've run out of the book I want, so I thought I'd look here." *That* certainly sounded plausible.

"Have you eaten? Do you want to get some lunch?" Oliver asked in a rush, surprising Percy once more.

Percy was flattered, and pleased, by the unexpected invitation. It was too bad he couldn't accept.

"I would have loved to," he explained. "But I have a prior engagement."

Oliver's face fell, and Percy had a sudden thought.

"Why don't you join us?" he said. "I'm only meeting Penny; I'm sure she'd like to see you."

Oliver looked undecided, but Percy insisted and he easily gave in.

Percy quickly paid for his book, deciding to live dangerously, and put it on his expense account, and they left together.

On the way out, Percy realised that Oliver was empty handed.

"What about your book?" he asked. "We have enough time; we can have a look for it."

"My book?" Oliver asked.

Percy gave him a pointed look; it wasn't like Oliver to be so forgetful.

"Oh, my book! They didn't have it. It doesn't matter."

Oliver linked their arms decisively and led Percy down the street.

oooOOOOooo

Percy hurried through the drizzly London night. He was almost late! Not that Percy *was looking forward* to keeping his appointment; *date* might almost be a better word. However, he had been forced into it, as part of one of his brother's ridiculous schemes.

Ron had firecalled into his office, yet again; without warning, yet again; and had launched into an excited ramble, yet again. He hadn't even bothered asking if Percy was busy.

Percy had heaved a long suffering sigh and had moved to sit in front of the fireplace without too much of a scowl. The things one had to put up with for family!

"Obviously Oliver Wood was a tragic failure," Ron had said. "I even tried with Finch-Fletchley; you know, blond, pretty, available*enice*, but that was no good either. I was told to mind my own business. Can you believe his nerve? It is my bloody business! As his best friend, it's my duty to stop him from making stupid mistakes. He might not see it now, but he'll thank me for it later."

Percy had sighed once more and shook his head in despair.

"Ron," he had said. "Ron! What on earth are you on about?"

Ron had looked perplexed, as if it had been obvious what he had been talking about.

"I'm talking about Harry, of course," Ron had answered.

Percy hadn't liked his tone of voice which seemed to indicate that Percy was stupid.

"Harry's still in Malfoy's clutches! Fat lot of help you've been; have you even spared the matter any thought?"

Percy had briefly wondered if his mother would ever forgive him if he throttled Ron.

"Of course I haven't given the matter any thought!" he had shot back, getting rather irritated. "Harry can go out with whomever he bloody well feels like, as far as I'm concerned."

As long as it's not Oliver Wood a small voice in his head had added.

Ron had looked betrayed and at a loss for words, but only for a brief second. He had quickly pulled himself back together and squared his shoulders.

"Whatever," he had said dismissively. "I have a plan. A fool-proof plan, not like the last one."

There had been a mad gleam in Ron's eye, and Percy had been torn between irritation and apprehension.

"You are going to take Harry to a gay bar," Ron had said triumphantly.

Percy had scowled darkly and pursed his lips in disapproval. He had tried voicing his objections but Ron had just talked over him.

"I know that Harry told me to *take my big freckled nose out of his business*" Ron had paused to look annoyed. "That's why I had to come up with a cunning plan. I told Harry that you're alone and would like to find someone, but are too shy to go to a gay bar by yourself."

"Now look here!" Percy had angrily remonstrated. The nerve of his brother!

"Well, it's true!" Ron had said defensively. "So I asked Harry if he could do me a favour and accompany you to a bar this Saturday. I also told him that you were too embarrassed to ask for help so I would be telling you that it was *Harry* that wanted the help finding someone. It's perfect! Now you have a brilliant excuse to show Harry all the other lovely rainbow-coloured fish in the sea, and how much better they are than the piranha he's involved himself with," Ron had finished off, looking dreadfully pleased with himself.

"Even though I am forced to admit that your plan isn't completely appalling, there is no way I'm going along with it," Percy had answered primly.

He had seen no way that this plan could turn out as successful, for Percy, as Ron's last one, and thus had wanted no part in it.

It was not to be. Ron had got a hard, determined look in his eye before speaking once more.

"I think you *are* going to go along with my plan, *dear brother*, because if you don't, I might just be *forced* to tell Mum how *lonely* and *depressed* you've been lately. I'm sure she'd be all too glad to help you out." Percy had gasped, shocked at Ron's underhand tactics. "And I think I just might ask George to help too," he had added triumphantly.

Percy had been left with no choice. And that was how he now found himself waiting in the drizzle outside a trendy London gay bar for Harry Potter. Percy looked at his watch once more. Harry was now fifteen minutes late, and Percy wondered if he would show up at all.

Percy was seriously considering calling it quits and returning to his nice dry flat and a good book, when Harry finally showed up, not a little out of breath.

"Sorry I'm late," he gasped. "Urgent wardrobe malfunction. I had promised I'd wear my emerald green shirt, but I couldn't find it. In the end I did, but it was dirty, and I'm just *hopeless* at cleaning charms. But Hermione's brilliant at them, but then it took me *forever* to find her. And yeah... here I am. Late. Sorry."

Harry grinned sheepishly as his nonsensical ramble petered to a stop. Percy wondered if it was a teenage thing or if Harry had picked up the bad habit from Ron.

"You're here now," Percy said, not interested in explanations. Explanations would only delay the progress, and thus the eventual *ending*, of the evening. "Let's go in."

Inside the bar was noisy and crowded, and Percy's first instinct was to flee. Harry, however, seemed quite comfortable and was looking around with interest, and Percy was determined not to be outdone by a mere boy.

Seemingly by magic, Harry managed to procure them a table. "Reservation," he said, grinning. Percy felt marginally better knowing that he wouldn't have to stand.

Sitting down, he realised that they had a good view of the dance floor, where a number of good looking young men were already bouncing to the beat of the music. Percy and Harry shared a knowing smile, and Percy began to hope that the evening wouldn't be *too* terrible.

A little later Harry disappeared and came back with two brightly coloured Muggle drinks with umbrellas in them.

"Try it," he told Percy, handing him one. "It's good."

Percy shrugged and took a sip. Surprisingly, it *was* very good. Actually, he found that he might just like this bright Muggle concoction more than his usual Blackberry Firewhisky.

They sipped their drinks in companionable silence for a while, until Harry, who had been nervously looking around the whole time, suddenly jumped up excitedly.

Percy turned round in time to see a smirking Draco Malfoy reach their table.

"Fancy meeting you here," the Slytherin drawled.

Harry pointed an accusing finger at him.

"Not that you don't look good, because you know that you do," he told the blond. "But we had agreed that if I were to wear the green shirt that you seem to like so much which I am, as you can see you were to wear something suitably red...which *you are not*."

Harry crossed his arms in front of his chest and glared at the unrepentant blond. He was right; the other man was dressed in tight fitting cream trousers and a matching cream shirt.

Draco sighed theatrically.

"If I must," he said and retrieved a thin crimson tie, already knotted, from his pocket and looped it over his head, tucking it under his collar. "Happy now?" he asked Harry sassily.

"It'll have to do," was the grudging reply.

Percy couldn't help laughing. It seemed like his brother's plan was once again foiled. Before he knew it, they were joined by a fourth. Oliver Wood showed up, holding two drinks.

"Here you are, princess," he said, handing Draco the most fluorescent drink Percy had ever seen.

Then, he looked over at the other two and smiled. "Hello, Harry. Hello, Percy."

Percy's heart lodged in his throat, and his stomach gave an uncomfortable lurch. Everything was suddenly very clear: this was a double date. Ron had told Harry that Percy was lonely, so Harry decided to set him up with the only other gay bloke he knew. Too bad it was Oliver. Not that there was anything wrong with Oliver; as far as Percy was concerned, Oliver was perfect. Unfortunately, Oliver would never be interested in someone like Percy.

Percy looked down at his drink dejectedly and took a large gulp. When he looked up again, Draco was dragging Harry off to the dance floor, and a smiling Oliver was sliding into the seat next to him. Percy gave a tentative smile back and wondered if it would be very bad if he pretended, just for tonight, that he was on a real date with Oliver.

Oliver turned out to be a very good sport as he kept Percy company. Harry and Draco spent most of the evening dancing until they eventually disappeared together into a dark corner of the bar.

Percy always enjoyed spending time with Oliver, even if it made his palms sweaty and his stomach fill with butterflies. And tonight Oliver was making it very easy for Percy to keep up the pretence of it being a proper date. He was charming and attentive, laughing at most of Percy's - not always successful - anecdotes, even telling a couple of his own - surprisingly amusing - Quidditch related ones.

As the night wore on, Percy drank more and more Muggle cocktails, trying in vain to get over his nervousness. Oliver matched him drink for drink, and before long they were slurring their words and having random bursts of giggling.

Percy was having such a good time that he told himself he would never refuse to take part in one of Ron's schemes again. He opened his mouth to tell Oliver as much when they were rudely interrupted by a gorgeous brunet in a sinfully tight sleeveless t-shirt made out of some sort of shimmery material that was so bright that the glare hurt Percy's eyes.

The visitor smiled warmly at Oliver and gave Percy a brief depreciating once over.

"Hullo, handsome," he greeted Oliver in a husky drawl. "Want to dance?"

Even in his inebriated state, Percy could tell that 'dance' was a euphemism.

Percy was shocked when Oliver turned the man down, apparently without a thought.

"No, thanks," he told the dark-haired man. "I'm with someone."

As the other man walked away, Percy turned to Oliver.

"Thanks," he told him. "But you didn't have to do that. He was *very* good looking. You have been wonderful company, but you should let yourself have some fun. Go dance with him, I don't mind, I promise."

That was a lie; Percy would very much mind, but it was hardly fair to Oliver being trapped babysitting stuffy old Percy, when the bar was literally crawling with beautiful young men of all colours and sizes, any one of which would be so much better suited for Oliver.

Oliver stared at Percy, perplexed, and not a little exasperated. It made Percy feel like there was something he was missing, but that was just plain ridiculous; what could he *possibly* be missing?

"Yes, he was very good looking," Oliver said earnestly. "But I don't want to dance, or do anything else, with him or anyone else. I'm having a great time with you."

Suddenly Oliver looked unsure of himself as a thought apparently occurred to him.

"You are enjoying yourself, aren't you? I'm not boring you, am I?"

Percy laughed, as if he could ever be bored by Oliver!

"Oliver," he said, the alcohol making him speak his thoughts out loud. "I could never be bored with you! I love spending time with you, you know. And to think I was dreading tonight. I was sure I'd be spending it sitting with Harry making stilted, awkward small talk. This is so much better!"

Percy grinned at Oliver, the big goofy grin he invariably got when he was drunk, and Oliver smiled back, showing those knee-melting dimples. The dimples were the catalyst. The Muggle cocktails didn't help either. Percy made a note to keep well away from them in the future. As if in a daze, Percy found himself leaning toward Oliver, ignoring the hysterical voice of reason in the back of his head that was screaming at him to stop.

And then everything went quiet, because he was kissing Oliver, and the world wasn't collapsing around him. And then, amazingly, Oliver was kissing back, and Percy almost swooned. Percy's mind completely shut down as the kiss seemed to just go on, and on, and on. Percy's hands found their way into Oliver's short hair. He turned Oliver's head this way and that, eager to explore all the possible angles of his brilliant mouth. Surprisingly, shockingly, Oliver let him. Oliver pliantly let Percy control the kiss as he slowly, but steadily, insinuated his burning calloused hands underneath Percy's shirt and up his narrow back.

Everything was a blur after that. At some point they came up for air, all the drink and the late hour finally catching up on them. Snickering and leaning on each other for support, they stumbled out the bar. Their stomachs were not feeling up to the Knight Bus, so they settled on hailing a Muggle taxi to take them home.

At the end of the night, Percy collapsed onto his bed tired, dizzy, drunk, but with a huge ear to ear grin.

oooOOOOoo

It was Monday midday and Percy was still hiding in his office. He had been hiding in his house all day Sunday as well, ever since he had woken up with a giant hangover and the sinking realisation that he could never ever look Oliver in the eye again.

Percy cringed every time he remembered Saturday night, and he couldn't stop remembering Saturday night because that must have been the singular best kiss he had ever had. And yet he wished he hadn't done it. The memory of how he had thrown himself at Oliver horrified him. And poor Oliver, obviously drunk and confused and unable to defend himself, had let Percy kiss him and manhandle him.

Percy had closed down his Floo connection and had blocked all non-work related owls. The last thing he wanted to do was hear from Ron; Ron whose fault all this mess was. Ron and his brilliant cunning plans. He was also avoiding Oliver. He wasn't sure if Oliver would be furious and accuse Percy of taking advantage of him, or rather embarrassed and eager to forget the whole thing. In any case, things would never be the same again.

Suddenly Percy's office door was flung open, and Oliver entered. Percy stood up, ready to make a dash for it, if it came to it. However instead of looking irate, Oliver simply looked sheepish. "Sorry about that," he said, gesturing to the door. "But your Floo was blocked, and the secretary wouldn't let me pass; she said you were very busy. I got a bit overzealous." Oliver shrugged apologetically, and Percy felt a pang of loss over how much he would miss him. "But it's well past two o'clock, and even busy Ministry officials have to eat. I brought lunch!" Oliver grinned tentatively and lifted up a picnic hamper.

A lump formed in Percy's throat. Oliver was going to act normally and pretend nothing ever happened. It was more than Percy had ever hoped for, and yet he couldn't help feeling oddly disappointed.

Percy gave Oliver a wobbly smile. "Do you mind having an office picnic? Madge wasn't lying, I really am very busy, but I could spare half an hour, or maybe an hour, for lunch."

Percy cleared up his desk and conjured up a checkered table cloth. Oliver efficiently emptied the hamper, and they both tucked in. They ate slowly, making stilted small talk, trying to act as if nothing had happened. Percy was unbelievably grateful to Oliver for his efforts: his gentle smiles and soft looks, his careful talk of the weather and work. Oliver was a true gentleman, Percy told himself.

However it was obvious that sooner or later Oliver would want to 'talk about it', and Percy held his breath through the whole lunch, dreading the unavoidable confrontation.

"Percy, I think we should talk," Oliver eventually began tentatively, seemingly engrossed in drawing patterns in the condensation on his bottle of Butterbeer.

Percy felt his stomach abruptly drop, leaving him nauseous and light-headed. He licked his lips and forced himself to speak.

"Yes, we should. I owe you an apology. I don't know what came over me. Actually I do. I had too much to drink and you were so bloody nice and you laughed at my jokes," Percy began in a rush. "But that's no excuse, because you were drunk too. And I took advantage of you, and that was wrong. I shouldn't have; friends don't do that to each other. I'm very sorry; you must believe me that I am. Forgive me, please forgive me. It won't happen again."

Percy was rambling like *Ron*, for Merlin's sake. He looked beseechingly at Oliver.

Oliver was frowning at Percy, and Percy got that odd feeling again that he was missing something.

"Percy." Oliver spoke carefully and slowly, as if every word were important. "That's not what I meant at all. You got it all wrong. You must *listen* to me."

Percy sat at the end of his seat holding his breath. That was it, he was sure, that was the end of his budding new friendship with Oliver. He had blown it.

Oliver never got to finish what he wanted to say, and Percy was given a temporary reprieve because Madge, the secretary, chose that moment to barge into his office.

"Sorry to interrupt your lunch," she said, shooting Oliver an apologetic look. "But the Minister wants to see you, Percy. It's urgent and can't wait. It's about the Irish delegation."

Percy shot up from his chair, grateful for the excuse to escape. He looked at Oliver guiltily.

"I'm very sorry," he said. "It's horrible of me to just walk out on you like this, but this is very important, and I can't let the Minister down. Would you mind terribly if we put off this discussion till a later date?"

It was obvious that Oliver minded, but there was nothing they could do about it. Percy gave Oliver one last contrite gaze as he hurriedly followed Madge out the office. Maybe this was a good thing, he thought. It would give Oliver more time to think about it. Maybe he would calm down and decide that he could accept Percy's apology after all.

2 of 2

Chapter 2 of 2

Even though Ron's cunning plans didn't have the intended result, he still planned on taking full credit. (Percy/Oliver, Harry/Draco)
Features meddling!Ron, oblivious!Percy, shy!Oliver, unabashed feel-good happy-end, frequent mentions of drunkenness.

The next day Percy went to work as usual. He left his Floo connection open, knowing that he'd have to face Ron and Oliver eventually. Oddly enough, his day progressed completely uneventfully. Midday came around, and no one had tried to get in touch: no owls, no Floo calls. He started to get worried and slightly disappointed. He couldn't hide from himself the honest truth that he had been on edge the whole day, looking forward to a Floo call from Oliver with equal parts trepidation and excitement.

Lunch time came and went, and still nothing. Percy fidgeted in his chair, feeling nervous and jumpy. He wondered if he could conceivably go home earlier; his concentration was completely shot, and he felt incapable of getting anything done. Percy paused for a second to feel shocked at himself for even considering such a thing. However, he was right - no matter how hard he tried, he couldn't gather his scattered thoughts.

Percy sat, staring intently at a piece of parchment, the words looking like so much gibberish, when his Floo finally flared. Without a thought, he dropped the parchment and ran to see who it was.

"Harry?" he exclaimed, astonished.

"Percy, will you let me through?" Harry asked without preamble.

He had his determined face on, and Percy was left staring dumbly, not knowing what to make of it.

"It's important," Harry insisted impatiently.

"All right," Percy responded weakly.

He mechanically waved his wand to open his Floo and stood back with a perplexed frown.

With a whoosh of green flames Harry tumbled out. He stood up quickly with a determined, and not a little angry, look on his face. Percy couldn't help but notice that Harry was clutching a crumpled piece of parchment in his hand.

No sooner had Harry tumbled out, when the Floo whooshed once more, and Malfoy elegantly stepped out after him. Percy's eyebrows disappeared into his hairline.

"I fail to see what all the fuss is about," Malfoy was saying. "It's just a harmless letter. I for one found it rather sweet and endearing actually."

Harry turned to glare at Malfoy.

"You would, wouldn't you?" he spat, nostrils flaring.

Malfoy affected an air of supreme boredom, indolently lifting an eyebrow.

All that did was enrage Harry even more. In one swift violent movement he spun on his heel and strode towards Percy.

"I however want to know the meaning of this," he demanded, thrusting the parchment under Percy's nose. "I want to know what made you think you could send something like this to my boyfriend," Harry all but snarled.

Taken aback, Percy gingerly took the parchment out of Harry's outstretched hand. He looked towards Malfoy for some sort of help, to find the blond lazily leaning against the mantle with a smug look on his face.

Percy looked down at the parchment and promptly felt his mouth drop open in disbelief and his eyes bulge out. It was a love letter, an awkwardly graphic and simperingly cutesy love letter, addressed to Malfoy from... Percy!

Percy looked up, shocked. Harry was looking angry and confrontational, while Malfoy was looking merely mildly curious and not a little amused.

Percy took a deep bracing breath.

"You think I wrote this?" he managed to force out in a wheezy voice.

"Well? Didn't you?" Harry demanded, standing on the balls of his feet as if to make himself look taller and more intimidating.

"Of course I didn't!" Percy sputtered, affronted, looking down at Harry over the rim of his glasses and his not insignificant height advantage.

Harry and Malfoy both cocked their eyebrows in an eerily similar fashion, silently demanding more.

Percy looked back down at the inflammatory letter.

"While the hand-writing is a rather good approximation of my own, it nevertheless is nothing more than that: an approximation. I am quite shocked, Harry, that you would believe me capable of writing such a piece of drivel," Percy remonstrated, shuddering.

Harry shrugged, looking slightly mollified.

"Who do you think wrote it then?" he asked Percy.

Percy had a good idea who it probably was.

"Who do you think wrote it?" he asked instead.

Harry sported a look of dawning apprehension, but by the look on Malfoy's face, he had correctly suspected the culprit all along.

"I should add that it looks like this letter was written by a straight man rather than a gay man," Percy added helpfully as he watched the scowl grow on Harry's face.

"Ron!" Harry growled under his breath.

Without even saying good bye, he stalked back towards the fireplace, his murderous intent obvious.

Malfoy chuckled.

"You must forgive Harry's rudeness," he told Percy with an indulgent smile. "But he has a bit of a one track mind. He will eventually remember that he left without properly taking his leave."

Malfoy moved to follow Harry back to Hogwarts. Before stepping into the Floo, he looked back over his shoulder and gave Percy a mischievous wink.

"Good evening, Weasley. Feel free to write to me whenever the desire arises... Harry's rather hot when he gets all worked up." Malfoy then smirked wickedly. "Now, I better go. I don't want to miss my second favourite pastime watching Harry chew out your baby brother."

Percy's Floo sparked green one last time, and he was left alone, still clutching the crumpled letter in his hand. For once he agreed with Malfoy; he could only hope that Harry was up to giving Ron the tongue-lashing he deserved.

Percy collapsed into his chair with a small smile. After this, it would be a long time before Ron worked up the nerve to Floo Percy, let alone ask him another favour. That, at least, was good news.

Percy lifted up the letter to read it once more. He couldn't help cringing at the cheesy lines and wincing at the disastrous attempts to be smutty. He couldn't help but be offended all over again that Harry had actually believed that Percy had written it. If Percy were to write a love letter, he was sure he wouldn't make such a hash of it.

Percy sat quietly for a couple of long minutes, feeling even more distracted than he had before. All the previous excitement didn't hide the fact that he still had no word from Oliver. Biting the bullet, he resolutely got up before he lost his nerve, made his excuses to Madge, and left work early.

oooOOOooo

Wednesday morning Percy dragged himself to work feeling decidedly dispirited. He still hadn't heard anything from Oliver.

As he sat glumly in his office and sipped his second tea of the day, Madge bustled in.

"Good morning," she said cheerfully. "I heard that someone's grumpy today."

She plopped a pile of letters on Percy's desk.

"Here's your mail; you might find something there to cheer you up."

Percy waited until she left before pulling his mail towards him to look through. The only thing that could possibly cheer him up was a grovelling letter of apology from Ron, but he sincerely doubted he'd be getting one any time soon.

On top of the pile, looking deceptively innocent, was a crisp white parchment, neatly folded and sealed with a Puddlemere United seal. It was from Oliver. Percy picked it up and held it with shaking hands. A letter. From Oliver. Percy held back a sob that threatened to escape. If Oliver was resorting to letters, then things were so much worse than Percy had thought.

Percy put the letter aside, determined to ignore it for a little more. What he didn't know couldn't hurt him. But as soon as he had turned away, he turned back to the letter and snatched it up again, heart beating fast. He couldn't wait; he had to know.

With one swift slide of his letter opener, he snapped the seal and unfolded it. With bated breath he let his eyes skim over the words, barely taking them in. His mouth dropped open, and his eyes grew large. It couldn't be! He returned to the beginning, forcing himself to read slowly this time. By the time he came to Oliver's signature at the end, he was practically gasping and his heart was beating hard enough to burst out of his ribcage. He read the letter once more to be sure.

As soon as he finished reading it the last time, he sprang up from his chair.

"I must see Oliver!" he told himself, speaking out loud.

He rushed out his room, stuffing the letter in his pocket, and made a beeline for the secretary's desk.

"Madge," he breathed, already short of breath. "I got to go; it's urgent! If anyone asks, tell them I'll work overtime to make up."

As he rushed away, eager to get to the nearest Apparition spot, Madge yelled after him. "It was good news then?"

Percy ran into Puddlemere's stadium, a stitch burning in his side. He had managed to bypass the guard by showing him his Ministry Badge and pompously informing him that he was on 'urgent Ministry business'. He couldn't help but feel guilty for abusing his power like this what would the Minister say? but sometimes needs must.

Once Percy reached the green of the pitch, he leaned forward, lungs burning, trying to get his breath back. Up in the air he heard the Puddlemere players and coaches exclaiming over his presence. He stood up straight and stared up at the sky, looking for Oliver. He was easy to find, over by the goal hoops.

Percy suddenly realised what he was doing; he had trespassed on to the stadium under false pretences and now he was disrupting the team's practice. He felt his ears burning with embarrassment. However, he manfully waved his arms to catch Oliver's attention and shouted at the top of his lungs. "Oliver!"

Percy could see the moment Oliver realised it was him. He waved to his team mates to be quiet and then shot off on his broom in Percy's direction. Oliver came to an abrupt stop a couple of feet away from Percy. He jumped off his broom and sprinted the rest of the distance, until he stood in front of the redhead.

"Percy?" he asked, confused. "What are you doing here? Is something up?"

Percy took the letter out of his pocket and waved it in the air.

"I got your letter!" he exclaimed.

Oliver blushed.

"Oh," he said, turning his eyes down and rubbing the back of his neck nervously.

"Yes." Percy was ridding high on adrenaline, and he felt like he was going to burst from the nervous energy and excitement he was holding in.

"Oh, Oliver!" he exclaimed. "I read your letter."

Percy's tone of voice must have given Oliver courage, because he looked up from under his sweaty fringe.

"Did you like it?" he asked shyly.

"I loved it, Oliver! No one has ever written me a love letter before. But if they had, yours still would have been the most perfect one." Percy blushed. "Did you really mean it? Everything you said? Did you really mean it?"

Oliver looked Percy straight in the eyes.

"Every word," he said quietly, but earnestly.

Percy blushed even brighter red, but looked so pleased he could burst.

"I have been so stupid," he said laughing. "So stupid and so blind! How did you ever put up with me?"

Oliver laughed, but didn't say anything, he just looked at Percy enquiringly.

Percy stopped laughing and put the letter carefully back in his pocket.

"In case I haven't made myself clear," he said, slowly and deliberately. "The answer to your question, to all your questions, is yes."

Oliver smiled widely, flashing his famous dimples one day Percy would have to tell him just how dangerous those dimples were and Percy finally was able to do what he always wanted to when Oliver smiled like that. Percy launched himself at Oliver, grasping his face between his hands and kissing him deeply.

This time they weren't drunk. They were in a Quidditch pitch on a Wednesday morning. There was a light chill in the air and a slight drizzle. There was stubble on Oliver's cheeks, since he apparently hadn't bothered shaving. Percy could hear the jeers and the wolf-whistles above their heads from Oliver's team mates. But as they held on to each other tightly and deepened the kiss even more, giving their audience a show, Percy felt that this kiss was even better than the last and that every kiss with Oliver would just get better and better.

Eventually they broke apart, gasping and laughing. Oliver hugged Percy close.

"I was afraid you'd find my letter silly," he confessed. "I had never written a love letter before. Actually, I got the idea from Ron."

Percy pulled back and looked at Oliver, perplexed.

"Ron?" he asked.

"Yeah," Oliver said chuckling a bit sheepishly. "The other day Ron called me and asked for help. He said he wanted to know how to write a gay love letter."

Percy looked disbelieving and Oliver laughed.

"Yeah," he said. "I couldn't believe it either. What would Ron want to write a gay love letter for?"

"What in Merlin's name is a gay love letter?" Percy asked, laughing.

"Dunno," Oliver responded. "I guess he meant a smutty love letter because then he started asking all these details." Oliver started laughing again. "You should have seen his face!"

"Anyway," Oliver went on, "I realised I had never written a love letter, smutty or not, and that maybe I should now that I had someone I wanted to write to. I thought that this way I might finally manage to make myself clear, since I didn't seem to be managing very well trying to talk to you."

"Remind me to thank Ron," Percy said, thinking that he might be able to forgive Ron the debacle with the letter to Malfoy after all.

Percy looked up into the cloudy morning sky and smiled, exhilarated; everything was turning out so much better than he could have hoped for. All it had taken was a little help from his brother.

~The End~