

The Wand That Chose Two Wizards

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The Wand That Chose Two Wizards

by [saltwatergarden](#)

Summary

Harry Potter returns to Hogwarts to finish off his seventh year, but finds that it's very different than the Hogwarts he once knew. He's sharing a common room with all the other eighth year students, he's no longer sure if he wants to become an Auror, his best friends are constantly off snogging, and his Potions partner, Draco Malfoy, is acting nothing like his usual bratty self.

Draco Malfoy wants nothing less than to go back to Hogwarts, but for his mother, he does it anyway. While he hopes he can hole up in his room and do nothing but homework for the year, he finds himself despising his terrible new wand, befriendng an inexplicably odd Ravenclaw, secretly taking Muggle Studies classes, and willingly helping the Saviour of the Wizarding World himself, Harry Potter. It's going to be a very interesting year.

Notes

HELLO FRIENDS.

This is my first attempt at a Drarry fic and knowing me, I'm going to be slow as fuck writing it, so I apologize in advance for any long stretches between updates. I hope you all like it and please let me know what you think <3

you are a walking, talking corpse at best

Chapter Notes

chapter title is from the song Fire by PVRIS

Draco began to regret his decision almost immediately after the train departed King's Cross Station. He stood in the middle of the compartment—the one he had always frequented with Crabbe and Goyle, as it was the first one the sweets cart would stop at—his hand firmly clenched around the wand in his pocket, still gazing out of the window, even though the station was now gone.

With a deep breath, he unclenched his hand and withdrew the wand from his pocket before sitting down by the window. He twirled the wand between both of his hands, observing the way the light bounced off of the shining wood. A long fifteen inches, Draco still wasn't used to the way it fit in his hand.

He had been in a bit of a rush when he'd bought it, not wanting to be seen by anyone, and he'd been far too ashamed to go to Ollivander's after the ordeal the senior wandmaker had been through at Draco's own home, so he had settled for some unknown, back-alley wand shop. The owner had been so thrilled to have a customer, Draco thought he could have been the Dark Lord himself and he still would have been happily attended to.

He had tried out only two wands before he started losing patience. After the first two—"vine wood with Veela hair, vivacious, quite bendy!" and "pine and kelpie mane, very strong!"—had resulted in rather loud explosions of a coat hanger and a window, Draco had decided he'd rather get this over with quickly before someone walked in and saw a Malfoy exploding things.

"I don't need an aggressive weapon," he had gritted out in a low tone. "I just want a regular damn wand."

The wandmaker's wide grin had faltered a little, but it quickly returned and he'd said, excitedly, "I know just the wand!"

Now, in his solitary compartment on the Hogwarts Express, Draco gently flicked the wand, muttering, "*Lumos*."

The end of the wand emitted a soft, yellowy light before flickering and dying out. He snorted to himself, thinking of the way the wandmaker had described it.

"Redwood and kneazle hair, fifteen inches, pliable! Gentle wand, known to bring luck! Suited for wizards who always make the right choice."

Always make the right choice, eh?

Idiot, Draco thought to himself.

But nothing had exploded when he took the wand, so he'd paid five Galleons—an absurd price for a wand of such shabby quality—and left as quickly as he could. Once he had gotten home, he tested a few simple spells with his new wand, and it wasn't entirely useless. It handled basic charms alright, but it wasn't *his* wand, and Draco found himself feeling a certain reproach for it, despite knowing this would not help its efficiency.

He went to tuck it back into his pocket, but its length caused it to poke at him in his sitting position and so, frustrated, he tossed it into the seat across from him. A sad little red spark fizzed from the tip as he did so.

“Known to bring luck, my arse,” he mumbled, though of course no one was listening.

Merlin knew he could use a little luck these days.

After his trial, he'd been sure all he wanted to do was hide in his room for months, if not years, and never see anyone again. If nothing else, he had been utterly exhausted. The previous two years of his life had felt like a never-ending nightmare, and he hadn't ever dared to think of what would come afterwards. He hadn't even dared to hope there would *be* an afterwards.

He certainly hadn't imagined he'd be sitting on the Hogwarts Express on September 1st, in a compartment all by himself, feeling pettily disdainful towards a wand.

It was all his mother's fault, really.

After the trials—after they had hauled Lucius off—Draco had expected his mother to fall apart. He had expected to step into his role as the man of the house, as Lucius had always told him he would one day. He had been prepared to take care of his grieving mother and devote all of his energy and focus on her. She deserved that.

But Narcissa did not fall apart. She had been allowed a goodbye with Lucius, during which she spoke to him in a reassuring voice, and when they'd taken him away, she had gripped Draco's arm and turned him around, fiercely walking him towards the Ministry's Floo network.

Draco had supposed she was simply keeping up appearances—his mother had always made sure she looked calm, impeccable, and untouchable while in public.

“Never let people know more about you than absolutely necessary,” she had always said.

Narcissa hadn't broken down at home either though. Draco had kept waiting, walking on eggshells around her, waiting to be ready when her façade dissolved. But it never did.

She had declared it her personal mission to cleanse and purge Malfoy Manor, and she had become unstoppable. Even the remaining house elves—only two, Polkey and Cobby—hadn't been able to slow her down, and Merlin knows they'd tried, working through the night sometimes, but she had been determined to do much of the dirty work herself. Eventually, Draco had quietly told them not to punish themselves when they saw her hard at work, that she wanted to be doing it. He had had no idea *why* she did, but the one time he had tried to stop her, it hadn't ended well.

“Draco, you're old enough to know what Dark Magic does when it's left to fester. Cleaning this house will take more than simply washing windows,” she'd said briskly, and returned to her work.

She had been right, of course. Malfoy Manor had been tainted with Dark Magic, Draco could feel it in every corner, seeping from the walls, rising from the floors. He had hated it.

It had gotten better, compared to how it had been before, when the Dark Lord had taken it over as his headquarters, but that wasn't saying much, and Draco still awoke in the middle of the night sometimes, drenched in sweat with his heartbeat pounding in his ears.

To Draco's surprise, Narcissa had begun making great strides, and the house elves had become much happier once Narcissa had discovered that elf magic had its own strengths in removing Dark Magic, and allowed them to busy themselves with the great purging of the Manor.

Draco had felt that he wasn't as needed around the house as his father had made him believe he would be. He'd also found that he didn't mind much, however, as he had quickly taken to spending most of his days lying in bed.

When he could sleep, he did, because despite the nightmares, being conscious had felt even worse, as it left him alone with his thoughts far more than he would have liked, and his mind was not a place he felt safe in anymore.

One day, Narcissa had marched into his room with a determined look on her face, her normally perfectly sleek hair looking frazzled and wild, and dust and ashes covering her robes.

"That is quite enough sulking, Draco, it's well past time you get up."

Draco had just looked at her, barely sitting up from his horizontal position on the bed.

"If your father were here, he would be furious," she'd said, testing a different tactic.

"Yes, well, Father's in Azkaban, so I'm sure he's got bigger things to worry about," Draco had responded, still not making any moves to rise from his bed.

"If you're not going to be any help around the house, you may as well be doing something to better your own future."

At this, Draco had finally looked up at her properly. Her arms at folded and she was regarding him with a scolding look, like the one she used to wear when he was a child and got caught chasing after the peacocks in the garden.

"My future? Mother, I *have* no future."

Narcissa had simply tutted at him.

"Don't be so dramatic, Draco, of course you do. I received a letter from Headmistress McGonagall for you; they're invited the students of your year back to Hogwarts to properly finish. You're going to do just that."

Draco had gotten very close to asking his mother if she had lost her mind.

"Hogwarts? You want me to go back to Hogwarts? After all the—after we—after the *war*?"

Narcissa had been resolute.

“Yes. You have yet to complete your N.E.W.T.s and you will not be able to acquire any respectable job without them. There was a time once when you did not have to worry about employment, but that is no longer the case.”

Draco had gaped at her, wondering how she couldn't see that he would never be able to gain respectable employment due to the bloody *Dark Mark* seared into his forearm. He had wanted to argue, but he'd recognized that look on her face, that look that clearly said nothing on earth could change her mind.

“I haven't even got a wand,” he'd said weakly, in a last-ditch attempt.

“Then we'll get you a new one,” she'd answered simply, and turned sharply to leave his room, a cloud of dust settling in her wake.

He supposed he could have argued with her more, insisted he study independently and just go sit his exams in June, but instead he'd remained silent, and done as he was told.

So that was why Draco was now sitting alone in a train compartment with a wand he hated and a terrible feeling in his stomach. He had successfully been able to completely ignore any thoughts about returning to Hogwarts until now, emotionlessly purchasing his books and wand, and even packing his trunk to prepare.

He was rather good at that—pushing unpleasant thoughts and feelings aside with a throwaway promise of *“I'll deal with that later.”*

He, of course, had not dealt with it later, and now he was faced with a host of anxious questions eating away at his mind. Was he even going to be allowed back? Did McGonagall really mean to send the letter to him, or did it just go out to everyone from his year—everyone who'd survived the war, that is? Would she refuse him at the door and insist he return to the Manor? Would any other Slytherins be returning?

And Merlin. The other Houses. He'd be eaten alive before even taking a seat at the Slytherin table.

Well, he thought to himself, miserably, *there are worse ways to go.*

Eyeing his wand with another contemptuous look, he decided there was only one way to stop the slew of stress-inducing questions, so he fetched his outer robes from where he had hung them up by the compartment door, fished in the pockets to find the vial he was looking for, and quickly swallowed down some Dreamless Sleep.

feels like a lifetime just trying to get by while we're dying inside

Chapter Summary

“His mum’s on house arrest and Lucius is in Azkaban, he’s got to be there to take care of her.”

“It was very nice of you to speak at their trial, Harry,” Hermione said, clearly trying to cheer Harry up.

Her efforts didn’t go a long way, as Ginny’s head snapped in his direction.

“You spoke at their trial?” she demanded. “Why?”

“You didn’t tell her?” Hermione asked, looking surprised.

Harry resisted the urge to bite back a sarcastic ‘yes, I told my maybe-girlfriend who lost her brother to Death Eaters that I spoke in defence of a Death Eater’.

Chapter Notes

hello hello! while I'm still able, I'm going to try to post a new chapter every week :) I can't guarantee how long that'll last but I'll do my best! hope you enjoy

chapter title is from the song July by Noah Cyrus

Something about this trip on the Hogwarts Express wasn’t sitting right with Harry. If he were to voice this thought, he was sure Hermione would respond with something about it having been longer than a year since they made their last trip, or perhaps something to do with how Hogwarts has forever changed in their minds after the Battle. Both were valid points, but they weren’t what was sticking out to Harry.

He felt on edge, like something was about to happen. He sat with his back straight and his hand holding tightly onto his wand in his lap.

Ginny had noticed, and managed to catch his eye. She furrowed her eyebrows at him and mouthed something like, “You alright?”

Harry nodded curtly, and though the concerned expression didn’t quite leave Ginny’s face, she nodded back and let it be. That was something Harry always liked about Ginny. She knew when to push and when to let things go. Even if it didn’t always suit Harry. Like the discussion they were supposed to have about their relationship. She was pushing about that. She was right to, Harry knew that, as he had promised her they would talk and had been putting it off all summer. He still

didn't want to talk, wasn't ready to talk, hadn't planned at all what he was going to say, didn't even *know* what he wanted to say.

She'd been patient with him, having more than enough of her own other issues to focus on and work through.

Fred's death had hit each member of the Weasley family in a different way. George, of course, took it the hardest. He'd spent practically the whole summer locked up in his and Fred's room, barely coming out at all, not even for meals. He'd hardly spoken, and when he had, it was in a monotone that Harry wouldn't have even recognized as his voice.

Percy had seemed to take it rather hard as well. Overwhelmed with guilt and the conviction that he was partially to blame, he had buried himself in work. Instead of Ministry bureaucracy this time, it was with Hogwarts repairs. He had been constantly back and forth between Hogwarts and the Burrow, sending furious owls to the Ministry, demanding more help from them so that school could start in the fall as usual.

Ginny had tried to hide it. She'd tried to be a rock for her family, for her mother especially. She had held herself tall and pressed her lips together when Fred's name was mentioned, but Harry knew her better than that.

Fred and George had always looked out for Ginny, had always protected her in that older brotherly way that Ron often tried to employ, but didn't quite succeed at. They'd made her laugh when she was upset, and had readily invited her in as the third prankster to their otherwise exclusive partnership. Ginny had clearly been devastated by Fred's death, and further devastated that George would not let her in to share her grief with him.

Harry had tried to be there for her, but he himself was in no position to be someone else's support system. Suddenly without a mission to focus on for the first time in years, he had found himself at a loss for what to do. He'd always put off really confronting his emotions about the events that had occurred during the war—and even before that—promising himself he could unpack everything once Voldemort was finally dead and gone.

Well, Voldemort was most certainly dead now, but Harry had still had no idea what to do with himself. He had tried taking care of Ginny, of Ron, of Molly, but he'd felt like he was intruding on the family's grief over their fallen son and brother. He had mourned for Fred, of course, but as much as the Weasley's had welcomed him in as one of their own, the loss of Fred was far deeper for them.

The one who was the most put-together—as usual—was Hermione. Her first order of business had been to return with everyone to the Burrow. She'd insisted Molly rest and took over as Mother Hen of the house. She had cooked, cleaned, healed wounds, answered nonstop owls from friends and family checking in, and in all the mess, had somehow still managed to track down where her parents were located in Australia.

Once the initial grief had somewhat numbed, and slowly the family began functioning again, she'd announced she was going to Australia to try and recover her parents' memories and bring them back. Ron had insisted on going with her. Harry had offered to join them, but Hermione could tell he wasn't up for another journey so soon, and had graciously told him that the two of them could handle it without him this time.

So Harry had slept. And slept. And slept and slept and slept. He had been rather surprised that he wasn't having nightmares from the war—it'd seemed like everyone was having them these days. But, he supposed, after a lifetime of having Voldemort inside his head, perhaps there was simply no energy left in him for nightmares.

He hadn't even been aware of how much time he had passed unconscious until Hermione and Ron had returned, both looking remarkably happier and tanner than when they had left.

Their search had been successful and, after additional intervention at St. Mungo's, Hermione's parents were home, safe and sound, though extremely upset by their daughter's deception and more than a little agitated that she'd fought an entire war without their knowledge.

The three of them shortly received letters from McGonagall, inviting them back to Hogwarts. Hermione had shoved Harry's into his face, eagerly waiting to know what he thought they should do. He easily translated this to mean that she wanted to return and Ron didn't, and he was to be the deciding vote.

"I dunno, Hermione," he'd said, honestly. "It wouldn't be the same, would it?"

In the end, it didn't matter what he said, because Hermione would convince them to go anyway.

So here they were, sitting in a compartment on the train, with Ginny, Luna, and Neville.

"How many people from our year do you reckon will come back?" asked Neville.

"How many survived?" Harry replied, earning him a reprimanding look from Hermione, who turned to answer Neville as if Harry hadn't spoken.

"I think most of Gryffindor is coming back."

"Sue Li from Ravenclaw isn't," Luna said, in that faraway voice of hers. "She and her family moved to Greece."

"Mum says that Hannah Abbott's family thought about sending her to Beauxbatons to finish her N.E.W.T.s, but she insisted she finish at Hogwarts," Ginny supplied.

"I wonder where we'll be staying," Ron voiced, and everyone turned to look at him.

"What do you mean?" Neville asked.

"Well, there's not exactly room for us in Gryffindor tower, is there? There's seven years, plus us. There aren't enough dormitories."

Hermione looked astounded.

"I can't believe I didn't think of that!"

"I'm sure they'll have someplace planned," said Ginny, calmly.

"Oh, yes. Hogwarts has all sorts of secret places," said Luna, a faint smile crossing over her face. "It always makes room for those in need."

Harry didn't really want to think about where his year was going to stay. He wanted to stay in Gryffindor Tower. He knew it was hard-headed and selfish of him, but all he wanted was to stuff himself full of treacle tart, crawl into his old four-poster, and sleep for the next few days.

He didn't say any of this, mainly because Hermione had already started voicing concerns about how much he was sleeping these days.

"I suppose they'll tell us when we get there," he said instead, and the others nodded, seeming to take this as the end of this particular conversation.

Luna, never one to be especially cognizant of social cues, continued, "I wonder about the Slytherins."

The others regarded her curiously.

"What about them?" asked Ginny, her voice somewhat hard.

"I wonder if any of them are coming back to repeat the year," Luna said, either not noticing or ignoring the harshness in Ginny's tone.

"They'd better not," Ron said, his own voice resembling Ginny's in its ferocity. "That'd make them stupid as well as evil."

"Don't say that, Ron," Hermione admonished. "Not all Slytherins are evil, you know. Some of them even snuck back in and fought on our side."

Ron snorted.

"What, like three people? So what?"

"So," Hermione's eyes narrowed, "This whole war started because of pitting people against other—pureblood, half-blood, Slytherin, Gryffindor—that's what got us fighting in the first place. I think if any of the Slytherins want to come back, they should be welcomed like everyone else."

There was a moment of silence after Hermione's statement, everyone processing it, except for Luna, who was just gazing out of the window.

"Who would even want to come back?" asked Harry. "From the Slytherins, I mean. Crabbe's dead. Goyle's parents are both in Azkaban. Nott's father died during the war, didn't he? Parkinson and her family fled to France or Spain or Italy or something. I assume Zabini's mother has her hooks in another rich old sod, and Malfoy—" Harry paused. He didn't actually know what Malfoy was up to.

The last time he'd seen him was at his and Narcissa's trials—one of the few times Harry had left the Burrow in the past several months.

While thoroughly grateful that Lucius's trial had been held separately, he still hadn't known why he so firmly wanted to speak at Malfoy's trial. He just did. Part of him briefly—stupidly—wondered if this was simply another move in their constant game of petty rivalry.

But when he entered the courtroom, and saw Malfoy, his arm wrapped protectively around his mother, his face paler than it had ever been and his jaw clenched, Harry had decided no, it was nothing like that.

Maybe he had finally gotten tired—tired of seeing young people dying and suffering in an old man’s war. Maybe he had just wanted it all to be over, wanted everything to settle down into some sort of normalcy that he’d never truly gotten to experience. Maybe it had had something to do with Malfoy’s defiant expression, this look that seemed to say he couldn’t care less if his own sentence was a Dementor’s Kiss, but if anyone dared try and harm his mother, he would kill them with his bare hands.

He hadn’t known why he wanted to speak at Malfoy’s trial, but he did, so when it was his turn to speak, he got up and simply told the truth.

He told the Wizengamot about Malfoy’s refusal to identify him at the Manor, perhaps exaggerating a bit about Malfoy “letting” him take his wand in their escape. He spoke about Malfoy’s desperation when tasked with the mission of killing Dumbledore, how he was being threatened with the death of his family if he did not comply. He talked about how Narcissa saved his life in the Forbidden Forest by risking her own and lying directly to Voldemort’s face.

At this, Malfoy’s face—which had remained stoic and emotionless the whole time—had slackened and he’d looked at his mother with wide eyes. Narcissa, however, hadn’t looked away from Harry for a second.

Harry hadn’t left until the sentences were read out - a year of house arrest for Narcissa and a year of probation for Malfoy. Malfoy had looked completely shocked, so thrown that he seemed to forget his ongoing effort of keeping his face blank. Narcissa had seemed to take it in stride, as always, but Harry had noticed she held her son just a little tighter.

She had come up to him afterwards, Malfoy just a step behind her.

“Thank you, Mr. Potter,” she’s said, her voice clear and smooth.

“Of course,” he’d replied, not knowing what else to say. He had looked up at Malfoy, not expecting much, but Malfoy had offered a nod, so Harry nodded back.

“Nah, I don’t think he will,” came Ron’s voice, bringing Harry back to the present. “His mum’s on house arrest and Lucius is in Azkaban, he’s got to be there to take care of her.”

“It was very nice of you to speak at their trial, Harry,” said Hermione, clearly trying to cheer Harry up. Her efforts didn’t go a long way, as Ginny’s head snapped in his direction.

“You spoke at their trial?” she demanded. “Why?”

“You didn’t tell her?” Hermione asked, looking surprised.

Harry resisted the urge to bite back a sarcastic, *‘yes, I told my maybe-girlfriend who lost her brother to Death Eaters that I spoke in defence of a Death Eater’*.

Instead, he just sighed. “Yes, I did. His mother saved my life.”

“I didn’t know that,” Neville remarked, looking interested.

“Funnily enough, I don’t actually enjoy talking about all my near-death experiences that much,” Harry snapped, earning him wary looks from his friends. He sighed again. “Sorry.”

“No need to apologize, mate,” Ron said, clapping him on the shoulder. “So, what do you reckon the rules for Quidditch will be? Think we’ll be allowed or not?”

Everyone eagerly jumped into the subject change, even Hermione, who normally couldn’t give a toss about Quidditch.

Ginny was still looking at Harry, though, and he knew that this wouldn’t be the last he would hear from her about this, so he made a mental note of adding talking about the Malfoys to the list of conversations he was avoiding having with her.

you're shallow and empty and filled with regret

Chapter Summary

A small clattering noise brought Draco's attention back to his own table and he looked down to see his absurdly long wand had fallen out of his pocket again. Cursing, he bent to fetch it and gave it a nasty look.

"Known to bring luck!" The wandmaker's words drifted back to him, and Draco desperately wanted to go back in time just to hex him into oblivion.

Yes, it was just so incredibly lucky that he was to spend another year at Hogwarts with Harry bloody Potter.

Chapter Notes

yes this chapter is short, I know, but to make up for it I will post the next one early I promise

chapter title is from the song Holy by PVRIS

The journey up to the castle was not like any of years past. It seemed as though everyone could see the Thestrals pulling their carriages now, which left many in a silent state of awe as they stared at the strange, skeletal creatures.

Draco, who'd been able to see them in his sixth year, didn't give them much notice, but that was more due to the fact that the gaunt, winged horses still made him feel rather uncomfortable.

He'd seen far too many horrific things during the war to justify his fear in these typically peaceful creatures, but there was something about them that just gnawed at his gut. Their pupil-less eyes, milky white and round, seemed to stare into one's very soul, and Draco found himself with his own eyes firmly focused on the ground.

He hoisted himself up into a carriage containing three younger students—perhaps second or third years. They looked up at him in mild alarm, but didn't seem to recognize him, rather appearing intimidated based on his age instead of his criminal history. Two of them were wearing Hufflepuff scarves, the other had a Ravenclaw-blue hair band perched on her head.

Draco sighed quietly to himself. He started to wonder about Slytherins from younger years, would they want to come back? He supposed many of them would have no choice, but he was sure that at least some parents would choose to send their Slytherins to Beauxbatons or Durmstrang. He wouldn't blame them. He did not expect any returning Slytherins to be met with welcoming arms, even those who didn't bear the shame of being related to a Death Eater.

By the time everyone had unloaded off the carriages and begun making their way into the Great Hall, it was clear as day that the Slytherin table would be the emptiest of them all. There were more students than Draco had predicted, but it wasn't nearly as packed as any of the other three tables.

Luckily, that meant there were plenty of vacant seats not directly beside anyone, so Draco quickly found himself in the very corner of the Great Hall, so as not to be as easily seen by anybody. He decided it would be prudent to sit near the door so that if he were to be mobbed by angry students, he would have a chance of fleeing.

He sat with his head ducked down as far as it would go without severely hunching over. His pale blond hair made him all the more noticeable, and for once, Draco desperately wanted not to be noticed. He was not altogether successful, he realized, as he felt a figure slide in to sit next to him. He dared a glance upwards and was both surprised and relieved to see a familiar face.

"Theo," he breathed, as the boy next to him gave a slight smile.

"Draco. I didn't think you'd be back this year."

Draco allowed himself a soft chuckle.

"I didn't think I would be either."

Theodore tilted his head and looked at him, curiously. His deep brown eyes betrayed a hint of something that looked akin to pity. Under normal circumstances, Draco would've shut that down in a second with a sneer and a derisive comment, however at the moment, he was far too grateful to have a somewhat friendly face around, so he refrained from the urge to immediately push him away.

"I'm glad you're here," Theo said quietly, after a moment.

Draco looked at him and opened his mouth to respond, but was stopped when a sudden hush fell over the Great Hall, as the large creaky doors opened and Professor Flitwick entered, leading a long line of first years to the front of the Hall. They looked absolutely tiny, even compared to Flitwick, and were huddled much closer together than necessary. As they reached the front of the Great Hall, Flitwick stepped forward, conjured a small stool, and placed the familiar, dirty old wizard's hat upon it.

Everyone stared and waited in silence. Draco strangely found he was holding his breath tightly. And then the tear near the brim opened wide, and in a terribly dark and low voice, the Sorting Hat began to sing:

Back before you all were born,

Before your parents too,

Two wizards and two witches thought

To build a magic school.

Good friends, they were, that shared a dream

*To educate the youth;
It was my job to tell you this
And now, to tell the truth,
Hogwarts has seen better days
The castle walls still bleed
It wishes to be home for you
On its behalf, I plead.
The founders were all different
And they valued varied skills
They all picked their favourites
In which those values they instilled.
But the four of them decided
When they opened up their doors,
Rivalry and competition
Would not turn to war
The castle has cleaned up your mess
And forgiven all your sins
But don't forget the rubble
That you last left it in.
With that said, I welcome you
Put me on and see
I have never chosen wrong
That, I guarantee.
You could be in Gryffindor,
Where they are strong and brave
Just remember there aren't always
Victims you can save.*

*You could be in Ravenclaw,
Where knowledge is your king,
But in this time of healing,
Logic isn't everything.
You could be in Hufflepuff,
Loyal, true, and kind,
But you will find your gentleness
Is often undermined.
Or you could be in Slytherin
Where ambition reigns
But beware, for you will need
Your heart as well as brain.
Wherever you might land,
Whichever House is home,
Hogwarts cannot be rebuilt
And I can't be resewn.*

There was a long quiet moment after the Sorting Hat finished its song, everyone glancing at each other as if hoping someone had an explanation. Draco had never heard such a song from the Sorting Hat before, even after the Dark Lord's return. He was constantly surprised by the complexity of the magic within Hogwarts, and the Sorting Hat was no exception.

When the Great Hall eventually started to applaud, he joined in, not wanting to seem disinterested or—Merlin forbid—spiteful. His eyes swept over the Hall, observing other people's reactions, until they stopped dead at the Gryffindor table, where none other than Harry Potter, the Saviour of the Wizarding World himself, sat.

Hermione Granger was speaking rapidly to him and a figure Draco assumed was Ronald Weasley, based on the mess of ginger hair on the back of his head. Potter was nodding, though clearly didn't seem to be processing any of what Granger was saying to him, his eyes still focused on the Sorting Hat.

Draco wondered what on earth he was doing here. Potter most certainly wasn't required to finish his N.E.W.T.s; who would possibly be requesting any sort of formal application from Harry Potter, regardless of what job it was? Draco had practically spent the last few months as a hermit, and he had *still* heard that the Ministry had offered Potter an Auror position without his N.E.W.T.s.

A small clattering noise brought Draco's attention back to his own table and he looked down to see his absurdly long wand had fallen out of his pocket again. Cursing, he bent to fetch it and gave it a nasty look.

"Known to bring luck!" The wandmaker's words drifted back to him, and Draco desperately wanted to go back in time and hex him into oblivion.

Yes, it was just so incredibly lucky that he was to spend another year at Hogwarts with Harry bloody Potter.

i was a knife in a gunfight and i fought so madly

Chapter Summary

“I don’t bloody believe it,” Ron muttered through gritted teeth beside him, and he sounded so angry that Harry’s attention was immediately torn away from thoughts of Lavender.

“What?” he asked.

“Malfoy’s here.”

“What?” Harry hissed and followed Ron’s eye line to find—sure enough—Draco Malfoy. He was seated in between Blaise Zabini and Theodore Nott, however while the two of them were engaged in conversation, he sat hunched over the table, his hands crossed and his eyes looking down.

Harry was so surprised by his presence; he didn’t know what to make of it. He knew Malfoy was a free man—technically, as he was still on probation—but he had never even entertained the thought that he would be returning to Hogwarts this year.

Chapter Notes

hi I'm back with another chapter, early as promised! you get briefly introduced to some new characters here, so I hope you enjoy! <3

chapter title is from the song Almost Had Me by LIGHTS

After the final first year—“Zima, Danielle!”—was sorted into Ravenclaw and the Sorting Hat was taken away, Professor McGonagall rose from her seat.

“Students, I know you are all tired and hungry, and I will not keep you long. First years, welcome to Hogwarts; members of your House will be happy to assist you as you acclimate to your new home. Any students returning for the eighth year, I ask you to kindly remain seated after the feast, as there are several matters we must attend to before you may be dismissed,” she paused to allow some brief murmuring. “As you all know, Hogwarts has been under repairs for several months. The castle’s magic has greatly assisted in this process; however, I beseech you to be kind to your home. It will only return the favour. Now, enjoy the feast!”

As soon as McGonagall finished speaking, the tables all magically filled with food, and—as if on cue—Hermione began chattering.

“Fascinating, isn’t it?” she asked, his eyes large. “I wonder if the Sorting Hat has ever issued warnings about the Houses before? I mean, it didn’t even sound like this in fifth year. ‘Remember

there aren't always victims you can save,' I wonder what that means."

"It's about 'Arry's saviour complex," said Ron, through a full mouth of roast chicken. Hermione looked at him, too surprised by his words to show any sign of disgust at his eating habits.

"I do not have a saviour complex," Harry said, defensively.

"Yesh, 'oo do," Ron said, grinning as he chewed.

"He has a point," Hermione added, in that diplomatic tone of hers. "You do make somewhat of a habit of swooping in and saving people."

"As opposed to leaving them to die?" Harry looked at her, incredulously.

"That's not what I meant," said Hermione, patiently. "I just mean maybe you should listen to the Sorting Hat! Not everyone can be saved."

Harry was ready to argue further, but Ron shot him a look that clearly meant: *leave it be*.

"Fine," he grumbled. "I promise not to save anyone this year."

"Cheers, mate!" Ron grinned at him, lifting his glass of pumpkin juice in the air as a mock toast.

Harry found that the rest of dinner went rather well. The comfortable energy of the Gryffindor table relaxed Harry to the point where he almost forgot his worries about the upcoming year. Almost.

When dessert was just wrapping up, and Ron was shovelling as much strawberry cream cake into his mouth as he could before the food all disappeared, Harry felt that uneasy nervousness creep back into his stomach.

He tried to tell himself it was simply that he'd eaten too much treacle tart, but he *always* ate too much treacle tart at Hogwarts's opening ceremony, so he knew that wasn't what it was.

"Aw, bollocks," Ron mumbled through his last bite of cake, as the golden plates before them all became clean and empty again.

"Ron, that was your *fifth* piece of cake," Hermione said, looking at him with her eyebrows raised.

"So?" Ron replied after a loud swallow. "We were on the run last year. Eating nuts and fish bones and Merlin knows what."

"And you've been stuffing yourself on Molly's cooking ever since we got back," Hermione continued, and Harry was about to tune them out when McGonagall rose from her seat again, and the Great Hall fell silent once more.

"Students, I hope you have enjoyed the welcoming feast. Before I dismiss you, I have a few announcements to make. Mr. Filch, our caretaker, has asked me to remind you that all Weasleys' Wizard Wheezes products are strictly forbidden within the castle walls, along with three hundred and forty-six other items. The list is available upon request. As always, the Forbidden Forest is strictly out-of-bounds to students, along with the village of Hogsmeade to all below third year. Lastly, I would like to introduce you to this year's staff. Older students, you will, of course, be hearing some familiar names, however do try to stay awake, as we have some new faces for you to get acquainted to."

“I wonder who’s teaching Defence this year,” Ron commented, earning himself a dirty look and a whispered “shh!” from Hermione. Harry just shrugged at him, scanning the faculty table.

“Professor Horace Slughorn has returned as Potions master and Head of Slytherin House,” McGonagall paused as the Hall politely applauded and Slughorn raised a pudgy hand in a sort of wave. “Rubeus Hagrid remains as Hogwarts gamekeeper and Care of Magical Creatures professor,” the applause was much louder for Hagrid, several Gryffindors even yelling out things like “Yeah, Hagrid!” and “Woo!”

McGonagall quieted them with a simple glare over her rectangular glasses.

“Professor Sprout will continue as Herbology professor and Head of Hufflepuff,”—Sprout gave a friendly nod, her springy grey curls bouncing as she did so—“Professor Flitwick, of course, as Charms professor and Head of Ravenclaw,”—Flitwick stood on his seat and gave a deep bow,-
-“Professor Sybill Trelawney will carry on as Divinations professor. Firenze has returned to his herd in the Forbidden Forest and therefore will not be rotating classes with her,”—Trelawney looked rather pleased about this, but a few seats over, Harry could hear Parvati let out a little whine of disappointment,—“Professor Sinistra returns as Astronomy professor, Professor Vector as our Arithmancy master, and Professor Babbling continues for the Study of Ancient Runes.”

McGonagall waited for the applause to die out and then continued.

“Now I’d like to welcome our new professors. Professor Binns has decided to retire, as we believe he has realized he has been dead for several decades now,”—the first years, Harry noticed, looked rather alarmed by McGonagall’s nonchalant tone—“In his place, as the instructor for History of Magic, I’d like you all to welcome Professor Fiona Ramirez, who has come highly recommended from Ilvermorny.”

A woman on the far right end of the table stood up, and Harry wondered how he didn’t notice her before, with her wild chestnut hair that seemed to explode around her in outrageous curls. She wore robes of a dark blue colour, instead of the standard Hogwarts black.

“She looks rather young, doesn’t she?” Hermione said, sounding somewhere between worried and judgmental.

“Lupin was young, too,” Harry said, without thinking, and Hermione gave him a wide-eyed look, like a small bird being cornered by a hawk.

He sighed. He hadn’t meant anything by it, but recently it seemed like his friends were constantly on guard around him, like everything he said was meant as an attack on them.

He wanted to reassure her that he hadn’t meant it in a bad way, but the food was starting to settle in his stomach, making him feel heavy and sleepy, and he simply didn’t have the energy for it.

Instead, he focused back on Professor Fiona Ramirez, who was seated again, but still looking at the students with a merry grin on her face. Harry decided he liked her.

“Also from our friends across the pond, Professor Waya Boxturtle joins us as Defence Against the Dark Arts professor.”

Harry craned his neck to get a better look at the man who stood.

He had a serious face, but didn't look particularly stern, his features worn but kind against his dark complexion. His hair was long, thick, and black, held together neatly in a low-hanging ponytail. Interestingly, he also wasn't wearing traditional black Hogwarts robes, but instead what looked to Harry to be a simple long-sleeved black tunic and black trousers.

"Odd name, wouldn't you say?" Ron commented, as Professor Boxturtle sat down again.

"I think he must be Native American," Hermione said, her eyes still on the new professor. "I wonder what tribe."

"Don't you think it's strange that two of our new professors had to be imported from another country?" said Ron.

"Oh, Ron, don't say it like that. I'm sure they're both extremely qualified," responded Hermione with a wave of her hand.

"He doesn't look like a bloke you'd wanna mess with," Harry added, thoughtfully. "Maybe he'll last longer than a year."

"You reckon?" Ron grinned.

"Shh!" Hermione hushed them. "Oh, look, now we've missed an introduction."

Harry looked up, and unsurprisingly, Hermione was right. A woman with neat golden hair in a tight bun was just taking her seat.

"And finally," McGonagall was saying, "taking my place as both Transfiguration professor and Head of Gryffindor House, Professor Lachlan Ashworth."

The first thing Harry noticed about their new Head of House was that he was quite handsome. He was tall, with a firm posture and broad shoulders, and his face was stoic, his jawline sharp and nose straight. His dark brown hair was elegantly coiffed yet simultaneously looked like he hadn't done a thing to style it. Harry guessed he was somewhere in his forties or early fifties. Something about him reminded Harry of Muggle soldiers standing to attention—strong, unwavering.

Harry clearly hadn't been the only one to notice their new Head's good looks, as girls were whispering up and down the table. However, with a steady clearing of her throat, McGonagall had command over the Hall once again.

"Thank you all for your attention. Your schedules will be available to you in your House's common rooms first thing in the morning. Prefects, please guide students to your respective dormitories. Students who have returned to repeat their seventh year, please remain seated. Goodnight!"

There was a great scraping of wooden benches against the stone floor as students got to their feet and headed towards the large double doors of the Great Hall. It took several minutes for everyone to leave, and when the doors banged shut again, what looked like less than thirty people remained, scattered around the enormous room at their respective House tables. The staff had all dispersed as well, all except McGonagall and the Heads of Houses.

"Do come sit up front, please," McGonagall said, her voice sounding far more casual. She gestured to the side of the Ravenclaw table closest to the front of the room, and she herself got up and walked over to stand in front of it, her fellow professors following suit.

The students did as they were told, rising from their seats and walking over to the Ravenclaw table. Harry, once seated, was glad to see some familiar faces. Susan Bones, whose long red hair had been cut and now stopped just short of her shoulders, gave him a warm smile when they made eye contact. Padma Patil had scurried over to sit beside her sister. But on the other side of Parvati, Lavender Brown was noticeably missing.

Harry felt a sudden wave of guilt wash over him. He remembered, in the Battle, Lavender had been attacked by Greyback. He remembered Trelawney and Parvati leaning over her in the Great Hall.

It was right over there, he thought to himself, feeling his insides go cold.

He hadn't known she had died. He had never even *asked*.

"I don't bloody believe it," Ron muttered through gritted teeth from beside him, and he sounded so angry that Harry's attention was torn away from thoughts of Lavender.

"What?" he asked.

"Malfoy's here."

"*What?*" Harry hissed and followed Ron's eye-line to find—sure enough—Draco Malfoy. He was seated in between Blaise Zabini and Theodore Nott, however while the two of them were engaged in conversation, Malfoy sat hunched over the table, his hands crossed and his eyes looking down.

Harry was too surprised by his presence to know what to make of it. He knew Malfoy was a free man—technically, as he *was* still on probation—but he hadn't entertained the thought that he would be returning to Hogwarts this year.

Before Harry and Ron could begin discussing what could've possibly possessed Malfoy to think it was a good idea to come back to school, McGonagall had begun speaking again.

"I am delighted to see so many of you have chosen to return," she said, with a genuine smile on her face. "I do not intend to keep you long, however there are some imperative changes that we must go over."

Hermione had that concerned look on her face again.

"As some of you may have realized, your House dormitories are only designed to hold seven years of students, so we have had to organize alternative arrangements for you. The Founder's Tower has been transformed to become a living space for you. There you will find your dormitories as well as your new common room."

Several hands shot into the air. Her eyebrows raised, McGonagall called on Ernie Macmillan.

"Yes, Professor, does that mean we will *all* be sharing? All Houses?" he phrased it rather innocently, but everyone was well aware of what he was really asking: *Would they have to share with the Slytherins?*

McGonagall sighed.

"Your dormitories are split by House, for the most part, however some adjustments were made in order to fit you all into the space we had available. As for the common room, yes, Mr Macmillan, you will all be sharing."

More hands in the air.

“Yes, Miss Abbott?”

“Will we no longer have access to our old common rooms?”

Harry’s eyes widened. He couldn’t imagine life at Hogwarts without the cushiony armchairs in the Gryffindor common room, the warmth of the fire pleasant and comforting.

“That is correct.”

This was greeted by a substantial reaction—some students began whispering amongst themselves, Seamus seemed outraged, Ernie Macmillan’s normally pink face went white as a sheet, and even the Ravenclaws looked rather mutinous.

“As our oldest students,” McGonagall began in a raised voice, instantly quashing all other noise. “I expect you all to behave accordingly. The younger students will be looking to you for guidance and example, and I am *certain* you will not let us down.”

Her eyes narrowed at them as if daring them to argue with her.

“The entrance to your common room in the Founder’s Tower is behind a wall-mounted sixteenth century Persian rug, next to the portrait of Lady Kellestra. The current password is *Florence’s Law*.”

There were still several hands in the air, but McGonagall paid them no mind and continued.

“Now, we must also discuss your extra-curricular classes. Many of your core and elective classes will be taken along with the seventh years, however Hogwarts is offering a unique opportunity for you as well. Under normal circumstances, at this age you would typically be undertaking an apprenticeship or commencing training for your chosen field. Hogwarts will be welcoming experts to mentor you in whatever your field of choosing may be. On the schedules you receive tomorrow, you will find you each have an individual appointment with your Head of House next week, to consider what that field may be so that we may find you an appropriate mentor. Any questions?”

Many hands. McGonagall glared at them.

“About the apprenticeships?”

Everyone’s hand fell except for Hermione’s.

“Yes, Miss Granger?”

“What if there isn’t an expert in our chosen field?”

McGonagall allowed herself a small smile.

“Miss Granger, if you propose a field of study that has not yet been heard of or studied in any capacity, I vow I will do my utmost to find you as close to an expert as I possibly can.”

Hermione looked quite pleased.

“I also regret to have to inform you that you will not be permitted to play Quidditch on your House teams,” McGonagall seemed to have expected the responding outrage, as Ron, Harry, Dean, Kevin Entwhistle and Alice Runcorn from Hufflepuff, and Anthony Goldstein and Michael Corner from Ravenclaw immediately made noises of protest.

“I know,” McGonagall said, her voice once again echoing across the Hall and silencing them all, “that you are disappointed, however I strongly believe that with your additional classes and workload, you would be hard-pressed to find the time to meet the demands of Quidditch as well. You are, of course, welcome to use the pitch for flying practice when it is not being used by the Quidditch teams.”

She gave them all a stern look that clearly stated no further protest was welcome.

“Furthermore, as you are all of age, you are permitted to visit the village of Hogsmeade on all weekends, not only on supervised trips. Know that this is a *privilege*, and any breaches of conduct will be met with a swift ban.”

There was some excited murmuring at this before returning full attention to McGonagall.

“Lastly, I advise you to remember what we fought for—a peaceful and more accepting magical community. I trust you will treat each other kindly and with respect, and that you will extend that courtesy to our new professors, especially those joining us from Ilvermorny. They left prominent positions in order to assist us in our effort of returning Hogwarts to its full potential. I am sure you will make them feel welcomed and at home here.”

The tone of her voice made it clear this was not a suggestion.

“If there is anything you need, do not hesitate to approach me or your Head of House. It is our wish that all students feel comfortable in Hogwarts once again. Now, off to bed with you.”

even fool's gold brings the thieves at night

Chapter Summary

“Could be worse,” he said, and allowed himself a grin as he looked at the other boys. “I could be rooming with the Hufflepuffs.”

Blaise and Theo looked at him for a second—and then both fell into their own grins.

“Prat.” Blaise teased and gave Draco a playful shove.

“Go on then. I’ll see you at breakfast. If the Hufflepuffs haven’t, I don’t know, cuddled you to death or whatever Hufflepuffs do.” Draco said, already turning to walk into his room.

Chapter Notes

chapter five is heeeere! let me know what you think so far

chapter title is from the song Nothing Scares Me Anymore by Steve Angello

Draco decided he was going to cast all of the blame on his bloody wand. He couldn’t imagine how anyone could possibly think the blasted thing was a *good luck charm*, seeing as, since the moment he first acquired it, he had been receiving bad news at every turn.

Here he was, traipsing after Hufflepuffs to reach their new shared common room. Blaise and Theodore had both shot him and each other worried looks as they walked, but they all knew better than to speak. The less attention they drew to themselves, the better.

"Florence's Law," said someone up front; Granger, it sounded like.

Draco stretched his neck to get a better look, and saw as the ornamental rug rolled itself up and the bricks behind it began to unfold, revealing a hole large enough for one to walk through. The small crowd slowly started shuffling in, and Draco and his fellow Slytherin men were the last to enter, turning to watch the bricks reassemble themselves behind them.

The new common room looked nothing like the Slytherin dungeons. It was a large, circular room, with two sets of curved staircases at the very back. Near the staircase on the right were large arched windows, with cushioned window-seats and two small shelves full of books. By the staircase on the left was a bulletin board, already half-full with notes and announcements.

Grey carpeting covered every inch of the floor, and the various armchairs and sofas that occupied the room were all black or a muted shade of grey. White lamps glittered with the appearance of stars, bouncing off the walls. Desks were tucked away under the staircases, and bowls of fruit sat

on several end tables by the sofas. There were only a few spots of bright colour, made all the more noticeable by how monochromatic the rest of the room was.

On a small circular table placed in the very centre of the room was a glass vase. Inside were four flowers: a warm yellow marigold, a bright red poppy, a deep blue larkspur, and a pale green rose.

Subtle, thought Draco. And that was *before* he saw the wall.

On the curved wall opposite the arched windows hung four enormous tapestries, depicting the House mascots.

For Hufflepuff, a badger was embroidered on the soft yellow fabric and the words, *THE PURSUIT OF JUSTICE*, written underneath it in black.

The Ravenclaw eagle had its wings outstretched against the navy blue backdrop, with bronze writing proclaiming, *THE HUNT FOR KNOWLEDGE*.

On the rich scarlet of the Gryffindor tapestry was a lion, its mane exploding around it and its mouth open in a growl. Golden writing spelled out, *THE SEARCH FOR ADVENTURE*.

Draco's eyes came to rest lastly on the Slytherin tapestry, where a silver snake sat coiled up against the deep green background. Below it, in sparkling silver, sat the words, *THE QUEST FOR GREATNESS*.

Draco blinked up at it. He had expected to think of it as tasteless, but oddly enough, it comforted him, made him feel somewhat better. Here he was, feeling like enough of an outsider, and he couldn't even have the simple pleasure of hiding out in the Slytherin dormitory, lounging on the leather sofas and watching fish and merpeople swim by above him. And yet, even in this unfamiliar nook of Hogwarts, where the black and white and grey of the room seemed strange, the tapestry gave him this feeling of...safety.

"Oi, Malfoy!"

Well, it was nice while it lasted.

Draco turned his head, his body already tense, ready to be jinxed at any moment. He found himself almost face-to-face with Seamus Finnigan, who looked apoplectic.

Draco couldn't even blame him; he had heard from Blaise how bad Finnigan had gotten it from the Carrows last year. Even now, he had several small white scars overlapping each other on the side of his left eye, and his nose looked rather crooked, as though it had been broken more than once.

"What the bloody hell d'you think you're doing back here?" he growled.

If it were two years ago, Draco would've been scared—not that he'd have admitted it. He was a right coward back then.

Truthfully, he didn't think himself much braver now, but he'd seen so many terrible things—witnessed so many tragedies—that he figured he could deal with being punched a few times by an angry Gryffindor. It was bound to happen at some point.

Draco was about to respond, something sarcastic and condescending, but he was interrupted by a firm voice.

“Seamus.”

Finnigan reluctantly tore his eyes away from Draco’s face to look at Granger, whose jaw was set and whose eyes seemed to shine with ire. Draco found himself feeling more fearful of her than Finnigan, even though her gaze was not directed at him.

“Leave it. You heard McGonagall,” she said, frowning.

“But he—” Finnigan began, aggressively, before he was cut off by another voice.

“No.”

This time, the speaker was Potter. He didn’t look angry like Finnigan or stern like Granger. He just looked tired. His normally bright green eyes lacked their usual spark and he seemed to be slouching, his posture nowhere near as strong and commanding as it typically was.

“The war’s over. No more fighting. Enough,” he said, and Finnigan appeared to deflate a little.

“Right,” he said, still shooting Draco an ugly look.

“Let’s just all go to bed, everyone,” said Granger, already back to her characteristically bossy tone of voice, with a hint of forced cheerfulness.

“Girls’ dormitories are on the right,” the Gryffindor Patil girl said, with an air of finality, pointing to the railing of the right-hand staircase, which had a metal **L**—for Ladies, one would assume—embedded into it.

Without so much as another word, the students all obediently shuffled towards their respective staircases.

Draco stayed rooted to the spot, not wanting anyone to walk behind him. Hero Potter may have saved him from getting hexed this time, but Draco was taking no chances. Once everyone was already up the stairs, Draco allowed himself to follow.

When he reached the upper level, Blaise and Theo stood out in the hallway, waiting for him.

“What?” he asked, not in the mood to have a long discussion about what had just occurred in their new common room.

“We’re not placed together,” Blaise said, curtly.

Draco liked that about Blaise. He could weave a tangled web when he wanted to, spin a story however he liked, antagonize people with long monologues that just barely danced around a topic of conversation, but with his friends, there was no dawdling about—he was blunt and straight to the point.

“What?” he asked again, this time with his voice sharp and betraying far more fear than Draco would have liked. “I thought we were being grouped according to House.”

“*For the most part,*” said Theo, in a poor imitation of Minerva McGonagall. “Look.”

He gestured to the doors, which had the names of their inhabitants etched in golden plaques that hung neatly at eye level.

The door on the right read:

Seamus Finnigan

Neville Longbottom

Harry Potter

Dean Thomas

Ronald Weasley

Well, that made sense. All the Gryffindor boys had returned so naturally their arrangement would remain the same. Draco turned to look at the door on the left.

Kevin Entwhistle

Justin Finch-Fletchley

Ernest Macmillan

Theodore Nott

Blaise Zabini

Draco felt something inside of him stir uncomfortably. So they weren't all separated. It was just him, just Draco, who would be isolated from his House.

"I assume that's me then," he said, in a monotone, pointing to the last remaining door at the end of the short hall and between the other two.

Theo nodded, adding, "With the Ravenclaws."

Draco sighed. He wasn't pleased about this. Not at all. But earlier, he'd thought he might be the only Slytherin to be back at all, and it turned out he had Theo and Blaise and he thought that *maybe* he had seen Daphne on the way up to the Founder's Tower, so perhaps it wouldn't be *as* horrible as he had been imagining.

"Could be worse," he said, and allowed himself a smirk as he looked at the other boys. "I could be rooming with the *Hufflepuffs*."

Blaise and Theo looked at him for a second—and then both fell into their own smiles.

"Prat," Blaise teased, and gave Draco a playful shove.

"Go on, then. I'll see you at breakfast. If the Hufflepuffs haven't, I don't know, cuddled you to death or whatever it is Hufflepuffs do," Draco said, already turning to walk into his room.

He waited until he heard Blaise and Theo enter their dormitory and close the door behind them before he gave the plaque on his door a proper look.

Terrence Boot

Michael Corner

Anthony Goldstein

Draco Malfoy

Oliver Rivers

Silently telling himself that it was better than rooming with Finnigan and the Weasel, he took a deep breath and opened the door. Four faces looked up in unison to stare at Draco. He stood still, unsure what the right move was. Did he greet them? Did he refuse to make eye contact? Did he engage in this bizarre stare-down they seemed to be having with him? From the corner of his eye, he could see his trunk sitting at the corner of the bed farthest from the door.

This is ridiculous, he decided, feeling stupid just standing there in the doorway. Closing the door behind him, he took a few quick strides to the end of the room and knelt to open his trunk. Once he's unlocked it and opened it, he snuck a glance around him and was glad to see none of the other boys was looking at him anymore.

Well, it wasn't exactly comfortable, but he sincerely hoped it didn't have to be painful. Nevertheless, he made sure to lock his trunk and put up wards once his bed curtains were drawn. One could never be too careful.

your heart is black and mine is gold

Chapter Summary

“Mr Zabini and Mr Nott, partner with one another,”—Harry looked to the back, where Blaise Zabini, Theodore Nott, and Draco Malfoy were all seated at one table. Zabini and Nott shot Malfoy what looked to be an apologetic look, but Malfoy barely even shrugged.

“Miss Weasley and Miss Lovegood, I’m sure you will work well with each other,” Slughorn continued, smiling at Ginny and Luna. “Miss Granger and Miss Roper, you as well,”—a nod from him to Hermione and Sophie—“Mr Finnigan and Mr Weasley together, and that leaves us with...”—Harry felt a sense of dread filling him, like he had been jolted from a great height and his stomach was sinking like a stone. “Mr Potter and Mr Malfoy! Excellent. Please seat yourself with your partners if you aren’t already so we can begin with today’s potion.”

Chapter Notes

chapter six, a little short but hope you like it nonetheless!

chapter title is from the song Mine Is Gold by State Champs

“Double Potions today and every Monday,” Harry said, looking at his schedule as he plunked himself down next to Ron. “Typical.”

Ron, who was filling his plate with pancakes and hadn’t even glanced at his schedule, suddenly stopped, a pancake dangling off his fork in mid-air.

“Tell me you’re joking,” he groaned, using his free hand to fish his own schedule out of his pocket. Shaking it rather aggressively in order to unfold it, he squinted and then groaned even louder.

“I assume that means you’ve got it with me,” said Harry, helping himself to some poached eggs.

“Misery loves company, it seems,” Ron nodded glumly, not looking nearly as excited about his pancakes as he had a mere thirty seconds ago.

Their little pity party was interrupted when Hermione appeared, plopping herself down across the table from them.

“Have you two checked your schedules yet?” she asked, not pausing for a breath, let alone to let them answer. “When are your meetings with the new head of House? Do you know what you’re going to ask him? You still want to be Aurors, right? I *knew* seventh year was a year of preparation, but I had no idea we would be undertaking apprenticeships! I haven’t prepared for this at all. I have classes until past six, but I think I’m going to go to the library afterwards to do some more research.

I do with Professor McGonagall had at least *mentioned* this in the letter, how are we supposed to figure out what we want to do for the rest of our lives in a matter of weeks?”

Harry and Ron stared at her—as usual, in awe of how she was capable of such fast speech without taking a breath.

“Calm down, ‘Mione,” Ron said, only half of a pancake left on his fork now. “You’ll be great at whatever to choose.”

Harry was focused on something else.

“You have classes till after six?” he asked, incredulously.

Hermione nodded, busying herself with buttering a piece of toast at an inhuman speed.

“I was already planning on taking N.E.W.T.s in Arithmancy and Ancient Runes, but I want to have all my bases covered, so I’ve added back Care of Magical Creatures, and I *thought* about taking Divination again—” Ron sputtered a, “but—” which Harry knew was going to be something like, ‘*but you hate Divination,*’ but Hermione didn’t let him get another word in, savagely stabbing her toast with a jam-covered knife now, “but I didn’t. I’m also in your Transfiguration class, as well as double Potions, and then I have Arithmancy, double Charms, and Care of Magical Creatures.”

She looked off to the side as if trying to remember something.

“Oh!” she almost jumped in her seat a second later. “I’d almost forgotten, I have Astronomy as well, at midnight.”

She gave a small smile, looking pleased with herself, and put down the knife.

“I’m going to run, I wanted to see if I could have a quick word with Professor Ashworth before class starts. See you then!”

She shoved the toast into her mouth, holding it with her teeth, grabbed her book-bag, and waved at them before hurrying away.

Ron gaped after her.

“She’s gonna kill herself taking all those classes,” he said, shaking his head in disbelief. “You’d think she’d have learned her lesson after third year and that whole mess with the time-turner, but no.”

Harry snorted.

“You know Hermione,” he said, with a shrug. “She’ll drown herself in schoolwork if given the chance.”

“Yeah,” Ron agreed, looking off into space. “So Auror training. Wonder what it’ll be like. I mean, I suppose it’s not the same as the official Auror training, but still. Maybe it’ll give us a leg-up when we actually do apply.”

“Yeah,” Harry said, not really meaning it. He didn’t know how he felt about starting Auror training right away. The war had *just* ended. Thinking about instantly returning to duelling and defensive spellwork made his stomach queasy.

“Should we head to Transfiguration then? Don’t want to be late for the new professor,” Ron shovelled the last few bites of pancake into his mouth and choked it all down with a few gulps of pumpkin juice.

“Right,” said Harry, and the two of them got up from their seats at the Gryffindor table and started down towards the doors of the Great Hall. Before they walked through the enormous double-doors, Harry glanced towards the Slytherin table.

He was hunched down again, and had the hood of his robes drawn over his head, but it was the unmistakable figure of Draco Malfoy.

Harry didn’t know why he felt such a level of discomfort at the idea of Malfoy being back—after all, he was something Harry had regularly associated with Hogwarts, albeit not a favourite feature. Perhaps it was Malfoy’s own discomfort, how he sat slouched over—such a stark departure from his typical perfect posture—and how he seemed to be avoiding making eye contact with anyone, how desperately he seemed to want to blend into his surroundings. He was behaving nothing like the loud, annoying, attention-seeking Malfoy that Harry knew, and it was rather disturbing to see.

A voice in Harry’s head—that sounded eerily like Ginny—told him it wasn’t his job to worry about Malfoy. Given his position during the war, it was no wonder he was trying his best to remain unnoticed.

Casting his eyes away from the Slytherins, Harry attempted to banish any thoughts of Draco Malfoy from his mind.

Professor Lachlan Ashworth was standing at the front of the class when Harry and Ron walked in. He had his hands behind his back, which somehow made him look even taller than he already was.

Hermione was seated by the front, one of the other Gryffindor girls—Harry thought her name started with an S—next to her. Harry and Ron joined their table, Harry nodding a hello at the Gryffindor girl, who smiled back.

Slowly the classroom began to fill up, with more people than Harry would’ve expected.

“Lots of people for an N.E.W.T. level class, don’t you think?” Ron said, voicing Harry’s thoughts aloud.

“Transfiguration is a popular N.E.W.T. subject, though,” provided Hermione.

“There’s also seventh years in the class, as well as us...eighth years, I suppose,” said the Gryffindor girl. Ron looked at her as if he had just noticed she was there.

“Hullo,” he said. “Do I know you? I’m Ron. Ron Weasley.”

Hermione gave him a withering look, one that Harry knew meant she wanted to tell him off for his bad manners but knew it would do no good.

The Gryffindor girl didn’t seem to mind though; she just grinned widely, showing off teeth so dazzlingly white they would put Gilderoy Lockhart to shame.

“I’m Sophie Roper,” she said. “We’ve been in the same House for eight years now.”

“Oh,” said Ron, and he had the decency to go a little red in the ears. “Sorry.”

Sophie laughed—a warm, pleasant sound that made Harry think he would like her.

“It’s alright, I know you three have been rather busy—didn’t you defeat a troll or something when we were eleven?—I can’t imagine you were all too bothered about memorizing the names of all your classmates.”

Ron grinned as well, and even Hermione looked amused.

Various chatter filled the classroom, until Professor Ashworth cleared his throat firmly. The entire class fell silent, and Harry was rather impressed. Not all professors had the natural ability to silence a room like that.

“Welcome, students, to Transfiguration. In case you don’t remember from the opening feast, I am your new instructor, Professor Ashworth. I know you are all quite used to Professor McGonagall teaching this subject, and transitioning to a new professor in your final year can be challenging, however I guarantee as long as you work hard and complete your assignments, you will succeed in this class.”

Unhooking his hands from behind his back, he moved in front of his own teacher’s desk and sat down on top of it, suddenly looking far more casual than he had ten seconds ago.

“Now, I normally don’t like wasting precious class time, but I understand you may be somewhat curious as to who I am and why I’m here, so I will allow three minutes for any questions,” a little smile played at his lips. “I may not answer if your questions get too personal.”

Hermione’s hand, as usual, was one of the first in the air, however Professor Ashworth’s eyes fell upon Hannah Abbott.

“Yes, Miss...?”

“Abbott,” Hannah supplied. “Have you always been a professor?”

“No, I haven’t,” Ashworth said with a slight shake of his head. “When I finished at Hogwarts, I was recruited by the Arrows and played with them for a few years, until I took a Bludger to the knee and had to retire.”

“Wait, the Appleby Arrows?” Seamus suddenly interrupted.

Professor Ashworth didn’t seem bothered by the disruption, and just smirked slightly.

“The very same.”

Seamus looked confused for a moment and then his face cleared like all of his questions had been answered.

“You’re...you’re Lucky Ashworth! *The* Lucky Ashworth!” he gasped.

Professor Ashworth just raised his eyebrows.

“I did go by Lucky during my Quidditch days, however Professor McGonagall has rather strongly insisted I instruct you to address me as Professor Ashworth.”

Several murmurs filled up the room and Ron looked rather awestruck. Harry could tell the new professor's coolness factor had just gone up.

Hermione—never one to be impressed by Quidditch—looked rather sceptical, her lips pursed and her hand still raised.

“Yes, Miss Granger,” Professor Ashworth addressed her.

Harry wasn't surprised that he knew her name—the three of them had been featured in *The Daily Prophet* countless times over the summer. It seemed everyone and their mother knew about “the Golden Trio.”

“Have you taught before Hogwarts?” she asked. Ashworth chuckled.

“Yes, I have. Not to worry, this isn't my first teaching experience. My Quidditch days were a long time ago. I've been a professor for almost twenty years now.”

Hermione looked a little happier about this, but raised her hand in the air again. Ashworth had a little smile on his face now.

“Miss Granger?”

“Where have you taught before?” she asked. Harry thought it sounded almost like an interrogation, but Ashworth seemed quite relaxed.

“Good question,” he nodded at her. “I first started teaching at small schools in northern England, and I did a brief stint at the Academy of Broom Flying. Then I applied for a position at Beauxbatons and worked there for about seven years, before moving to Uagadou. I spent the next eleven years there, and the rest, as they say, is history, and here I am today.”

A seventh-year Hufflepuff boy was next to be called.

“Yes, in the back, Mr...?”

“Laurence Pickering, sir,” piped up the boy, who had shaggy brown hair that reminded Harry somewhat of his own in that it seemed to be falling all over the place. “Sorry, sir, but what is Uagadou?”

Hermione straightened in her seat, which Harry knew meant she had the answer, as always.

“No need to apologize, Mr Pickering. I find many students are largely unaware of the other major wizarding schools. Uagadou is actually the largest wizarding school of all, and the oldest as well. It's located in western Uganda, and has a truly gifted student boy. I am very grateful for my time there.”

Professor Ashworth only answered two more questions before he jumped off the desk and clapped his hands together.

“I hope that gave you a better idea of who your new professor is. That being said, I think it's time we move on to actual class content.”

Professor Lachlan Ashworth—as cool as his Quidditch background may have been—turned out to be a rather commanding instructor. He had them start on Self-Transfiguration, something he said

was heavily emphasized at Uagadou. His pace was quick and Harry found himself struggling to keep up with the rapid instructions. He had them use their textbooks as a reference, but seemed to prefer hands-on learning, insisting that Transfiguration had to be “felt.”

Usually, this sort of teaching frustrated Hermione, as she was far more comfortable learning from books, however she seemed to be doing quite well. Ashworth praised her at the end of class, telling everyone to look closely at how her hair had straightened out and become coarser, much closer to a lion’s mane than human hair. He helped her Transfigure it back and instructed them all to write twelve inches on the possible consequences of improperly cast Self-Transfiguration.

As they left the Transfiguration classroom, Hermione seemed quite satisfied.

“Wasn’t that *fascinating*?” she asked, her eyes shining brightly. “Becoming an Animagus is such a difficult process and you don’t get to choose the form you’ll take, but Self-Transfiguration is completely up to you! I wonder why it isn’t taught more often; I suppose the downside is the spell only lasts a certain amount of time, but as long as you can reapply it, that shouldn’t be a problem. I’m so curious to see what else is more commonly taught in other wizarding schools.”

“He could’ve been a little more patient,” Ron grumbled. “We’re not all gonna master it right away.”

“High expectations aren’t a *bad* thing, Ron,” insisted Hermione.

“Whatever,” Ron said, still sounding rather put off. “I think he’s just bitter he had to quit playing Quidditch.”

Harry just shrugged, wondering if Ron’s disdain for Ashworth had more to do with how much Hermione seemed to like him than his rigorous instructing technique. He himself wasn’t sure how he felt about Ashworth. He was quite interesting and seemed to be a good teacher, despite how quick he seemed to move through the material.

Hermione continued talking about what Ashworth could possibly introduce them to throughout the year as they made their way to the dungeons. By the time they entered the Potions classroom, Ron looked moderately displeased.

“Sophie! You’re in this class, too!” Hermione said, seeing the dark-haired Gryffindor girl who had beaten them there and was seated by the wall.

Sophie turned and smiled widely when she saw them. Hermione walked over to sit at her table, and Ron and Harry followed, taking the table behind them.

Harry wasn’t sure when Hermione had become friends with Sophie—she had never been particularly close to the other Gryffindor girls before—but he was glad for her, remembering how happy she always was whenever they were at the Burrow and she got to spend time with Ginny.

Just as Ginny entered Harry’s mind, the energetic redhead bounded into the classroom, followed by Luna and Seamus.

“Ginny!” Ron looked rather surprised. “What are you doing here?”

She grinned at them.

“What does it look like? You have classes with seventh years too, remember?”

“I didn’t know you were taking N.E.W.T. Potions,” Harry said, to both Ginny and Luna.

“I need four N.E.W.T.s even if I want to play Quidditch, and I’m good at Potions,” shrugged Ginny.

“D’you reckon all our classes will be as crowded as Transfiguration?” Ron asked Harry, who shrugged.

Personally, he wouldn’t mind if they were. He knew Slughorn would be expecting him to perform exceptionally, and the more people there were, the easier it would be for Harry to hide in the back.

“N.E.W.T. Potions is bloody hard to get into,” Seamus piped up. “McGonagall’s making me do it again after last year.”

“What was it like last year?” Hermione asked, turning around in her chair to look at Seamus, interestedly.

Seamus shrugged.

“Slughorn tried his best to keep it normal, but everything was so mad and hopeless. He just sort of let us keep making Calming Draughts and simple Healing Potions to slip to the younger students. Didn’t really learn much.”

None of them knew quite how to respond to that, but lucky they were spared the need to when Slughorn entered the room, hurrying to the front.

“Apologies for my tardiness, students,” he huffed, clearly out of breath. “Professor Hagrid was showing me his new batch of flying lizard eggs and I simply lost track of time.”

Harry looked around the classroom. It wasn’t nearly as occupied as Transfiguration, but there was a decent smattering of people, more than there had been in his sixth year Potions class.

“Right!” said Slughorn, making himself comfortable in the chair behind his professor’s desk. “Welcome to Potions! First thing’s first. We’re going to be concocting some complex and often dangerous potions this year, so I trust everyone will pay the utmost attention to my instructions.”

There was a little twinkle in his eye and he looked over at Harry, who tried his best not to make eye contact.

“Secondly, several of our potions this year are highly reactive and dependent upon those mixing them, so I’ve decided the safest way to handle this is to assign you partners you will stick with for the year. As several of the traditional Old Magic love potions we will be crafting are known to have messy reactions when men and women both participate in their creation, you will be partnered with someone of your sex.”

He cast a look around the room as though he was counting and nodded to himself, seeming pleased.

“It should all work out perfectly, in fact. Mr Smith and Mr Lynch, you two can be partners,”—Harry saw Zacharias Smith and another seventh year Hufflepuff boy sitting in the front look rather satisfied—“Miss Wilkins and Miss Bellmore, the two of you can work together,”—Nadine Bellmore, a Gryffindor girl Harry only knew of as being one of Romilda Vane’s friends, looked far less happy with this arrangement, looking with disdain over at Ella Wilkins, a Slytherin girl very small in stature—“Mr Zabini and Mr Nott, you’ll partner with one another,”—Harry looked at the

back, where Zabini, Nott, and Malfoy all sat at one table. Zabini and Nott looked at Malfoy with apologetic expressions, but Malfoy barely even shrugged.

“Miss Weasley and Miss Lovegood, I’m sure you will work well with each other,” Slughorn continued, smiling at Ginny and Luna, “Miss Granger and Miss Roper, you as well,”—a nod from him to Hermione and Sophie—“Mr Finnigan and Mr Weasley together, yes, and that leaves us with...”

Harry felt a sense of dread filling him, like he had been jolted from a great height and his stomach was now sinking like a stone.

“Mr Potter and Mr Malfoy! Excellent. Please seat yourself with your partners if you aren’t already so that we may begin today’s potion.”

Harry noticed that every set of partners was already seated together besides him and Malfoy, and Nadine Bellmore and Ella Wilkins.

“Well,” he said, in a resigned sort of voice, to Ron. “See you after class, I suppose.”

Ron gave him a sympathetic look.

“Sorry, mate.”

Harry just sort of shrugged and got up from his seat, walking over towards the back where the Slytherins were. Ella Wilkins, who had been sitting at a table by herself, jumped slightly as Nadine Bellmore approached her and slammed herself into the seat next to her in a huff.

Malfoy had stood up from his shared table with Zabini and Nott and moved to the next table over, but hadn’t taken a seat yet.

“Hullo, Malfoy,” Harry said, tentatively approaching him.

“This table alright?” Malfoy asked in a dull tone, not looking at Harry. This struck Harry as quite odd; since when did Malfoy need Harry’s approval for anything?

“Sure,” he agreed and moved to take one of the seats. Malfoy sat down next to him, seeming to be putting most of his weight into leaning away from Harry.

“We’ll be starting off with something a little simpler to get you back into the rhythm of things,” Slughorn announced, rising from his chair with what seemed like considerable effort and pointing his wand at the blackboard. “However, don’t get lazy! This potion will require constant supervision in order to achieve the desired result.”

Slughorn flicked his wand and words began to appear on the board.

“Today we will be brewing *Elixir Eloquentiam*, informally known as Silver Tongue Tonic. A favourite of politicians and speech-makers, it serves to make its drinker more persuasive and articulate. The instructions are on page eighty-seven of your textbooks. Off you go!”

There was a moderate amount of rustling as everyone bent to withdraw their textbooks. Harry did so himself, not failing to notice that Malfoy’s textbook was already on the desk, flipped to the right page.

“Er...I’ll get the ingredients,” Harry said, standing up from his seat and starting to search for the potion in his book. Malfoy just gave a sort of non-committal nod.

Harry strolled over to the cabinet, where several other students were also gathering their ingredients. Hermione, who had her arms full and was about to walk off, stopped to give Harry a concerned look.

“Are you alright?” she murmured, slightly under her breath. “With...you know?”

She nodded her head in the direction of Malfoy, who was hunched over his textbook.

“Yeah,” Harry replied, with a shrug. Strangely enough, it was true, as Malfoy hadn’t said anything obnoxious or insulting thus far, which Harry found incredibly out of character.

It made some amount of sense though; after all, the war had changed everything, and his side had lost. As much as he hated it, Harry’s title of The Boy Who Lived Twice practically guaranteed he was untouchable.

He glanced at his book, making sure he was retrieving the right items from the cabinet. Once his arms were quite full, he returned back to where Malfoy was seated.

“Here,” he said, dropping the load onto the desk. Malfoy flinched slightly as his sudden arrival, but then just nodded hurriedly.

“You can grind the ginger root,” he said, not looking up at Harry, but sliding over a mortar and pestle.

“Er, right,” Harry agreed, because they both knew that despite Harry’s unexpected success in sixth year, Malfoy was the superior Potions student.

They worked in silence, Harry mindlessly crushing the ginger root while Malfoy meticulously sliced up the fairymoss. A few minutes passed like this, until Malfoy straightened up and looked over to see Harry’s work.

“Potter, it’s ginger, not a beetle. You’re not killing anything. Gentle, circular motions will do the trick.”

Harry stared at him. He wasn’t sure Malfoy had ever uttered a sentence to him that wasn’t ridden with insults. He supposed Malfoy was still telling him off for not doing it correctly, but he almost—dare Harry say it—sounded like Hermione in his admonishing.

“Earth to Potter,” suddenly Malfoy’s fingers were right in front of his face, snapping quickly. “Merlin, I knew you were slow, but even Goyle was quicker than this.”

That sounded much more like the old Malfoy. Harry scowled at him and went back to work on grinding the ginger root, lightening his hand movements only a bit. After several more moments, Malfoy decided it was time to put the leech juice over a flame, and withdrew what looked like to Harry to be an abnormally long wand.

“*Incendio*,” Malfoy uttered, but the tiny flames that spurt out of the end of his wand died immediately, not enough to spark a fire under the cauldron.

“Blasted piece of rubbish,” Malfoy cursed, under his breath.

“Here, I can—” Harry stumbled over his words, yanking his own wand from his robe pockets and casting a quick “*Incendio*.”

Warm, orange flames immediately flared up under the cauldron. Malfoy looked somewhat put out, but didn’t say anything; instead he reached over and grabbed the ground up ginger root from Harry’s side of the table and poured it into the cauldron.

The rest of the class went off in relative silence for Harry and Malfoy, only interrupted by Malfoy occasionally muttering instructions like, “pass the pomegranate seeds,” or mild reprimands like, “does that *look* like butterscotch to you, Potter? It’s bright green, for Circe’s sake.”

Harry didn’t protest much, since Malfoy was doing most of the work anyway, and by the time the end of class had come around, Harry had done little more than grind the ginger root and hand Malfoy random ingredients, but their potion was exactly the thick, silvery blue it was supposed to be.

“*Excellent* work, Mr Potter, as usual! Ten points to Gryffindor!” Slughorn said, delightedly, as he came by their table.

“Er...” Harry didn’t know what to say to this, as he knew it was thanks to Malfoy that their potion even came out right, but he couldn’t exactly admit that he had basically done nothing to Slughorn. Before he could figure out what to say, however, Slughorn had already moved on to the next table. Once they were dismissed, Harry went to say something to Malfoy, perhaps apologize for Slughorn completely ignoring him and crediting their potion to Harry alone, but as soon as Harry turned to face him, Malfoy was already out of his seat and halfway out the door.

words: how little they mean when you're a little too late

Chapter Summary

“Bloody wanker,” Finnigan said, somewhat under his breath, but still clearly audible to the entire common room. “Think your Death Eater father’d be proud? Oh, wait, but he’s dead, innit?”

Draco felt his blood go cold. Without thinking, his hand shot out and grabbed Theo by the wrist, to hold him back from charging at Finnigan. But Theo didn’t make a move. He simply stared at Finnigan, his expression unchanging, but from up close, Draco could see all the colour flood from his face.

Furiously, Draco looked at Potter. He wasn’t exactly sure why, but wasn’t Potter the one always going on about the war being over and the fighting being behind them? He found himself angered even further when he saw Potter was simply gazing out the window, as if blind to what was occurring right in front of him.

Chapter Notes

hi guys, sorry for the late update, hope you enjoy it; it was one of my favorite chapters to write :)

chapter title is from the song Sad Beautiful Tragic by Taylor Swift

Only a few days into classes and already Draco was in half a mind to write a desperate letter to his mother, pleading to let him return to the Manor. He restrained himself—barely—purely because he pictured the Malfoy matriarch sweeping through the Manor in her long robes, the elves trailing after her and attempting to expel as much Dark Magic from the walls as possible, and he knew she wouldn’t spare much mercy for Draco lounging around in Hogwarts.

There wasn’t really much opportunity for lounging, though, not while living in the same quarters as the other Houses. Draco found himself constantly on alert, scanning his surroundings at all times, making sure he always knew who was around him.

It was nowhere near as horrific as living in the Manor during the Dark Lord’s reign, of course, but Draco certainly did not feel comfortable. Which was part of the reason why, when he entered the common room, he felt his shoulders relax in relief when he found it empty for the most part, spotting Slytherin colours by the windows.

Draco walked over to join them, levitating one of the desk chairs over to sit beside Theo, across from the girls, who were up on the windowseat. On the left, with her long blonde hair falling

elegantly over her shoulders, sat Daphne Greengrass, a piece of parchment floating in the air as she perused over it.

On the right sat Violet Foxblade, the only other Slytherin girl from their year to come back to Hogwarts. Draco didn't know her very well—in fact, he wasn't sure if he had ever even spoken to her. She'd always seemed rather quiet, and kept to herself. She and Daphne hadn't been particularly close either, not that Draco recalled, at least. She always seemed somewhat invisible.

Draco had seen her family name—Foxblade—in a book about pureblood genealogy that he'd found in the Manor once, but it was an old book and hadn't even included Lucius's generation, let alone Draco's. The Foxblades hadn't been among the Death Eaters, nor any of the Dark Lord's known supporters. Draco supposed, like the Notts and Greengrasses, they had remained hidden and neutral during the war.

She sat with her legs crossed, a book open in her lap. Her thick black hair was piled up messily atop her head, and she twirled a quill between her fingers, a faraway look in her eyes.

"How were your classes?" Theo asked, as Draco took his seat. Draco merely sighed.

"I beg of you, no more conversation about classes."

Theo nodded seriously, clearly understanding what Draco meant. Daphne looked up at him, her bright blue eyes shining.

"That bad?"

"He's paired with Potter in Potions," Theo explained. Daphne snorted.

"Of course. Why make it easier on us?"

Her use of the word '*us*' had Draco curious.

"How were yours, then?" he asked her. She shrugged.

"About how you'd expect, I suppose. Professor Babbling barely looked at me, even though no one else knew *any* answers, besides Granger, of course. Then on my way to the Great Hall from Ancient Runes, Zacharias Smith thought it ever-so-funny to call me a 'Death Eater whore' and throw a Stinging Hex my way."

Violet, who hadn't seemed to be paying much attention, suddenly snapped her head up and over to look at Daphne.

"He hexed you?" she asked, her voice sounding rather intense.

"He tried," Daphne corrected, smirking. "His aim is shite; he didn't even get close."

"Zacharias Smith is a piece of hippogriff dung," Violet said, decisively, and Draco suddenly wondered how she had ever seemed quiet and invisible—she certainly didn't seem it now. "D'you know he didn't even fight during the Battle of Hogwarts? He fled with the first years like the bloody coward he is. And now he wants to act all high and mighty?"

"Did he really?" Theo interjected, interestedly. "But wasn't he part of Potter's little club during fifth year? Dumbledore's Army, or whatever rubbish it was?"

Violet shrugged.

“I wouldn’t know about that.”

Draco was wondering about something else.

“How did you know?” he asked her, meeting her hazel eyes levelly. “That Smith fled, I mean?”

“Because I was there,” Violet said, simply. “I hid amongst the Ravenclaws when they sent the Slytherins off. A few of the other seventh and sixth years did too.”

“Why?” Draco persisted.

“Because we wanted to fight,” Violet replied, not breaking eye contact with him the entire time. “It was narrow-minded and senseless to send the entire House of Slytherin away. I know our history, I know most Death Eaters were Slytherins, but not *all* of us affiliated with them. We wanted to fight for Hogwarts.”

Draco, Daphne, and Theo all stared at Violet in surprise. Of course Draco knew that not all Slytherins were Death Eaters, it would be stupid to think that. He hadn’t, however, known that any Slytherins had remained to fight on the other side during the Battle. He’d assumed they’d all just... gone home, ran away. Now that he thought about it, it was a rather foolish assumption.

“Better you than me,” Theo added, although not unkindly. “I wasn’t even in England.”

Draco had heard that about him, though he had never been sure.

It had always been a rumour—that Nott’s elderly father had taken him to France after Dumbledore’s death. Draco had always wished it was true—the entire time through the Dark Lord’s reign. He had prayed—to everything, to nothing—that Theo was somewhere safe. It was the only thing he dared hope for, that Theo make it out of this alive.

He felt a warmth rise up his neck at the memory, and quickly realigned his focus on the conversation that had carried on while he’d been sucked into his thoughts.

Daphne was speaking, looking at Violet with a mingled expression of worry and...perhaps admiration?

“Were you hurt? Did people think you were on the Dark Lord’s side? Did anything happen to you?”

Violet smiled at her, seemingly touched by her concern.

“Let’s be honest, nobody knew who I was,” she said, sounding not at all upset by this. “I just took off my Slytherin colours and blended in. And,” she added, looking at Daphne rather fondly. “I’m alright. Took some hits, had a few broken bones, and I have a few scars, but they were all superficial wounds and I was patched up, no problem.”

Daphne and the boys continued to stare at Violet, in awe of this flood of new information about their classmate. Aware that she was being gawked at, Violet raised her eyebrows at them.

“Come off it, now. I wasn’t the only one there, you know.”

“I’m glad you’re alright,” Daphne said, reaching out and squeezing her arm gently. Violet smiled sadly at her.

“Me too. But I didn’t stay and fight just to have my friends be called Death Eater whores in the halls.”

Daphne just snorted once again.

“Oh, please, I can handle Zacharias Smith. It’s the younger Slytherins I worry about more. Did you know only *three* Slytherin seventh years came back this year?”

“What?” Theo demanded, sharply. “Where are the rest of them?”

“Durmstrang or Beauxbatons, I suspect. Or dead,” she replied, in a dull tone.

“Tracey died in the Battle,” Violet said, quietly, referencing the other would-be eighth year Slytherin girl, besides Pansy and Millicent.

“Who are they? The seventh years that come back, I mean,” Draco asked, remembering a small-looking Slytherin girl in his Potions class.

“There’s Tobias Harper, you know, that annoying one who played backup Seeker for you sixth year? Sort of looks like a rat?” at Draco’s nod, Daphne continued, “Then there’s Edgar Caverly; he’s a weird sort, rather quiet, but he speaks mermish for some odd reason, so he was always pressed up against the glass in the Slytherin common room, talking to the merpeople. And then there’s Ella Wilkins. She’s the only girl who stayed, so they’ve got her in the dorm with Astoria and the other sixth-year girls.”

“She’s in Potions with us,” Theo said, confirming Draco’s deduction. “Tiny little thing, isn’t she?”

“That Gryffindor girl nearly swallowed her whole,” Draco agreed.

A loud shuffling of stone interrupted them and they all turned to see the bricks of the entrance to the common room unfolding to reveal a gaggle of Gryffindors and Hufflepuffs—among them, Draco noticed immediately, Potter and Weasley.

The group seemed to notice the Slytherins at once, and while Draco’s eyes dropped to the floor, he could tell from his peripheral vision that Daphne, Violet, and Theo didn’t break eye contact.

He felt like a coward, but then again, it wasn’t like any of *them* had been Death Eaters. Violet had even fought on the *Order’s* side apparently, for Merlin’s sake.

“What’re you looking at, Nott?” Finnigan snapped.

“Merely observing how absolutely covered in dust your robes are. How are you not sneezing every minute?” Theo responded, smoothly.

While it *was* Finnigan who instigated the exchange, Drago tugged gently on Theo’s robes, not wanting him to get into a fight.

“You *really* wanna run your mouth?” Finnigan’s fair skin seemed to be reddening slightly. The tall one, his friend—Thomas—tried to pull him back slightly.

“Leave it, Seamus,” he said. “He’s not worth it.”

“Thank you, Thomas, but I’d rather not have you deciding what I am or am not worth,” Theo clipped.

“Bloody wanker,” Finnigan said, somewhat under his breath, but still clearly audible to the entire common room. “You think your Death Eater father’d be proud? Oh, wait, but he’s dead, innit?”

Draco felt his blood go cold. Without thinking, his hand shot out and grabbed Theo by the wrist, to hold him back from charging at Finnigan. But Theo didn’t move. He simply stared at Finnigan, his expression unchanging, but from up close, Draco could see all the colour flood from his face.

Furiously, Draco looked at Potter. He wasn’t exactly sure why, but wasn’t Potter the one going on about the war being over and the fighting being behind them? He found himself angered even further when he saw Potter was simply gazing out the window, as if blind to what was occurring right in front of him.

Daphne was the one to jump in.

“Keep a tighter leash around that one next time, Thomas,” she spoke curtly. “And feel free to remind him that Sylvester Nott was never affiliated with the Death Eaters, and that he died of natural causes in his home in France. Neither he *nor* Theo were even in Britain during the war. I’m confident your friend has more blood on his hands than us evil Slytherins do.”

With that, she simply swept up her things with a wave of her wand and gestured for Violet to follow her up into the girls’ dormitories. Theo was quick to go as well, refusing to look at Draco, and hurrying off to his own room.

Draco shot one last vicious look at Potter, surprised to find bright green eyes staring back at him. Ripping his gaze away, Draco followed Theo up the stairs to the boys’ dormitories. He entered Theo’s shared room with the Hufflepuffs to find it empty, other than one bed with the bedcurtains drawn.

“Theo?” he said, gently. “It’s just me.”

He heard a sigh and then the curtain was pulled to the side to reveal Theo, blinking up at him.

“Draco,” he spoke matter-of-factly. “You didn’t have to come after me.”

“I wanted to make sure you were alright,” Draco murmured, walking over and sitting beside Theo on the side of the bed.

“I’m fine,” he replied, offering a slight smile and letting his hand fall onto Draco’s leg.

Draco felt his breathing pick up, ever so slightly. Ever since *the incident* in fifth year, Draco had been careful not to get trapped alone in a room with Theo. He made sure there was always someone else there as a buffer—it used to be Crabbe and Goyle, sometimes it was Pansy or Blaise. He knew it was safer that way, that way nothing could *happen*.

Theo was looking at him, his dark eyes wide and questioning, and Draco looked away, his heart beating rather quickly.

“What?” he mumbled, scared that if he spoke aloud his voice would be trembling.

“You’re a good friend,” Theo said, his lips pressing into a small smile. “Thank you.”

Draco’s eyes snapped back to him, and bloody hell, he was going to go for it anyway, wasn’t he? Blast the consequences and all. He felt his eyelids slowly flutter closed as he leaned forward a miniscule amount and then—*WHAM!*

The door to the dormitory swung open and Draco and Theo jumped apart.

“What’s this about some Gryffindor prat giving you a hard time?” Blaise demanded as soon as he entered the room. “Oh, Draco, you’re here too, good. Please tell me who it is so I can have my mother marry his father and kill him off.”

when you're young, you just run, but you come back to what you need

Chapter Summary

Harry didn't know how Hermione felt about Waya's casual nature, but he himself was starting to like him. He reminded him, Harry realized with a pang in his heart, of Remus.

"Let's get started, then." He said, clapping his hands together. "I assume you are all familiar with boggarts."

There was a murmur of assent from the class, but no one sounded particularly happy about it. Riddikulus may have been a third year spell, but boggarts were disliked by people of all ages. No one really looked forward to confronting their worst fears. Neville especially looked rather distressed. Waya chuckled slightly at this reaction, and Harry was even more overwhelmed with memories of Remus.

"I know, they're not my favourite either. Let's get this over with then, shall we?" he said, and with a flick of two of his fingers, the door to a broom closet over on the right opened and a desk came barrelling into the classroom.

Chapter Notes

chapter title is from the song This Love by Taylor Swift

also - I know the "why can't it be 'follow the butterflies'?" quote is from the movies and not the books, and the fic is around the books entirely, but I just think that quote is hilarious so let's pretend it was in the books, yeah?

Harry found himself rather nervous as he walked with Ron and Hermione towards their first Defence class.

He supposed he had good reason, given how unpredictable Defence classes tended to be, due to the instructor constantly changing—and often trying to kill him.

Hermione had reminded him that Voldemort had cursed the position and now that he was dead, so was the curse. She was right, of course, and it made good sense, but Harry couldn't help the irrational feeling of anxiety creeping up in his stomach.

When they arrived in the classroom, Waya Boxturtle was standing at the front, leaning against his desk and waiting for the room to fill up. Seamus, Dean, and Neville were already seated and Ron

automatically steered to sit near them. Harry followed, but he couldn't help from thinking about the events of the night before.

He knew Seamus was angry. He knew Seamus had every *right* to be angry—he remembered Seamus' face when he'd returned to Hogwarts the night of the Battle, how Dean had barely recognized his best friend due to all his injuries. But what had happened yesterday didn't sit right in Harry's stomach. The Slytherins hadn't been *doing* anything, they were just sitting by the window. And sure, Nott was a bit of a prat, but he hadn't really antagonized Seamus.

He thought about what the Greengrass girl said, about how Nott's father had never even been a Death Eater. He had thought he was. He wondered if she'd been lying, but then, what would be the point? Everyone seemed to hate the Slytherins nonetheless. He tried to remember when he had heard that Nott's father had died in the war. Had he heard wrong? Had he been told that Nott's father died *during* the war and, since Nott was a Slytherin, Harry had just assumed?

He felt terrible. Nott had looked paler than Malfoy when he took off towards the dormitories and if the Greengrass girl was right, Seamus had just needlessly harassed him about his father's death. Nott's father had been a widower, which meant Nott was now an orphan.

Like Harry.

"Welcome, welcome," came a warm but gravelly voice and Harry refocused his attention to the professor. "My name is Waya Boxturtle, but please, call me Waya."

People seemed quite surprised by this, and Hermione furrowed her eyebrows.

"As you may know, I previously taught Defence Against the Dark Arts at Ilvermorny. I myself attended there as a youth. I know you have been through several professors in your years here at Hogwarts, so I think for our first few days together, we will go through some review work based on my curriculum for the years below you. Once I have a grasp on where we are as a class, we'll get started on the good stuff. Any questions?"

Hermione's hand flew into the air.

"Yes?" Waya called on her.

"Sir, may I ask why you left Ilvermorny?"

He smiled, his dark eyes twinkling.

"What is your name?"

"Hermione Granger, sir."

"Hermione," he said, slowly. "A lovely name. Greek, if I'm not mistaken. Well, Hermione, the simple answer is I believed I was needed. I taught at Ilvermorny for sixteen years, I consider it my home. However, I knew that Hogwarts was rebuilding and would be needing a new Defence teacher, and it so happened that one of my previous students was beginning his own teaching career. I decided that I could offer my services here at Hogwarts, and recommend my student as my replacement at Ilvermorny. And please," he added with a warm smile. "Waya is just fine. No need to call me sir."

Harry didn't know how Hermione felt about Waya's casual nature, but he himself was starting to like him. He reminded him, Harry realized with a pang in his heart, of Remus.

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"I know, they aren't my favourite either. Let's get this over with then, shall we?" he said, and with a flick of two of his fingers, the door to a broom closet over on the right opened and a desk came barrelling into the classroom.

There were several gasps from the class, and Harry didn't know if it was because of the rattling desk or the powerful wandless magic their new instructor had so casually just performed.

For Harry, it was the latter. Everyone made a big deal about how he could perform a few basic spells wandlessly, going on about how only the strongest witches and wizards could do it. Even Hermione had said how difficult it was to master wandless magic, and here was their new professor, tossing desks around the room so effortlessly.

"Any volunteers to go first?" Waya asked, his eyebrow raised and a smirk playing at his lips. There was a lengthy silence, then interrupted by a sigh from Ron.

"May as well get it over with," he said glumly, and got to his feet.

"Wonderful!" said Waya, his smirk widening into a grin. Looking at the red and gold scarf carelessly draped over the back of the seat Ron had just vacated, he continued, "A Gryffindor? The House of the brave! You represent it well. What's your name?"

"Ron Weasley," Ron responded, with far less enthusiasm in his voice than was in Waya's.

"Ah! Your sister was in my previous class. Talented young woman, a firecracker!" Waya said warmly, clapping a hand on Ron's shoulder. "Alright, Ron, I assume you've faced a boggart before."

"In third year," Ron confirmed, looking like he rather regretted his courageous bid to go first.

"What shape did it take?"

"An Acromantula," it came out rather slowly, as if Ron was reluctant to even say it aloud.

Waya nodded, with a look of understanding.

"Do you think it's changed since then?"

Ron shrugged, his hand slightly tensing around his wand.

"Well, let's find out then. Remember to think of something funny," Waya said, with a touch of finality. "Wand raised."

Ron raised his wand and Waya did a little twisting motion with his fingers and the drawers of the desk flew open. It wasn't an Acromantula.

It was, however, what looked like an army of spiders. Thousands and thousands of little black spiders poured out of the drawers all over the desk and the floor, all heading towards Ron, their many legs moving so quickly they seemed to blur. Harry couldn't even blame him for the terrified wide-eyed expression he had; it wasn't a pleasant sight.

"*Riddikulus!*" said Ron, firmly, and instantly, the spiders transformed before their eyes.

Harry couldn't help but laugh when he saw they had turned into butterflies. A soft chorus of "Ooh"s came from the classroom, in response to all the beautiful colours of the butterflies' wings.

"Hmm," Waya tapped his chin. "That was certainly effective, Ron. I'm just wondering, how are butterflies funny to you?"

Harry laughed harder and Ron's ears began to go pink.

"It's an inside joke," he finally mumbled.

"Well, it definitely worked. Good job, five points to Gryffindor. Who's next?"

When he returned to his seat, Ron scowled at Harry, who was still grinning.

"I guess I'll go," Seamus said, standing. "If Ron can go through a war and a madman trying to kill everyone and still fear spiders the most, I think I'll be fine."

A few people laughed, but Harry automatically looked to the back of the classroom, where the Slytherins were seated. It was only Malfoy and two girls. One of them was the older Greengrass girl, and the other one looked vaguely familiar to Harry, though he couldn't recall her name. She'd been there last night, when the confrontation with Theo had happened.

They weren't laughing, but they didn't look particularly put out. The Greengrass girl looked somewhat bored, the other girl was watching Seamus with sharp eyes, and Malfoy...well, Malfoy looked quite concerned about something. His brow was furrowed so much that his forehead was showing wrinkles. Seamus had just turned his banshee into an opera singer and Dean was stepping forward.

Was Malfoy afraid of the boggart? Harry didn't remember what his boggart was, he wasn't sure if they had even gotten around to Malfoy back in third year. Remembering what Remus had said about why he had stopped Harry from facing the boggart the first time, he wondered if Malfoy's boggart was Voldemort. He wondered if Waya would consider this. He hadn't known Ron or Hermione's names, which made sense, since he wasn't British. Would he know Malfoy's?

He was distracted from his thoughts about Malfoy by Neville, who had just stepped up to the boggart. While he still looked considerably nervous, he was nowhere near the shy, trembling boy he had been back in third year. Harry privately thought that one of the only good things that had come out of the war was Neville's rise in self-esteem. He had finally realized that he was as good a wizard as any, and better than most, in fact.

As Neville approached the boggart, Harry waited for it to turn into Professor Snape, but it didn't. Instead, it morphed into something much smaller, sitting on the floor. Harry shifted to see better,

and felt his heart jump when he saw the Sorting Hat, ablaze. It made sense of course, having a hat that was on your head set on fire must be a traumatizing experience. He just hadn't thought, out of all the things in the war, that was what had struck Neville the most.

Neville flinched, but held his wand steady.

"Riddikulus!"

The flames vanished, and the hat seemed to rise from the floor for a moment, until a little bunny appeared underneath it, chirping and trying to get free from the hat. Warm laughter filled the room and Harry felt the knot in his chest loosen slightly.

"Harry," said Waya, looking at him expectantly. Harry obediently rose from his seat, not failing to notice how Waya had known his name without asking.

He walked up to the boggart, raising his wand and awaiting the dementor. He knew how to deal with real dementors now, so a boggart would be no problem, but he couldn't help feel his stomach twisting in nervousness and anticipation.

The dementor didn't come.

The boggart started to form into a similar shape, but it wasn't a cloaked shadowy figure, it was far more...human. And it was just about as tall as Harry was...with the same messy hair...and glasses. Was it his dad?

But no. This man was older, maybe in his mid-thirties, and his glasses were round and—Harry felt something sharp add to the already uncomfortable feeling in his stomach—he had that familiar lightning-shaped scar on his forehead.

Boggart-Harry just stared at him. His eyes were tired, they had heavy bags under them, and when he lifted his hand to push his hair out of his face, the real Harry noticed a silver ring around his finger. The boggart took a few steps towards him, walking with a limp reminiscent of Moody's, and dressed in the traditional deep red uniform of the Aurors.

Harry was frozen. He hadn't expected this. He didn't know how he possibly *could* have expected it. How was he supposed to make this funny? There was nothing funny about this! He didn't even know what it meant! How was he his own worst fear? Was he afraid of getting older? Afraid of getting married? Afraid of being an Auror, of getting injured on the job? Afraid of the future?

"Harry?" Waya said, in a soft tone.

Harry's eyes snapped to him. He was looking at Harry with a gentle, understanding expression on his face. Harry wanted to demand what he was looking so understanding about, when Harry himself had no idea what was going on. Merlin. Alright. Focus. Something funny.

"Riddikulus!" he croaked and watched his future self transform into a giant novelty Harry Potter bobblehead.

"Excellent," Waya nodded at Harry, and gestured for him to sit back down.

Hermione and Ron were waiting at their table with wide eyes and questioning glances. Harry just shook his head at them. They seemed to take this as an answer for now, but Harry knew there

would be many questions later. Hermione's expression was unreadable.

The next few people's boggarts were a bit more standard—Hannah's was a dragon, Padma's was a cobra, Hermione's was her parents, looking at her unrecognizably—and Harry's mind was spinning, unable to figure out what his own boggart meant.

He couldn't imagine why he would be afraid of getting older. For so long, he hadn't known if he was even going to survive his adolescence. He was bloody lucky to be alive at all, and even luckier to have a chance at a real, normal life. Why on earth would he be *scared* of that?

It was only when Waya looked towards the back of the class and beckoned the Slytherins forward that Harry's attention was brought back to the classroom.

The Greengrass girl went first, telling Waya her name at his request—Daphne. She had a hard expression on her face and didn't shake one bit when she raised her wand and approached the boggart.

Harry watched curiously as the boggart formed into a wedding dress, that floated ominously towards Daphne. She made no moves to indicate that she was frightened at all—Harry supposed that the wedding dress was more symbolic of her fear, the way Remus's full moon had been—and clenched her jaw before uttering, "*Riddikulus!*"

The long white gown transformed itself into a clown costume, complete with oversized striped shoes and honking red nose, and Daphne stepped back with a satisfied expression on her face.

Waya looked quite happy with her, offering her a smile before looking towards Malfoy and the other girl. They looked at each other; both had guarded expressions, but they seemed to be communicating with their eyes. Harry desperately wanted to know what was being said—or, more accurately, not said.

The girl stepped forward, providing her name to Waya when asked.

"Violet Foxblade," she said, lifting her wand into the air. The next thing Harry saw made his heart nearly stop in his chest.

A young girl, who couldn't possibly be older than sixteen, with thick dark hair similar to Foxblade's, was lying on the floor, blood gushing from countless wounds on her body. Her clothes—Muggle jeans and a t-shirt—were tattered and dishevelled, the skin on her arms torn to shreds as if attacked by a wild animal.

With a feeling of horror immediately coursing through him, Harry watched as greenish smoke swirled above her body, forming in the shape of the Dark Mark.

There were gasps from around the classroom, as Foxblade stared at the lifeless body before her. Like Harry had been, she seemed to be frozen, unable to open her mouth and cast the spell. The longer she stood there, the more blood poured from the girl, the more her body sagged lifelessly.

"Enough."

It was Malfoy who had spoken and when Harry's eyes flew to him, he was already pulling his wand out and striding forward. He pulled Foxblade back by her shoulders and stepped in front of her, waiting for the boggart to assume another form. Harry took a deep breath, awaiting the snakelike

face of Voldemort. But his assumptions were wrong once again. Malfoy's boggart did take the shape of a man, but a different one—a tall one, in formal black robes, with long pale blond hair slicked back...

Lucius Malfoy.

He was sneering at Malfoy and withdrew a wand to point at him as he seemed to charge him. Harry was halfway out of his seat before he realized what he was doing, thanks to Ron grabbing his arm and yanking him back into his chair, giving him an incredulous look.

"Riddikulus!" Malfoy said, clearly. The boggart didn't completely change form, however Lucius's pin straight hair began to frizz up into curls resembling Bellatrix's, sending the fake Lucius into a hysterical panic.

It *was* pretty funny.

Waya, who had been observing Malfoy and Foxblade carefully, waved his hand at the desk and the boggart was forced back into its drawers. The class was silent. Everyone was staring at the Slytherins.

Waya regarded Foxblade gently.

"Violet, do you need a moment?"

She looked at him, her face blank and expressionless, yet rather devoid of colour.

"No, thank you. I'm fine. I know they're supposed to be frightening. I'm sorry I couldn't cast the spell."

Waya smiled sadly at her.

"I avoided approaching the boggart because I didn't want to expose the class to a dead body. But you children have lived through a war. We can't expect them all to be spiders, can we?"

Foxblade gave a stunted nod and let Malfoy lead her back to their seats. Harry watched them, watched how Greengrass looked at Foxblade with worry all over her face, watched how tightly clenched Malfoy's jaw was.

"Alright, class," Waya faced the class again. "Let's move on to Shield Charms."

i am the one thing in life i can control

Chapter Summary

“May I inquire why you wish you pursue Potions?”

Draco looked up at her, then up at Dumbledore, then—with another jolt in his stomach—at the portrait next to his, which contained a stony-faced Severus Snape, whose eyes bored into Draco like he was trying to burn a hole through his skull.

“It’s my best subject,” Draco supplied, looking back at McGonagall, mostly because he knew Snape would be disappointed with that answer.

McGonagall didn’t look too pleased herself.

“That may be true, Mr Malfoy, but that’s no reason to pursue an apprenticeship in such a complex subject. Do you envision yourself working as a Potioneer or Potions Master?”

Draco felt his shoulders slump.

“Not really,” he replied, honestly.

Chapter Notes

Just realized that it's been more than a week since I posted! My bad, I'm sorry! Hope you enjoy! Also, please gush over how wonderful Minerva McGonagall is with me!

chapter title is from the song Wait For It by Lin-Manuel Miranda, from Hamilton

Draco thought that today's Defence class was quite enough drama for the day, but his schedule had other plans for him, because today also happened to be the day he was to meet with his Head of House in order to establish what sort of apprenticeship he would be pursuing this year.

He desperately, selfishly wished Severus was still alive. As cantankerous as the old Potions Master had been, Draco had felt comfortable around him. He had always looked out for Draco, despite Draco—stupidly—insisting he could handle everything by himself. He remembered Severus trying to help him in sixth year and felt a bitter sort of anger wash through him. He had been so foolish.

He sighed as he reached Slughorn’s quarters. He had never been chosen as one of Slughorn’s special favourites and, while that used to bother him to no end, he found that now he couldn’t bring himself to care. He had no desire to be special anymore, he just wanted to get by unharmed.

“Ah, Mr Malfoy,” Slughorn said, seeing Draco through the peephole. “Come in, come in.”

The door swung open and Draco entered, trying not to be overwhelmed by the many different patterns assaulting his eyes all at once. Slughorn had sofas and carpets and lamps everywhere, all of varying styles and materials, and all aggressively vibrant in colour.

“Sit, Mr Malfoy, sit,” Slughorn encouraged from his place on an olive green velvet armchair.

“Thank you, sir,” Draco said, carefully, taking a seat across from him on the edge of a dark orange loveseat.

“So! Tell me, Mr Malfoy, what is it you have an interest in pursuing?”

“Well, sit, Potions has always been my best subject,” Draco responded.

“Potions, hmm?” Slughorn murmured, unhelpfully. “Anything in particular you’d like to do with Potions or are you interested in becoming a Potioneer?”

Draco paused.

“I’m not sure, Professor,” he said, honestly.

Slughorn wasn’t looking at Draco, he appeared far more interested in the crystal glass of brandy in his left hand.

“Well, I’m sure there’s something else you could do,” he said, dismissively, and Draco found himself bristling at how casually Slughorn was taking this. He knew that he had scoffed at the idea of having any sort of future himself, but it felt very different when someone else—a professor, at that—was doing it.

“Something else, sir?” he asked, his jaw clenched as he worked hard to remain polite.

“Yes, yes. Perhaps Potions isn’t the right field for you. It takes...a certain kind of wizard,” Slughorn still wasn’t meeting his eyes and took another sip of brandy.

“May I meet with the Headmistress instead?” Draco suddenly asked, his voice hard.

Slughorn actually looked at him now, his eyebrows raised.

“Why?” he asked.

“She’s the one who invited me back to Hogwarts. She seems to be the only one who thinks I have a future at all.” *Besides my mother*, he neglected to add.

Slughorn looked affronted for only a moment before his face relaxed.

“Very well, Mr Malfoy, if you wish. I can ask her when would be—”

“I’ll go now,” Draco interrupted, rising to his feet. “Thank you, sir.”

He tacked on the thanks so he wouldn’t sound excessively rude—he didn’t want to give anyone a reason to accuse him of reverting back to his ‘old ways’—and then turned and left Slughorn’s quarters as quickly as he came.

By the time he reached the entrance to the Headmistress's office, he was beginning to doubt his decision.

What reason did he really have to be seeing her instead of Slughorn? Would it look like he was seeking preferential treatment of some kind? After all, Minerva McGonagall was certainly not his biggest fan.

A more immediate issue had presented itself to Draco, however, as he stood in front of the gargoyle and realized he did not have the password to get up to the Headmistress's office. He stood there for a moment, feeling like a fool for not having thought of this. He was just wondering if he'd be better off going back to Slughorn and agreeing to pursue an apprenticeship in Charms or something when someone cleared their throat behind him.

He whirled around to find Professor McGonagall looking at him from behind her rectangular glasses, her lips pursed and her eyebrows raised.

"Headmistress," he released in a breath.

"Is there something I can assist you with, Mr Malfoy?" she asked, expectantly.

"I was hoping I could have a word with you, Professor," said Draco, in his most respectful tone.

McGonagall regarded him, and Draco felt like she was moments away from taking points from Slytherin, but then her face cleared.

"Very well, then. Follow me," she turned to face the gargoyle and said clearly, "*Phoenix tears.*"

Draco watched as the gargoyle stepped aside to reveal a short spiral staircase. McGonagall stepped up on one of the higher steps and motioned for Draco to do the same. He followed suit, careful to leave several steps between himself and the Headmistress. The staircase then began to move, twisting and carrying them upwards until they had reached the top.

The Headmistress's office was cluttered, but everything seemed to be neatly ordered in its rightful place. Magical objects filled the room and Draco would've loved to spend hours examining each and every one of them. McGonagall, however, did not seem to have time to waste.

"Have a seat, Mr Malfoy," she said, gesturing to the spindly purple chairs that sat in front of the desk, and moving to sit behind it. Draco sat and looked up at her, intending to get right to the point, but finding himself frozen.

Right above McGonagall's head, in an elegant golden frame, hung the portrait of Albus Dumbledore. He was in sky blue wizards robes and his matching eyes twinkled as they gazed down at Draco.

McGonagall seemed to realize what was distracting Draco.

In a much softer voice, she said, "Mr Malfoy? Is something the matter?"

His eyes snapped back to hers.

"I was supposed to have my meeting with my Head of House today," he said, trying to ignore Dumbledore's portrait and the intense, twisting pain in his stomach that he felt because of it.

McGonagall quirked an eyebrow up, waiting for more.

“And Professor Slughorn—well, he—I mean, I don’t think—he wasn’t—” Draco cursed himself for being so impetuous; here he had been trying so hard to keep his head down, to stay invisible, to go unnoticed, and he had to go storming off to the Headmistress just because he felt Slughorn wasn’t taking his future seriously enough. Did it even matter? Whether he got his N.E.W.T.s or not, Draco’s future had been stamped out the minute he’d taken the Dark Mark.

“Is there a field of study that you wish to pursue, Mr Malfoy?” McGonagall asked, coolly. Draco blinked at her.

“Potions,” he said, automatically. “But Slughorn—”

“*Professor* Slughorn is not the only Potions Master we have at our disposal, Mr Malfoy, and I daresay he would find himself far too busy with classes and Head of House duties to take on apprentices this year regardless.”

Draco felt his body release tension he hadn’t even realized he’d been holding.

“Oh,” he said.

McGonagall looked at him curiously.

“May I inquire why you wish to pursue Potions?”

Draco looked up at her, then up at Dumbledore, then—with another jolt in his stomach—at the portrait next to his, which contained a stony-faced Severus Snape, whose eyes bore into Draco like he was trying to burn a hole through his skull.

“It’s my best subject,” Draco supplied, looking back at McGonagall, mostly because he knew Snape would be disappointed with that answer. McGonagall didn’t look too pleased herself.

“That may be true, Mr Malfoy, but that’s no reason to pursue an apprenticeship in such a complex subject. Do you envision yourself working as a Potioneer or Potions Master?”

“Not really,” Draco admitted, his shoulders slumping. He didn’t dare look up at Snape, but McGonagall seemed to know what he was thinking.

“That’s quite alright, Mr Malfoy,” she said, crisply. “I’m well aware you were Severus’s favourite student; however, that should not cause you to feel an obligation to one day fill his position.”

Draco chanced a glance up at Snape’s portrait. He was relieved to see a smirk playing at Snape’s mouth.

“What about Transfiguration?” McGonagall went on. “I seem to recall you did rather well in my classes as well.”

“I haven’t been doing well so far this year,” Draco said, looking downwards in automatic shame. It was true. Although they were barely a week into classes, Draco had made absolutely no headway with Self-Transfiguration, and he was usually one of the first to make progress, typically right after Granger.

“Why is that?” McGonagall pressed.

Draco tried to hold himself back, he really did.

“It’s because of this maddening wand!” he burst out, withdrawing his wand from his robes and tossing it haphazardly on McGonagall’s desk. “I’ve used other people’s wands before, I know wands can have difficulty harnessing a wizard’s power if not finely attuned to the wizard using it, but I have never encountered a wand so utterly useless before in my life. Yes, kneazle hair does make for weaker wands, but I can barely cast a Lumos without it going out in three seconds flat. *‘Known to bring luck,’* I ought to sue him and ruin his entire business...”

Draco realized he was rambling a little bit too late and quickly shut his mouth and leaned back into his seat, feeling embarrassed.

Several of the portraits were looking at him now and when Draco dared to look up at Dumbledore, he was surprised to see that the old man looked rather amused.

“What kind of wand is this? Kneazle hair, you said?” McGonagall asked, picking up the wand rather delicately and acting as though Draco hadn’t just had a ridiculous outburst. He was grateful for that, if nothing else.

“Redwood and kneazle hair, fifteen inches, pliable,” he recited, listlessly. “I should’ve known there was something wrong with it. Fifteen inches? That length doesn’t suit me at all, and wood from coniferous trees is notoriously difficult to match with mammal hair in wands, it’s common knowledge, really. I can’t believe he charged me five Galleons for this piece of rubbish, the *nerve...*”

“Mr Malfoy,” McGonagall cleared her throat rather firmly, and Draco flushed and promptly shut up.

But when he looked at her, she didn’t look reprimanding. Instead, she had a curious glint in her eye, one that Draco recognized. She wore that look while watching Quidditch matches, he decided, and especially right when Potter was about to catch the Snitch.

“Have you ever considered studying wandlore?”

The question took Draco by surprise and he stared at her with wide eyes.

“Can one even study wandlore?” he asked, his voice hushed.

Wandlore wasn’t something one could just research in a library; it was an intricate, secretive kind of magic, an art.

When he was younger, Draco had hungrily devoured all he could possibly read about wands—and everything else, for that matter—but there was no information available on the craft itself. For good reason, too, it certainly wouldn’t be safe if just anyone could fashion a wand whenever they wanted. The craft of wandmaking was usually handed down generationally, so the secrets remained within the wandmaking families. The Ollivanders were, of course, the most famous wandmaking family in Britain, but Draco knew of other international ones as well.

Gregorovitch had come from a family of wandmakers. He had also read about Kinta Wolfe, the granddaughter of the famous Native American wandmaker Shikoba Wolfe, and Alejandro Allegretto, the latest in a long line of successful Argentinian wandmakers.

“What other way would you propose learning it?” McGonagall responded, but she was holding back a small smile. “Is this something you would be interested in, then?”

Draco nodded emphatically, unable to put into words how immensely interested he was.

“I do need to impress upon you, though I’m sure you’re aware, there is a reason wandlore is kept so well-hidden,” the Headmistress’s voice was stern once again. “I will do my best to find you a mentor that wishes to pass their skills on, but there may be some stipulations regarding secrecy spells.”

“Yes, Headmistress, I understand,” Draco was still nodding and had to practically force his head to stay still.

“Very well, then. I believe dinner is about to start, best be headed down to the Great Hall,” she said, rising from her seat. Draco quickly followed suit, but paused when she began to head back towards the spiral staircase.

“Mr Malfoy?”

Draco had never behaved so out of sorts with a professor before, had never lost control of his temper, or had an outburst, or stuttered as much as he had today, so he couldn’t help but think, *oh, to hell with it.*

“Could I—could I perhaps…have a moment with Professor…?” he gestured vaguely towards McGonagall’s desk, but thankfully, he saw comprehension reach her eyes.

She offered him a soft smile, which looked somewhat out of place on her normally stern face.

“Of course. However, if I don’t see you in the Great Hall within the next twenty minutes, I’ll be forced to come back and get you, and I think you’ll find I’m rather nasty when interrupted at mealtimes.”

Draco couldn’t believe it—he was smiling.

“Thank you, Professor,” he said, genuinely. “Thank you for discussing this with me.”

“You’re quite welcome, Mr Malfoy. You were sent that letter for a reason. You are wanted back here at Hogwarts.”

Draco stared at her, and thankfully, she didn’t seem to expect a reply, just gave him another knowing smile and retreated down the moving staircase.

He turned around to face the two portraits, hanging side by side. They couldn’t look more different—Dumbledore with his white hair and pale blue robes and the golden frame, next to Snape in his typical black, wearing a disdainful expression, his dark hair hanging in his face. Even Snape’s frame was a deep chestnut brown.

“Wandlore, Draco?” Snape said, curling his lip slightly. “And all these years, here I thought I was instructing the next great Potions Master.”

“I’m sorry, Professor,” said Draco. “Are you disappointed?”

“Nonsense, my boy,” this came from Dumbledore, and Draco looked at him in surprise.

To add to Draco's shock, Dumbledore was smiling at him, his eyes crinkling as they regarded him.

"Wandmaking is an honourable art, and a difficult one at that. I will admit, I had quite an interest in wandlore back in my day. I was able to learn a bit, but Garrick was very careful not to let any secrets slip around me, and quite right he was in doing so!"

Draco felt another wave of guilt wash over him at the mention of Ollivander. He knew that Ollivander would certainly not be the one to mentor him, not after the ordeal he had suffered in the Manor's dungeons. Draco just hoped that McGonagall would be able to find another good wandmaker that would be willing to teach him.

"I am not disappointed, Draco," Snape reassured him. "Merely surprised. You are a man of many talents and I am sure you will prosper, as you did in my class."

Warmed by the unexpected compliment, Draco smiled again.

"Thank you," he then looked at Dumbledore, trying to ignore the pain that welled up inside him as he did so. "Professor Dumbledore—"

Dumbledore cut him off before he could get another word in.

"No need for apologies, young Draco. You have been gifted with a glorious second chance here, and it would be wasteful to spend your time punishing yourself for past mistakes. It is up to you, Draco, what you choose to do with those mistakes: repeat them, or learn from them."

"Yes, sir," Draco nodded obediently, which just made the old Headmaster chuckle.

"You always did think me a bit full of myself, didn't you? Well, you may not have been entirely wrong. Go on now and join your friends at dinner."

"Thank you, Professor," he said, nodding at both Dumbledore and Snape, and then striding off down the spiral staircase and towards the Great Hall, feeling a sense of purpose return to his steps.

do you believe you're missing out, that everything good is happening somewhere else?

Chapter Summary

“Is that something you think you might like to pursue?”

“Er...what exactly, sir?” Harry asked, confused.

“Teaching.”

Harry stared at him.

“I, er, I never really thought about it, Professor,” he said, truthfully.

“You’re a fast learner,” Ashworth went on, “and a natural leader. You’re remarkably selfless and you enjoy helping people. I think you’re perfectly suited for it.”

Harry’s mind was racing, mostly through memories of practicing with the D.A. Of Hermione’s face when she first saw the form of her Patronus. Of the astounded gasps when Ginny cast a perfect Reducto. Of Ron’s delighted glee when he actually beat Hermione in a duel. Of Luna declaring, “I liked the D.A. It was almost like having friends.”

Chapter Notes

this is a really short chapter but I hope you like it anyway!

chapter title is from the song Jesus Christ by Brand New

“Mr Potter, do come in,” Ashworth opened the door wider and welcomed him into his office. Harry walked in, taking in the room around him.

It was easy to tell Ashworth was incredibly proud of being a Gryffindor. He had a scarlet triangular tapestry with a lion on it hanging on the wall behind his desk, and the desk itself was home to a number of golden quills and a large, red chair made of velvet.

“Please, sit down,” Ashworth said, gesturing to the slightly smaller chair on the other side of the desk. Harry sat, running his fingers over the smooth velvet of the seat.

“So,” said Ashworth, with a small smile. “Time to discuss the future, it seems.”

“Right,” Harry replied, trying his best not to sigh.

“Professor McGonagall told me that in your O.W.L year you expressed an interest in becoming an Auror, is that still true?”

“Yeah, I suppose,” shrugged Harry.

“You suppose?” Ashworth raised an eyebrow.

“I reckon I’d be good at it,” replied Harry, suddenly feeling defensive. He knew his marks weren’t always perfect, but he *had* gotten an O in his Defence O.W.L and even made it into N.E.W.T level Potions. McGonagall had had confidence in him, and she was not a woman easily impressed.

Ashworth chuckled lightly.

“Harry—may I call you Harry?—I assure you I was not doubting your abilities. It merely sounds like you aren’t all that enthusiastic about it.”

Harry gave him a look. He thought for a moment that he’d be much more comfortable talking about this with McGonagall, but there was also something nice about having someone completely new. Though doubtlessly he knew who Harry was, he didn’t *know* Harry, not the way McGonagall did. And though Harry respected McGonagall more than anyone else—probably even more than he had Dumbledore—there was a big part of him that was afraid of disappointing her.

“Honestly, I’m not,” he admitted. “It’s not that I don’t want to do it, it’s just...well, we’ve *just* fought a war, haven’t we?”

“You’re not eager to jump right back into combative spellwork,” Ashworth said, nodding.

“Right,” Harry agreed, suddenly feeling a lot lighter after this confession.

“Completely understandable, Harry,” reassured Ashworth, with a smile. “What was it about being an Auror that first attracted you?”

Harry thought about this for a moment before answering slowly.

“I want to help people. And,” he felt his heart clenching painfully at the thought of Tonks and Moody, “some of the best people I know were Aurors. They gave their lives to save others.”

Ashworth’s face was serious now, and he nodded, thoughtfully.

“Professor McGonagall told me a bit about a club you ran in your fifth year,” he said. “Dumbledore’s Army, was it?”

Harry couldn’t help but grin.

“Club is a nice word for it,” he said. “It wasn’t exactly allowed.”

Ashworth grinned as well.

“Ah, well, I think we can gloss over that for now. Can you tell me more about it?”

“There isn’t much to say,” Harry shrugged. “Umbridge refused to teach us properly and Voldemort was back, so we had to do something.”

“And you had an extensive knowledge of Defence Against the Dark Arts, as I understand it?”

Harry shifted slightly in his seat. He still wasn't very comfortable saying he was in any way more advanced than his fellow students. He knew he could perform some spellwork better than most, but he hadn't really done much for it.

“I had just been taught some spells early,” he said.

Ashworth shook his head, an amused expression on his face.

“Professor McGonagall told me you would be modest. You can perform a corporeal Patronus, can you not?”

“Yes,” Harry confirmed.

“And you taught most—if not all—of Dumbledore's Army to do the same?”

“I—yes.”

“Did you enjoy it?”

“Enjoy what, sir?”

“Did you enjoy the meetings? With Dumbledore's Army?”

“Yeah, it was great. We had loads of fun, and we all knew what we were doing was important. Everyone was eager to learn and try stuff.”

Ashworth was giving him a knowing smile.

“Is that something you think you might like to pursue?”

“Er...what exactly, sir?” Harry asked, confused.

“Teaching.”

Harry stared at him.

“I, er, I never really thought about it, Professor.”

“You're a fast learner,” said Ashworth, “and a natural leader. You're remarkably selfless and patient, and you enjoy helping people. I think you're perfectly suited for it.”

Harry's mind was racing, mostly through memories with the D.A. The image of Hermione's face when she first saw the form of her Patronus. The astounded gasps when Ginny cast a perfect *Reducto*. Ron's delighted glee when he actually beat Hermione in a duel. Luna declaring, “*I liked the D.A. It was almost like having friends.*”

“I can't believe I hadn't thought of that,” he said, astounded.

Ashworth chuckled warmly.

“It took me getting a shattered knee after years of Quidditch to realize I was meant to be a teacher. Don't beat yourself up about it.”

“Could I apprentice for it then? For teaching?” Harry asked, amazed at how he suddenly felt much happier about the remainder of the year.

“Absolutely,” confirmed Ashworth. “I’ll mentor you myself. I’d like for you to also train with Waya some, there is a lot you could learn from him.”

“Thank you, Professor,” said Harry, genuinely. Ashworth gave him a smile and stood up, causing Harry to follow suit.

“Not at all, Harry. Believe it or not, this was one of my shorter meetings,” he reached out his hand for Harry to shake.

“Have you met with Hermione yet?” Harry asked, shaking his hand. When Ashworth shook his head, Harry grinned. “Good luck with that, sir.”

Ashworth barked out a laugh.

“Have a good night, Harry.”

“You too, Professor,” Harry gave him one last smile and left his office, feeling lighter than he had since he first entered the castle this year.

i didn't know i was broken til i wanted to change

Chapter Summary

“It isn’t an eye for an eye, Draco,” she said, sharply. “Just because I told you my story doesn’t mean you have to tell me yours. You don’t owe me anything.”

“Why?” Draco croaked. “Why did you tell me?”

Violet gave a little sigh.

“I don’t know. We can’t help how we’re raised, I suppose. We believe what our parents tell us. You were raised to think all Muggles were inferior to wizards in every way. My parents would have raised me the exact same way if it hadn’t been for Laurel. They were forced to face the truth, and in that, they were lucky and so was I. Just because you weren’t doesn’t mean you’re a bad person. Not if you’re willing to challenge your old views when given new information.”

Draco stared at her, and he felt oddly touched. Violet didn’t need to give him an explanation. Quite frankly, he didn’t deserve one. And yet, she had trusted him—a Death Eater—enough to tell him that her little sister was a Squib. She didn’t think him a bad person—which was more than he could say for most people.

Chapter Notes

AH guys I love this chapter it was so fun to write; OH HEY by the way, look at these amazing character sketches Maya did for me of Violet and Draco! You can find her on Tumblr @wingedcorgi ! She's awesome and her art is incredible!

chapter title is from the song I Wanna Get Better by Bleachers



When Draco entered the common room, he was glad that it was noticeably unoccupied by Gryffindors. There were a few Ravenclaws sitting at one of the tables near the staircases, and the Hufflepuff Bones girl was curled up in an armchair, asleep, with Abbott in a chair next to her, her nose in a book.

Draco looked over to the windowseat, where the few remaining Slytherins had taken to hiding, and saw Violet Foxblade sitting there, cross-legged, with an open book resting on her legs. Thinking of their last Defence lesson, he walked over to join her.

“Mind if I sit here?” Draco asked, gesturing to the windowseat. Violet looked up at him and her hazel eyes softened.

“Go ahead.”

Draco sat down delicately next to her, placing his bag beside him.

“What are you reading?” he asked.

“Oh, this?” Violet sighed, picking up the book from her lap and closing it. “It’s my Muggle Studies textbook. I’m not really focused though.”

“You take Muggle Studies?” Draco asked, astonished. She was certainly an intriguing Slytherin, that was for sure.

“Yeah,” she sighed, shoving the book into her bag. “The new professor is quite good, but she assigns an Abraxan-load of homework.”

Draco just nodded, unsure of what to say.

“How are you?” she asked. “Classes go alright?”

Draco didn’t really want to discuss today’s classes, which had included a Transfigurations class where he had made absolutely no progress and a Potions class where he had done all the work and the credit had once again gone to Potter, so he merely shrugged.

“Listen, Violet, I don’t mean to pry, but…” he paused, not quite knowing how to continue.

He had never really had friends, not in the traditional way. Crabbe and Goyle weren’t exactly the kind of friends one could talk to, and Draco had never told them much about himself. The closest he had had to a confidant was Pansy, and he was very careful about how he spoke to her as well, because she couldn’t always be trusted.

There was absolutely no reason for Violet to trust him, and there was no reason for him to attempt to comfort her, but the image of the boggart as that bleeding young girl—that looked so much like Violet—had consumed him. He couldn’t stop thinking about it, and he couldn’t stop thinking about Violet, this girl that he had shared a House with for years and yet knew absolutely nothing about.

“You want to know about my boggart,” Violet said, shrewdly.

“I’m sorry,” Draco said.

“Don’t be. She’s not really dead,” Violet’s face was calm, but her voice was oddly quiet.

“Who is she?” Draco asked, finding that his voice had lowered to match hers.

“My sister, Laurel.”

“I didn’t know you had a sister.”

“Yes, she’s fifteen,” Violet said, slowly. Draco looked at her, curiously.

“Is she at Hogwarts?”

Violet just looked at him for a moment, as if appraising him.

“No,” she said, cautiously. “She’s a Squib.”

Draco stared at her. Without a doubt, Violet Foxblade had to be the strangest person Draco had ever met. A Slytherin, who came from an old pureblood family, who had remained quiet and invisible for most of her Hogwarts career, who had fought *against* the Death Eaters during the Battle of Hogwarts, who was fiercely defensive of her fellow Slytherins, who took Muggle Studies, who had a *Squib* for a sister?

“Are you alright, Draco?” Violet asked, coolly, watching Draco try and arrange his face into a neutral expression.

“I’m sorry, it just—”

“Surprised you, I know,” nodded Violet, sagely. “Yes, my parents were rather surprised themselves. But she’s quite brilliant, you know. She finished Muggle secondary school a year earlier than normal.”

She spoke with an intense sort of affection in her voice and Draco thought inexplicably of his mother.

“Are your parents—?” Draco trailed off, not quite sure how to phrase it.

“Yeah, they are,” Violet replied, seemingly understanding exactly what Draco meant. “They used to be way more into that ‘pureblood is superior’ stuff, but after Laurel, they sort of had to reanalyse everything they believed in. She changed everything. They had to take her into hiding during the war. Wanted me to come with them, but I stayed at Hogwarts.”

She had a soft look on her face and Draco almost envied her for a moment, wondering what it was like to love someone so much.

“Why are you telling me all this?” he asked, suddenly realizing how much she had just revealed. “I’m a Death Eater.”

To his disbelief, Violet rolled her eyes.

“You *were* a Death Eater. Barely. What, are you saying I shouldn’t be telling you?”

“Well, no, I just...” Draco thought about this. “I just don’t understand why you’re trusting me with that information.”

Violet offered him a sad smile.

“Well, you did sort of save me in Defence. And your boggart wasn’t much better.”

“Ah,” Draco murmured, thinking of his father and feeling a shudder go down his spine.

“Don’t worry, you don’t have to explain.”

“But you told me—” Draco began, but Violet was quick to cut him off.

“It isn’t an eye for an eye, Draco,” she said, sharply. “Just because I told you my story doesn’t mean you have to tell me yours. You don’t owe me anything.”

“Why?” Draco croaked. “Why did you tell me?”

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Draco stared at her, and he felt oddly touched. Violet didn’t need to give him an explanation. Quite frankly, he didn’t deserve one. And yet, she had trusted him—a Death Eater—enough to tell him

that her little sister was a Squib. She didn't think him a bad person—which was more than he could say for most people.

“Thank you,” he said gently, and she smiled at him in response. A thought occurred to him as he mulled over her words and he paused before voicing it.

“Do you think,” he kept his voice low, even though he knew no one was listening, “you could maybe tell me some of what you learn in your Muggle Studies class?”

Violet flashed him a wide grin.

Draco was sitting in McGonagall's office once again, feeling mildly uncomfortable with both Snape and Dumbledore's eyes on him. He was already nervous enough to hear what McGonagall had to say about his possible wandlore apprenticeship, and having the two former headmasters stare down at him was not particularly helpful. Thankfully, McGonagall didn't keep him waiting long.

“Mr Malfoy, thank you for joining me,” she said, as she swept into the office in her long black robes. Automatically, he stood when she entered, but she quickly waved at him and he sat right back down. She took the seat behind her desk, and he faced her, glad to have something to focus on other than Dumbledore and Snape's portraits.

“Tomorrow, the bulletin board in your common room will announce the names of every student's mentor, the weekly times they will meet, and the classroom in which they will have their sessions. Now, because wandlore is a heavily protected magic, it would be best if the other students did not know what you were studying. You may tell one or two of your most trusted friends, but you must make sure it stays quiet. You don't want to attract unwanted attention.”

Draco nodded along. It wasn't like he had anyone he wanted to tell anyway.

“I thought that, instead, I would have it announce me as your mentor,” McGonagall continued. “If anyone asks, you can tell them you're undertaking a Transfiguration apprenticeship. I will, of course, go along with this story.”

She paused to let him absorb the information, and Draco jumped at the chance to ask her what he was dying to know.

“Does that mean someone agreed to mentor me?” he asked, trying to hide the anticipation in his voice.

McGonagall gave him a small smile.

“Of course. I daresay you will have one of the most experienced mentors of all. Garrick Ollivander himself has agreed to oversee your apprenticeship.”

Ollivander? As in, the Ollivander that was locked up and tortured in his family's dungeon?

“I...but he—why?” Draco managed to stumble out. If his mother were here, she would be horrified at all of his stuttering.

McGonagall raised an eyebrow at him.

“I suppose you will have to ask him that yourself, Mr Malfoy.”

At his overwhelmed expression, she softened slightly.

“He was quite eager when he heard it was you I wanted him to instruct.”

Draco stared at her, trying to find some way to make sense of it all, to find a logical explanation. It was true that it wasn't Draco himself who locked Ollivander in the Malfoy dungeons, but he had been responsible for bringing food down to the prisoners, and he hadn't released them. The Lovegood girl had been there, too, and Dean Thomas, and that goblin.

Lovegood had been far too polite to him—friendly, even, at times. Ollivander had been a tired sort of polite as well, while Thomas had remained mostly silent, staying in the corner of the dungeons and not even looking at Draco. The goblin had been the only adversarial one and that had stopped as soon as Draco withdrew his wand in silent threat. Draco had secretly been glad he didn't have to curse him.

He didn't like cursing people without wands. He was taught proper duelling techniques growing up, taught its importance in ancient pureblood tradition. Attacking someone who didn't have a wand to defend themselves didn't feel *right*. When he had been forced to do it, he'd tried to pretend he was fine with it. He would talk himself down, telling himself he was being a self-righteous Gryffindor and to just get it over with.

He'd never stopped hating it, though, so any time he could avoid it, he did. He'd imagined it would be so much worse cursing someone without a wand who was also as kind to him as Lovegood was.

He remembered one time he had come down to bring them all food and discovered that Bellatrix had been there earlier, playing with them. Thomas had been on the ground, not bleeding but shaking with his whole body, clearly having been subjected to the Cruciatus, one of Auntie Bella's favourites. The goblin and Ollivander had seemed more in shock than grievously harmed, but Lovegood had looked like she had been torn apart.

She had great gashes in her face, her neck, her chest. She'd seemed to be bleeding from *everywhere*, her clothes staining red at an alarmingly rapid pace. Ollivander had been trying to help, fruitlessly, pushing rags onto wounds in an effort to stop the blood, but it had been coming from too many places.

Draco had acted without thinking, his wand practically flying as he cast healing spell after healing spell. By the time he was done, Luna had retained a few scars but looked monumentally better, no longer bleeding.

“Thank you, Draco,” she had said, softly, and reached out to put her palm against Draco's cheek. Draco had just stared at her, disbelievingly, the same way everyone else had seemed to be staring at *him*, before turning tail and fleeing the dungeon quicker than he came.

He'd been a coward, like he always was. He'd spent his whole life talking a big game, and it turned out he hated everything he'd bragged about—hated the Dark Arts, hated performing Unforgivable Curses, hated hurting people.

He could've saved them all, could've set them all free—Lovegood, Thomas, the goblin, Ollivander. But he hadn't. Instead, he'd just followed orders like a scared little boy. And then Potter had showed up, and managed to orchestrate an escape for all of them. He'd been a prisoner, *wandless*, and he had still saved the day.

As usual.

Draco had had the chance to do something good, and characteristically, he had failed to do so. He saw absolutely no reason why Ollivander would want anything to do with him.

i don't blame you for being you, but you can't blame me for hating it

Chapter Summary

“Malfoy!” he said, walking up to him, and Malfoy’s head snapped up so quickly, Harry practically felt it in his own neck.

“Potter,” he responded, coolly, in contrast to his startled reaction.

“How come you’re doing an apprenticeship with McGonagall?” he asked, and suddenly he felt Hermione’s hand grip his forearm.

“Harry, leave it,” she warned in an undertone, but Harry ignored her. He wasn’t picking a fight, he just wanted to know. Malfoy raised a pale eyebrow at him.

“What business is that of yours?” he asked, his voice level.

Chapter Notes

Agh, I know this is late, sorry about that. Been traveling a lot lately and I also managed to catch a cold so I'm just a whole ass mess rn. Will try my best to have the next chapter up in a week tho :)

chapter title is from the song A Little Less Sixteen Candles, A Little More "Touch Me" by Fall Out Boy

Harry awoke to find Ron and Hermione’s blurry faces peering over him in his bed. He instantly scrambled to sit up and reached around blindly for his glasses. Once he had shoved them onto his face, he exclaimed, “What?”

“Our apprenticeship information is out,” replied Hermione at once. “Everyone’s mentors are listed on the bulletin board.”

“Oh, was that today?” Harry asked, tossing his covers aside and getting out of bed. Truth be told, he had sort of forgotten about the apprenticeships since his meeting with Ashworth. It was incredible how calm he felt after that meeting, especially considering how much he had been agonizing over it before.

“Yes, it was today,” said Hermione, an air of impatience in her tone. “And we were just wondering when you had planned on telling us you decided you weren’t planning on apprenticing to be an Auror anymore.”

Harry, who had been midway through pulling his robes on, paused and stared at them. Hermione had her arms crossed and her eyebrows raised, and Ron just looked sort of expectant, waiting for him to respond.

He sighed, and fastened his robes.

“I forgot to tell you,” he admitted. “I’m sorry.”

“Don’t be sorry, mate,” Ron was quick to chime in. “We were just confused is all.”

“Let’s go down together, yeah?” Harry suggested. “I’ll tell you everything at breakfast.”

At the mention of breakfast, Ron was instantly agreeable, and the two boys turned to Hermione for her approval. Her stern posture dissipated.

“Oh, fine. I expect a thorough explanation though.”

“I’ll do my best,” Harry grinned.

The three of them ambled down the stairs from the boys’ dormitory together to where what looked like every student in their year was crowded around the bulletin board. Harry craned to get a good look at the board.

Three columns had been drawn, with the far left side showing the name of the instructor, the middle the names of the students, and the right the days, times, and locations of the meetings. Harry was surprised to see that some mentors had more than one student assigned to them.

“Does that mean they won’t be in individual sessions?” Harry asked, looking towards Hermione for answers. As usual, she had them.

“Yes, it’ll sort of be like a group setting. But there aren’t more than three students per mentor, to make sure everyone gets the close attention and instruction they need,” she sounded like he repeated that word for word from Professor McGonagall.

Harry scanned the list until he saw his own name.

*Professor Lachlan Ashworth - Harry Potter – Mondays at 4:30 pm, Thursdays at 1:45 pm;
Professor Ashworth’s office*

He sighed a little in relief that he was the only student Ashworth was mentoring. He supposed it was a little bit selfish, but he was rather looking forward to learning one-on-one from Ashworth, and Waya, too. Again, he thought of Remus, and their one-on-one sessions back in third year, where he taught Harry how to cast a Patronus.

In an attempt to shake himself of his thoughts, he began to look for Ron and Hermione’s names on the board. He found Ron’s together with Seamus and Michael Corner, apprenticing under Gawain Robards.

“Robards!” Harry exclaimed. “That’s brilliant, Ron, he’s Head Auror! Wonder how he’s making the time.”

Ron grinned widely and Harry clapped him on the shoulder hard, filled with pride and excitement for his best friend. Hermione—who had confided in Harry and Ron that she had chosen to study to

be an Unspeakable, something she was not allowed to tell anyone else and had firmly told them they were not to breathe a word about—shared her mentor, Evadne Moreau, with Oliver Rivers, whose name Harry barely recognized, but who Hermione told him was a Ravenclaw.

Curiously, Harry continued scanning the board. He saw some familiar names in the column of mentors, namely Tiberius Ogden—who had been in the Wizengamot—and Gwenog Jones, former captain of the Holyhead Harpies. Dean Thomas and Alice Runcorn were the names in her row, and Harry was definitely going to ask Dean more about that later.

Neville and Justin Finch-Fletchley were both apprenticing with Professor Sprout, which came as no surprise, and Ernie Macmillan, Harry saw with a healthy amount of disappointment, was apprenticing under Remington Armistead, the associate editor of the Daily Prophet. It was when he reached McGonagall's name that he paused.

Headmistress Minerva McGonagall – Draco Malfoy – Mondays at 5 pm, Wednesdays at 9 pm, Thursdays at 11 am, location to be announced

Harry hadn't thought McGonagall would be doing any apprenticeships. Wasn't she far too busy as Headmistress already? And what was Malfoy apprenticing for with her anyway? He looked among the small crowd of students around the board for Malfoy, but his pale hair was nowhere to be seen. He cast his glance to the common room at large and finally spotted Malfoy on the windowseat, mid-conversation with the Slytherin girl who'd had the terrible boggart—Fox-something. Without even thinking, Harry walked over to them, barely aware of Ron and Hermione following him.

"Malfoy!" he said, walking up to him, and Malfoy's head snapped up so quickly, Harry practically felt it in his own neck.

"Potter," he responded, coolly, in contrast to his startled reaction.

"How come you're doing an apprenticeship with McGonagall?" he asked, and suddenly he felt Hermione's hand grip his forearm.

"Harry, leave it," she warned in an undertone, but Harry ignored her. He wasn't picking a fight, he just wanted to *know*.

Malfoy raised a pale eyebrow at him.

"What business is that of yours?" he asked, his voice level.

"Why aren't you doing a Potions apprenticeship?" Harry continued.

"Why should I?" Malfoy shot back.

Harry furrowed his eyebrows, slightly confused.

"You were Snape's golden child. Everyone knows you were best at Potions." After a slight cough from behind him, he added, "Besides Hermione."

Malfoy's eyes narrowed dangerously.

"My sincerest *apologies*, Potter, I hadn't thought about how *invested* you were in my career prospects. I'll make sure to consult you next time I plan on making any decisions regarding *my* life, shall I?" he sneered, and Harry took a cautious step backwards.

For Malfoy, this was relatively tame, but for the new Malfoy, the one Harry had been interacting with in Potions class since the beginning of term, this was a change. Malfoy had been—dare he say it—*polite*; even the little jibes he made at Harry's potion-making skills had been rather gentle and...well, *funny*.

Now, he seemed a lot more like pre-war Malfoy. Harry didn't quite know how to react. His Malfoy-instincts were off.

"Git," Ron coughed, stepping forward and putting a hand on Harry's shoulder. "Come on, Harry."

Harry stayed rooted to the ground, looking at Malfoy, trying to figure him out. Malfoy scowled at him.

"If you're desperate to know, Potter, I'm apprenticing in Transfiguration and there's no one more skilled in the field than Minerva McGonagall. Next time you feel the urge to poke your nose into other people's business, however, kindly do so on your own time and leave me out of it."

Harry returned his glare and allowed Ron and Hermione to lead him away. It seemed that Malfoy hadn't changed at all and was the same old prat he always was.

"Alright, we're at breakfast, Harry, get on with it," said Hermione, all business, while Ron loaded bacon onto his plate next to her.

"Right," he said. "So I met with Ashworth..."

He told them about their meeting, about how Ashworth helped him figure out that the aspect of the Auror job that was appealing to him was the opportunity to help people, and how teaching was another way of doing that that Harry felt more comfortable with and excited about. When he finished, Hermione's eyes were sparkling.

"*Wow!* Harry, that's wonderful! I can't believe I hadn't thought of that—you were amazing with the D.A., of *course* you're be a brilliant professor!"

Harry felt himself blushing at her praise, and he couldn't help but grin. Still, he looked towards Ron, rather nervously.

"This alright with you, mate?" he asked.

"Course," said Ron, easily. "Auror training won't be as fun without you there, but you sound really chuffed about this. 'Mione's right, too, you know. You'd be a good professor. I learned loads from you in fifth year."

Harry was touched.

"Thanks, Ron," he said, genuinely. "You too, Hermione."

He was feeling entirely too fond of his two best friends at the moment to bring up what was nagging at him. He knew that if he did, they'd just tell him off, but he couldn't help but wonder—what was going on with Malfoy?

He looked over at the Slytherin table. Malfoy was there, his attention-seeking hair hidden under the hood of his robes. A Transfiguration apprenticeship didn't make any sense. He supposed Malfoy

might be good at it, but it was so out of nowhere. Potions made sense. Even Quidditch would make more sense. But Transfiguration?

Harry wondered if he could ask McGonagall about it, if she'd tell him anything, maybe that it was a cover for something, perhaps something to do with the terms of Malfoy's probation. That would make sense. That would also explain why Malfoy had gotten so tetchy when Harry had asked about it.

"Harry? *Harry!*" It was only when Hermione started snapping her fingers in front of Harry's face that he refocused in on the conversation at hand.

"Sorry," he said, smiling sheepishly. "Got distracted."

Hermione glanced from Harry to the Slytherin table and back again with a worried expression.

"Don't start," she said, warningly.

"Start what?" said Harry, innocently.

"You know exactly what. I know Malfoy's a prat, but he's been keeping his head down. Just leave it alone."

"I didn't even say anything!" Harry exclaimed, defensively, looking at Ron for backup.

Ron just shrugged, the traitor.

"You know how you get when it comes to Malfoy," he said, simply, like that explained everything. Harry was tempted to respond that *no*, he didn't know how he got when it came to Malfoy, but Hermione's expression kept him at bay.

"Fine," he mumbled. "I wasn't even going to say anything."

Of course, he very much *had* been going to say something, but Hermione and Ron didn't need to know that. He kept a closer eye on Malfoy that day, trying to see if he could spot anything out of the ordinary about him. It was surprisingly hard to do, since Malfoy was clearly trying to keep himself as invisible as possible. It reminded Harry unnervingly of their sixth year, the first time Malfoy seemed to want to avoid attention.

But this time, Harry didn't find Malfoy skulking around in corridors or crying in bathrooms. In fact, the only thing that appeared unusual was that he seemed to be struggling in his classes far more than usual. He had always been one of the top students, typically only narrowly edged out from the top by Hermione. But in Transfiguration, he was one of the only ones who hadn't been able to fully transfigure his head into that of a big cat. Instead of looking angry, like Harry would have expected, Malfoy just sighed and unclenched his jaw, muttering to himself under his breath.

At dinner, his resolve broke and he brought it up to Ron and Hermione. Ron just gave him a resigned look and emitted a grumble that sounded suspiciously like, "I told you so," and Hermione pursed her lips at him.

"Harry, his father is in Azkaban and his mother is on house arrest. They've had Aurors in and out of their house all summer. Practically none of his friends returned to Hogwarts this year. Maybe schoolwork isn't the first thing on his mind right now."

Harry stared at her, feeling incredibly stupid. How had he not thought of that? He hadn't even considered what would happen to the Manor after the war. It had been Voldemort's headquarters, of *course* the Aurors would want to examine it. Harry thought of Narcissa—beautiful and glamorous—who had saved his life in the Forest, who had lied right to Voldemort's face in order to save her son.

He wasn't going to start feeling any empathy for Lucius Malfoy any time soon, but with a glance over at the Slytherin table, he felt slightly ashamed for having assumed Malfoy was up to something again.

chasing out my skeletons and the troubles they have caused

Chapter Summary

“I didn’t know you and Nott were so close,” Potter continued. Draco felt his face flush, as vivid memories of fifth year suddenly rushed at him full-force—Theo and him arriving back into the dormitories after a late night Slytherin party, giddy off of stolen Firewhisky, laughing for the first time in what felt like months, the feeling of Theo’s warm body pressed against him as they slouched by the door, the hesitant press of soft lips against his...

“Alright, students! Cover your potions and mark them with your names before arranging them in the stands! Make sure you know when to come in and check on them!”

Draco’s face was burning as he placed the top over the cauldron and carefully removed it from the flame.

“Are you alright, Malfoy?” Potter inquired, looking at him with a curious expression.

“Yes,” he snapped. “You can manage labelling the cauldron with our names, can’t you? Wonderful.”

Without waiting for a reply, Draco grabbed his bag and fled the room.

Chapter Notes

chapter title is from the song Thanks To You by All Time Low

As soon as Slughorn announced the name of the potion they were brewing, Draco’s heart sank. The old professor spoke with such excitement and vigour, but all Draco could think about was how much time it was going to take from him.

Potter went off to fetch the ingredients, as had become their routine, while Draco stared at the instructions on the page before him. It was by far the most complicated potion they had been assigned so far. While that wasn’t enough to intimidate Draco, the fact that they were meant to regularly check in on the potion to add ingredients at specific times thoroughly exasperated him.

Everyone was supposed to take turns with their partner to check up on the potion. Draco, however, certainly didn’t trust Potter to do more than hand him ingredients. He even managed to mess that up at times.

“Here,” Potter returned, dumping an armful of supplies onto the table. Draco massaged his temple with an index finger.

“Mind yourself, Potter,” he snapped. “Some of these are delicate.”

“Sorry,” Potter just grinned lazily and Draco found his irritation rising. Of course Potter didn’t care. He would just sit there and do nothing and then get all the credit when the potion turned out perfectly. As usual.

“I wouldn’t expect you to understand,” Draco sniffed, and carefully set the dragonfly wings out of Potter’s reach.

Potter gave him a funny look, which Draco ignored in favour of uncapping the jar of dragon claws. He peered inside, trying to ignore the unholy stench that arose as soon as he removed the lid. With a sigh, he recapped it and pressed it to Potter’s chest.

“Wrong dragon,” he said. “We need a Czech Snakesnout’s claws, not a Chinese Fireball’s.”

“What’s the difference?”

Draco looked at him, hoping his glare was enough to make Potter feel uncomfortable. It probably wasn’t. This *was*, after all, the boy who had faced down the Dark Lord.

“Tell me, Potter, *how* did you manage to get into N.E.W.T Potions again? Did you bribe the O.W.L test taker? Promise her a signed photograph or something?”

Potter scowled at him, but grabbed the jar and left to switch it out in the supply cupboard. Draco poured half of the pomegranate juice into their cauldron and lifted his wand before thinking twice and setting it down.

As humiliating as it felt, he’d rather ask Potter to start the fire than risk their potion being messed up because of his dysfunctional wand.

When Potter returned with the correct dragon claws, Draco said, as casually as he could manage, “Light the fire, would you, Potter?”

“Why can’t you?”

Draco met his eyes with a deadpan expression.

“I do all of the work in this class and you can’t be bothered to cast an *Incendio*?”

Potter had the decency to look down in shame and withdrew his famous wand to cast the spell. Draco reached out for the dragon claws and transported them to a bowl where he could properly crush and powder them.

Casting an eye at the rest of the ingredients on the table, he added, “You can take the morning dew back. It doesn’t need to be added for another week.”

“Another week?” Potter asked, and Draco sighed. Honestly, was interacting with Potter *always* this frustrating? No wonder Granger was so tightly wound; if Draco had to spend half his life explaining everything to Potter, he would be too.

“Yes, Potter, were you not listening? This potion takes a month to complete, which means we will have to periodically be checking in on it and adding ingredients twice a week. By ‘we,’ of course I mean me, because as previously mentioned, I do all the work in this class while you sit there and

ask me inane questions like ‘*what’s the difference between a Czech Snakesnout’s claw’s and a Chinese Fireball’s?*’”

It all came spilling out of Draco without him even realizing. When he drew in a sharp breath at the end of his rant, he could feel Potter’s eyes boring into his skull. He forced himself to keep his gaze focused on his work, deftly crushing the claws into a fine yellow powder.

Potter wordlessly picked up the offending glass bottle and walked off again. Draco let out a breath he didn’t know he’d been holding. He didn’t know what it was about Potter that made him so intimidating, but it frustrated him to no end that the boy had that hold over him. He’d known Potter since they were *eleven*, surely he would be used to his presence by now?

“What’s your problem, Malfoy?” Potter spoke as soon as he returned to the table. Draco chose not to look at him—always the safer option.

“I have no idea what you’re talking about,” he said, carefully pouring three drops of pixie juice over the powdered dragon claws and watching as the mixture sizzled loudly.

“Come on,” continued Potter. “You were being all...civil before.”

Draco couldn’t help but snort. Civil? Barely restraining himself from calling Potter an imbecile every time he messed up a basic ingredient wasn’t exactly civil, was it?

“If it’s my *civility* you’re after, I’m afraid you’ll have to get in line,” Draco responded, tartly.

“Merlin, Malfoy, you really have to make everything difficult, don’t you?” Potter shot at him and finally Draco turned and met his eyes.

“*I* make everything difficult, Potter? Me? Tell me what potion we’re making. Go on,” Draco slammed the textbook shut as Potter’s eyes automatically moved to it. “That’s what I thought. Tell me the main difference between using pomegranate juice and lavender water as a base. The effect ginger root has in potions. How to withdraw a lionfish spine without spilling its venom. Can’t answer any, can you? But that’s fine, because *Malfoy will do all the work* and you’ll sit back and watch and win yourself twenty potions for Gryffindor for simply *breathing* near the potion.”

“Is that it?” Potter said, quietly. “You’re mad because Slughorn keeps giving me all the credit for the potions?”

Draco rolled his eyes.

“Potter, if I got angry every time you got the credit for other people’s work I would have exploded by now.”

“Then what’s your problem?”

“Right now, you are my problem. Pass the horned thimbleweed.”

Potter obligingly handed over the thimbleweed, but didn’t seem to be as finished with the conversation as Draco wanted to be.

“Look, I get it, you think I’m useless at Potions. I sort of am. But you don’t really seem to want my help anyway, so make up your mind, do you want me to do my fair share of the work or not?”

Potter's arms were crossed, but he didn't look upset. His eyebrows were furrowed and his stupid hair was hanging in his face, but he lacked that fiery glint in his eyes that meant he was really incensed.

"If you were capable of actually doing the work, I'd say yes, but seeing as your potion-making skills are worse than those of a first year, I think I'll handle our potions by myself."

"You really are a git, Malfoy, you know that?"

"Don't forget Death Eater," Draco retorted, without thinking.

Potter stared at him, eyes wide.

"What did you just say?" he asked, his voice suddenly quiet.

Draco met his gaze, staring directly into Potter's green eyes.

"Well, you Gryffindors seem to be picking up the habit of calling every Slytherin you see a Death Eater. Might as well use it on the only one of us that actually was."

A look of realization crossed Potter's face, one that Draco did not like at all, and it was accompanied with something that looked a lot like shame.

"This is about what happened the other day with Seamus and Nott."

Draco clenched his jaw and returned his attention to their potion, which was slowly turning from a pale yellow to a bright lime green, and smelled pleasantly citrusy.

"Seamus shouldn't have said that," Potter continued, sounding abashed. "He was out of line."

"You didn't seem to think so at the time," responded Draco. Potter just blinked at him.

"What do you mean?"

Merlin, he was really slow about everything, wasn't he?

"I *mean*," said Draco, sharply. "You didn't say anything, did you? Just let him prattle on about Theo's father, when he didn't have a clue what he was talking about. Didn't matter to you, did it? Theo might as well have been a Death Eater in your eyes."

He didn't know if it was the effect of the pixie juice coming out in the fumes of the potion, or just another sign he was losing his mind, but Draco felt the words come out of him without permission, like he had no control over what he was saying.

He bit his tongue, in an effort to keep anything else from spilling out. Potter was staring at him.

"I'm sorry. I don't think that, you know," he said. "Well—I did think Nott's father was a Death Eater at first, but after Greengrass said all that, I asked Hermione and she said that it was only his uncle that was a Death Eater and that his father and uncle hadn't spoken in years anyway because of the association with Voldemort, so..." he trailed off rather nonsensically, and Draco shook his head slightly to himself. Of course he had had to run it by Granger, his walking encyclopaedia.

“I didn’t know you and Nott were so close,” Potter continued. Draco felt his face flush, as vivid memories of fifth year suddenly rushed at him full-force—Theo and him arriving back into the dormitories after a late night Slytherin party, giddy off of stolen Firewhisky, laughing for the first time in what felt like months, the feeling of Theo’s warm body pressed against him as they slouched by the door, the hesitant press of soft lips against his...

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Without waiting for a reply, Draco grabbed his bag and fled the room.

i thought i loved you but it was just how you looked in the light

Chapter Summary

“Are you saying you agree with Malfoy? Malfoy?”

“He was right,” Harry admitted. “He usually isn’t, but this time, he was. Remember all the times Malfoy made fun of my parents being dead? We didn’t think it was okay when he did it, why is it okay when Seamus does it to Nott?”

That shut Ron up rather promptly.

“You’re right, Harry,” said Hermione, with a slight sigh. “Malfoy’s right. I didn’t know he and Nott were friends, though, to be honest.”

“Me neither,” said Harry. “He was very defensive of him, too. And he called him Theo.”

At this, Hermione raised her eyebrows.

“Well, you didn’t really expect him to call him Nott, did you?”

Harry didn’t want to admit that yes, he had sort of expected that.

Chapter Notes

Sorry this is a few days late; I totally forgot to post it! My bad. Hope you enjoy!

chapter title is from the song Hum Hallelujah by Fall Out Boy

“How did you get your potion to be that perfect lime green colour? Sophie and I did everything right, but it was still only a yellowish green by the time we were done. Harry? Harry!”

Hermione’s fingers suddenly appeared in front of Harry’s face, snapping for his attention. He blinked and looked over at Hermione, who had an expectant expression on her face.

“Oh, er...sorry, I don’t really know,” he admitted, sheepishly, knowing she was about to scold him. “Malfoy does most of the work, I just sort of...hand him things.”

He was half-right; Hermione did have a disapproving look on her face, but when she spoke, she only said, “Well, it’s better than using the Prince’s book, I suppose. Still, Harry, you should at least be paying attention to what he’s doing. And that’s not really fair to Malfoy, either.”

“Since when do we care about what’s fair to Malfoy?” added Ron. Sophie, who had accompanied them on their walk up to Founder’s Tower and was now sitting with them in their common room's

armchairs, snorted, which made Ron grin happily. Hermione shot him a reprimanding look.

“How do you expect Harry’s going to pass his N.E.W.T.’s if he lets Malfoy do all the work for him and doesn’t learn anything this year?”

“Oh, bollocks, I hadn’t even thought of that,” Harry groaned.

“At least ask him to explain,” she suggested. “Clearly he knows what he’s doing.”

She spoke the last sentence with a little bit of an edge in her voice, and Harry knew she was jealous that Malfoy had been able to get their potion to the exact colour it was supposed to be and she hadn’t.

“Sure, I’ll just ask my pal Malfoy to tutor me in Potions, shall I?” Harry said, sarcastically, earning himself chuckles from Ron and Sophie.

“You said yourself he’s been better this year,” Hermione argued.

“Yeah, that was before Seamus mouthed off at Nott. Apparently they’re good friends or something, and now Malfoy thinks that we all think every Slytherin’s a Death Eater,” explained Harry.

“He can’t be mad about that!” cried Ron, defensively. “He bloody well *is* a Death Eater!”

“Was,” Harry found himself unconsciously correcting.

“He has a point, Ron,” said Hermione, thoughtfully. “Nott wasn’t a Death Eater, nor was his father. Apparently, they were in France the whole duration of the war.”

“So he’s a coward,” Ron put in.

“Or maybe his dad just wanted to protect him,” chimed in Sophie.

“And being a coward and being a Death Eater aren’t the same thing,” Harry added, softly.

Ron looked at him, a surprised expression on his face.

“Are you saying you agree with Malfoy? *Malfoy?*”

“He was right,” Harry admitted. “He usually isn’t, but this time, he was. Remember all the times Malfoy made fun of my parents being dead? We didn’t think it was okay when he did it, why is it okay when Seamus does it to Nott?”

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“Me neither,” said Harry. “He was very defensive of him, too. And he called him Theo.”

At this, Hermione raised her eyebrows.

“Well, you didn’t really expect him to call him Nott, did you?”

Harry didn’t want to admit that yes, he had sort of expected that.

“He called Crabbe and Goyle by their last names!” he said instead.

“Yes, well, Crabbe and Goyle weren’t exactly his friends, were they?” Hermione responded.

“More like minions,” Ron grumbled, causing Sophie to unsuccessfully cover up another snort.

Hermione looked like she was going to say something more, but was interrupted by the loud sound of the bricks of the entrance to the common room opening. Dean and Seamus walked through, followed closely by an interested-looking Luna and a grinning Ginny.

“Ginny!” Ron exclaimed. “What are you doing here?”

“Visiting you, dear brother, what’s it look like?” Ginny said, with just the slightest note of sarcasm in her voice.

“We were curious to see your common room,” Luna supplied, smiling at them before taking a seat next to Hermione. Ginny had already made herself comfortable in a grey armchair next to Harry’s.

“What do you think, then?” Sophie asked.

“Oh, it’s lovely. Could do with some more colour, though. You know...” Luna launched into a long-winded explanation of how colour affected the soul, but Harry’s was distracted by Ginny reaching out and putting her hand on his on the arm of his chair. He looked up to find her brown eyes on him.

“Can we talk?” she asked, quietly. Ah. So here it was. He nodded wordlessly and followed her as she got up from her chair and walked over to where the bulletin board was at the bottom of the staircase up to the boys’ dormitories.

“So,” she said, punctuating the word a little more forcefully than necessary.

“So,” Harry said, shuffling from foot to foot. “How are your classes going?”

Ginny narrowed her eyes at him.

“That’s not really what I wanted to talk about, Harry.”

“Right,” said Harry, looking down and feeling stupid. Ginny sighed softly.

“Look, you can just say it, Harry. I know you don’t want to be together.”

Harry’s eyes snapped back to her face.

“I didn’t say that.”

Ginny smiled a bit and Harry’s heart ached in the sudden realization that she was right.

“You didn’t have to,” she replied. “You’re forgetting that I know you.”

“I don’t—I didn’t—I’m—”

“You don’t have to say you’re sorry,” Ginny interrupted his stammering. “I understand. We can’t really expect things to go back to the way they were before the war. Nothing is the same anymore.”

“I wish it was,” Harry said, quietly. Ginny looked at him, and Harry could’ve sworn the expression she wore was pity.

“No, you don’t,” she said.

“I do care about you,” Harry said.

“I know you do. I care about you, too. But I’m tired of waiting. I spent years waiting. I don’t want to be that girl who just waits around for someone. I’m more than that.”

“Of course you are,” Harry mumbled, pathetically. “I didn’t mean to make you feel like—”

“Harry,” Ginny put a hand up to stop him. “You didn’t. You didn’t do anything wrong. I just...I don’t like this. I know you’ve been avoiding me, and it’s rubbish. You don’t have to feel like I’m going to break if you tell me you don’t want to be together.”

“I don’t think you’re going to break,” Harry said automatically.

“Then why haven’t you told me yet?” Ginny challenged, her eyebrows raised.

Harry sighed.

“I hadn’t really figured it out myself yet.”

Ginny’s expression softened.

“Oh, Harry,” she reached out and stroked his face gently with her hand. It was clearly a gesture of kindness, but Harry couldn’t help feeling like it was somewhat condescending.

“Being in love is different when the world is ending around you, isn’t it?” she said.

Harry had never thought about it quite like that, but she was right. He remembered kissing Ginny in the Burrow before Fleur and Bill’s wedding, how everything had just disappeared around them, how nothing in the world mattered but her, for those few blissful seconds.

It wasn’t like that anymore. The war was over, and for the first time, Harry didn’t feel his impending death looming over him. He didn’t need to escape into Ginny’s broad grin and sweet-smelling hair. He found he didn’t even want to.

“I’m sorry, Ginny,” he said, honestly. “I just don’t think I can do this—us—right now.”

Entirely inappropriately to what he had just said, Ginny smiled warmly.

“See, that wasn’t so hard, was it?”

Realizing she was teasing, Harry allowed himself to grin.

“You’re as bad as Ron, you know,” he said, and Ginny laughed and suddenly, he felt a lot lighter in his chest. “Come on, let’s get back to the others.”

They walked back to where the others were sitting with smiles on their faces, Harry finally feeling like everything was maybe going to be alright.

if you talk enough sense, then you'll lose your mind

Chapter Summary

He felt like he was lying to them. Like he was presenting himself in sheep's clothing, an innocent boy who just got caught up in a bad situation. He wasn't a prisoner in that house, not really, no matter how much he had felt like he was. He still got to lie down in a warm bed at night, even if he didn't actually sleep when in it. He had done horrific things throughout the war. Before the war.

Subconsciously, he rubbed at his left forearm, at the black mark seared deep into his flesh. He had tried to remove it this summer, using every spell he could think of until he had resorted to digging into his own skin with a kitchen knife. Polkey, one of the last remaining house elves, had found him and managed to pry the knife away from him. She had then immediately tried to punish herself using the knife, and Draco had had to yell at her to stop. He made her promise not to tell his mother and then had her make herself a cup of tea to calm down.

The Dark Mark had remained untouched, and all that he had done is add some more scars around it.

Chapter Notes

one of the hardest chapters to write but also one of my favorites. I live for the Luna/Draco friendship <3

chapter title is from the song I Found by Amber Run

Draco wasn't staring at Potter and the Weaslette, he really wasn't. They just happened to be in his direct line of sight, laughing and smiling and *touching*. Draco scowled; did they really have to do this here? Couldn't Potter just be decent and take her up to his dormitory? Just when Draco thought he might, the two of them simply walked back to their merry group of Gryffindors in the armchairs. Very well, then, at least they'd stop being nauseating in front of Draco. After all, they certainly didn't want to have to see that; Potter was the last thing he wanted to think about at the moment.

In fact, he didn't even realize he was still facing the armchairs until he made unmistakeable eye contact with Luna Lovegood. He quickly blinked and looked away, but he could feel her large eyes stay on him and he fidgeted on the windowseat, uncomfortably.

He wished Violet was here. They were becoming rather fast friends, and she was very good at distracting him, usually with outraged rants about how she'd seen younger Slytherins being bullied or else with reviews of what had been covered in her most recent Muggle Studies class.

Truthfully, Draco found the latter far more interesting, not that he'd ever admit it. He had been leaning a lot from her. Muggles seemed to have their own kinds of magic, things they created that worked sort of like they had charms put on them. Violet tried to explain how they worked without magic, but it had been extremely complicated and Draco had barely been able to follow. He was sure he'd get it after a while.

Recently, she'd told him about the Great Muggle Wars. He'd heard about them before, but only in passing. He remembered a section in his old Botany book that had mentioned flowers as symbols of death and remembrance in reference to them.

There had been two of them, both in the 20th century, and the facts she'd given him had left him in such disbelief that he had spent an entire night in the library's Muggle Studies section, until he'd learned as much as he possibly could. He'd sat there, horrified at what he'd read, but also horrified that he hadn't known. After that, he listened to every word Violet said about her classes, and almost always went to the library afterwards for further research.

"Hello, Draco,"

He looked up to find Luna Lovegood standing barely two feet away from him.

"Hello, Lovegood," he replied, wondering what on earth she was doing there. Without an invitation, she sat down on the windowseat beside him, drawing her legs up and crossing them. She regarded him with a dreamy sort of smile.

"Have you been down to visit the herd of Thestrals?" she asked casually, as if the two of them were old friends. "The babies' wings have finally grown in."

Realizing she was expecting an answer, Draco managed a, "No, I haven't found the time."

Lovegood nodded seriously.

"Of course, I know your year is very busy with the apprenticeships. Have you begun yours yet? What are you apprenticing in?"

"Oh, er, Transfiguration," Draco replied, still at a loss as to why she had decided to engage him in conversation. She looked at him and he resisted the urge to fidget uncomfortably under her stare. She didn't seem to blink quite as often as most people.

"Ah, it must be a secret. That's alright, I'll go along with it. Transfiguration is a good cover," she nodded again and flashed him a wide smile. "I hope it's something you enjoy."

Draco was taken aback. He didn't understand how she could tell he wasn't actually studying Transfiguration—he was, after all, a skilled Occlumens. Was she perhaps some kind of Seer? Would she answer him if he asked how she knew?

"Yes, it is," he said, instead, quietly. She seemed satisfied with the answer.

"That's wonderful. It's always important to do something you love, don't you think?"

"What are you doing, Lovegood?" The question burst out of Draco like rushing water breaking a dam. "Why are you talking to me? Why are you being nice to me? You were a prisoner in my dungeons, Lovegood, my aunt *tortured* you!"

The soft smile that played at Lovegood's lips never left during his outburst. She didn't even flinch.

"I remember the dungeons, Draco," she said in that matter-of-fact way of hers. "I remember you always bringing us extra food and healing our wounds. You looked more scared than any of us, really. Sometimes it seemed like you were also a prisoner in that house."

Draco stared at her, dumbfounded. First Violet, now Lovegood, he felt like he was in some sort of dream, where every one of his sins was being forgiven. It seemed like a free pass, like he was being absolved.

And yet, he still found himself unable to sleep at night. He still awoke constantly from nightmares of all of the horrible things he had done. He still felt heavy in his chest, and soiled with guilt. He still hated himself, with every fibre of his being.

He felt like he was lying to them. Like he was presenting himself in sheep's clothing, as an innocent boy who just got caught up in a bad situation. He hadn't been a prisoner in that house, not really, no matter how much he may have *felt* like one. He still got to lie down in a warm bed at night, even if he didn't actually sleep when in it. He was not innocent; he had done sickening things during the war.

Subconsciously, he rubbed at his left forearm, at the Dark Mark seared deep into his flesh. He had tried to remove it this summer, using every spell he could think of until he had desperately and hysterically resorted to digging into his own skin with a kitchen knife.

Polkey, one of the two remaining Malfoy house elves, had found him and managed to pry the knife away from him. She had then immediately tried to punish herself with the knife and Draco had had to yell at her to get her to stop. He then made her promise not to tell his mother, and had her make herself a cup of tea to calm down.

The Dark Mark had remained untouched, and all that he had done is add some more scars to it.

"Seventh years are being advised to start thinking about apprenticeships, too," Lovegood said suddenly, breaking Draco out of his thoughts. She was staring at him with a knowing look in her eyes.

"That's nice," he said, pathetically, withdrawing his fingers from his left forearm.

"I've decided I'm going to do magical art," she continued. "I thought about Magizoology, but the curriculum is rather restricting. They refuse to even look for Crumple-Horned Snorcacks, very narrow-minded of them, don't you think?"

She didn't seem to be waiting for an answer, so he didn't give her one.

"I would quite like to give magical tattoos," she said, and Draco's eyes snapped to her. She was looking at him, smiling, and she felt his jaw clench.

"Good for you," he said, tersely. She reached out and put a hand over one of his, a move that caused him to freeze.

“You can’t remove *all* magical tattoos, but you can cover them up, you know.” Her voice was kind and warm and she was still smiling at him, and he realized that she was *offering* him something.

“I—” he felt quite overwhelmed. Swallowing tightly, he said, “If you ever need someone to practice on, Lovegood...”

He didn’t quite manage to finish his sentence, but she beamed at him nonetheless.

“That’s very kind of you, Draco, thank you. And you can call me Luna, you know.”

Then, to his utter bewilderment, she leaned over and kissed him on the cheek. He simply stared at her, not knowing what to make of her, when an aggressive voice suddenly shouted, “Hey!”

He looked up to find Ginny Weasley stomping towards him, followed closely by Potter, who seemed to be trying to pull her back.

“*What* do you think you’re doing, Malfoy?” she demanded, standing in front of him and crossing her arms. He raised his eyebrows at her. *This* kind of behaviour, he knew much better how to deal with.

“Having a conversation with Lovegood,” he replied, coolly. “What does it look like?”

“Why are you bothering her?” Weasley continued, narrowing her eyes at him.

“Ginny, come on,” Potter urged from behind her, quietly. “You know Luna went up to him.”

“You should listen to your boyfriend, Weasley,” Draco smirked. “He’s actually got it right for once.”

“Oh, sod off, Malfoy,” Potter snapped at him and Draco grinned. *This* felt familiar. *This* felt like the old days, before the war, before the Dark Lord, before the entire world fell apart, when all Draco had to worry about was Granger beating him in a test and Blaise teasing him about his hair and Goyle eating all the chocolates his mother sent him and Potter just being so annoyingly *Potter*.

“It’s alright, Ginny,” piped up Luna from beside Draco in a bright tone. “Draco and I were just talking about apprenticeships! He doesn’t want to tell me what his is, but that’s okay; I told him about wanting to do magical tattoos and he said he’d let me practice on him.”

The Weaslette just sneered at him.

“You’d know all about magical tattoos, wouldn’t you, Malfoy?”

Draco felt something inside him go cold.

“Ginny,” Potter was saying, in a low, warning voice, but she didn’t flinch. Draco was seconds away from spitting back a biting retort, but held himself back.

Because it *wasn’t* before. It was after. After the war, after the Dark Lord, after his father went to Azkaban and his family name came tumbling down into the dirt. After Potter both saved the world and destroyed the one Draco had thought he lived in.

“Luna kindly offered to cover mine up. If I ever get tired of being reminded of the mistakes I’ve made, I might take her up on it.”

Weasley didn’t seem to have a response to this, so instead she gestured for Luna to get up and leave with them. Draco was uncomfortably aware of Potter’s eyes on him. Luna got to her feet, still smiling at Draco.

“Would you like to join me to visit the Thestrals sometime, Draco?”

“That would be lovely, Luna,” Draco responded, smiling back at her. Lovegood certainly was odd, but he would take odd over a scowling Weasley any day.

the truth never set me free so i did it myself

Chapter Summary

Harry felt his stomach sink more and more with every word Ashworth said. He didn't have anything against the idea, exactly, but his standing in school was nothing like it was in fifth year, when he was in charge of Dumbledore's Army. In fact, it was completely the opposite now. Instead of the outcast, he was now the Boy-Who-Lived-Twice, Saviour of the Wizarding World, as much as he hated it. How was he supposed to find someone who actually needed tutoring and was able to take him seriously as a teacher, instead of seeing him as the Harry Potter? It wasn't like he could just get old members of the D.A. either, they had already learned what he had to teach them.

Chapter Notes

chapter title is from the song Careful by Paramore

Seven minutes into Harry's fourth meeting with Ashworth, he was already out of breath.

"Are you sure you're not training me to be an Auror?" he huffed, as Ashworth lowered his wand and gestured for him to take a seat. Ashworth laughed.

"You do want to be a Defence teacher, don't you? Knowing Defence is part of that."

"Sure, but how much classroom duelling is there going to be?" Harry asked, accepting the glass of water the professor offered to him.

"You don't want to be one of those teachers that only does theory, do you?" Ashworth questioned, raising his eyebrows.

"Godric, no," Harry shook his head vigorously, thinking of Umbridge. Ashworth chuckled again.

"There is something I wanted to bring up with you. Sort of an assignment, if you will."

"Yeah?" Harry asked, his curiosity spiked.

"I know you've had some practice teaching, in your fifth year, with Dumbledore's Army. I think it would be beneficial for you to do some more of that."

Harry furrowed his eyebrows.

"But...Dumbledore's Army doesn't exist anymore."

“Yes, of course, I don’t mean exactly that. I mean, I think you should find someone—a student, or even several students—whom you could tutor. There are definitely students who need it and it would be good practice for you as well. I know you’re busy with classes, but try and find a time once a week to meet up with whoever you end up tutoring.”

Harry felt his stomach sink more and more with every word Ashworth said. He didn’t have anything against the idea exactly, but his standing in school was nothing like it had been in fifth year. In fact, it was completely the opposite now. Instead of being the crazy outcast, he was now the Boy-Who-Lived-Twice, bloody Saviour of the Wizarding World, as much as he hated it. How was he supposed to find someone who actually needed tutoring and was able to take him seriously as a teacher, instead of seeing him as *the* Harry Potter? It wasn’t like he could just get old members of the D.A. either, they had already learned what he had to teach them.

“Harry?”

“Huh?”

“I said, is that something you think you can do?”

“Yes, of course,” Harry lied, not wanting it to seem like he was incapable of completing a simple assignment. Ashworth’s face spread into a wide smile.

“Excellent. Let me know when you’ve found someone and keep me updated on your progress. Meanwhile, we’ll continue our sessions together. I’m trying to find a time where Waya can come in as well, since he’s much more of a Defence expert than I am.”

“That would be great, Professor,” said Harry, honestly. He really was looking forward to sessions with Waya. The Defence instructor was fascinating—he never revealed much about himself in classes and was rather casual with them, but he was an excellent teacher.

They were always on their feet, practicing and moving, and Waya would just throw in new spells for them to learn on the fly. Harry was secretly hoping Waya would begin teaching them more wandless and non-verbal spells. The man was a master at them, casting almost every spell wandlessly unless he was showing them the proper wand movement for a new spell.

Harry was able to do some spells wandlessly, but they were only minor spells, like *Lumos* and *Wingardium Leviosa*. He would love to know how to cast more powerful spells. After his wand had been broken—albeit temporarily—he had been forced to realize how dependent he was on it. Knowing how to cast a variety of wandless spells would make him feel far more secure. He wondered if he could ask Waya to teach him some during their sessions, or if that wouldn’t count as being necessary for his apprenticeship.

For now, however, he had to worry about finding someone to tutor.

“What?” Harry asked, still not fully understanding what he was being told. Hermione rolled her eyes at him.

“Which part of this is complicated, Harry? Ron and I just decided that we’re better off being friends,” she repeated, concisely. Harry cast a confused look from her to Ron.

“But...why? You just got together.” He decided it best not to mention the intense jealousy and romantic tension the two had been sporting for each other since fourth year that had been so obvious even Harry had picked up on it.

Hermione gave a little sigh.

“I suppose the simplest answer is that it’s different now. During the war, I think everything felt so amplified. There were so many times when our lives were in danger, and it just intensified every emotion. But now, our priorities aren’t just getting out alive anymore and it just...” she looked at Ron with a soft expression. “It changes things, you know?”

Harry couldn’t help but be reminded of what Ginny had said during their talk.

“Yeah, mate, and it...well, ‘Mione says it was like an experiment, right? We had feelings for each other, so we gave it a go and...well, it didn’t work out the way we thought.”

“But...do you still? Have feelings for each other?” asked Harry. Hermione and Ron looked at each other, exchanging some kind of communication through their eyes that was lost on Harry.

“We’ve been through a lot together,” Hermione said, in a voice that was suddenly gentle. “We all have. And I will always love Ron, just like I will always love you, Harry. But it’s the three of us. I think it was always meant to be the three of us.”

Harry looked at Ron, waiting for him to confirm or deny this.

“What she said,” Ron affirmed, and then grinned widely. “Besides, after a few more months, she would’ve lost her patience and killed me anyway.”

Hermione protested and swatted at him and Ron laughed and batted her away and Harry felt a sudden lightness in his head.

He gave Ron a sheepish look and said, “I suppose now is a good time to tell you about me and Ginny, then.”

i've been looking sad in all the nicest places

Chapter Summary

“I mentioned what I’d read in your book about Muggle symbolism being related to wand trees and he told me that that was a lot more common than many people realized, that a lot of Muggle ideas on imagery have their roots in magic. And it reminded me of some books on Magical Botany I had read when I was young, about the use of flowers in potions and about what they represent in magical culture. I know a lot about Magical Botany actually, and it had me thinking, what if Muggle symbolism of flowers was similar?”

Violet was looking at him with a smile on her face and an expression that Draco could only understand as proud.

“You’re really interested in this, aren’t you?”

Draco nodded, slowly.

“You’re quite the surprise, Draco Malfoy, you know that?”

He offered her a smile in return. “I hope you mean that in a good way.”

Chapter Notes

Hi all! I know the last chapter was super short, so here's a long one to make up for it! Thanks for reading, let me know what you think <3

chapter title is from the song I Don't Wanna Live Forever by ZAYN and Taylor Swift



 Poppy

 Hot Springs - Siberian Larkspur



Draco walked through the empty hallway with a tightly wound knot in his stomach. This was a mostly unoccupied part of the castle—he supposed that was why their meeting space had been chosen here, as the true nature of his apprenticeship would have to remain a secret.

If he's been less nervous, maybe he would've noticed how odd the corridor was, even for Hogwarts. There were no windows; the hall was lit with high-hanging torches, charmed to keep their flames burning at all times. There were also no paintings, which was unusual for Hogwarts, where most walls were covered with portraits of various figures from magical history.

As it were, though, Draco was far too preoccupied to wonder about the strange qualities of the hallway he was walking down. Tonight was his first meeting with Ollivander, and he didn't know what to expect. He still didn't understand why Ollivander had agreed to mentor him, but he was overwhelmingly grateful that he had, so he didn't want to mess up and make him change his mind.

When he reached the door of the classroom at the end of the hall, he paused and closed his eyes for a moment. He thought of Luna in the dungeons, her smile after he had healed her, and the way Ollivander had looked at him, with a curious expression in his bright eyes. Draco took a deep breath and opened the door.

Ollivander was seated in a low chair, his frail-looking hands delicately turning a wand over as he examined it. At the sound of the door opening, he looked up and a small smile crossed his face when he saw Draco.

"Welcome, my boy. Do come in," Ollivander gestured to a seat across from him and Draco obediently crossed the room and sat, his hands in his lap and his back up straight. His tense posture didn't escape Ollivander's notice.

"You're nervous," he stated. It was clearly not meant as a question, but Draco nodded anyway.

“Yes, sir,” he said.

“Don’t be,” Ollivander said, gently. “I wouldn’t have agreed to take you on if I didn’t believe in your abilities and in your talent. You’re a bright young man, Mr Malfoy. You’ve made some bad decisions in your life, no question,” –Draco felt a coldness spike at his gut at these words —“but I believe strongly in man’s tremendous capability for change.”

“You’re too kind, sir,” Draco said, feeling that same sort of hollowness he’d felt at Luna and Violet’s words. Ollivander regarded him.

“You do not believe yourself worthy of forgiveness.” This was also not a question. Draco looked down, not able to meet the wandmaker’s eyes.

“Very well. A different question, then. You wish to study wandlore?”

Draco looked up, and nodded.

“Why?”

“Because it’s the root of it all. We study various types of magic; branches, categories, but wandlore is more than that because it’s more than magic; it’s the vessel through which our magic is channelled. We’re dependent on our wands, they’re as much a part of us as our magic is.”

Ollivander smiled at him, causing even more wrinkles to appear in his worn face.

“A good answer. Tell me, what do you already know about wandlore?”

“I know about the woods used for wands, about how Bowtruckles guard wand trees. I know many of them were used in ancient Egyptian and Celtic magic. I know many Muggle beliefs about the symbolism of wand trees are actually linked to their magical properties,” he neglected to mention that he had only recently acquired this last bit of knowledge, thanks to Violet showing him a chapter on links between the Muggle and Wizarding world in her textbook.

Ollivander held up a hand, indicating for him to stop.

“May I see your wand?”

Draco felt his heart drop. He almost felt he would be insulting Ollivander by showing him the shoddy excuse for a wand he’d been using. Nevertheless, he withdrew it and handed it to the old wandmaker. Ollivander examined it for a long, agonizing minute or two.

“What were you told of this wand?” he finally asked.

“I beg your pardon, sir?” Draco asked, trying not to wince at the man’s furrowed eyebrows.

“Its wood, its core. What were you told?”

“Redwood, sir. Redwood and kneazle hair, fifteen inches. He said it was lucky,” Draco recited, finding himself once again mentally cursing the wandmaker that had sold it to him. To his surprise, Ollivander let out a bark-like laugh. Draco stared at him.

“Redwood doesn’t bring luck,” Ollivander said, shaking his head. “That’s an old superstition. Redwood wands are attracted to people who have the skill of always landing on their

feet, which others interpreted to mean they were lucky and ran to give credit to the wand. No, no, redwood doesn't bring good fortune, it is simply drawn towards people with the knack of snatching advantage from catastrophe."

Draco merely felt his heart sink even further down into his stomach.

"That doesn't really sound like me, sir."

Ollivander just chuckled, shocking him again.

"Well, my dear boy, that seems to be irrelevant here, as this isn't actually redwood."

"What?" Draco cried, looking from him to the wand.

"Redwood is in short supply and constant demand," Ollivander continued, calmly. "It has an excellent reputation and is a highly sought after wand wood. It is especially rare in Britain, since redwood trees are mostly found in North America. I'm afraid you've been swindled."

"Unbelievable," Draco muttered, shaking his head. "What is it then?"

"Come closer and take a look," Ollivander said, holding out the wand for Draco to see better. "Let this be your first lesson. You see the warm, reddish-brown tone? Feel how tough and durable it is? This is a hardwood. Redwood trees are softwoods, and their colour is a much richer, deeper red. Take a closer look at this. You're familiar with the woods, you said, can you tell what this is?"

Draco took his loathed wand into his hand and inspected it, feeling the material in his hand. Ollivander was right, of course, it was much sturdier than redwood should be. It had striping down it too, which woods had that again?

"It is walnut?" Draco asked. "No, no, wait, it's far too reddish for that. Mahogany?"

A smile lit up Ollivander's face.

"*Excellent*," he said, sounding delighted. "I do believe I am looking at Britain's next great wandmaker."

Draco's heart leapt out of his stomach and soared.

"What are you reading?" Violet asked, taking her usual seat beside Draco on the windowseat. Not wanting to get distracted, Draco simply held up the large book in order for her to see the title.

"*The Language of Flowers*? Draco, is that a Muggle book?"

Draco nodded, keeping his eyes trained on the page.

"Is there a reason you're reading a Muggle book about flowers?"

Realizing she was not going to give up on a conversation just because he was ignoring her, Draco finally put the book down and looked up at her.

“I had my first meeting with Ollivander last night,” he said in a low voice. After a lot of deliberation, he had decided that Violet was going to be the one person he told about the true nature of his apprenticeship. He knew that they were new friends, but he felt so inexplicably close to her and he couldn’t stop thinking about how she had trusted him with intimate details about her life and her family, so he made the decision to trust her back. So far, he wasn’t regretting it.

“How was it?” she asked, her volume going down to match his.

“Fascinating. I mentioned what I’d read in your book about Muggle symbolism being related to wand trees and he told me that it was a lot more common than people realized, the amount of Muggle ideas on imagery having their roots in magic. And it reminded me of some books on magical botany I had read when I was young, about the use of flowers in potions and about what they represent in magical culture. I know a lot about magical botany actually, and it had me wondering if Muggle symbolism of flowers was similar.”

Violet was looking at him with a smile on her face and an expression that Draco could only read as proud.

“You’re really interested in this, aren’t you?”

Draco nodded slowly.

“You’re quite the surprise, Draco Malfoy, you know that?”

He offered her a smile in return.

“I hope you mean that in a good way.”

A laugh bubbled out of her.

“Git. Get back to your flower book, I have homework to do.”

Draco didn’t need to be told twice, picking up his book and diving back in.

It was hours later when Violet let out a loud yawn and closed her own books.

“I’m tired, I think I’m going to go to bed.”

Draco looked up at her.

“Sleep well.”

“Thanks, Draco. Don’t stay up too late. The flowers can wait until tomorrow.”

“Yes, Mother,” he smiled at her.

“I don’t know why I bother,” she muttered, but she was smiling as she packed up her things and headed up to the girls’ dormitory.

Draco closed his book and looked around at the common room. It was empty; it had been for at least an hour now, aside from him and Violet.

His eyes fell upon the small, circular table that sat in the centre of the room, and the vase upon it. He hadn't mentioned it to Violet, but this had been another motivator for his research into flowers. He had been curious about the flowers since he first saw them and wondered why those particular ones had been chosen. He'd been hoping maybe the Muggle book would give him some more answers.

He walked over to the table and Summoned one of the desk chairs from under the staircases so he could sit by it. There had to be a reason for each choice, surely. Draco just didn't understand what those reasons were.

Draco was still sitting there staring at the flowers when the now-familiar sound of bricks clattering open shook him from his daze. His head snapped up and—of course—it was Potter. Who else? Of course Potter believed himself immune to the rules, of course Potter wouldn't find a problem with being out of bounds after midnight, why would he?

Draco chose to look back at the flowers, but his meditative state had been interrupted. He was now too aware of the crease in his brow, how pursed his lips were, the taste of blood inside his mouth as he chewed on the inside of his cheek. His expression of frustration must have been quite obvious, because Potter decided to comment on it.

"What's got your wand in a knot?"

"What's it to you, Potter?" Draco shot back, with none of the old bite he used to have. Potter shrugged, like he couldn't possibly care less.

"Just don't see a reason to be glaring at flowers."

Draco sighed and leaned back in his chair.

"I'm not *glaring*, I'm simply..." he trailed off. Alright. He was glaring. A little. He hadn't *meant* to. And it was rude of Potter to even say so, who was he to come barging in and accusing Draco of *glaring*?

Potter just *looked* at him, eyebrows raised, green eyes wide and expectant.

"The selection...I cannot fathom it," Draco finally said, giving the flowers another withering look. "I wouldn't be surprised if Dumbledore was behind it, he was always fond of this sort of illustrative exhibition."

Potter's face suddenly seemed to go hard, his jaw set like he was clenching his teeth.

"Dumbledore's dead," he said, shortly, his voice clearly betraying hints of anger. Draco sighed again. Merlin, but Potter was exhausting, wasn't he?

"Yes, I know. His portrait is in the Headmistress's office. He gives lots of advice. The rumour is it was his idea to have everyone in our year housed together."

"Oh," Potter said, starting to walk towards the middle of the room, towards Draco. "Why would you think this was his idea?"

“Haven’t I just said?” Draco sighed impatiently, though he really hadn’t, and it wasn’t like he had anywhere else to be anyway.

Potter shrugged again, and Draco was slightly surprised to see him walk over to the desks and pick up a chair to bring over. Draco just watched him. The way Potter did things was odd sometimes. Why walk over to the desks and drag a chair all the way over when he could have just levitated it over?

Draco didn’t ask, though, as Potter got back to the round little table and sat down in his new chair.

“They’re just the House colours, aren’t they?”

Draco looked at him, the brightness of his green eyes causing a little jolt in his stomach that he had learned to expect around Potter, but still hadn’t gotten used to.

“Do you know anything about the symbolism of flowers?” he asked, careful that he not sound insulting in his questioning.

“Should I?” asked Potter, giving the flowers another look, as if they were going to suddenly reveal their secrets to him.

“I suppose not,” Draco said, slowly, “if you’ve never read about botany.”

Potter snorted and raised his eyebrows.

“Really, Malfoy? When would I have read about *botany*?”

Draco shrugged and looked down, feeling a combination of irritation and embarrassment. *He* had read about botany when he was a child. He had been fascinated. He had been fascinated about everything; everything had been so exciting to him when he was young. He had wanted to know everything there was to know.

For a while, at least.

“Well, I have,” he said, somewhat defensively. “And that’s why I can tell you that they’re not just *House colours*, you daft Gryffindork. Flowers are a way of communicating. They have a language.”

Potter didn’t even react to the insult, instead patiently asking, “So what are these ones saying?”

Draco looked at him, trying to figure out if this was some sort of trick, if Potter’s friends were lying in wait for the perfect moment to jump out and hex him. But Potter simply looked curious, his face so open, every emotion written so plainly on his face it made Draco feel vulnerable just *looking* at him.

He sighed. Alright, he supposed he could *briefly* explain basic magical floral symbolism to Potter. He had, after all, just amassed a lot of new information about the Muggle side of things as well. Perhaps it would help him understand more if he talked about it.

“Very well, let’s look at the poppy then.”

“What about it?” asked Potter, his eyes on the delicate red flower.

“There are *hundreds* of red flowers to choose from if they simply wanted to represent Gryffindor’s colours, why not choose something else? A rose? A carnation? A tulip?”

Potter chewed down on his lip in thought. Draco’s eyes flickered to watch the movement before he refocused.

“Poppies are used in a variety of potions,” Draco continued, when it was clear Potter wasn’t going to say anything. “Opium poppies are even used in Muggle medicine,” at this, Potter’s head snapped up, as though shocked Draco could possibly know anything about Muggles. Draco chose to ignore this, partly because merely a short time ago, his surprise would have been completely founded.

“Throughout time, people interpreted flowers differently. Witches and wizards in East Asia believed the poppy to be a deeply romantic flower, and recommended couples keep them in their homes to magically strengthen their passion for one another. However, in Ancient Greece and Egypt, poppies represented sleep and death, due to the effect of opium. Many ancient wizards used to believe poppies were the key to resurrection. Potioneers ended up overdosing on the opium in the poppies in their efforts to create an elixir that could bring people back from the dead.”

He glanced at Potter, who looked entirely captivated by Draco’s explanation, and quickly averted his eyes back to the vase. He felt his voice subconsciously lower.

“But after the first Great Muggle War, poppies became symbolic of remembrance. Red ones specifically became intrinsically linked to death and the memories of soldiers who died in the war,” he trailed off rather pathetically, realizing that *war* was the last subject he should be bringing up around Harry bloody Potter, but Potter didn’t tense up or storm off the way he’d been seen doing when the war was brought up.

Instead, he was staring at the flower in the vase like he was seeing it for the first time.

“What about the other ones?” he asked in a quiet voice.

“Hmm?” Draco leaned forward in an effort to hear better.

“The other flowers. What do they mean?”

Draco allowed himself a smirk.

“Well, well, well, a Gryffindor not entirely consumed with his own House only?”

Potter rolled his eyes and Draco was secretly glad for it. There had to remain *something* familiar in this otherwise otherworldly conversation they were having. They were, after all, a Death Eater and the Chosen One, and Draco couldn’t escape the nagging feeling that this wasn’t just going to end as a simple conversation about botanical imagery.

“Go on then,” Potter encouraged, looking at Draco keenly. “What about the other ones?”

Draco let out a resigned sigh. Well, he’d been agonizing over the choices of flowers by himself for ages now; what was the harm in saying it aloud, especially if someone was eager to listen?

"I don't understand why they chose marigold for the Hufflepuffs," he said, firmly. "Surely a clearer choice would be the sunflower, happiness and good fortune and all that Hufflepuff drivel. Or even a black-eyed Susan, representative of the justice Hufflepuffs are apparently *pursuing*," he gestured up to the enormous tapestries, and was rather pleased when Potter snorted.

"But marigold," Draco murmured, looking at the flower with a mixture of frustration and fondness. It *was* rather beautiful after all. "Another symbol of remembrance of the dead. Celebration of the dead." At the look on Potter's face, he hastened to clarify, "No, no, not a celebration of their *death*, but rather of their life. You know, there is a popular Mexican cultural event where they gather to rejoice the lives of their departed loved ones. Day of the Dead, it's called. It's quite lovely, in fact. Both wizards and Muggles celebrate it."

Potter was giving him that odd, curious look again, so Draco deemed it advisable to press on.

"But it was also a symbol of despair and grief. The loss of love. It was a flower of pain. Its connection with death also led to people believing it had the power to resurrect the dead, though not as much as the poppy. Some people thought the marigold to be a positive flower, too. Medieval wizards used to carry them as love charms when they wanted to attract someone new. They were said to represent winning someone's affection through dedication and hard work. But the marigold's association with death was too strong for it to truly escape."

"I think that makes sense for Hufflepuff," Potter finally spoke, in a quiet but firm voice. "Celebrating the lives of the dead, I mean. Overcoming hardship, dealing with sadness in a positive way. I reckon Hufflepuffs are the strongest lot of all of us sometimes."

Draco watched him, but Potter's eyes remained on the flowers. Draco found it an odd thing to say; he never thought that Potter was especially close with any Hufflepuffs. None of his immediate group were Hufflepuffs, not that Draco knew of. He wanted desperately to know, but he knew Potter would clam up and disappear if he pried, so he contained his curiosity for the moment.

The Siberian larkspur then," he said, and Potter seemed to return from a moment of reverie. He gave an apologetic smile, as if he had interrupted a professor mid-lecture.

"Sorry, yeah, go on."

Draco eyed him unsure if he was being made fun of. But Potter seemed genuinely interested, so he carried on.

"Well, for starters, it's quite beautiful."

"That's the blue one, right?"

"Precisely. Blue flowers are quite rare in nature, but the Siberian larkspur is one of them. The first known use of larkspur flowers was to chase away scorpions and other such pests. Both Muggles and wizards used it for this reason, although wizards also believed that larkspur could protect them from ghosts and spirits."

"Can it?" asked Potter. Draco smiled a little.

"Not really. That was mostly an old wives' tale. It worked on the scorpions though. Moreover, it *is* an important ingredient in advanced potion making, however only the most

experienced Potions Masters can use it, as if it's not handled properly, it can be poisonous. It has a wonderful scent though," Draco paused as Potter leaned over to sniff the flower and then nodded in agreement.

"According to Greek mythology, when Ajax was not gifted Achilles' armour, which was meant to symbolize the title of the bravest warrior, he threw himself upon his own sword, and the small blue larkspurs grew out of the places of his blood drops," Draco paused again here, unsure if he wanted to voice his thoughts. But Potter was looking up at him, waiting, and, well, he was already this far in.

"I don't know if they're the right choice either. For Ravenclaw, that is. I suppose, to a certain extent, yes, they represent dignity, dedication, protection against danger, and again—remembering loved ones who have passed. But, more notably, they are symbols of cheerfulness and openness. They're for the romantically adventurous, people looking for new experiences; creative, positive people."

"I don't know about that," Potter mused, looking at the blue flower with an expression of newfound appreciation. "Everything you just said describes Luna perfectly, and she's a Ravenclaw."

Draco blinked and considered this. Then his shoulders slumped.

"I don't know," he said. "Perhaps I don't really understand the Houses as well as I thought."

Potter simply stared at him, his green eyes large and unreadable. Draco sat under his gaze until he felt his skin start to crawl. Swiftly, he straightened up.

"Well, Potter, I hope this has been educational for you, I'm off to bed now," he said, reverting back to the typical lofty tone he used with Potter. He rose from his chair and was about to turn and head towards the staircase to the boys' dormitories when Potter's hand shot out and grabbed his arm. His reflexes really were—Draco felt himself internally cringe—lightning sharp.

"Wait," said Potter, redundantly.

"What?" Draco asked, impatiently. Managing a civil conversation with Potter was one thing; he drew the line at physical contact.

"You didn't explain Slytherin's," Potter said, pointedly gesturing towards the green rose.

"I wasn't aware I owed you an explanation," Draco sneered back.

"Oh, come off it, Malfoy," said Potter, sounding irritated. "Just tell me."

Draco sighed.

"Do you really want to know?"

"Yes."

Draco wasn't sure when he started ceding to Potter's demands without bitterly arguing the whole way down, but he supposed he would have to analyse this new change in his behaviour at a later time, and for now, he took his seat again and scowled at the pale green flower.

“It makes the least amount of sense,” he was put off, and he knew he sounded it too. “Green flowers are even more unusual than blue, but nonetheless, a *rose* for Slytherin,” he barked out a sharp laugh and ignored the apprehensive look Potter threw his way. “Well, you wanted an explanation. Roses typically mean love, but green specifically symbolises peace and tranquillity. Traditionally, they’re spiritual flowers, and they’re popularly used in fertility potions. They’re meant to represent *life*. Life, and hope, and growth, and rejuvenation. *New beginnings*,” he snarled so viciously that Potter looked up at him, alarmed, but Draco didn’t allow him to interrupt. “Balance, stability, peace of mind, cheerfulness, self-respect, *a sign of good tidings*.”

“What’s wrong with that?” asked Potter, and Draco had half a mind to hex him.

“What’s *wrong* with that?” Draco demanded, feeling his voice getting shriller but now unable to stop himself. “It’s utter *rubbish* is what’s wrong with it! Every other House—remembrance of the dead, celebration of the dead, tribute to the dead, but Slytherin? *New beginnings*.” Draco could feel the heat rising in his chest, the anger he had worked so hard on repressing for months bubbling up inside of him. “Because obviously we couldn’t give a toss about the dead, right? Because we didn’t lose *anyone*, right? Balance? Peace? Who are they trying to fool? *Stability*? Slytherin House has never been so unstable in all of Hogwarts history. It’s *bollocks*, growth and joy and fucking *self-respect*!”

Potter did not interrupt once, nor did he try to reign in Draco’s outburst. He simply sat there, watching and waiting as Draco ranted. When he was finally done, breathing heavily and looking down at the floor, Potter spoke softly.

“Well, maybe it’s not about what the Houses are, but what they should be.”

Draco looked at him. He wasn’t looking back; instead, he was looking off into nothingness, the moonlight reflecting gently in his bright emerald eyes. His face was worn—like that of a man who had fought a war—but still so young—like that of a boy—and Draco suddenly felt a strange urge to tuck him away somewhere warm and safe and hide him from the world.

“You said they’re odd choices. Maybe they’re meant to send us a message, like the Sorting Hat. The poppy could be telling Gryffindor that we can’t keep chasing after the dead. They’re gone. We have to acknowledge that we can’t change that, we can’t bring them back. And the Hufflepuffs. They’re always cheering everyone else up, making sure everyone else is taken care of. Maybe the marigold is a way of telling them that they’re allowed to grieve as well. That they are allowed to feel the pain of everyone we lost. Maybe the larkspur is saying that Ravenclaws shouldn’t close themselves off, that they should be willing to take chances and risk getting hurt instead of saying safe inside their comfort zone.”

Draco didn’t even realize how spellbound he was by Potter’s speech until he heard himself ask in a raspy voice,

“And Slytherin?”

Potter’s eyes finally met his, and he offered a sad sort of smile.

“Peace. Growth. *New beginnings*. It’s offering you a chance. Slytherin doesn’t have to be defined by the mistakes its members have made in the past. It’s a new day. And clearly, it has a good feeling about what Slytherin is going to become.”

“It does?” Draco asked, suddenly feeling rather stupid.

“You said it yourself,” Potter said, shrugging as if it was all very simple and clear. “Hope. Self-respect. A sign of good tidings. Sounds pretty good to me.”

Draco just stared at him, awestruck, as Potter rose from his chair. He hovered for a moment, as though steeling himself to do something.

“Thanks for telling me about the flowers,” he finally said. “It was interesting.”

“Right. Uh, certainly, Potter,” Draco managed, mentally cursing himself for his stammering.

“Well. Night, Draco,” said Potter, and then he bounded up the left-side staircase and disappeared from sight.

All that rung in Draco’s head was Potter saying his given name aloud, something Draco could only remember him doing once before—while taunting Voldemort moments before he killed him.

we all learn to make mistakes and run from them

Chapter Summary

Unfortunately for Harry, news of Ron and Hermione's breakup did little to distract the students of Hogwarts from the far more popular news of his and Ginny's. While Ron and Hermione had certainly gotten their fair share of attention over the summer—especially in all those articles about “The Golden Trio”—their fame was newfound, while Harry remained a household name.

Suddenly, everyone wanted to know what had happened between him and Ginny, and when he refused to give out any details, people were more than happy to make up their own.

“Honestly, this is getting ridiculous,” Hermione commented at dinner, regarding the latest rumour that Ginny had cheated on Harry during the war.

Ron nodded emphatically. “Nadine Bellemore tried to confront Ginny about it. Threw a hex at her and everything.”

“What?” Harry demanded. “Is Ginny alright?”

Ron just grinned. “Please, mate, this is Ginny we’re talking about. Bellemore ended up on the receiving end of her famous Bat-Bogey Hex. Should teach people to stay away from my sister.”

Chapter Notes

Hi friends! I know this is very late and I'm so sorry! These past two, three weeks have been seriously deadly for me; I'm behind on schoolwork and real life work and my apartment's a mess, it's just a disaster. ANYWAY, I wanted to say a big thank you for your comments on the last chapter (and all of them, to be honest). I keep meaning to get around to replying to them all, but as stated previously, I'm terrible at time management and my life is collapsing around me, so I'm sorry but I love you all and thank you thank you thank you for all the kind comments!! Enjoy this chapter, I'll try to be on time with the next one!

chapter title is from the song Misguided Ghosts by Paramore

Harry had to admit, he much preferred Ron and Hermione post-break up. The first week was admittedly a little awkward between the two of them, but after that, they slipped easily back into old rhythms, and Harry felt like he really had his friends back.

He knew it was selfish to feel glad they had split, but the two of them seemed better off for it as well. Ron was brighter, laughing more, and Hermione seemed less agitated, and she wasn't

nagging at them about homework quite as much. Harry finally asked Hermione about it one night in their common room, while Ron was busy with his Auror apprenticeship.

“Are you and Ron alright, Hermione?” he asked, watching her from his armchair. Hermione’s quill didn’t pause for a second, and she didn’t look up from her parchment.

“Of course we are, Harry, why wouldn’t we be?”

“I mean it, Hermione, I’m not going to find him attacked by a flock of birds, am I?”

Hermione looked up to shoot a glare his way, but with a sigh, she set her quill down.

“I know it seems really sudden,” she said. “But it’s like all the pieces came into focus and let us see the bigger picture. Your first love is...well, it’s powerful. And it holds on to you. And I think, during the war, we needed that. I needed to hold onto this hope that Ron would come back, when he left. And I think he needed to hold on to the hope that I was waiting for him. And in the Battle, it felt like...it felt like the culmination of our entire lives here at Hogwarts. It felt like it was the apex, we threw everything into it. I fought the hardest I’ve ever fought during the Battle. So...it only makes sense that I would love just as hard, doesn’t it? But that was the peak for me and Ron, I think, that was the most it’s ever going to be. I think we both felt like...like it was the end of the world. One way or another, we felt like everything was going to *end* that night. But it didn’t. Life went on. And I think we realized that our feelings for each other were never going to be as strong as they were on that one night.”

Harry must have still looked confused, because Hermione sighed again and gave him a small smile.

“You know, I first started thinking about it when we got back from Australia,” she said, looking off into the distance with a fond expression on her face. “My parents were very upset with me, of course, but somewhere in the midst of all the scolding, my mother took me aside and asked me about Ron. She said she could tell that something had happened, something had changed between us. I asked her about Dad, about how she had known she was in love with him. She told me that being in love with someone wasn’t what made you want to spend your life with them. She said that there were thousands of kinds of love, and only by letting yourself feel as much of it as you can will you figure out the differences.”

“That kind of sounds like what Dumbledore always used to say,” Harry said, without thinking. When Hermione gave him a curious look, he elaborated, “He always talked about the power of love and I always related it to my mother, and her love for me. But there were other kinds of love that saved me, other kinds of love that had that power.”

Hermione smiled, warmly, and reached out to squeeze his hand.

“So you and Ron definitely didn’t work out then?” he asked again, just to be sure. She rolled her eyes.

“You’ve seen us argue. How long did you really think we were going to last?”

Unfortunately for Harry, the news of Ron and Hermione’s breakup did little to distract the students of Hogwarts from the much bigger news of his and Ginny’s. While Ron and Hermione had certainly gotten their fair share of attention over the summer—especially in all of those articles

about “the Golden Trio”—their fame was newfound, while Harry was a household name. Suddenly, everyone wanted to know what had happened between him and Ginny, and when he refused to give out any details, people were more than happy to make up their own.

“Honestly, this is getting ridiculous,” Hermione commented at dinner, regarding the latest rumour that Ginny had cheated on Harry during the war. Ron nodded emphatically.

“Nadine Bellmore tried to confront Ginny about it. Threw a hex at her and everything.”

“What?” Harry demanded. “Is Ginny alright?”

Ron just grinned.

“Please, mate, this is Ginny we’re talking about. Bellmore simply became the latest victim of Ginny’s ever-famous Bat-Bogey Hex. Should teach people to stay away from my sister.”

Harry sighed in relief. The last thing he wanted was to be the reason people began attacking his friends again.

“People really have no idea what they’re talking about,” Hermione said, sounding irritated. “As if Ginny would ever cheat. I overheard two Ravenclaws saying it was because she was jealous about all the *attention* Harry was getting after the war. They’ll make up any preposterous reason they like just to have something to talk about.”

Harry couldn’t help but notice that both of those rumours seemed to have Ginny in the blame. He had hoped their breakup wouldn’t have negative repercussions for her, but it looked like that was a pointless wish.

“It will blow over,” Hermione said in a comforting tone to Harry, clearly noticing his worried expression. “Have you found someone to tutor yet?”

She clearly thought changing the subject to Harry’s apprenticeship would ease his mind, and Harry appreciated the sentiment, but he only felt his worry increase.

“No,” he groaned. “I can’t think of anyone. The only person I considered was Dennis Creevey, but he’s too young for Advanced Defence. Ashworth said I should try to find someone who’s finished their O.W.L.s.”

“Hmm,” Hermione’s bushy eyebrows drew in thought. “What about Demelza Robins? You know her from Quidditch, right?”

Harry brightened for a moment, but then was interrupted by Ron making a loud sound and shaking his head. He and Hermione waited for him to finish chewing and swallowing so he could elaborate. He let out a burp and then grinned at Hermione, apologetically.

“Sorry,” he said, sheepishly. “Anyway, Demelza’s the Quidditch captain this year, because Ginny turned it down. You could try, but I don’t know if she’ll have time for extra lessons, you know.”

“Ah, bugger, you’re right,” Harry sighed. “Why did Ginny turn it down anyway? Isn’t she hoping to get recruited this year?”

“Yeah, but you know Ginny. She loves bossing people around, but only when it’s not actually her job,” Rob shrugged.

“*Anyway*,” Hermione interjected. “I’ll try and think of someone for you, but keep an open mind, alright? Don’t just shoot everyone down.”

“Alright, alright,” Harry agreed. “Maybe I’ll ask Slughorn if I can make an announcement in class or something.”

He dreaded the idea, but he knew showing Hermione he was serious about it would get her off his back. As expected, Hermione looked satisfied with this answer, and resumed eating her dinner.

“Hey, Harry, I almost forgot, do you wanna come to Hogsmeade with me this weekend?” asked Ron, as he began loading his plate with seconds.

“Er, sure, how come?”

Ron gave a little bit of a sigh.

“I want to go to the Ollivander’s branch down there.”

Hermione looked up.

“Is your wand still causing you problems?”

“Not *problems*, exactly, it’s just...well, it’s not as good as my old one.” Ron reached into his robe pocket to withdraw his wand and let it clatter onto the table.

“I told you to get one this summer, when I got mine,” Hermione said, in a chastising tone.

“Hang on, why did you need a new wand?” Harry asked, looking at Hermione.

“Because mine and Ron’s got taken by the Snatchers, remember? I’d been using Bellatrix’s wand,” she shuddered slightly as she said Bellatrix’s name.

“And this is Pettigrew’s,” Ron nodded towards the wand now sitting beside his plate. Harry looked down at it, and saw that it was indeed much darker and shorter than Ron’s old one.

“I’d forgotten,” he said. Turning to Hermione, he asked, “Where’d you get yours? Ollivander?”

Hermione shook his head.

“Ollivander was closed for most of the summer. He only opened in time for the new first years to get their wands. I got mine from an Australian wandmaker while we were down there.”

She withdrew her wand and twirled it between her fingers. Harry observed it, wondering how he hadn’t noticed Hermione had had a new wand this entire time. It was rather handsome, as wands went, a light brown colour with white, Celtic designs above the handle.

“It’s elm and mermaid hair,” Hermione elaborated. “I was sceptical at first, because you know everyone in Britain considers Ollivander the best, but it’s been working wonderfully.”

“Did you hear Ollivander might be retiring?” Ron chimed in. Harry looked at him, surprised.

“What? Why?” he asked.

“I’m not surprised,” Hermione said, sagely. “After everything he went through in the war.”

“But...who will take over for him?” questioned Harry.

“That’s what I was wondering,” inserted Ron. “The Ollivanders have been wandmakers for generation, but Ollivander didn’t have any kids. His Hogsmeade branch is handled by a wandkeeper, but I don’t think he actually makes any of the wands.”

“Well, I’m glad you’re going to get a wand before he retires,” Hermione said to Ron. “I’m sure he’s thought about his successor, perhaps he’s trained someone to replace him?”

“Yeah, maybe,” Harry said, but he wasn’t really mollified.

In today’s Potions, they were finishing the Energy Tonic they’d been working on all month. Harry felt guilt swell up inside him as Slughorn talked about how they’d been checking in on their potions each week, knowing full well he hadn’t checked on it once.

Malfoy didn’t say anything about it, though, so Harry simply retrieved the remaining ingredients they needed and sat quietly in his chair, watching Malfoy work. It was rather calming; Malfoy worked with a certain rhythm, and it almost seemed like he wasn’t following the instructions but rather his own intuition.

Until suddenly he paused. Harry watched as his back stiffened and he cast a quick glance around the room.

“What is it, Malfoy?” he asked, as there was clearly something going on. Malfoy turned his head to look at him and, to Harry’s utmost surprise, he gave him a small smirk.

“Can you keep a secret, Potter?” he asked.

“Er...what?” said Harry, too confused to answer properly. Since when did he and Malfoy share secrets?

Malfoy merely rolled his eyes, and discreetly withdrew a miniscule glass vial from his bag. Reaching across the table, he picked up a large jar labelled *Dried Snakeberry* and began to transfer some of the dark red powder into the vial.

“Malfoy, what are you doing?” asked Harry, slightly alarmed now.

“Relax, Potter, I’m not plotting anything evil,” said Malfoy in a low tone. “I don’t suppose you know what snakeberry is, do you?”

“No,” Harry replied, though Malfoy surely knew that he had no idea what snakeberry was.

“It’s a funny ingredient, found only in Bolivia. Consume it fresh and it’s deadly, however if you dry it and then boil it, it can boost your energy, hence its use in our potion. *But*,” his voice

turned to a whisper and he paused dramatically, “if you *snort* the dry powder, it serves as a *marvellous* psychedelic.”

Harry stared at him. Surely he was joking. But then, Malfoy making a joke, especially around Harry, seemed even more outlandish than Malfoy consuming psychedelics.

“I never thought you the type,” he said, honestly. Malfoy scowled at this.

“Yes, well, you don’t *know* me, Potter.”

Harry didn’t have a reply for this, so he stayed silent and watched Malfoy stopper the vial and slip it back into his bag. After leaning over to stir the potion, Malfoy sighed.

“It isn’t for me,” he confessed.

“Hmm?” said Harry, pretending he hadn’t heard.

“The snakeberry. It’s not for me,” Malfoy repeated, a gentle pink flush rising on his pale neck.

“Who’s it for then?”

“Theo,” Malfoy spoke so quietly that Harry had to lean forward to hear him. “It’s his birthday this Saturday.”

Harry looked at him curiously. There was no reason for Malfoy to be telling him this, but it felt like the conversation they’d had over the flowers in the common room the other day had sparked some unusual sort of truce between them. For a moment, Harry wondered if this was an experiment, if Malfoy was testing him with something small to see whether or not he could be trusted.

“Oh. Tell him happy birthday,” he said, though there was also no reason for him to be wishing Theodore Nott a happy birthday. “And don’t worry, I won’t tell Slughorn.”

Malfoy looked at him with those intense silvery eyes as if appraising him, and Harry was just about to start squirming under his gaze when Malfoy gave him a short nod and turned his attention back to their potion.

i was looking for a dose of actuality

Chapter Summary

“Experimenting with cores is a vital part of your education in wandmaking. Were you thinking of any in particular?” Ollivander turned his wide, silvery gaze to Draco.

“Well,” Draco said, slowly. “I was thinking about the trees used for wand woods and how many of them are significant in Muggle culture as well.”

He paused, wondering how to best explain his thought process.

“My friend, Violet, takes Muggle Studies,” he said, “and she was telling me about how Muggles often intuitively recognize signs of magic, even if they don’t necessarily understand that it’s magic they’re recognizing. It’s something the Wizard-Muggle Relations office is constantly trying to better understand. So I thought, instead of magical creatures and artefacts, would it be possible to use cores that have magical qualities but are visible and accessible to Muggles as well?”

Ollivander’s eyes were twinkling.

Chapter Notes

chapter title is from the song Reverberate by Telehope

Draco still felt his cheeks burning in embarrassment over the events of two nights ago. He and Theo had gotten sufficiently high on the dried snakeroot for Theo’s birthday, and—in his delirium—Draco had kissed him.

Theo had frozen, and when Draco finally pulled away, he had excused himself and fled to the bathroom, leaving Draco sitting there and staring after him. The next day, once they were both fully sober, Theo quietly told Draco that perhaps he had misunderstood something, that he wasn’t interested in him like that.

His insides burning, Draco simply chuckled and blamed it on the snakeberry, assuring him that he too only thought of them as friends. Theo seemed quite relieved to hear that and smiled at Draco before walking away again, leaving Draco feeling utterly humiliated for the rest of the day. Unfortunately for him, that feeling seemed to have carried over into today as well.

Even the snow that had softly fallen overnight and settled gently to blanket the castle grounds couldn’t cheer him up, and Christmastime had always been his favourite time of year. When he arrived at the Great Hall for breakfast, he saw that the elves had put up the Christmas

decorations during the night, leaving the room sparkling and beautiful, and still he could not enjoy it.

He parked himself next to Violet at the Slytherin table and immediately reached for the fried potatoes. Violet gave him a look, her thick eyebrows flying upwards.

“You’re voluntarily eating starch for breakfast? Who are you and what have you done to Draco Malfoy?”

From across the table, Daphne snickered, and Violet looked up to beam at her. Draco, on the other hand, scowled.

“Starch is a dietary necessity,” he mumbled, parroting what Violet told him almost every single morning.

“Is it because it’s almost Christmas? Do tell me you properly stuff yourself during Christmas dinner, at least,” Violet persisted.

“Of course I do,” replied Draco, neatly cutting a tiny potato in half. “The elves at the Manor always prepare an enormous feast.”

As soon as the words left his mouth, he wished he could take them back. He had forgotten that, of course, it wasn’t like that anymore. None of the last few Christmases had followed their old traditions.

Daphne and Violet both seemed to realize he was having some sort of internal crisis, as they mercifully changed the subject.

“Are you going to Hogsmeade this weekend?” Daphne asked, turning her head to Violet with an elegant toss of her blonde hair. Violet nodded.

“Yes, I need to get some new parchment and ink. Are you?”

“I was thinking about it,” said Daphne.

“You should! We could go by the Three Broomsticks for a warm drink. It’s been ages since I’ve had a Butterbeer,” suggested Violet. Daphne considered this and then smiled.

“That sounds lovely.”

“Great,” Violet said, and from right beside her, Draco noticed her olive complexion slightly reddening. “What about you, Draco?”

“Hmm? Oh, Hogsmeade. No, I’m not planning on going,” Draco responded, mentally debating whether he should go for some toast as well.

“Why not?”

“I’ve been promising Luna I would go visit the Thestrals in the Forest with her for weeks now. Apparently, the babies’ wings are fully grown and they’re starting to fly now, so I told her I’d join her to visit them this weekend.”

“Luna Lovegood?” Daphne asked, her eyebrows furrowing.

“Yes,” Draco replied, already prepared for her to make a ‘Loony’ Lovegood joke, and knowing full well he couldn’t be defensive, as he’d said far worse about the Ravenclaw in the past himself.

“That’s so fascinating. Does she visit them a lot?”

Draco blinked, wondering if Daphne was being sarcastic. After a moment of silence, Daphne regarded him with a confused expression.

“What? Is it a secret or something?”

“No, No, I just...” Draco stared at her. “You don’t...you don’t think she’s crazy?”

Daphne frowned at him.

“She’s rather eccentric, and more than a little bit odd, but I don’t think she’s crazy, no.”

Draco continued to stare at her until Violet elbowed him in the gut, snorting.

“Don’t mind him, Daphne. He’s been hanging out with the wrong sort of Slytherins for too long.”

Daphne smirked at this.

“Ah, yes. How could I forget, having roomed with Pansy Parkinson for seven long years?”

Violet shuddered.

“Don’t remind me.”

Draco still felt quite perplexed by the conversation unfolding in front of him, but he was starting to feel like maybe that was a good thing. Because Daphne was right—yes, Luna was eccentric and extremely odd, but she had been perhaps the only non-Slytherin student to have shown genuine kindness to Draco, and Merlin knew he didn’t deserve it.

His train of thought was interrupted by the swift and, as always, wondrous arrival of the owls. Draco had always loved the sight of all the owls coming as they delivered the mail, their magnificent wings spread wide, with various packages and letters swinging from their talons. The sheer number of them was impressive on its own, and after years of always receiving letters and packages from home, Draco would get a warm, excited feeling in his stomach every time he saw the birds.

His own eagle owl landed gracefully in front of him, right beside his plate of potatoes, a beige envelope tied to her foot.

“Hello, sweetheart,” he murmured to her, giving her a scratch and offering her a piece of fried potato, which she grabbed with her beak right away, before reaching for his letter. He knew it was from his mother, but there was still something comforting about unfolding the letter and seeing her familiar elegant handwriting.

My dearest Draco,

I was delighted to receive your letter. I am pleased to hear you are making the most of your final year at Hogwarts. I am sure you will continue to excel in your classes, as you always have.

Draco felt his stomach shifting guiltily. He hadn't confessed his wand troubles to his mother, nor how they had been negatively impacting his school performance. He had told himself it was because he didn't want her to worry, but truthfully, he was more than a little embarrassed. Narcissa had never been one to push him about doing well in his classes—that had always been Lucius—but he just couldn't bear to disappoint her.

The Manor is undergoing more renovations, as you might have expected. Polkey and Cobby have been working day and night, however there is more Dark Magic embedded into the foundation of the Manor than we had predicted, so the process is taking far longer than I initially thought. Perhaps it would be better if you were to remain at Hogwarts over Christmas this year, my darling. I am aching to see you, however the magic in the Manor is highly unpredictable at this time, and I wouldn't want it to affect you. I am looking forward to seeing you over Easter, and for you to see all of the progress we have made with the Manor so far, hopefully even more so by then.

All of my love,

Mother

Draco felt his heart sink lower and lower into his stomach with every word he read. It must have shown on his face, because Violet immediately looked concerned.

"Is everything alright, Draco?"

He quickly folded up the letter and gave Violet a small smile.

"Yes, of course. I won't be going back to the Manor for Christmas this year, that's all."

"Oh," said Violet, a look of understanding crossing her face. "I'm sorry."

"It's quite alright," replied Draco, but he allowed her to reach over and squeeze his hand.

"You're welcome to come and have Christmas dinner with us," she said. "Laurel will be back for the holidays as well."

“That’s very kind of you,” he said. “But I must decline. Christmas is a time for family, I wouldn’t want to intrude.”

“Well, the invitation is open if you change your mind,” Violet insisted.

“Thank you,” said Draco, tucking the letter into his bag and giving Elpis another little scratch before sending her off to the Hogwarts owlery.

He couldn’t deny that he was disappointed. He had been looking forward to escaping the disgusted glares and muttered insults that followed him around Hogwarts like a particularly irritating ghost. He wanted to see his mother and enjoy the Christmas meal prepared by the elves and spend time up in his room reading without worrying about who was around him at all times.

He knew it wouldn’t have been a typical Christmas like the ones he’d had as a child, what without Lucius at the head of the table and only two elves left to prepare the meal, but nonetheless, Draco felt down at the prospect of missing it. He had never spent Christmas at Hogwarts—in fact, he had mercilessly mocked the students that did, loudly proclaiming that they had had no one who wanted them back home.

And now it was he that was staying at Hogwarts, he that wasn’t welcome back at home. Of course, he couldn’t be mad at his mother, he knew she was only thinking of his best interests. He couldn’t imagine it was easy for her either, trying to purge the Manor of Dark Magic with only two elves to help her. Truthfully, he wasn’t sure if it was even possible to remove all the Dark Magic from the Manor, as plenty of it had existed long before the Dark Lord had claimed the house as his headquarters.

But Narcissa was fiercely determined to complete her mission, and Draco knew better than to get in her way once she had her mind set on something.

So, he was spending Christmas at Hogwarts this year. He tried not to feel too bitter about it; after all, there were plenty of students who had no parents to go back to at all.

Some of those students had lost their parents *to* Draco’s own family members, so really, he had no right feeling bad for himself at all. Feeling oddly angry and appropriately guilty, Draco bid Violet and Daphne a good day and quickly left the Slytherin table, before Violet could start to figure out what was going on in his head.

Draco had to admit that the baby Thestrals were quite remarkable. Luna had described them as ‘sweet,’ which he wasn’t sure he agreed with, but there was certainly something special about them. Their wings were far bigger than their bodies, and they flapped them excitedly when Luna leaned forward to scratch under their scaly necks. They were able to get a few feet up in the air, but their sense of balance wasn’t fully developed, so they always tumbled to the ground after a few seconds.

“Are you headed home for Christmas, Draco?” Luna asked, smiling in that dreamy way of hers as one of the babies got back to its feet after a fall.

“Not this year,” he replied, watching cautiously as another baby Thestral bit at his shoelaces playfully. “Mother is trying to clear out the Manor of Dark Magic.”

Luna nodded wisely.

“There were an awful lot of Wrackspurts when I was there.”

Draco decided against asking what Wrackspurts were.

“What about you?” he asked, instead.

“Oh, yes,” said Luna. “I’ll be with Dad, and then we’re both going to the Burrow for Christmas dinner.”

Draco considered this and decided to ask this time.

“What’s the Burrow?”

“It’s the Weasleys’ house. They always have big Christmas celebrations. I was very excited to be invited.”

Draco could picture it: a whole gang of red-headed Weasleys gathered around a too-small table, tossing presents at each other and laughing. He immediately felt the urge to make fun of them, to insult, to lash out. But it was accompanied by a stab of jealousy. They would all be together, and he would remain at Hogwarts, alone.

“Hogwarts Christmases are lovely, though,” Luna gave him a warm smile and looked at him in that uncomfortable way of hers, that made him feel like she could see right through him. “The feast is always delicious, and the castle is so peaceful and quiet.”

“Thank you, Luna,” said Draco, realizing how deeply he meant it only once the words left his mouth. “And thank you for inviting me to visit the Thestrals. They really are magnificent.”

Draco watched the baby Thestrals run up to their mothers, who leaned down and nuzzled them, their glossy dark skin almost shining.

He’d always been slightly fearful of Thestrals, especially once he had been able to see them. He was old enough to know that the myths about them being omens of death were nothing more than superstitions, but they certainly *looked* like they could be omens of death. They were frightening in their reality, the way that just seeing them was a reminder of death, of all the deaths one had witnessed.

But seeing the babies changed that. They were clumsy and excitable and their mothers were patient and caring with them. They were just creatures, living their lives, at peace with the enormous burden the Wizarding World had placed upon them.

Before he could change his mind, Draco stepped forward and reached out a hand, gently stroking the silky mane of a nearby young male. It let out a low breath and pushed its head further into Draco’s palm.

“Oh, he likes you!” Luna cried, delightedly, and Draco couldn’t help but smile.

He looked at the Thestral, who was staring up at him with his unblinking milky white eyes. Slowly, he let his thin black eyelids shut over his eyes.

“That means he trusts you,” added Luna. Draco looked from her back to the beast, eyes closed and leaning into Draco’s touch, and he felt a surge of *something* in his stomach, something warm and painful, an ache that buried inside him and seemed to take root.

With another look over at Luna, who was petting one of the mothers, he realized it just might be affection.

“I was wondering how you decided on those three cores,” Draco began tentatively.

“Well, my boy, as you may know, my father and grandfather used various cores, as do wandmakers around the world—cores such as kneazle whiskers or mermaid hair or Thunderbird tail feather—and they can certainly make for suitable wands,” Ollivander gazed off into the distance, something that Draco had by now realized meant he was reminiscing. “In my studies, I found unicorn hair, phoenix feather, and dragon heartstring to produce the most reliable wands with plenty of variety within them. But every wandmaker is different; we all have our own spin on how produce wands. Alejandro Allegretto, a wonderful wandmaker in Argentina, prizes fairy wings and dragon scales over other cores. Irene Dandridge, an exceptionally talented young wandmaker in Australia, makes wands out of mermaid hair, billywig stingers, and snallygaster heartstring, which make for very different wands and she does an excellent job.”

Draco made a mental note to heavily research more wandmakers around the world.

“Experimenting with cores is a vital part of your education in wandmaking. Were you thinking of any in particular?” Ollivander turned his wide, silvery gaze to Draco.

“Well,” Draco said, slowly. “I was thinking about the trees used for wand woods and how many of them are significant in Muggle culture as well.”

He paused, wondering how to best explain his thought process.

“My friend, Violet, takes Muggle Studies,” he said, “and she was telling me about how Muggles often intuitively recognize signs of magic, even if they don’t necessarily understand that it’s magic they’re recognizing. It’s something the Wizard-Muggle Relations office is constantly trying to better understand. So I thought, instead of magical creatures and artefacts, would it be possible to use cores that have magical qualities but are visible and accessible to Muggles as well?”

Ollivander’s eyes were twinkling.

“What do you look so concentrated over?” Violet said, dropping her bag on the seat across from him with a loud thunk and taking the next seat over for herself.

“I’m making a preliminary list of possible wand cores,” Draco responded, chewing on his lip.

“Ooh!” Violet leaned forward, interestedly. “What have you got so far?”

Draco set aside his quill and looked down at his list. Considering he had been working on it for an hour, it was rather short.

“Python scales, meteor dust, black cat whiskers, owl feathers, volcanic ash, spider silk, bee wings, and raven feathers.”

“Oh, I want to know how the raven feathers work out! My Patronus is a raven,” Violet said. “How are you going to test them?”

“I’m going to give Ollivander my list next time we meet and he’s going to procure samples for me to try. He’s already taught me a lot about crafting the wand around the core in order to properly bind it to the wood. We’ve practiced with his traditional cores, but he wants me to experiment and find my own way of making them. I can’t give you too many details because of all the secrecy spells, but that’s the basic gist of it.”

“That sounds amazing, Draco,” Violet said, with a warm smile. “Good luck with the new cores. I think it’s really cool that you’re considering objects with roles in both the Muggle and Wizarding worlds.”

“Thanks,” Draco said, sincerely. He greatly valued Violet’s opinion and was tremendously grateful he had her to confide in.

“What about you?” he asked. “How’s your apprenticeship going?”

“Oh, it’s been wonderful!” she exclaimed. “Peter even said he was going to take my proposals to his boss.”

“That’s fantastic, congratulations!”

Draco didn’t fully understand everything Violet told him about her apprenticeship, but he knew she was studying under a Squib, Peter Duncan—which was a surprise in and of itself, because Draco hadn’t known Squibs could even see Hogwarts—who worked for the Wizard-Muggle Relations office in the Ministry, and that she wanted to create more opportunities for Squib integration into Wizarding society.

Looking at Violet excitedly gushing across the table from him, his best friend with a passion for combining Wizarding and Muggle culture, he thought to himself: *if only Father could see me now.*

this is my home, this is my city; if i go down, you're coming with me

Chapter Summary

Harry sat back in his seat and watched Malfoy slowly stir the potion—two turns counter-clockwise, then four clockwise, then repeat six times. He felt somewhat useless, but he had tried to help, even offering to stir, but Malfoy had slapped his hand away dismissively.

He supposed it was for the best, since Malfoy clearly had a better handle on what they were doing. And he let Harry prepare some of the ingredients, like sifting through the iguana blood or dicing the pixie-weed. Sometimes he'd criticize him for how he was doing it, but Harry came to realize it wasn't out of malice but rather a side effect of how perfectionistic Malfoy really was. Sometimes he'd even be...kind, if Harry could even believe it.

Chapter Notes

apologies for the late post, the holidays have got me in a major writing slump!! hope you enjoy the chapter, late as it may be!

chapter title is from the song Familia by Nicki Minaj, Anuel Aa, & Bantu

Ever since the news of his and Ginny's breakup had spread, Harry had been confronted on almost a daily basis by girls sneaking up on him in order to ask him out. He had started carrying his Invisibility Cloak around with him again and sweeping it over himself whenever he heard a group of girls approaching. It was becoming increasingly difficult, however, as some of them had figured out his schedule and would wait for him outside of his classes.

"Honestly, Harry, you can ask them to leave you alone," Hermione tutted as he pulled off his Cloak in the Transfiguration classroom.

"That never works," Harry grumbled.

"At least there haven't been any love potions yet," said Hermione, brightly.

"Don't remind me," groaned Ron.

"Ah, yes, the Romilda Vane incident of sixth year," Sophie nodded, wisely. The three of them stared at her.

"How'd you know about that?" Ron asked, and Sophie rolled her eyes at him.

"Please, everyone knows about that. Nadine spread it across the entire House. She and Romilda had a bet over whether or not it would work. Of course, Nadine only won on a

technicality.”

Ron gaped at her.

Since they shared two classes with her, the three of them had become friendlier with Sophie, no one more so than Hermione. Harry found he quite liked her; she was sharp enough to keep up with Hermione, which often kept her from getting frustrated with him and Ron, who weren’t always on the ball, but she was also very funny. Besides, she worked well to balance any remaining awkwardness that happened to arrive between Hermione and Ron. As time went on, though, their relationship was shifting back to what it had been like prior to their getting together—Hermione getting mildly irritated at Ron for always putting off his schoolwork and Ron making ridiculous but often sensible excuses.

“Harry, if you want, I can play fake annoying girlfriend whenever anyone bothers you,” Sophie offered Harry a flash of a grin. Despite his annoyance at his current situation, Harry snickered.

Sophie batted her eyelashes at him and Ron choked on a cough.

Harry sat back in his seat and watched Malfoy slowly stir the potion—two turns counter-clockwise, then four clockwise, and then repeat six times. He felt somewhat useless, but he had *tried* to help, even offering to stir, but Malfoy had slapped his hand away dismissively.

He supposed it was for the best, since Malfoy clearly had a better handle on what they were doing. He let Harry prepare some of the ingredients, like sifting through the iguana blood or dicing the pixiweed. Sometimes he’d criticize him for how he was doing it, but Harry came to realize it wasn’t out of malice, but rather a side effect of how perfectionistic Malfoy really was. Sometimes he’d even be...*kind*, dare Harry believe it.

Just a minute ago, Harry had been cutting the Biting Nettle and Malfoy had looked at the plant, then looked up at Harry, and said, in a patient but somewhat tired voice, “Potter, what is that you’re cutting?”

“Er...the Biting Nettle?” Harry had responded, a question in his voice.

“And why, do you think, is it *called* Biting Nettle?”

Harry had just blinked at hi, but before he could say anything, he felt a sharp pain suddenly rise up in his fingers and on his palms, like he’d been...like he’d been *bitten* by thousands of tiny, angry leaves.

“Ow,” Harry had winced, holding up his hands to get a good look. “Blimey!”

Small red marks were appearing all over his palms, thousands of miniscule little bite marks. Harry had looked up to find that Malfoy was halfway across the room at the storage cabinet, returning swiftly with a bowl that he placed down on their work table.

“Put your hands in that,” he’d instructed. Harry had peered into the bowl and found the thick, viscous liquid rather familiar—murtlap essence. He’d sunken his hands into the bowl and sighed loudly in relief as the pain ebbed away. He had looked at Malfoy, to thank him, but he was

already back to work on the potion, pulling on his pair of dragonhide gloves before finishing Harry's work of dicing the Biting Nettle.

"Are you daydreaming again, Potter?" Malfoy's voice brought Harry back to the present, and Harry blinked rapidly and looked at him, trying to pretend he had been paying attention. Malfoy snorted, clearly not fooled.

"If it wouldn't be too much trouble, oh, Chosen One," he said, his eyebrows raised and his voice dripping with sarcasm. "Could you pass the crushed stag horns? And, for the love of Circe, do *not* touch them without wiping your hands."

Harry grinned, withdrawing his hands from the murtlap essence and wiping them haphazardly on his robes. Malfoy gave him a disgusted look, but Harry ignored it. He was amazed at how much better his hands were feeling.

"Hey, they're not scarred at all," he said, happily, looking at his palms.

"Of course not, you soaked them within thirty seconds of the bites," Malfoy said, as if it were the most obvious thing in the world. "The stag horns, Potter."

Harry dutifully reached over and grabbed a jar of dark brown powder, which he assumed was what Malfoy wanted. He was proven right when Malfoy took the bowl without criticizing him.

"My Patronus is a stag," he said, randomly, watching as Malfoy poured the powder into the potion, which fizzled and let out some white steam."

"Yes, Potter, I know that. Everyone in the Wizarding World knows that," Malfoy still sounded tired, but there was a hint of amusement in his voice as well.

"Oh," said Harry, feeling rather foolish. "Well, what's yours?"

Malfoy mumbled something, reaching for the stirring rod.

"What?" asked Harry, noticing that Malfoy's face was becoming somewhat pink.

"I said I don't know," he snapped. "I've never produced a corporeal Patronus."

"Oh," said Harry. He hadn't even thought of that. He should have, seeing as how Patronuses were considered highly advanced magic and many fully grown-adults were incapable of casting one.

Before he realized what he was saying, though, he had blurted out, "I can teach you, if you want."

"I don't need your charity, Potter," Malfoy sneered.

"It's not charity," Harry responded instantly. "You'd be doing me a favour."

"Oh?" Malfoy's voice was still hard and cold. "And how's that?"

"I'm apprenticing to be a professor," Harry said, easily. It surprised him how willing he suddenly was to share all of this personal information, with Draco Malfoy, no less.

Malfoy looked at him, and Harry was pleased to see he looked more confused than angry.

“I thought you wanted to be an Auror,” he said. Harry shook his head.

“Nope. Professor. And Ashworth wants me to find someone to tutor, as practice.”

Malfoy’s face seemed to betray an internal conflict. He looked curious, but at the same time, he *was* Malfoy, and it wouldn’t be like him to go this long without an insult.

“Find someone else, Potter, I’m not an experiment.”

“I know that, Malfoy,” Harry snapped back. “The problem is I don’t know how much I’d be helping anyone else.”

“Why not?”

“Well, I...” Harry paused, trying to think of a good way to phrase it so as not to give Malfoy more of a reason to taunt him. “I need to know if I’m a good teacher. And some...some people might not be...honest about that.”

Malfoy snorted, his attention once again on their potion, which had turned thick and chocolatey.

“Your fan club won’t care about what you’re teaching, more about who’s doing the teaching.”

“Exactly,” Harry confirmed with a grimace.

“Alright, Potter,” Malfoy said. “You can teach me.”

“Really?” asked Harry, disbelievingly.

“Sure,” Malfoy shrugged, and then gave Harry a devious look. “But you’ll owe me.”

“I—what?”

“You heard me. You said it yourself, I’m doing you a favour here. So, I let you teach me, and then you’ll owe me.”

Harry narrowed his eyes at him, trying to figure out what scheme he was up to. But then Hermione’s voice rang out in his head, reminding him to give the Slytherins a second chance, and after all, he *was* in need of someone to tutor, so he decided to throw caution to the wind.

“Deal.”

“Malfoy? You picked *Malfoy*?” Ron looked both incredulous and disgusted.

“I know, I know, it’s mad, but he agreed, and there *is* stuff I could teach him!”

“Provided he doesn’t hex you the second you’re alone in a room together,” mumbled Ron and Harry shot him a look.

“I think I’ve proven I can take on Malfoy in a duel.”

“Fair point,” Ron grinned. It seemed a simple jab at Malfoy was enough to prove to Ron that Harry had not in fact lost his marbles. Harry looked over to Hermione, who had been suspiciously silent.

“Hermione?” he asked. “What do you think?”

Hermione furrowed her eyebrows, looking thoughtful.

“I’m not sure,” she finally said, looking like the words had been painful to say. “He does seem different this year, but...with your history, I just don’t know. You’ve always been able to get under each other’s skin.”

Harry sighed. She was right; he knew she was right, but there wasn’t much to be done about it anymore. Malfoy had been a lot easier to work with recently, but that wasn’t any sort of guarantee that he would be responsive to Harry’s instruction. In Potions, he had the upper hand, since he was the one who knew what he would be doing. This would be different, and Harry knew Malfoy wasn’t going to be an easy student.

He started to wonder if this was a good idea after all.

“I think that’s an *excellent* idea, Harry!” Ashworth exclaimed. “He’ll have to work around his apprenticeship, of course, but Mr Malfoy is an incredibly dedicated student from what I’ve seen, so I’m sure that won’t be a problem. How often do you plan to meet?”

“Er, I dunno,” Harry admitted, a bit thrown by Ashworth’s enthusiasm. “I guess we’ll decide after we see how the first meeting goes.”

Wayla, who was joining them for today’s session, was watching Harry carefully, in almost the same way Dumbledore used to, like he could sense something about him, though the eyes that trained him now were a dark chestnut brown instead of a twinkling blue.

“To be honest,” Harry sighed, thinking he may as well admit it. “Malfoy and I don’t exactly have the friendliest history.”

Wayla’s stern expression didn’t change, but Ashworth gave a small chuckle.

“I’m well aware of your turbulent relationship,” he said, in an assuring voice. “Professor McGonagall has given me the highlights.”

Harry couldn’t help but feel embarrassed. The war was one thing, but the previous six years of mostly petty antics between him and Malfoy were another. He had always seen Malfoy as somewhat of a nemesis, but in comparison to everything that had happened last year, it all seemed sort of childish.

“It will be up to the two of you to conduct yourselves professionally, of course,” Ashworth was saying, “however I think the additional challenge would be good for you. Teaching isn’t easy, and you’re never going to have a classroom consisting of only well-behaving, respectful pupils.”

Wayla nodded at this.

“My father always told me,” he said, in his rough voice, “the two most crucial elements to being a good teacher, much like being an efficient leader, are patience and kindness.”

Well, thought Harry, Malfoy was definitely going to test his patience.

where all the boys at with emotional stability?

Chapter Summary

Draco stretched out in his bed and sat up, feeling warm. He allowed himself a minute to wake up fully and get his brain working properly before drawing his bedcurtains and hopping out of bed. He dressed quickly and head into the bathroom to wash up. He found himself excited to get to breakfast. He supposed it was simply a force of habit, it was as if his body knew it was Christmas Day and started preparing him for it.

Of course, this Christmas would be very different. He wouldn't walk downstairs to find his parents waiting for him with several beautifully wrapped presents. He wouldn't levitate the silver star to sit on top of the tree, or eat the magnificent Christmas feast prepared by the elves, or listen to his mother sing along to Celestina Warbeck on the wireless.

As he walked down the stairs from the dormitories, he tried to keep an open mind. He still felt a warm, happy sort of feeling in his stomach, and he was determined to make the most of this Christmas, however untraditional it was.

Chapter Notes

hello all,
once again, I must apologize for the lateness of this chapter. I'm returning home in four days and hopefully then will have more time to dedicate to writing. that being said, this chapter is a little longer than the past few so I hope that somewhat makes up for it.

quick note:

Draco's eagle owl, Elpis, is named after the Greek personification and spirit of hope.

chapter title is from the song GUY.exe by Superfruit

Draco had never seen the castle so empty. He had been expecting it to be, of course, but the reality of how quiet the halls were, of how sad the Great Hall looked with only a smattering of students dispersed around its long House tables, hadn't really hit Draco until he arrived for breakfast.

Having never spent Christmas at Hogwarts before, Draco didn't have anything to compare it to, but if he had to guess, he would suppose there were more students staying at the castle than in previous years, for no reason other than the war having taken many of their family members from them. Draco could only hope that those students who felt in necessary to take justice into their own hands—which they did by aiming hexes at Draco's back—had been on that morning's Hogwarts Express.

He began surveying the Slytherin table in what he believed to be a futile effort to find someone to sit with for breakfast. His eyes landed upon Theo, who was looking down at his plate rather morosely. The two hadn't spoken much since the very embarrassing snakeweed incident on Theo's birthday, but he was still Draco's friend and he felt bad about just up and ignoring him simply because of an awkward moment.

So he walked over and plopped his bag down, taking a seat across from Theo, who looked up at the sound.

"Draco," his face transformed into a smile. "I forgot you were staying over Christmas."

"I forgot you were as well," Draco admitted, sheepishly. He felt a prickle of guilt wash over him. Of course Theo would be staying. Both of his parents were dead.

But Theo was still smiling.

"I need to go to Hogsmeade this week," Draco began carefully, monitoring Theo's face for his reaction. "I have to pick up a gift for Mother. Would you like to join me?"

He winced a bit, realizing again he had just brought up an insensitive topic by discussing his mother, but the gentle smile remained on Theo's face. Maybe Draco was walking on eggshells for no reason.

"I would love to. I should get something for my grandmother as well."

The tension sufficiently relieved, Draco felt his shoulders relax and he speared a chunk of fruit with his fork.

"Are any of your roommates here over the holidays?" Theo asked, taking a small bite of toast. Draco began shaking his head, but then paused.

"Actually, yes, I think so. Tall bloke, sort of long, dark hair, bit of a bookworm. His trunk was still there this morning. River or Rivers or something."

"Oliver Rivers," Theo nodded, and at Draco's questioning look, followed up with, "He's in my History of Magic class. Quiet sort, bit of a swot but friendly enough."

Draco nodded as though he agreed, not that he had made a real effort to get to know his Ravenclaw roommates. They hadn't made much of an effort either, but he didn't mind. He much preferred being ignored to being hexed.

"What about yours?" he asked.

"Well, Blaise is gone, as you know. Two of the Hufflepuffs as well. Finch-Fletchley stayed."

Draco, who knew that Finch-Fletchley was a Muggleborn, didn't ask more. He could guess why Finch-Fletchley was staying, and he'd rather not have to say it out loud. A beat passed, where Theo and Draco chewed in silence and Draco felt his stomach twist uncomfortably.

"How is your apprenticeship going?" Theo asked. Draco hadn't told Theo the truth about his apprenticeship—he had only trusted that information with Violet—but he jumped at the opportunity to change the subject.

“Oh, it’s excellent. I didn’t expect it to be so engaging, nor did I expect to have as much choice in my instruction.”

The answer was vague, he knew, but at least this way, he remained honest.

“What about yours?”

“It’s...challenging,” Theo replied, slowly. “Whitewater is no joke.”

“No, I imagine he’s not,” said Draco. Gabriel Whitewater was one of the greatest Potioneers alive. Even Snape—who had always been notoriously hard to impress—spoke of him with great respect. Draco had been amazed McGonagall had gotten him to agree to mentor a student at all.

“But I suppose I shouldn’t complain about high expectations. He’s demanding, but there’s no doubt that it’s working.”

“What potions have you brewed?”

“He wanted me to practice making the most popular potions first, so it’s been a lot of Dreamless Sleep and Pepper-Up for the first few months, but recently we’ve been doing more complex ones. We’ve done the theory of Felix Felicis and actually brewed Veritaserum. We’re meant to start Polyjuice once the new year starts. We were meant to do Amortentia, but apparently we’ll have to brew that for our N.E.W.T.s so regular Potions class will cover it.”

Draco’s eyes were wide.

“Those are some highly controlled Potions.”

Theo shrugged.

“Many of the ingredients are regulated, so it’s not like I can brew them on my own, but I need to know how to brew them before I apply for a license for my own Apothecary.”

“So is that what you want to do after Hogwarts? Open an apothecary?” asked Draco. Theo nodded enthusiastically.

“Whitewater thinks it *unambitious*, but not everyone can study experimental potions. I think I would enjoy having a store, brewing for a living. It’s relaxing, potion-making.”

“I know what you mean,” Draco nodded. “I considered apprenticing in it too.”

“Why didn’t you?” Theo asked, and Draco could tell he’d been waiting to ask this question for a while now. “I always thought you would. I mean, you were always Snape’s favourite, always top of the class.”

“Second in the class,” Draco corrected with a smirk. “Don’t forget about Granger.”

Granger’s success in school had always infuriated Draco, especially since his father never let him forget how a Muggleborn had bested him in every subject, but now, he simply couldn’t find any anger left in him for her.

Theo took the point with a small smile of his own.

“Still,” he continued. “Transfiguration?”

Draco shifted in his seat a bit.

“It’s a good base subject,” he said, truthfully. “I know it’s not as specialized, but it lets me keep my options open. I just couldn’t see myself as a Potioneer, no matter how much I enjoy brewing.”

“That makes sense,” Theo nodded, and Draco felt himself release a small breath of relief. It was odd, this feeling—how uncomfortable he suddenly felt at telling even the most insignificant of lies. He’d never had a problem with it before, smoothly lying without a problem to get himself in or out of any situation, as necessary.

Maybe it was because Theo was a friend. Or maybe he had been spending too much time with Luna, and her blunt honesty was rubbing off on him. Or maybe—most likely—since he had lied so much in the past and it had all ended rather catastrophically, his subconscious was deciding not to let him do it anymore.

Draco just hoped his subconscious wouldn’t land him in more trouble.

The trip Draco and Theo took to Hogsmeade four days later turned out to be a success, despite a few moments of awkwardness. Theo had first wanted to visit Tomes & Scrolls to pick up a book for his grandmother. When Draco had spotted him walking towards the till with Bathilda Bagshot’s *Omens, Oracles, & the Goat*, he raised an eyebrow. Theo had just groaned.

“Don’t ask,” he had said, but elaborated anyway. “She’s recently gotten into Bagshot’s books. I don’t know why, but she’s been going on about ‘discovering every side of wizarding history.’”

Draco had shrugged, an amused expression on his face. However odd her taste in books may be, he was glad Theo’s grandmother seemed to be close enough to Theo to warrant gift-fiving. At least he wasn’t completely alone.

After that, Draco had agonized over a rack of scarves in Gladrags Wizardwear for over twenty minutes, weighing the benefits of silk versus cashmere, until Theo had had enough and simply grabbed one at random. As Draco had handed over the coins for it, he decided the right choice had been made—Mother would appreciate the softness of the silk, and the pale blue colour would match her eyes.

Theo had then insisted they stop at Honeydukes, which Draco rolled his eyes at, but he ended up finding a glass case of sugared violets that he was sure his mother would love and even bought a few Chocolate Frogs for himself. Theo, who had more than a single sweet tooth, practically had to be dragged out, carrying a rather large bag of various chocolates and sweets.

“What do you say then, old chap?” Theo said, clapping Draco on the back and squeezing his shoulder. “Fancy a Butterbeer?”

“Alright then,” Draco acquiesced, unsure if the pink in his cheeks could be blamed solely on the brisk weather. It was only after they had walked into the Three Broomsticks that Draco realized why this was actually a horrible idea.

Madam Rosmerta stood behind the bar, her curly hair bouncing as she talked animatedly with a patron. Draco froze in the doorway.

“Draco?” Theo looked back when he realized he was steps ahead. “You alright?”

“I don’t think we should—” he started in a low tone, and then Rosmerta’s face turned to them. Draco felt his body go rigid, his stomach lurching uncomfortably. Theo looked from him to Rosmerta, as the two stared at each other, and his face changed as realization dawned on him.

“Oh, Draco, I’m sorry, I...” he trailed off, seeming to be at a loss for what to say. Draco’s body was still unmoving and he felt his pulse quicken. He couldn’t identify his emotions; they were coming at him too fast. He knew there was guilt—there was always guilt. Remorse. Regret. Anger.

Rosmerta blinked a few times, but seemed to regain her composure much quicker. She cleared her throat and spoke in a clear voice, although not with as much ease as her usual demeanour.

“Do come in, boys, and close the door behind you; you’re letting the cold in.”

It took Draco a moment to process this, so Theo grabbed his wrist and yanked him forward until Draco found himself closer to the bar, almost face to face with the barmaid.

“Madam Rosmerta,” he began in a low tone, having absolutely no idea where he was going with this. “I am so...I really must...” he floundered.

Saying ‘sorry’ was not enough. Could one really just apologize for casting an Unforgivable? There was a reason they were called Unforgivable Curses after all; no apologies could possibly make up for them.

Rosmerta was looking at him apprehensively.

“I followed your trial in the papers,” she said quietly, so that only Draco could hear. “Are you back in school then?”

Draco nodded, feeling like his insides were being flattened.

“If you’d like me to leave, I would more than understand,” he said, looking down. There was a long moment where Rosmerta said nothing, until finally she made a tutting sound.

“Nonsense,” she said, suddenly sounding more like her usual self. “You’re just a boy. Go on then and have a seat, I’ll be right over to get your order.”

Draco looked up at her and saw her eyebrows furrowed and a look of something determined in her eyes. At a loss, Draco simply nodded and turned to follow Theo, who had found a table for them to sit at.

Draco found himself rather speechless, but luckily, Theo didn’t press. Rosmerta came around to get their orders and, since Draco was still having trouble forming words, Theo ordered two Butterbeers. As she walked away, Draco faced Theo properly.

“How can she do that?” he asked, his voice so low he could barely hear himself. “How can she just...forgive me?”

Theo's face was achingly sympathetic.

"I don't know if it's forgiveness, Draco," he said, softly. "I think it's...understanding."

"Understanding of what?"

Theo gave a little shrug with one shoulder.

"You were young," he said, like it was that simple, and Draco couldn't help but feel slightly incensed.

"That's no excuse," he retorts, bitterly. "You were young, too."

"I was in France. I was lucky."

Draco looked into Theo's eyes and felt his own gaze turn into a glare.

"Potter was young," he muttered. Theo paused, clearly not having expected that. His expression became somewhat more serious.

"Potter was told from a very young age what his role in the war would be, by adults he trusted, and he played that role. You did exactly the same."

"I was wrong," Draco spat, resentfully. He knew it wasn't Theo's fault of course. The trouble was there wasn't anyone he could adequately pin the blame onto. He had heard from Luna, from Ollivander even, that he couldn't help how he was raised. Ollivander's words constantly rang in his head: *'We are all products of our childhoods.'*

So his parents, surely, held some of the blame. They had raised him to believe in blood purity, to believe in the inferiority of Muggleborns, that Muggles had oppressed them for hundreds of years and it was time to finally fight back. Father had gone on and on about how Muggleborns were stealing magic from "real" wizards. Of course Draco had believed him. He had believed everything Father told him.

He had been in for a rude awakening later on.

But he couldn't put it all on his parents. He had been sixteen when he had taken the Dark Mark. Nearly of age. Practically an adult. And yes, it had been terrifying and painful and he had regretted it instantly, but he had still made the decision to do it.

It wasn't really your decision, a little voice in his head chimed in, unhelpfully. *Your father's reputation, his life, was on the line. His loyalty was questioned. He threatened you at wandpoint.*

It was all too complicated. Yes, of course he had been under pressure, of course he had been threatened, of course he had been worried about his parents. But it had been *his* choice to follow the Dark Lord's commands, even if he was only doing it to protect his parents. However reluctant he may have been, he was still the one who let Death Eaters into Hogwarts. He was directly responsible for all the lives those Death Eaters had then taken.

It was *his* fault.

"Yes," Theo said, his eyes watching Draco closely. "You were wrong. A lot of people were. But you went to trial. You were judged and you were sentenced and you are paying the price for it."

“I’m only on probation. I’m under McGonagall’s supervision, just like everyone else at Hogwarts,” Draco argued. “It isn’t like I’m in Azkaban.”

Theo paused again, and his expression softened.

“Do you think you deserve to be?” he asked, quietly.

Draco didn’t quite know the answer to that.

On Christmas morning, Draco woke up with his chest feeling much lighter than it had in months. He had spent the previous night wrapping his mother’s gifts before sending them off, along with a letter, with Elpis. The eagle owl had seemed quite happy to have something to deliver and Draco felt another little pinch of guilt. Elpis used to be rather busy, bringing Draco gifts or letters from his mother on an almost daily basis, and taking his replies back. This year had been different. Narcissa had been keeping herself busy with the great purging of the Manor, so Draco had only received a handful of letters since the beginning of term. Elpis still regularly visited Draco in the mornings when mail arrived, even if she wasn’t bringing him anything.

Draco stretched out in his bed and sat up, feeling warm. He allowed himself a minute to wake up fully and get his brain working properly before drawing his bedcurtains and hopping out of bed. He washed up and dressed quickly, finding himself excited to get to breakfast. He supposed it was simply a force of habit, it was as if his body knew it was Christmas Day and started preparing him for it.

Of course, this Christmas would be very different. He wouldn’t walk downstairs in the Manor to find his parents waiting for him with several beautifully wrapped presents. He wouldn’t levitate the silver star to sit on top of the tree, or eat the magnificent Christmas feast prepared by the elves, or listen to his mother sing along to Celestina Warbeck on the wireless.

As he walked down the stairs from the dormitories, he tried to keep an open mind. He still felt a warm, happy sort of feeling in his stomach, and he was determined to make the most of this Christmas, however untraditional it was.

He hopped off the last step and surveyed the common room. At first glance, it looked empty, but as he walked towards the brick wall where the entrance was hidden, he saw his Ravenclaw roommate—Oliver Rivers, he reminded himself—sitting in one of the grey armchairs, his legs tucked closely and a book in his hands. He looked up at the sound of Draco’s steps and made eye contact with him. Draco paused, unsure what to do, and then, smiled hesitantly.

“Merry Christmas,” he said. Rivers looked confused for a moment, but then smiled in return.

“Merry Christmas,” he replied, before turning back to his book. Draco decided this was a victory.

He arrived at breakfast a little bit late, so Theo was already seated and eating when he got to the Great Hall, and Draco walked over to sit across from him. Theo greeted him warmly, and immediately insisted he have some pigs in a blanket, despite his preference of avoiding heavy foods in the mornings.

Draco didn't argue, and loaded two of the little sausages onto his plate. He had only just started eating when the owls began flying in. It wasn't nearly the massive amount of birds that normally arrived in the mornings to deliver the mail, but Draco still found the sight impressive.

A screech owl landed heavily in front of Theo, dropping a rather large package by his plate. Theo looked quite amused and gave the owl a bit of toast before sending it off.

"It's from Grandmother," he said to Draco and began to unwrap it. While he was still ripping brown paper off, Elpis arrived as well, carrying a small parcel and an envelope. Draco reached out to untie her and offered her a piece of sausage, which she snatched up with her beak quickly. He stroked her soft feathers and murmured gently to her.

"Sorry you haven't been sent home much this year. I'll try to send more letters."

She hooted happily and flew off. Draco looked over at Theo, who had finally pulled his present loose from its wrapping. He was looking at it with great interest, but Draco couldn't see properly over all the dishes in the way.

"What is it?" he asked, and Theo raised it so he could get a proper look.

"A Wizard's Chess set," he replied, setting down the heavy board and picking up a pawn, made of a delicate blue stone of some sort. "It's made of celestite. Blue and white."

Draco held out a hand and Theo dropped the pawn into his palm so he could take a closer look.

"It's beautiful," he said, honestly.

"We could play a game later."

"If you want to lose your first game with a brand new set," Draco said, grinning. Theo laughed.

"Go on then, open yours."

Draco looked back in front of him, at the small parcel and letter that sat by his plate. He reached for the envelope, wanting to read his mother's letter first.

My dearest Draco,

Thank you, my love, for your wonderful gifts. The scarf was especially lovely;

I am proud to have raised a son with such excellent taste. The sugared violets

look delicious, I will have to stop myself from devouring them all tonight. I hope

you are well, dear. I am sorry we were not able to spend Christmas as a family

this year. I have been permitted to visit your father later tonight, escorted by a

group of Aurors. I requested that you be allowed to Floo to the Manor and join us,

but I was told it would be a violation of your probation. Codswallop, if you ask me. I will pass your love on to your father, of course. I know that things are complicated now, Draco, and I am so sorry we have let you down. Please know that I want only the best for you. You are the greatest treasure of my life, and I am honoured to be your mother. The last few years have been difficult, and it only recently occurred to me that we never adequately celebrated your seventeenth birthday, the summer before last. A wizard's seventeenth birthday is an important occasion, and yours passed in a time of war. This is the reason behind your Christmas gift this year. It is traditionally a gift given to a witch or wizard when they come of age, but since you didn't receive it then, here it is, more than a year and a half later. It is an heirloom that once belonged to my cousin, Regulus. I hope it suits you. You often remind me of him. Remember, my love, while you are certainly a Malfoy, you are also a Black.

All my love,

Mother

Draco blinked at the letter, surprised at how emotional his mother's words had him.

"You alright, Draco?" Theo asked, furrowing his eyebrows at him.

"Yeah," Draco nodded, swallowing hard to prevent any tears from sneaking up. He folded the letter and tucked it back into its envelope before reaching for the parcel and opening it up. He drew in a sharp breath as soon as he saw it.

It was a watch—of course—but it was a *stunning* watch, with a pale grey dial and shiny black hour and minute hands that glistened under the Christmas lights that hung in the air. Circling around the dial were miniscule planets and the moon, displaying their orbit. The band was black and, as Draco traced a finger across it, he determined it must have been made from dragonhide. It was in remarkably good shape for being an heirloom and Draco picked it up gently. The face was unusually thin and, as he touched the back lightly with his fingers, he could feel there was some sort of inscription. He turned it over and found the letters *R. A. B.* engraved into the silver.

"Regulus Black," he murmured to himself.

"Er, Draco?" Theo asked, prompting Draco to look up at him and see an unfamiliar owl standing on the table between them.

“Oh, hello,” he said to the owl, who had a long, slim box and a rolled up note tied to his talons. “Are you here for me?”

The owl hooted and Draco reached over to untie the parcel before the bird got too impatient. As soon as he was free, the owl took flight, before Draco even had the chance to offer him a treat.

“Who is that from?” Theo asked. Draco shrugged, looking at the box curiously.

“I haven’t a clue. I wasn’t expecting anything from anyone else.”

He unrolled the note and began to read.

Mr Malfoy,

I am certain that you will soon be more than capable of crafting your very own wand, however as I’ve become familiar with your magic over these past months, I took the liberty of making one for you. I know you have been struggling in classes with your current wand, and you are far too talented a wizard to be held back by an inefficient wand. As a small assignment for you over the holidays, try and determine the wood and core of this new wand. I will test you on it when our sessions resume.

Best,

Garrick Ollivander

Draco felt his breath catch in his throat. No. There was no way. But as he reached for the box, which he now saw looked exactly the same as wand boxes Ollivander sold his wands in, he could feel the anticipation rising up inside him. He opened the box tentatively and withdrew the wand from within.

He held it in his hand and felt a rush of magic run through him, as if it was connecting him to his new wand. The length was far more comfortable; at a quick glance, it looked to be about eleven inches. It was a warm colour, relatively light but not as pale as aspen or poplar. He supposed it could be sycamore, though it was a bit redder than a sycamore wand should be. He wouldn’t be able to figure out the core until he experimented with it a bit.

“Is that a new wand?” Theo asked, looking over curiously. Draco nodded, still overwhelmed at the generous gift he had just received.

“Who bought you a new wand?”

Draco looked up and found himself making a decision in his head within a second.

“Can I tell you something?” he asked, quietly. “Confidentially?”

Theo furrowed his eyebrows, clearly puzzled.

“Of course.”

“It’s about my apprenticeship. I’m not really studying Transfiguration.”

let a couple years water down how i'm feeling about you

Chapter Summary

“Yes, yes. The two used to be great friends, of course, as all the founders had been. It was only after Slytherin descended into a state of deep paranoia and madness about Muggleborns that the two had their infamous falling out. Thus began the centuries-long rivalry between the two Houses. I’m sure that two founders would be rather impressed that you and Draco have kept that spirit alive amongst yourselves.”

Waya had a smile playing at his lips, and Harry felt a hot flush creeping up his neck. It wasn’t only him and Malfoy. Gryffindor and Slytherin students simply hated each other on principle.

Didn’t they?

Chapter Notes

this is very late, I know. I have no excuses. just hope you enjoy <3

chapter title is from the song Back To You by Selena Gomez

Surprisingly enough, Harry felt sufficiently refreshed when he returned to Hogwarts in the new year. He hadn’t expected much when he had left with Ron for the Burrow, remembering the summer and how much time he had spent just sleeping. But it had turned out to be more enjoyable than he thought. Andromeda had brought Teddy around for Christmas dinner and the baby had delighted everyone by Metamorphasing his hair to match whoever was holding him.

Hermione had arrived after spending some time with her parents, and Luna and her father had been there for Christmas dinner. George had been in far better spirits than he had been that summer, and even joined the rest of them outside for a few games of Quidditch. January was set to have several Quidditch scouts arriving at Hogwarts for recruitments, so Ginny had insisted she get as much practice as she possibly could. Ron had just been happy to play again, and Harry had found he had rather missed flying—though the Weasley brooms didn’t have much on his old Firebolt.

Arriving back at Hogwarts still gave Harry the feeling of coming home, but it also had him feeling somewhat nervous. He had sent Malfoy an owl asking if they could have their first session the week term began again and had received a brief response in perfect cursive:

That would be acceptable.

D.M.

He supposed that was good enough, but he couldn't help but begin to doubt his decision once again. There was no love lost between him and Malfoy, and he wasn't completely sure that this endeavour wouldn't end in thrown hexes.

He tried to remind himself of what Waya had told him, about patience and kindness, but Harry had trouble associating Malfoy with either of those virtues.

Hermione had had a point—as she usually did—when she said that he and Malfoy always knew how to really get to each other. But they were managing to somewhat work together in their Potions classes, and Malfoy was nowhere near as snarky and insulting as Harry had previously known him to be. He could only hope that that attitude continued during their lessons together.

There was also the matter of finding a place for them to meet. Automatically, the Room of Requirement had popped into Harry's head, but he didn't even know if the Room had recovered. Even if it had, Malfoy probably wouldn't want to revisit a place where one of his closest friends died. Feeling a strange sense of guilt rise up in him, he decided he would ask Ashworth to help him find an empty classroom they could meet in.

He had also started thinking about what he would start their lessons off with. He knew he had promised to teach Malfoy how to cast a Patronus, but he didn't want to start with that, for fear that once Malfoy could do it, he'd have no reason to stick around and learn anymore. He also wasn't sure how much of what he had to teach would be new information to Malfoy.

After all, teaching the D.A. was one thing—they had been teenagers with an inefficient teacher—but Malfoy had fought through the war, just like Harry had, and had probably been taught a whole number of complex—and Dark—spells by his terrifying aunt Bellatrix.

All in all, Harry was probably thinking far too much about the lessons with Malfoy. He had asked Hermione for advice on which spells to start with, and she had given them one of those looks with her eyebrows furrowed and the corner of her mouth bending into a frown that made him feel like she was analysing him. She had also given him decent advice though, so at least he didn't feel completely unprepared about his upcoming challenge. And Malfoy certainly would be a challenge, just as Ashworth had said.

It seemed there was nothing more to be done about it, besides arrange a location and do his best not to allow his head to fill up with self-doubt. The former was certainly preferable to the latter, so he made sure to ask Ashworth about it at their first meeting after the holidays.

"I thought you might ask, Harry, so I've actually gone ahead and set up an area for you to practice and study."

At Harry's slight look of surprise, Ashworth smirked.

"Yes, don't forget that there will be studying involved, with *you* in charge of overseeing it."

Harry tried his best not to flush.

"Yes, sir, Hermione made sure I understood that loud and clear."

Ashworth grinned.

“I’m glad to hear it.”

“Which classroom is it?” Harry asked.

“It isn’t a classroom,” Ashworth gave him a little smirk. “It hasn’t been used in several years. You may remember it from your first year. Professor McGonagall has informed me of your adventure with the Philosopher’s Stone.” Harry’s eyes widened in surprise, memories of flying keys and a monstrous three-headed dog flashed in his brain.

“The third-floor corridor on the right-hand side,” he said, more as a statement than a question, but Ashworth nodded at him nonetheless.

“Good memory,” Waya said from the corner, where he’d been sitting silently until now. Harry grinned at him.

“Hard to forget seeing a face stick out of the back of someone’s head when you’re eleven, sir.”

“Yes, I’m sure it must be,” Waya said, with a gruff sort of laugh. “But please, save the sir for Professor Ashworth here.”

Ashworth rolled his eyes good-naturedly at him.

“You Americans are so casual.”

“And you Brits are so stiff,” Waya countered with a raised eyebrows, before turning to Harry. “I was thinking for the rest of this session, we could focus on something a little different.”

Harry was immediately interested. He had only had one session with Waya before the Christmas holidays, which had been about methods of instruction, and he was eager for more. Ashworth was an excellent professor, but Waya had such power in his magic, it could almost rival Dumbledore’s.

“I believe that’s my cue to leave,” Ashworth said with a warm smile. “I’ll be off grading papers. Waya, send a Patronus should you need anything.”

Waya nodded at him and Harry bid him goodbye as Ashworth walked out of the door, leaving the two of them in his office.

“How are you feeling about your upcoming lessons with Draco?” Waya asked, an unreadable expression on his face.

“I’m not sure,” said Harry, honestly. “I’ve made a list of spells and duelling strategies to start with, so I do feel prepared. I know Professor Ashworth is counting on me to do well, but Malfoy and I have a pretty rocky history. I don’t know if it’s enough just to know what I’m going to teach.”

Waya looked at him curiously.

“From what I hear, you and Draco have been rivals since your first year.”

“Gryffindor and Slytherin have the biggest House rivalry in the school,” Harry said, even though he knew that was a gross oversimplification of his relationship with Malfoy.

Waya smirked.

“Ah, yes. I found it very interesting how those two Houses have retained the famous enmity their respective founders had for each other.”

“Godric Gryffindor and Salazar Slytherin were enemies?” asked Harry. He vaguely remembered Hermione saying something about the two male Hogwarts founders hating each other, and that a fight between them was what drove Slytherin away from the school, and that Harry really ought to read *Hogwarts: A History*.

“Yes, yes. The two used to be great friends, of course, as all the founders had been. It was only after Slytherin descended into a state of deep paranoia and madness about Muggleborns that the two had their infamous falling out. Thus began the centuries-long rivalry between the two Houses. I’m sure the two founders would be rather impressed that you and Draco have kept that spirit alive amongst yourselves.”

Waya had a smile playing at his lips, and Harry felt a hot flush creeping up his neck. It wasn’t *only* him and Malfoy. Gryffindor and Slytherin students simply hated each other on principle. Didn’t they?

“We’re not at each other’s throats as much this year,” he said, defensively.

“I’m glad to hear it,” Waya said, his voice becoming serious again. “Nothing wrong with some healthy rivalry, of course, but I find it’s never good to pit children against each other at an early age.”

Harry paused and then shrugged.

“I guess not. It does get taken a little far sometimes, but that’s how it’s always been. Were the Houses at Ilvermorny different?”

Waya considered this for a long moment before answering.

“The Houses of Ilvermorny represent parts of a whole. Horned Serpent—the mind; Thunderbird—the soul; Wampus—the body; Pukwudgie—the heart. Each vitally important, but best results come from all parts working together. That isn’t to say there isn’t any competition between the Houses; there certainly is. But overall, students from different Houses are encouraged to cooperate with each other, share their skills, in order to create harmony and balance. Professor McGonagall has been pushing for stronger House unity here at Hogwarts as well this year, especially because of how Slytherin House has been suffering.”

Harry felt a prickle of annoyance at that. *Slytherin* was suffering? Everyone else stayed behind and fought in the Battle, while Slytherins had run. Slytherin was the House of the Death Eaters, the House of *Voldemort*.

And yes, while a voice—sounding suspiciously like Hermione’s—rang in the back of Harry’s head, reminding him that not *all* Slytherins had been Death Eaters, he still didn’t think he needed to feel sorry for them.

“All the Houses have been suffering,” he said, shortly. “We just fought a war.”

Waya gave him that look again, that made Harry feel as if he were about to be the victim of a Legilimens.

“That is without question. The students of Hogwarts are all recovering from the events of last year. However, it seems to me that—for Slytherin House—the war had not yet ended.”

Harry didn’t quite know what that meant.

i'm a little bit hard to love, i think i do that on purpose

Chapter Summary

"I know! Honestly, I wish more people were as curious as you. The wizarding world is so ignorant on all things Muggle, they think they're all quaint and stupid, but the fact that they've done so much without magic is madly impressive, in my opinion."

Silently, Draco agreed with her. He couldn't believe he had lived his entire life without knowing anything about the people he had been taught to hate. He had constantly been told they were useless and pathetic, and all the while they had been inventing ingenious substitutions to magic. He felt like he'd been lied to.

"Muggles don't know about magic because they're purposefully kept in the dark, but wizards don't know about Muggles because they choose not to," Violet was saying, more to herself than to Draco. "I bet none of them even know that the Americans have been to the moon."

"The Americans have what?" Draco burst out, staring at Violet.

Chapter Notes

the sessions with Harry and Draco have FINALLY begun!! yes, when I tagged this slow burn, I meant a S L O W B U R N. has anyone seen that Tumblr post where it's like "I want a Jane Austen level slow burn where they don't even touch pinkies until page 358" thats me. we're making moves tho !!

chapter title is from the song Hard To Love by The Mowgli's

"That's rather clever," Draco said without thinking and then immediately felt himself flush with embarrassment. He was much better about acknowledging the ingenuity of Muggles these days, but there was still this part of him that instinctively felt peculiar when he spoke these thoughts aloud.

Violet just waved her hand dismissively.

"I know! Honestly, I wish more people were as curious as you. The wizarding world is so ignorant on all things Muggle, they think they're all quaint and stupid, but the fact that they've done so much *without* magic is madly impressive, I think."

Silently, Draco agreed with her. He couldn't believe he had lived his entire life without knowing anything about the people he had been taught to hate. He had constantly been told they were useless and pathetic, and all the while they had been inventing ingenious substitutions to magic. He felt like he'd been lied to.

“Muggles don’t know about magic because they’re purposefully kept in the dark, but wizards don’t know about Muggles because they *choose* not to,” Violet was saying, more to the room at large than directly to Draco. “I bet none of them even know that the Americans have been to the moon.”

“The Americans have *what*?” Draco burst out, staring at Violet. She looked at him as if just realizing he was there and her plump lips spread into a broad grin.

“Oh, I *knew* it, I *knew* no one would know!” she cried, sounding far too delighted.

“Explain!” demanded Draco. “What do you mean they’re *been* to the moon? That’s impossible.”

“No, it’s not,” said Violet, sounding smug. “I’m not telling you any more. You’ll have to find this one out by yourself.”

Draco gaped at her.

“*What*? But you’re the one teaching me about Muggle things! At least tell me enough so I can look it up in the library!”

“No, I think it’s time for some independent studying.”

“Going to the library *is* independent studying!”

“Why don’t you ask someone else?” Violet proposed.

“Who else am I supposed to ask?” insisted Draco.

“I don’t know. Maybe it’ll force you to make some new friends!”

Draco glared at her and Violet tossed her thick hair back with a mischievous grin on his face.

“I’ll just ask your professor,” he said, haughtily. “Professor Inglehart, isn’t it? The blonde one?”

“Oh no, you don’t,” backtracked Violet quickly. “I’m going to tell her not to tell you.”

Draco’s eyes widened. He was constantly taken aback at how he had never noticed Violet until this year when she was possibly the most Slytherin of them all.

“*Why*?” he complained. “Don’t you want me to know?”

“Yes,” replied Violet, calmly, closing her book—*Muggle Magic*—and putting it back into her book bag. “But I’m the only person you talk to about Muggles and I’m not even from a Muggle family. If you’re genuinely interested, and I think you are, it’d be good for you to talk to people who actually grew up around Muggles.”

“Muggle-borns,” said Draco, listlessly.

“Or half-bloods,” shrugged Violet.

“Well, that’d be all fine and well,” Draco sighed, “if they didn’t all hate me.”

“Don’t be dramatic.”

Draco raised his eyebrows at her.

“Finnigan barely restrains himself from hexing me on sight, Thomas is a little bit better but that’s not saying much, Finch-Fletchley nearly pisses himself any time I’m in the *room*—”

“I get it, Draco,” Violet silenced him with a glare. “I was actually thinking of Hermione Granger.”

Draco didn’t even try to keep his jaw from falling open.

“Close your mouth, Draco, it’s unattractive,” Violet said, without looking at him, already busy opening her Defence textbook.

“Are you *mad*?” he said in a hushed voice.

“You know, Daphne asks me that about twice a day,” responded Violet, nonchalantly.

“You *are* aware that Granger was *tortured* in my *home*, aren’t you?”

Violet sighed and looked up from her book, giving Draco one of her *looks*, piercing him with stern hazel eyes.

“Draco, are you familiar with the concept of *mending fences*?”

Draco just stared at her.

“She’s in my History of Magic class,” Violet continued, “and she’s never anything but nice to me. She’s one of the only Gryffindors who stands up for us Slytherins, you know?”

“She hates me,” Draco mumbled.

“She hates the Draco Malfoy who called her a Mudblood and made her and her friends’ lives miserable,” retorted Violet, effectively shutting Draco up again. “But the Draco desperate to know how Muggles walked on the moon?”

Draco’s head snapped up.

“Wait, they *walked* on it? *How*? I—Violet!”

Suddenly, Violet was laughing, warmly and heartily, and despite himself, Draco felt one of those strange, new rushes of affection for his friend.

“Does that mean you’re going to ask her?” she asked, grinning widely.

“I suppose,” grumbled Draco, allowing her to drape an arm around his shoulders and pull him into a one-armed hug.

On a daily basis, there were numerous moments that quite glaringly reminded Draco of how wildly different his life had become this year. Every conversation he had with Violet—especially those regarding her Muggle Studies class and apprenticeship—was one of these moments, but as he sat, cross-legged, on the dirty ground of the clearing in the middle of the Forbidden Forest, with an adolescent Thestral’s head in his lap, stroking its silky mane and listening as Luna Lovegood dreamily recounted what she was learning about modern magical art, he briefly wondered if perhaps he had been transported to a parallel dimension.

Throughout the war, but especially during his sixth year, he often felt as if it wasn’t even him inside his own body, as if he was watching himself from afar, as he cursed the necklace or poisoned the mead or worked on the Vanishing Cabinet. It was easier that way—to separate himself from the things he was doing, because he knew there was no other way he’d be able to accomplish them.

This year felt like the opposite. He was acutely aware of every muscle in his body; every breath he was taking; the feeling of the soft grass he sat on and the hard soil right beneath it; the smooth yet coarse texture of the young Thestral’s mane as he stroked it with his fingers; the gentle, melodic sound of Luna’s voice; the cool winter air keeping his cheeks pink.

He was surprised at how much he liked it. He had always been afraid of feeling too much, of being even a little bit less than entirely in control of his emotional state, but there was something so simultaneously grounding and freeing about this—about the relaxed awareness of his body. He was still trying to sort out his mind, and this year had given him a lot of new information to analyse and sort out, but for the first time since Voldemort had returned over three and a half years ago, he felt somewhat comfortable in his own skin.

Well. Most of his skin, that is.

“Luna?” he asked quietly, after a brief lull in conversation fell between them. She turned her head and fixed her wide eyes at him.

“Would you still be willing to...to cover up my Dark Mark?” he found his voice almost turned into a whisper at the end and he was glad Luna didn’t ask for him to repeat himself.

She blinked at him.

“Is that what you want?”

“I wouldn’t ask if it wasn’t,” Draco murmured, slightly under his breath.

“Can I see it?” she asked, her casual tone of voice not at all betraying how serious of a question she was asking. Draco felt an unpleasant chill pool in his stomach, the way it always did when he thought about his Mark.

No one had seen it in a long time. In fact, the only one who had seen it since Draco had taken a knife to his skin had been Polkey, who had caught him in the act.

His Mark looked the same, still dark and black, but now littered with small scars even whiter than Draco’s skin. He had done his best to avoid looking at it since then, but it was hard to avoid your own body, your own skin.

A familiar numbness started to fill Draco and he knew what was coming. He was going to lose this warm feeling of consciousness and drift back into that disconnected state that kept all difficult emotions bottled up somewhere far away. He was surprised to find that he didn't want to do that anymore.

He tried to focus, on Luna's kind face, on the cold air, on the warm breaths of the Thestral sleeping soundly in his lap. He stopped his stroking of the Thestral's mane to tug the left sleeve of his robes up and then reached his arm out towards Luna, displaying the Mark at full view.

He felt like he was being pushed underwater, his throat constricting and his breath speeding up. His stomach began churning at once and he almost pulled his arm back with regret.

But then Luna reached out a hand and traced his forearm with a fingertip. Draco felt a chill run up his arm and down his spine, but her touch was gentle. She said nothing about the scars, but he could feel when her finger went past the lines of the Mark and onto the smooth skin of the scars that had sliced into it.

"You want to cover it completely?" she asked. He wondered how she did that, how her voice remained soft and dreamy and never wavered for a moment.

"Yes," Draco replied, his own voice not rising above a hoarse whisper. Luna continued to trace over the Mark with her finger.

"Magical tattoos are particular," she began, her eyes looking up from his arm to his face once again. "Especially when imbued with Dark Magic."

Draco remained silent, waiting with baited breath.

"They don't much like being tampered with," Luna continued, and Draco braced himself, ready for Luna to tell him it wasn't possible, that he was stuck with this monstrous mark seared into his skin for the rest of his life.

"What did you want to cover it with?" she asked instead, looking at him with her head slightly tilted, her dirty blonde hair almost touching the ground.

"I don't know," Draco responded, honestly. What did it matter? More than anything, he wanted it *gone*, but he knew that wasn't possible. Luna looked at him for a long moment, and Draco again resisted the urge to pull back his arm and let his sleeve fall over it again.

"Do you like flowers, Draco?" Luna asked, her eyes far away again, gazing into the Forest.

"What?"

"Flowers," she repeated, a smile forming on her face as she withdrew her finger from his skin at last. "You seem like someone who appreciates flowers."

Draco relaxed his arm, but didn't pull it back towards himself yet.

"Yes," he said, letting out a breath he hadn't realized he had been holding. "I do."

Luna looked towards him with a smile on her face.

"What's your favourite?"

Draco was always careful walking around hallways—he had to be. There was often a Stinging Hex or Trip Jinx waiting for him around the corner. It hadn't been unexpected, even when he first arrived. Maybe especially when he first arrived. He had been a Death Eater, of course there would be people seeking revenge. He knew Daphne and Theo had also encountered a few hexes here and there, from people who mistakenly thought their families had been Death Eater sympathizers, but nowhere near the level of Draco.

He walked around Hogwarts with his hand clenched around his wand in his robe pocket. His new wand had him feeling safer, since he could now actually cast a decent Shield Charm. That was all he ever cast. He never retaliated, never shot a curse back, which was yet another thing that was drastically different about him this year. He was on probation, which meant he had to keep himself squeaky clean, without even so much as a detention on his record. Even if he cast in self-defence, he had no guarantee that his story would be believed. After all, who would believe a former Death Eater over a grieving student?

He turned the corner with his hand firmly wrapped around his wand, hearing the vague sound of conversation, but relaxed his hand when he saw a silver and green scarf on one of the figures.

As he got closer, he realized that the figure was actually Daphne, her golden hair tied up in a lax ponytail and her Slytherin scarf draped around her neck loosely. She was leaning over someone, and speaking in a low and soothing tone.

Draco approached them, quietly at first, but then clearing his throat to make his presence known. He had a habit of sneaking up on people, not necessarily on purpose. He had always had a quiet way about him, something his mother liked to describe as his *inner peace*. The thought was almost funny now.

At Draco's little cough, Daphne's head shot up and the girl beside her flinched noticeably. That was when he realized who she was—Ella Wilkins, the small-statured girl from his Potions class. She had a gash on her face, a long cut down her right cheek. Daphne had clearly cast a healing spell on it, as it wasn't bleeding, but it was definitely still fresh, all red and swollen. Ella's eyes were similar, the puffiness of her eyelids giving away the fact that she had just been crying.

"It's okay, Ella," Daphne said, comfortingly. "He's my friend."

"What happened?" Draco asked, looking from Ella's wound to Daphne's worried face.

"What do you think?" she snapped at him, in a much less patient tone than she'd just used. "She was hexed."

"What? Why?" he demanded. He was looking at Daphne, but it was Ella who answered him.

"It's been happening all year," she said, in a small voice. If she wasn't in an N.E.W.T. class with him, Draco wouldn't have believed she was a seventh year. She barely looked fifteen.

"Why? Who's doing this?" Draco continued. Daphne shot him a dangerous look.

"Don't *interrogate* her, Draco!" she scolded.

“It’s okay, Daphne,” Ella said, still in that quiet voice that Draco had to almost strain to hear. “It’s a couple of guys in my year. And some from sixth year, I think.”

“Why?” Draco repeated the one question that wasn’t being answered. Ella shrugged.

“Because I’m a Slytherin. They’re angry about the war,” she said this in a monotone, as if reading from a textbook, and it was this tone, more than anything else, that lit the fire in Draco’s belly.

He ground his teeth.

“Ella, is it?” he asked, keeping his voice quiet for fear of losing control of it. After her nod, he asked, “May I see your left arm?”

She stared up at him, eyes wide at the implication, but she obediently held out her arm and pulled up the sleeve of her robes to reveal smooth, blank skin. Un-Marked. Unblemished.

Draco held out his own arm, ignoring Daphne’s sharp intake of breath and Ella’s full gasp as he yanked his sleeve up.

“You see this?” he said, as Ella and Daphne stared at the scarred Dark Mark. “I am the only Marked person in this castle. I am responsible, not you nor any other Slytherin. Next time, you tell them that if they’re angry about the war, they can take it up with me.”

He let his sleeve fall back down as he lowered his arm, turning to Daphne, who had composed herself and schooled her facial expression into one of neutrality.

“I presume you haven’t reported this to McGonagall,” he said. She shook her head.

“Ella didn’t want to give me any names.”

“It’ll just make it worse,” Ella added in a tiny squeak, clearly not able to get over Draco’s show as quickly as Daphne.

“They’ve sliced your face,” he said, bluntly. “How much worse can it get?”

Potter was already there when Draco arrived at seven p.m. sharp.

“Am I late?” he asked, coolly, knowing he wasn’t.

“No, no, I just came early, in case I needed to set anything up,” Potter replied, pushing his glasses further up onto his nose.

Draco looked around. He’d never been in this particular part of the castle, but it didn’t look markedly different. A closed off corridor, large enough for duelling practice. Draco noticed a few dummies and closed chests in the corner.

“And did you?” he asked, elaborating when Potter looked confused. “Need to set up?”

Potter looked towards the dummies in the corner and shook his head.

“No, Ashworth had already put those in by the time I got here.”

“Mhm.” Draco nodded, remaining standing with his hands in his pockets. Potter fidgeted uncomfortably, shifting balance from one foot to another.

Draco simply watched him, mildly enjoying his obvious discomfort. He had been the one to ask Draco to do this, to come here and play like his student, so there was no way Draco was going to make it easier for him.

A lot of things may have changed this year, but by no means were Draco and Potter going to become best friends.

“Sorry,” Potter said, to Draco’s surprise. “I know this is awkward.”

“I’m sure I have no idea what you mean, Potter,” Draco replied in a lofty tone.

“Come off it, Malfoy,” scoffed Potter. “It’s not like we’re friends, you and I. But we’ve been working well together in Potions this year.”

Now it was Draco’s turn to scoff.

“Working together? Is that what you call it, Potter?”

Potter scowled.

“You know what I mean,” he said, shortly. “We don’t have to be friends to be able to work together.”

“Very well, Potter. I agree to be civil, if that’s what you’re looking for,” Draco provided, which he found to be rather generous. Potter just snorted.

“Alright, that’s more than I was expecting, if I’m being honest. I figured we’d start off with healing spells, if you’re amenable.”

“Ooh, big word, Potter,” said Draco. He couldn’t help himself. Potter just brought out this part of him. He expected a retort, but instead, Potter just laughed.

“I’m going to take that as a yes,” he said. “Come on then, tell me what healing spells you’re familiar with.”

Draco eyed him suspiciously, but Potter merely looked back with his bright green eyes expectant and his face open and patient. It was almost disarming, in a way. He had never seen that expression aimed at him before.

“Well,” he began, slowly. “I know quite a few.”

can't wait to be normal, right after this weekend

Chapter Summary

There was a long stretch of silence, before Malfoy spoke.

“What made you decide you wanted to do this?” He asked. “Teaching, I mean?”

Harry looked at him, curiously. This was their fourth session, and Harry was simply glad that there hadn't been any arguments between them, or insults thrown. Malfoy had gotten impatient last session when he couldn't master a spell quite as quickly as he wanted, and he had said that maybe Harry would have made a better Auror after all, but that was incredibly tame for him, and Harry had just laughed.

But they also hadn't talked about anything other than the spellwork, and Harry wasn't sure if doing so was the best idea. After all, it wasn't like they had ever held a civil conversation before.

Chapter Notes

!!! things are h A p P e n N i N G !!!

chapter title is from the song Last Hurrah by Bebe Rexha

It was Saturday afternoon and Harry was sat at the edge of the pitch, watching the Gryffindor team practice. Ron had been with him, loudly yelling advice until the team captain—Demelza—finally marched over and told him she'd kick him out if he didn't stop, but he had had to leave for his apprenticeship meeting.

Harry had stayed, and was now watching Ginny fly, deftly weaving through other players with the Quaffle tucked under her arm. It was odd how little he was thinking about Quidditch this year. He thought he'd miss it much more, but McGonagall had been right at the start of year feast when she'd said their N.E.W.T. work and apprenticeships would keep them quite busy.

Still, watching Ginny soar through the air like she was born for it had him feeling wistful. It was a strange feeling—nostalgia—especially since this was his first year at Hogwarts where he was actually, truly safe from Voldemort. That was peculiar in and of itself, and Harry often found himself feeling antsy, as if he were waiting for some kind of attack. He'd mentioned it to Hermione once, and she'd given him a very concerned look before mentioning something called Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder in a soft voice.

He tried to focus on the players, flapping robes of scarlet bright against the pale blue sky. It was calming, and effectively distracted him from the two feet of parchment he was meant to be

writing for Charms.

Unfortunately, a whistle went off as Demelza called her players in for a team huddle, which meant their practice was coming to an end. Harry watched them until Demelza dismissed them and they headed off towards the locker rooms, and then slowly rose to his feet, dusting off his jeans to remove any grass that may have stuck to him. He didn't really want to leave; it was a surprisingly warm day in January and he liked the comforting familiarity of the Quidditch pitch, even though he wasn't flying.

He slowly made his way up towards the path to the castle, but he stopped suddenly, surprised to see a group of unfamiliar people huddled a few feet away from the locker rooms. It took a few moments before he realized that they must be the recruiters Ginny was talking about. He felt a surge of nervous excitement for her.

She'd flown well in practice—she always did—but he knew she was stressing herself out about the recruiters. He knew her top choice was the Holyhead Harpies, but it all depended on who showed an interest in her.

"Mr Potter?"

Oh, bollocks. He looked up to see the gaggle of recruiters all looking up at him with wide eyes. He tucked his hands in his pockets and ambled over to them. He supposed they wanted to ask about Ginny. The news of their breakup had gone past simple school gossip and had managed to make the front page of the Daily Prophet's Christmas issue.

"Hi," he said, sheepishly.

"Delmont Bradshaw," the man who had called his name, a tall, somewhat gangly-looking fellow who looked to be somewhere in his mid-thirties, thrust his hand forward to shake Harry's eagerly. "Recruiter for the Appleby Arrows. Pleasure to meet you, Mr Potter."

"Er, Harry's fine, thanks," Harry said, awkwardly. A woman, standing a foot or two behind Bradshaw and short enough to be partially hidden by his towering figure, with raven-coloured pin-straight hair and hooded eyes, snorted.

"Don't freak him out, Del," she said, elbowing her colleague teasingly, before looking up at Harry, who was quite a bit taller than her. The first thing he noticed was the striking colour of her eyes—an extremely pale blue that shone in the gentle sunlight.

She reached out a hand and he shook it, trying not to wince at how strong her grip was. For a woman so petite, she was clearly very strong.

"Tabitha Hawk," she introduced herself. "I represent the Falmouth Falcons."

"Nice to meet you," Harry said.

He was then introduced to the other three recruiters of the group—Chester Vogel, a slightly hefty man with thick black eyebrows and a matching moustache who worked for the Montrose Magpies; Ruth Merriweather, a relatively young woman with long auburn hair falling down to her hips who was here for the Holyhead Harpies; a Keegan Hitchens, a fair-skinned man with broad shoulders and a friendly-looking face, who represented the Kenmare Kestrels.

“Were you watching the practice?” the eager Delmont Bradshaw asked. “We heard your year wasn’t allowed to join the teams this year, is that correct?”

Harry nodded.

“But the Gryffindor team looks great this year,” he was quick to add. “They’ve got some really talented players.”

It was true, Demelza had chosen her players well. Ritchie Coote and Jimmy Peakes had stayed on as Beaters, and Demelza and Ginny were joined as Chasers by a new find by the name of Natalie McDonald, a fifth year who flew with her small body pressed down against her broom to advance her speed. She was flying on what looked like a Comet 360, but her speed could rival that of the Firebolt due to her technique.

“Were you here to watch Miss Weasley?” asked the Kestrels recruiter, Keegan Hitchens. Ah, there it was.

“I came to support my House team,” Harry said with a smile, keeping it neutral, but adding, “Ginny’s a fantastic player, one of the best I’ve seen.”

Hitchens nodded, seeming impressed, and Harry hoped that his endorsement might help Ginny land on offer.

“Oh? Who else have you had your eye on?” asked Chester Vogel, with a grin on his face.

Harry hesitated. He wanted to answer honestly, about the new Gryffindor Keeper—Simone Wexler, a girl in the same year as Ginny and a formidable force—but he feared his answer would be misconstrued, and the next article in the Daily Prophet would be about Harry dating his way through the Gryffindor Quidditch team.

“I wouldn’t know,” he said, amiably. “That’s your job, isn’t it?”

Vogel and Bradshaw chuckled, graciously.

“What about yourself?” asked the dark-haired Tabitha Hawk, watching him carefully with her light eyes.

Harry looked at her in surprise.

“Me?”

“Yes. Your Quidditch talent is no secret. The whole Wizarding World saw the way you flew in the Triwizard Tournament. Rumour has it you even impressed Viktor Krum. You were Captain of the Gryffindor team two years back as well, weren’t you?”

“Er, I mean, yes, I was, but—” Harry stumbled over his words, and Hawk cut in.

“Do you have an interest in pursuing Quidditch professionally?” she asked, getting right to the point. “The Falcons would love to have you try out.”

“Oh, er, thank you,” he said. “But I don’t think that’s for me.”

“Of course,” Hawk said, in an understanding tone. “If you change your mind, however, don’t hesitate to send an owl.”

“Thank you, that’s very kind,” he said, and she nodded shortly. Just then, the Gryffindor team began to spill out of the locker rooms, and the recruiters all bid a quick goodbye to Harry before rushing towards them. Harry made eye contact with Ginny, whose eyes widened as she seemed to realize what was happening.

He grinned at her and waved, before turning back to the path up to Hogwarts. He really did have to start on that Defence essay.

“Where’s Ron?” Harry asked, as he sat down in a grey armchair beside Hermione. Recently he’d noticed that a lot of the time it was just him and Hermione. Sometimes it was because Ron had long apprenticeship meetings, but it had become increasingly frequent for him to be absent. He hadn’t asked about it, assuming that maybe he still wasn’t comfortable being around Hermione or something, but it had been long enough since they’d broken up and they seemed to be back to normal around each other.

“He went to Hogsmeade with Sophie for a drink,” Hermione supplied.

He looked at her in confusion.

“Why didn’t you go with them?”

Hermione looked up from whatever schoolwork she was focusing on to raise her eyebrows at him.

“They’re on a *date*, Harry,” she said, like she was speaking to a child.

“They’re what?” Harry exclaimed. “Since when has that been going on?”

Hermione shrugged.

“Just since we got back, I think. But they’ve clearly liked each other for a while now.”

It had certainly not been clear to Harry, but he didn’t say that to Hermione because he knew she would just give him one of her *looks*.

“Oh,” he said instead. “Are you alright with that?”

She gave him a kind smile.

“You don’t have to worry about me, Harry,” she said. “I actually think Sophie and Ron are a good match. They’re very similar, you know.”

He supposed that might be true. Sophie did have a similar sense of humour as Ron; they were always laughing at each other’s jokes. She was also similar to Hermione though, in that she was studious and dedicated to her classes.

“It isn’t weird for you?” he asked.

“Would it be weird for you if Ginny started dating someone new?” she asked.

Harry considered this, thinking of Ginny flying around the pitch like a bird, of her expression as she saw the recruiters ambushed the team outside of the locker rooms.

He shook his head.

“No, I guess it wouldn’t be.”

“Well, there you go,” Hermione said.

“You hated when he was dating Lavender, though,” Harry said it without thinking, and what followed was a long moment of silence between them.

“That was different,” said Hermione in a quiet voice. “Those feelings between Ron and I don’t exist anymore.”

“Okay,” Harry said, not wanting to push her any further. He still wasn’t sure he understood the complex relationship between his two best friends, but he supposed he never really would—it was their thing. And if Hermione was fine with Ron dating Sophie, then so was Harry.

“As long as you’re alright,” he said and Hermione gave him a gentle smile and reached over to squeeze his hand warmly.

Harry’s eyes were slowly drifting closed in his armchair when the familiar sounds of bricks clattering jolted him awake. He blinked repeatedly, trying to fully wake up and looking at who was walking into the common room.

“Hey, Neville,” he said, yawning widely. Neville looked up at him in surprise and then smiled.

“Hullo, Harry,” he said, warmly. “What are you doing up so late?”

“Lost track of time,” he said, shrugging. “What about you?”

“Had to check on my Starthistle plants,” Neville said with a wide grin. “They’re almost at full bloom.”

“Congrats,” Harry said, though he had never heard of Starthistle plants.

“Thanks!” Neville answered, brightly. “Edgar Caverly actually gave me the seeds, his family owns a farm where they grow all sorts of magical plants.”

“Cool,” Harry grinned, as Neville sat beside him on the armchair vacated by Hermione several hours earlier. “Who’s Edgar Caverly?”

“Oh, he’s a seventh year in my Herbology class. He’s really interested in underwater Herbology, and he knows a lot about it because the Slytherin common room is right under the lake.”

“He’s a Slytherin?” Harry asked in surprise.

Neville gave him an odd look.

“Yeah,” he said, easily.

“And you’re...friends?” Harry asked, slowly.

“Yeah,” Neville continued talking in that easy tone. “He’s a bit weird, but he’s a good guy. He’s great at Herbology, too.”

Harry pondered this. He wasn’t quite sure what to make of the Slytherins this year. They had always seemed...unpleasant to him. Ever since his first conversation with Hagrid, all those years ago, where he’d first learned about Voldemort and what had happened to his parents.

There’s not a single witch or wizard who went bad who wasn’t in Slytherin.

Harry thought about that. He had never really questioned it, since Voldemort and most of his followers had been in Slytherin. Bellatrix Lestrange and Lucius Malfoy and Antonin Dolohov...all Slytherins.

But then he thought of Peter Pettigrew.

Pettigrew—the man who had gotten his parents killed, beloved best friend of his dad and Sirius and Remus, who had betrayed them—had been a Gryffindor.

It was all very confusing.

But it wasn’t just him. Gryffindor and Slytherin students famously didn’t get along, as he and Wya had discussed. It just wasn’t common to see Gryffindor and Slytherin students as friends. The Slytherins had never given Harry any reason to trust them, and that hadn’t changed this year, despite all he’d been hearing about them needing a second chance.

“What’s it like?” he asked. “Being friends with a Slytherin?”

He flushed, feeling like he could’ve phrased that question much better. Thankfully, Neville didn’t point that out.

“It’s nice, actually,” Neville said, smiling. “He used to get made fun of by the other seventh-year boys, but only him and one other guy came back this year. I never thought I would have anything in common with a Slytherin, you know. Always thought they were evil and all that. But he’s just a regular bloke, with a couple odd hobbies. He was so surprised when I was nice to him in class. He said no one even spoke to him now, just because he was a Slytherin. His parents weren’t Death Eaters or pureblood fanatics or anything; his mother’s actually a half-blood. It just made me think, how dumb is it that we hate each other because of traits detected in us when we were eleven, you know?”

Harry considered this, and thought of Malfoy. He had always been, to Harry at least, the *worst* Slytherin, and they were managing to somewhat get along these days.

“That makes sense,” he said, truthfully. “I guess it’s just weird for me to think about the Slytherins as...people. I know that sounds awful.”

“I understand,” Neville said. “The Gryffindors and Slytherins have always been terrible to each other, it’s practically a Hogwarts tradition. But it’s different this year. There aren’t as many Slytherins as usual, and everyone’s really angry at them. I get it, people lost a lot in the war. But

that wasn't the fault of any of the Slytherins that came back, you know? None of the Death Eaters' kids came back this year. Well, except for—"

"Malfoy," Harry filled in, and Neville nodded.

"But it's like no one cares about that. Everyone's just going after all the Slytherins now, as if they were all Death Eaters or something. It's not right," he frowned, and Harry was suddenly thrown by how grown up he looked. He was nothing like the shy, chubby-faced boy he once was.

"You're right," Harry found himself nodding in agreement.

"Okay, let's take a break," Harry said, as Malfoy's carefully placed hair started to fall into his face due to his sweating forehead. Full-body healing spells were exhausting, as Harry knew all too well.

He expected Malfoy to argue, to insist he was fine to go on, but instead he just nodded, falling against a chair. Harry went over to the trunk in the corner, which had a Cooling Charm on it, and pulled out two glass jars of water. He handed one to Malfoy, who took it with a nod, and then sat in the chair beside his.

There was a long stretch of silence, before Malfoy spoke.

"What made you decide you wanted to do this?" He asked. "Teaching, I mean?"

Harry looked at him, curiously. This was their fourth session, and Harry was simply glad that there hadn't been any arguments between them, or insults thrown. Malfoy had gotten impatient last session when he couldn't master a spell quite as quickly as he wanted, and he had said that maybe Harry would have made a better Auror after all, but that was incredibly tame for him, and Harry had just laughed. But they also hadn't talked about anything other than the spellwork, and Harry wasn't sure if doing so was the best idea. After all, it wasn't like they had ever held a civil conversation before.

"I don't know, honestly. Ashworth suggested it, and it just sort of...made sense," Harry said, truthfully.

"I thought you wanted to be an Auror," Malfoy said.

"I thought I did, too," said Harry, quietly. He didn't want to elaborate, didn't want the conversation to lead to the war, as it inevitably would. Thankfully, Malfoy didn't pursue the subject.

Instead, he said, "Though I also thought you might become a Quidditch player."

Harry looked at him in disbelief.

"Really?"

Malfoy snorted, derisively, taking a swig out of his jar.

"Don't sound so surprised. We both know you were the youngest Seeker in a century," he said.

Harry thought about the Quidditch recruiters from yesterday, and couldn't help smiling.

"I actually got an offer to play Quidditch for the Falcons yesterday," he said. It was just a thing to say, but Malfoy turned and stared at him, his mouth actually falling open slightly.

"No, you didn't," he said. Harry looked at him in confusion.

"Yeah, I did?"

"And you turned it down?"

"Yeah?" he phrased it like a question, unsure where this was going.

Malfoy rolled his eyes so hard there was a split-second where only the whites of his eyes were visible.

"Of course it's no big deal to you, oh, Saviour of the Wizarding World," he said, sarcasm dripping from his voice.

"I didn't say it was no big deal!" Harry said, defensively. "I just don't want to play Quidditch professionally. I feel like it wouldn't be fun if I had to do it for work."

"Oh, alright, alright. Still, the *Falmouth Falcons*. They're my favourite team," Malfoy sighed, almost wistfully, and Harry found himself interested. He didn't know much about Malfoy, not in this sense.

"I don't really have a favourite," he found himself saying.

Malfoy snorted.

"Always thought you'd be a Puddlemere fan."

"They're alright," Harry shrugged.

"They're boring," Malfoy countered.

"They haven't sent a recruiter out yet," said Harry. "Not that I've heard anyway."

"They don't like to pick right out of Hogwarts. They usually wait until other teams have picked up the newbies, and then trade players once they see where the real talent lies."

"Oh," Harry said, wondering how Malfoy knew all of this. "That's smart, I guess."

"Harder to get their players to earn team loyalty that way," Malfoy argued. "The Falcons have never had a player leave their team for another and the only player they ever pinched off another team was Tabitha Hawk, who played for the Wimbourne Wasps for a year before the Falcons got her."

"Tabitha Hawk? She was the recruiter!"

Malfoy once again shot him a wide-eyed look.

"What? *Tabitha Hawk* was here? At Hogwarts?" he demanded.

Harry nodded.

“Yeah, I didn’t know she used to play for the team, I thought she was just a recruiter.”

Malfoy shook his head, incredulously.

“Tabitha Hawk was the best Keeper the Falcons ever had. She played for seven years and never once let the Quaffle into the hoops. Not *once*. Other teams only won by catching the Snitch before them.”

“Woah, that’s impressive.”

Malfoy threw him an ugly look, but it lacked any real malice.

“I can’t believe *Tabitha Hawk* wanted to recruit you and you said no. Fucking Potter.”

Harry, surprised at hearing Malfoy curse, let out a laugh, and he could swear he saw Malfoy’s mouth twitch.

i've been moving mountains that i once had to climb

Chapter Summary

Draco suppressed a snort. He supposed he should have expected that; it must have been quite hard to believe that Draco Malfoy was suddenly all chummy with Muggles and Muggle-supporters. Sometimes he didn't even realize how much he'd changed until he was confronted with moments like these.

"Yeah," he said, shrugging as if it were nothing. "She's been teaching me about them."

Potter looked as if Draco had just announced he was marrying a house elf.

"She's teaching you about Muggles?" he said it with such disbelief that Draco was unsure whether to be offended or not. Then he remembered the countless times he had called Granger a 'Mudblood' and decided he didn't have the right.

So he simply nodded.

"Apparently, my education in all things Muggle was severely lacking," he said. He was looking all around the room, trying to find something to fix his gaze on, uncomfortably aware that Potter's eyes never once left his face.

There was yet another long moment of silence and then Potter broke it with a sudden and random subject change.

"Have you been going to the Quidditch games?"

Chapter Notes

when writer's block hits you so hard you disappear into nothingness for a month <<<

chapter title is from the song Gold Steps by Neck Deep (this lyric has meant so much to me that the first tattoo I ever got is based on it!!)

"Absolutely not, she's with Potter and Weasley," Draco said, stubbornly. Violet and Daphne shared exasperated looks that Draco chose to ignore.

"She's *always* with Potter and Weasley," said Daphne, impatiently. "Honestly, Violet, how do you put up with him every day?"

"I have the patience of a saint," Violet said, looking completely serious. Draco turned to scowl at her, and she responded with an angelic smile.

“You know what? Fine. Fine, I’ll ask her. Since you *refuse* to tell me yourself,” Draco stood up and, with a significant look at the two of them, began to stride over to where the famous trio sat in the grey armchairs. Once he reached his destination, however, he immediately began to regret the decision.

He and Potter were managing to be relatively civil to each other, but Weasley’s presence was bringing back all of his old instincts. It was like a natural reaction, and he felt his palms sweating with the mere effort of biting back a rude remark.

The three of them had been engaging in a quick-paced, hushed conversation, but as soon as Draco had approached, they had gone silent, instead looking up at him.

“What d’you want, Malfoy?” Weasley said, the aggression barely disguised in his tone. Draco clenched his teeth.

“Granger,” he said, as politely as he could. “Could I have a word with you?”

Granger’s bushy eyebrows shot upwards in surprise.

“What for?” Weasley demanded, and this time, Draco didn’t stop himself from scowling at him.

“It’s Granger I’d like to speak to, not you, Weasley,” he snapped. All things considered, he could’ve said a lot worse. He turned back to Granger. “In private, please.”

“Anything you want to say to Hermione, you can say in front of us,” Weasley puffed out his chest and crossed his arms, an air of finality in his voice.

“Oh, *honestly*, Ron,” Granger rolled her eyes at him, but Draco saw she made no moves to indicate she was going to vacate her chair. She turned back to him. “What is it, Malfoy?”

He sighed and cast a desperate look over to where Daphne and Violet remained, sitting by the window. They weren’t looking at him, but rather laughing over something. He couldn’t believe he had to do this in front of Potter and Weasley.

“How did the Americans walk on the moon?” He let it all out in one quick breath, trying to get it over with as quickly as possible.

Granger blinked at him, and for a moment, Draco had the terrifying thought that Violet had been messing with him this whole time.

He was just thinking how best to hex her when Granger asked, “You mean the Muggles?”

“Yes.”

All three of them were staring at him now, and Draco felt incredibly uncomfortable. He had the strong urge to walk away, but he *was* curious, and he had gotten this far already.

Suddenly—out of nowhere—Granger offered him a smile.

“Have a seat, Malfoy,” she said, gesturing to an unoccupied armchair.

“What? But—he—you—*Hermione!*” Weasley sputtered, as Draco obediently sat himself down in the armchair Granger indicated.

“Be quiet, Ronald,” Granger said, swiftly, and Draco was rather impressed when Weasley shut his trap instantly. She turned to Draco. “How’d you find out about that anyway?”

“I—is it supposed to be a secret?” Draco asked, confused. At this, Potter chuckled, and Draco felt himself bristling. He was just about to snap at him when Granger cut in.

”No, no, of course not. I was just wondering.”

“Violet told me,” Draco supplied.

“Violet?” Potter asked, his eyebrows scrunching up.

“Yes, Violet,” Draco sighed. “Violet Foxblade, she’s sitting on the windowseat with Daphne.”

Potter looked over to the window, to where Violet and Daphne were still engaged in conversation.

“I recognize her,” Potter said, and Draco rolled his eyes.

“Yes, Potter, you’ve been in school with her for eight years now,” he neglected to mention how even he had barely known Violet before this year.

“She’s in a class with us, isn’t she? I’ve seen her before.” Potter looked quite puzzled.

“Defence. She had a terrible boggart at the beginning of the year. She fought in the Battle of Hogwarts. On your side,” Draco offered, numbly.

Potter stared at him, his eyes wide, but it was Weasley who answered.

“But...she’s a Slytherin.”

There was something of a question in his voice. Draco regarded him with a cold glare.

“Well-spotted, Weasley.”

“Shove off, Malf—”

“*Anyway*,” Granger interrupted loudly, shooting Weasley a sharp look and then turning back to Draco. “The moon landing, what do you want to know?”

Relieved that he didn’t have to talk any more about the war, Draco nodded.

“Everything. I don’t understand. How did they do it?”

To his surprise, Granger smiled again.

“Well, Muggles have these machines that can fly,” she started.

“Yes, yes, aeroplanes, I know,” Draco said, not wanting to seem completely unknowledgeable. Granger looked quite pleasantly surprised.

“Yes, but aeroplanes can only fly on Earth. They also have machines that can fly into space. I don’t know *exactly* how they work, to be honest, but I know there are several types. Muggles use them to explore space, and to observe the Earth from space.”

She was saying all of this in a remarkably nonchalant tone of voice, and Draco was astounded. Lots of the things Violet had told him about Muggles had shocked and impressed him, but this had to be the most unbelievable. Muggles were really just flying around *space*?

“The spacecraft that went to the moon was called Apollo 11,” Granger went on.

“Like the Greek god?” Draco asked, earning himself another smile.

“Yes, exactly. It was part of a longer program of space exploration the Americans were doing. Apollo 11 is the one that accomplished the mission. Three astronauts—that’s the name for the people who go to space in those machines—were in the crew. So the machine was launched into space by a rocket—which is this other machine that deploys it and projects it forward. I think it took them about three or four days until they landed on the moon. And then the astronaut who was first to set foot on the moon was called Neil Armstrong.”

Draco was doing his very best to keep his facial expression blank and emotionless, but inside he was bursting with questions.

“But how?” he allowed himself to ask. “Wouldn’t he, you know, explode?”

“Oh! I can’t believe I forgot to say this, astronauts wear these special space suits. They protect them from the extremes of space and have a system that make it easier to move around. They also have an oxygen supply, of course.”

“And...and they made all this—the suits and the rockets and the space...spacecraft—without magic?”

Granger had a smile on her face again, a big one, showing off her white teeth. For a moment, Draco was distracted. He vaguely remembered Granger having sort of bucked teeth when she was younger. Perhaps she had grown into them.

“Yeah, it’s amazing, isn’t it?” she said.

“Yeah,” Draco murmured, without even realizing what he was saying. “Yeah, it is.”

When he looked up, he found Granger, Weasley, and Potter all staring at him. Granger was still smiling slightly, while Weasley looked like someone had clubbed him in the head. Potter had an infuriatingly unreadable expression on his face, his bright green eyes boring into Draco as if wanting to unravel him like a ribbon.

“Well,” Draco said, standing up suddenly and straightening his robes. “Thank you, Granger, I appreciate the information.”

With as much dignity as he could muster, he stalked off, heading back to where Violet and Daphne sat by the window. As he left, he could’ve sworn he heard Weasley ask, “Was all that *true*, ‘Mione?”

The Hufflepuffs were planning a party. Or, so claimed Daphne, at least.

“It’s for Valentine’s Day, apparently,” she said, tossing her golden hair over her shoulder dramatically. Violet looked up at her from whatever book she had been focusing on.

“Where’d you hear that?” she asked.

“I overheard Turpin and Patil whispering about it last night,” Daphne explained, referring to her and Violet’s Ravenclaw roommates. “It looks like everyone knows about it except for us.”

“Let me guess,” said Violet, slamming her book shut. “The Slytherins are not invited.”

Daphne nodded her head in confirmation.

“I heard Patil saying that the plan was to wait until we were all asleep and then go down to the common room and cast Silencing Charms so we won’t wake up.”

“That’s *terrible*,” she exclaimed. “They’re going to all that effort just to exclude us?”

Draco just snorted.

“It’s actually rather clever, considering they’re Hufflepuffs.”

Daphne and Violet didn’t seem to find this funny.

“Oh, come off it,” Draco said. “Don’t tell me you really want to go to a Valentine’s party thrown by the *Hufflepuffs*? Do you think they know *how* to throw a party?”

“That’s not the point,” Violet argued. “It’s cruel.”

Draco shrugged.

“They probably just don’t want to be reminded of the war. Of their families dying.”

Violet went quiet, her eyes softening.

Daphne, however, retorted haughtily, “I haven’t killed anyone’s family. And I will remind you, Draco, that neither have you. Just because your parents and Nott’s second cousin or whoever were Death Eaters doesn’t mean we should all be punished for their sins.”

“It was his uncle,” Draco muttered, knowing it didn’t matter. Theo and his father had distanced themselves from Cantankerus Nott, but that hadn’t stopped his actions from staining the family name and causing everyone to assume Theo and his father were also Death Eaters.

“New plan,” Daphne said, ignoring Draco’s comment and turning back to Violet. “We are crashing that party.”

Violet gave her an apprehensive look.

“I don’t know how much better we’ll be liked if we crash their party.”

“Please,” Daphne flipped her hair once again. “It’s just like Draco said, the poor Hufflepuffs will have no idea what they’re doing. I will enlist the help of one Blaise Zabini and we are going to show up with Firewhisky and Daisywine and his wizard radio and they will have no choice but to welcome us in with open arms.”

Violet now had a smile growing on her face.

“That’s not a bad idea, actually,” she said, thoughtfully.

“Violet, darling, when is the last time you’ve known me to have a bad idea?” Daphne said, fixing her fluttering eyes on Violet and causing the other girls’ cheeks to flush a deep red.

“Oh, keep it in your robes,” said Draco, surprising even himself. Daphne fixed him with a hard glare and Violet went even redder and Draco couldn’t help but laugh.

After Draco thanked Ollivander profusely for his new wand, the elder wandmaker got straight back to work. They hadn’t been able to resume their sessions right after the holidays, as Ollivander had had business abroad. So now, in early February, Ollivander declared they had much to catch up on.

“I’m certain you had no issues determining the wand and core?” Ollivander asked, expectantly.

Draco, who had been confident in his analysis of his new wand, suddenly felt nervous under the silver gaze of his mentor.

“It looks to me to be larch and unicorn hair,” Draco said, trying to sound sure of himself. To his relief, Ollivander’s face lit up in a smile.

“Excellent, my boy, excellent. What can you tell me about larch wood?”

“Notably hard to please,” Draco said at once. Once he had figured out that his new wand was made of larch wood, he’d been slightly apprehensive, unsure if it would work well for him. “It’s constantly in demand because of its strength and reputation. It can be tricky to handle, but when bonded to a well-deserving master, it can have a lot of hidden abilities and effects.”

While the wand had been working favourably for Draco so far—especially in comparison to his previous one—he wasn’t entirely convinced that larch was the perfect match for him. It seemed to ask a lot of him, for a wand.

“Yes, yes, very good,” Ollivander nodded, approvingly. “And how’s it been working for you? Any problems?”

“None at all, sir,” Draco said, unable to keep a hint of pride out of his voice. Ollivander awarded him with a warm smile.

“That’s lovely to hear. I knew that larch would be the right choice for you. It will help you pick up your confidence as well,” at this, he gave Draco a wink. “And unicorn hair, like your first wand. I remember it well—hawthorn and unicorn hair, ten inches, quite springy.”

Draco nodded, and oddly, he suddenly missed his old wand. It had been a good one, and he had learned most spells on it. He supposed it was natural to have a sentimental attachment to one’s first wand.

“That wand went on to defeat He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named,” Ollivander continued, a sombre look crossing his face. Draco felt his stomach drop. The conversation had arrived, as many did these days, at the war.

“I think that had more to do with the wizard than the wand he was using,” he mumbled. He didn’t often find himself complimenting Potter, but at this point, it would simply be ignorant to deny that

he was an extraordinarily powerful wizard.

“Now, now,” Ollivander said, a small smile creeping back onto his face. “Don’t forget what I am teaching you here. The topic of wand ownership is a tricky one, and it’s one we will examine further. It was a complex exchanging of hands that allowed for young Mr Potter to achieve his victory. He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named was in possession of the Elder Wand, and had he acquired proper ownership of it, we would be living in a much different world right now.”

Draco felt a shiver run down his spine. He didn’t want to think about that. He already spent far too many nights having horrible dreams about it, about what would’ve happened if Voldemort had won. Sometimes he didn’t think he would have lived. Even if Voldemort hadn’t disposed of him, he wasn’t sure how high his will to live would have remained.

“I do wonder,” Ollivander said, his voice suddenly changing to sound curious, “what the current status of ownership of the hawthorn wand might be.”

Draco blinked at him.

“What do you mean?” he asked. “Potter won it off of me. It’s his now.”

He couldn’t keep the bitterness out of his voice.

“Yes, one would think so,” Ollivander’s pale, silvery eyes were looking somewhere faraway. “But when he won that wand from you, he also gained ownership of the Elder Wand, which had also previously held allegiance to you, though you were, of course, unaware of that fact. However, Mr Potter chose to put the Elder Wand in hiding, using it to repair his old wand instead. That would lead us to believe that Mr Potter holds the allegiances of three wands—his holly wand, the Elder wand, and the hawthorn wand.”

As complicated as it may have seemed, it all made sense to Draco. What he didn’t understand then was why Ollivander was now doubting Potter’s ownership of the hawthorn wand.

He said as much, asking, “So the hawthorn wand *is* Potter’s, then?”

Ollivander refocused his eyes on Draco, still smiling slightly.

“Think about it, my boy,” he said. “Remember what I told you on the very first day. *The wand chooses the wizard*. Most wand woods are not fickle, hawthorn most definitely not. When Mr Potter handed me the wand to examine, I concluded that he had won it from you and become its owner. However, after the Battle of Hogwarts, Mr Potter chose to repair his old wand rather than continue to use the hawthorn wand. At the time, I assumed this was because of Mr Potter’s fondness for his first wand, one of the first items that connected him to the magical world. Now, however, I wonder if it may partially have been because the hawthorn wand had not fully yielded its allegiance to him.”

Draco felt his heart rate quicken.

“Do you mean that...that it could still belong to me?”

“An excellent question,” Ollivander nodded. “I would have to examine it to be certain. You see, wizards can use one another’s wands, however they will never respond as well as they do to their rightful owner. I would have to know how the hawthorn wand responds to both you and Mr Potter.”

Just like that, Draco's heart fell again. That was never going to happen. Even if Potter agreed to let him have his wand back, he wouldn't agree to experiment with it without a proper reason, and Draco couldn't tell him the truth about his apprenticeship.

Well, at least he didn't have to deal with the infernal fake-redwood wand anymore.

Draco was growing sick and tired of healing and repairing spells.

"Potter, this is the fifth session we're spending on this," he finally exclaimed, after a full twenty minutes of practicing. "I think I've got it."

Potter looked at him with an insufferable smirk on his face.

"You've got it now, sure. But it's different when you really need to use it. You're under a lot more pressure."

"Yes, Potter, I'm well aware that I won't be using healing charms on a dummy in an empty corridor."

Potter raised his eyebrows at him.

"Alright, then. Let me test you. Best spell for a broken finger?"

"*Emantur ligna*," Draco crossed his arms. "Make it a challenge at least."

Potter's smirk simply grew wider.

"Dislocated wrist?"

"*Episkey*."

"Spell to clean a dirty wound?"

"*Redige vulnere*."

"Stop a wound from bleeding?"

"*Prohibe sanguinem*."

Potter narrowed his eyes at him, and Draco felt a rush of satisfaction at coming out on top—for *once*. But just as he was about to crow in victory, Potter pulled out his wand and in a swift movement, pulled up his left sleeve, pointed his wand at his own forearm, and cast, "*Diffindo*."

It all happened very fast. One second, Potter was looking at Draco with a set expression, the next there were long slashes down his arm, blood flowing like a river and Potter's legs began to shake.

Draco let out an involuntary yell and automatically rushed towards Potter to grab him as he began to fall.

"Are you *mad*?" he cried, grabbing at Potter's arm and pointing his wand at it. "*Vulnera sanentur*."

A spark of yellow shot from Draco's wand, and Potter's blood began to run in the other direction, returning to Potter's arm before the gashes closed up neatly, leaving no evidence of any wound. Potter's long white scar, the same size as Draco's Dark Mark, remained.

Draco leaned back with a sigh, allowing his speeding heart to slow down and catching his breath. The whole encounter couldn't have taken more than a minute, and yet Draco felt as if he'd run a mile. Potter was quickly regaining colour in his face and as soon as he sat up, Draco fixed him with a glare.

"Have you lost your fucking mind, Potter?" he said, darkly. Potter just looked at him, green eyes bright and wide.

"You need to be able to know how to use them in a practical setting," he said, as if it were the simplest answer in the world.

"And what exactly would you do if I *wasn't* able?" Draco demanded.

Potter shrugged, which only made Draco angrier.

"Does it matter? You did it."

Draco scrambled to his feet with as much dignity as he could manage.

"Does it matter? Does it *matter*? Paint me the scene, would you, Potter? Let's say I didn't remember the spell, or couldn't cast it. Then what?" He didn't give Potter a chance to answer. He was furious. "I go get help, I suppose, and what? Tell them that Harry Potter cursed *himself* in front of me in an empty corridor? You think they'd fucking *believe* me? They would laugh me all the way to Azkaban, you utter *imbecile*!"

Potter was staring at him, eyes wide and mouth slightly agape. Draco let out a heavy breath; he was practically shaking with how angry he was.

Potter slowly got to his feet, letting his sleeve fall down over his arm and his scar.

"I'm sorry," he said, quietly. "I didn't think."

"Of course not," Draco spat. "You never think, do you? You just act, you reckless Gryffindor, even if it's something immensely irresponsible, and *dangerous*. Why do you keep insisting on risking your life? Are you trying to prove a point?"

He had to stop. He had to leave now or he was going to end up saying something he couldn't take back. The times when he could spit unforgivable insults at Potter without worrying of any major repercussions were long behind him and he needed to get control of himself *now*.

Potter's shoulders sagged.

"I don't know," he said, and he sounded so low, so *defeated*; it threw Draco off so much that for a moment he almost forgot how angry he was. "I keep feeling like I'm waiting for a fight and I can't stand it, I just...I just need the fight to come and be done with."

Draco stared at him, unable to make sense of the boy in front of him. Potter was the Saviour of the Wizarding World, he had saved *everyone*. Even the remaining few Death Eaters were no danger to him, as they were all hiding from being hunted down by the Aurors. He had fought an entire war

and gone head to head with the most powerful Dark wizard of all time and he had *beaten* him. What more of a fight could he possibly want?

“The fight already came, Potter,” he said, shortly. “You won.”

Potter sighed, falling into a chair. Draco pulled another around and sat as well.

“I know,” said Potter. “I guess I just don’t feel like the war is over yet. I don’t know if I ever will.”

Draco pondered this. It was a stark difference to how Draco himself felt, as he was constantly reminded of the war being over, what with how he and his fellow Slytherins were being treated, but also with how he himself had changed, spending time with people like Luna Lovegood and Violet and *Potter*, and actually enjoying himself in their company.

But the feeling of fear that he associated with the war hadn’t left him. He still woke up in cold sweats from nightmares featuring snakelike eyes and green light. He kept expecting to wake up and find himself in the Manor under Voldemort’s control, as if this unusual post-war world had all been a strange dream.

“I understand,” he said, cautiously, unsure if he actually did. His fear hadn’t left him, but Potter couldn’t really be *afraid*, could he? What did he have to be afraid of?

Potter looked at him, surprise in his eyes.

“You do?” he asked, sounding oddly hopeful.

“Well,” Draco paused, wondering for a moment how he ended up in this kind of conversation with Harry Potter of all people. “Sometimes I wonder if he’s really gone for good this time. Sometimes I expect him to just show up out of nowhere. Sometimes it’s impossible to fall asleep at night because I see him every time I close my eyes.”

He closed his mouth suddenly, realizing how much he was letting spill out. He felt as if he’d lost his mind. What was he doing, exposing all of these weaknesses to Potter? Talking about his feelings? Who was he becoming? Potter was staring at him as if he’d grown another head, a mixture of shock and awe in his face.

“Exactly,” he murmured. “Do you ever just hold onto your wand in your robes as if you’re about to be attacked?”

“Well, yes, but that’s more to do with the Stinging Hexes than anything else,” Draco replied, without thinking.

“The what?”

“Nothing,” Draco tried to cover up, but Potter narrowed his eyes in that frightening way of his. “Oh, don’t be an idiot, Potter. Of course people are angry at me, what did you expect?”

He waited for Potter to respond, but he just sat there, looking thoughtful.

“I talk too much now,” Draco grumbled, more to himself than to Potter. “This is all Violet’s fault.”

That caught Potter’s attention as well.

“Who is she anyway?” he asked. “Violet Fox...glove?”

“Foxblade,” Draco answered, before pausing. “What do you mean? She’s my friend.”

“Since when? I’ve never seen you with her before this year.”

“Since this year,” Draco said. “There are only a few of us Slytherins left, you know.”

Potter went quiet for a moment. Then he spoke again, in a slow voice.

“I remember her boggart? It was a girl bleeding. A girl who looked like her. Did someone in her family die?”

“That’s her business, Potter,” said Draco, narrowing his eyes at Potter. He didn’t know why he was asking all these questions about Violet, but he was feeling a sense of protectiveness over his friend rise up in him.

“Sorry,” Potter said, somewhat sheepishly. “I was just curious. You said she told you about the moon landing, right?”

Draco felt a flush rise up in his neck, remembering the embarrassing experience of having to ask Granger about it in front of both Potter and Weasley.

“Yes,” he said, purposefully not elaborating at all. Unfortunately, Potter was not the type to take a hint.

“How did she know about that?” he asked. “Isn’t she a pureblood?”

“She takes Muggle Studies,” Draco said, avoiding the topic of Violet’s sister. While Violet didn’t keep her apprenticeship and passion for Wizard-Muggle relations a secret, he didn’t know how many people knew about Laurel and he wouldn’t want to betray a confidence. “She wants to work with Squibs and Muggles.”

Potter was staring at him with wide eyes once again.

“And you’re...okay with that?” he said, slowly.

Draco suppressed a snort. He supposed he should have expected that; it must have been hard to believe that Draco Malfoy was suddenly all chummy with Muggles and Muggle-supporters. Sometimes he didn’t even realize how much he’d changed until he was confronted with moments like these.

“Yeah,” he said, shrugging as if it were nothing. “She’s been teaching me about them.”

Potter looked as if Draco had just announced he was marrying a house elf.

“She’s teaching *you* about Muggles?” he said it with such disbelief that Draco was unsure whether to be offended or not. Then he remembered the countless times he had called Granger a ‘Mudblood’ and decided he didn’t have the right.

So instead, he just nodded.

“Apparently, my education in all things Muggle was severely lacking,” he said. He was looking all around the room, trying to find something to fix his gaze on, uncomfortably aware that Potter’s eyes never once left his face. There was a long moment of silence, and then Potter broke it with a sudden and random subject change.

“Have you been going to the Quidditch games?”

Draco furrowed his eyebrows at him, confused at where the conversation was going. But then, maybe this was just how conversations with Potter were. He didn’t have much experience in the matter, unless you counted insults and thrown hexes as conversation.

“Not really,” he said. “Theo goes to all of them, but I haven’t really wanted to. Not as much fun when you’re not playing, is it?”

“Yeah, that’s how I’ve been about it, too,” Potter said, casually, and Draco was stuck again by one of those abrupt realizations of how bizarre everything now was. Here he was, sitting with Potter, having a perfectly calm conversation about Quidditch. What had the world come to?

“There’s a match tomorrow,” continued Potter. “Hufflepuff versus Ravenclaw, so no real investment from either of us.”

Draco wondered why Potter was telling him this.

“Do you want to go?”

Draco looked at Potter, who was looking at him, expectantly.

“What, with you?” he asked.

Potter shrugged.

“Yeah. We can stand five feet apart and glare at each other occasionally if it makes you feel better.”

Draco fought the urge to smile.

“Fine,” he said. “But you’re still a prat. This doesn’t mean we’re mates now, Potter.”

Potter’s face broke into a crooked grin.

“Heaven forbid.”

Draco decided the events of the past half hour definitely had to be analysed further and possibly discussed with Violet, but for now, his composure remained cool.

“Very well. Now teach me something new. I’ve clearly mastered healing spells.”

i know i'm not the center of the universe, but you keep spinning around me just the same

Chapter Summary

"They're Death Eaters," said a Ravenclaw girl, coldly, which stopped all murmurings immediately and wiped the smile off of Greengrass' face.

"Slytherin does not mean Death Eater, Lisa," Hermione said, turning towards the girl. "They're not."

"Malfoy is," Ernie argued.

Harry looked at Malfoy again, who was still looking down at the ground, but whose jaw was clenched so tightly that Harry could see the bone sticking out of his pointy face.

"Malfoy was judged by the Wizengamot and given the appropriate sentence," Harry said, finally standing up from his chair. "Unless you think your opinion matters more than the Wizengamot's?"

Chapter Notes

apologies for the lateness, life got in the way and for some reason I find Harry's chapters harder to write than Draco's. a bit odd but oh well. hope you enjoy.

chapter title is from the song Heavy by Linkin Park, ft. Kiiara

"Hermione?" Harry asked, tentatively, approaching his friend at one of the desks in their common room. "Can I talk to you a moment?"

Hermione's bushy hair sprang back as she snapped her head up. She regarded Harry with furrowed eyebrows and a concerned expression.

"Of course. Are you alright?"

"Yeah, yeah, I'm fine," Harry confirmed, taking the seat across from her. "I just..."

He paused, unsure how to properly articulate what he wanted to talk to her about.

"I went to a Quidditch match with Malfoy yesterday," he said, a hint of surprise in his voice. Saying it out loud really made him realize how utterly surreal it was.

Hermione seemed to think so too.

“You did what?” she asked, perhaps thinking she had misheard him.

“We went to see the Quidditch match,” he repeated. “With Malfoy.”

Hermione blinked at him, slowly.

“Why?” she asked, which was precisely the question Harry didn’t have an answer to. So instead, he decided to tell her about their last session, about what had happened after he had stupidly slashed open his own arm and Malfoy had healed it and yelled at him, and about the strange conversation they had had afterwards.

Hermione listened calmly and nodded, except for at the part where Harry said he had cast a *Diffindo* on himself, where she gasped.

Once he had finished, she had a soft look on her face.

“Harry, are you asking me if it’s okay to be friends with Malfoy?” she asked. Harry stared at her. That wasn’t at all what he was thinking.

“No,” he said. “I’m just...confused.”

“About what?”

“About what I’m supposed to feel!” he exclaimed, frustrated.

“Why do you think you’re supposed to feel one way or another?” she asked.

“Because Malfoy’s a Death Eater,” he said, much more firmly than he really meant.

“You spoke at his trial, Harry,” she continued, in that gentle tone.

“He didn’t deserve to go to *Azkaban*,” Harry said, stubbornly. “That doesn’t mean that what he did was right.”

Hermione went somewhat quiet.

“I don’t think anyone thinks what he did was right, Harry. I don’t even think he does anymore.”

And, well, yes, that did seem to be true, if Harry was to believe what Malfoy had told him about learning about Muggles from his new friend.

“But...he still did them,” Harry couldn’t help but think of Dumbledore. Hermione looked thoughtful for a moment before replying.

“I wish it were easier, Harry,” she said, actually placing her quill down and weaving her fingers together. “Malfoy was always so easy to hate, especially for you, because you were always fighting with each other, but I suppose it’s different now, because he seems to be becoming a different person.”

“But you can’t just become a different person,” Harry argued.

“Of course you can. You don’t think you’ve changed at all after everything that’s happened? People grow, Harry, and we change, and some of those changes can be overwhelming.”

Perhaps absent-mindedly, Hermione touched the scar that Bellatrix had left on her throat.

“Aren’t you...you know...angry?” he said.

Hermione’s eyes flashed back to him in an instant.

“Of course I am,” she replied, almost indignantly. “But we have to be careful about where we aim that anger. Was Malfoy an awful prat who hated Muggleborns? Yes. Is he still? Honestly, I’m not sure. But I don’t want to waste any of my energy hating him anymore. It’s exhausting and unproductive, and even when I feel that anger inside of me, it’s not towards Malfoy. At the end of the day, he was just a kid, and while he was a terrible bully, I don’t think that equates to being a war criminal.”

Harry took a moment to digest this. He let out a sigh.

“Everything’s different now,” he said. “Is it wrong that maybe I hoped Malfoy would still be a horrible git just so something would remain the same?”

Hermione gave him a little smile.

“He’s still no prince, you know,” she said, with a joking tone in her voice.

“I know,” said Harry. “Can you believe he’s learning about Muggles from his friend, that Foxblade girl?”

“Violet Foxblade?” Hermione asked. “She’s in my History of Magic class.”

“Malfoy seems really close to her,” Harry commented.

Hermione gave him an odd look.

“I suppose. She’s quite interesting, you know. She fought back against the Carrows last year, even though she wasn’t invited to be in the DA.”

Even though the DA was headed by Neville last year, Harry still felt a surge of guilt.

“I thought the Slytherins were all helping the Carrows. Torturing first years and everything.”

Hermione’s expression darkened at Harry’s words.

“Some of them were. Crabbe and Goyle especially, just following along, since Malfoy was gone. But definitely not all of them. The Slytherins were always an unpleasant lot, but that doesn’t mean they were all aspiring Death Eaters.”

Harry sat in silence, considering this. He thought about what the Sorting Hat had told him in his first year, that he would do well in Slytherin. He couldn’t help but wonder how different his life would be if he had been sorted there instead of Gryffindor. He very much doubted it would have changed his feelings toward Voldemort.

“So,” Hermione said, a small smile back on her face. “How was the Quidditch match?”

Harry blinked at her.

“What?”

“The Quidditch match. With Malfoy. How did it go?”

“Oh,” he said, remembering the day before. “It was... weirdly normal. We mainly just watched the game. It was odd though, rooting for the same team as Malfoy.”

“Who were you rooting for?” she asked, which was unlike Hermione, who normally couldn’t care less about Quidditch.

“Ravenclaw,” Harry supplied. “Mostly because Zacharias Smith is the Hufflepuff Seeker and he’s a tosser. He did terrible too, the Snitch was right in front of him at least three times and he still didn’t catch it.”

Hermione smiled at this.

“It sounds like you had fun,” she said.

And well. Yes, he supposed he had. With Malfoy. It would take some getting used to that.

“Tell me if I am mistaken, but from what I heard, you are one of the few students at Hogwarts capable of non-verbal, wandless magic.”

Harry could feel the excitement bubbling up inside of him.

“We learned some non-verbal spells in sixth year,” he affirmed. “And I can do a few wandless spells, but I can’t do both non-verbal and wandless at the same time.”

Wayla nodded, thoughtfully.

“Wandless magic is far more difficult than non-verbal, which is why it isn’t typically taught here at Hogwarts.”

Not wanting to interrupt, but also bursting with curiosity, Harry asked, “Did you learn it at Ilvermorny?”

Wayla regarded him with his dark eyes, before slowly beginning to speak

“The history of magic is very different in North America. My people practiced magic openly for many years, occasionally using staffs as vessels for our magic, but for the most part it was wandless. It was when the colonists arrived that we had to learn how to cast non-verbally. Wizards and witches were hunted in those days, among the Puritans themselves as well as among us.

“Many of them believed it was our people that were spreading magic amongst their own and we were heavily persecuted for it. It became vital for our people to know how to cast without leaving any evidence of magic, and so non-verbal and wandless magic became ingrained in our culture. When Ilvermorny was founded, members of our tribe—among others—offered to teach non-verbal and wandless magic in exchange for instruction at the school. It was a skill born of necessity, to escape persecution, however Ilvermorny is now famous for teaching it to their students.”

Harry listened raptly. He had never found History of Magic interesting in the slightest in his past six years at Hogwarts, however much of that had to do with the person—or ghost, rather—who was

teaching it. Having never heard anything about magic in the Americas, Harry found himself quite curious.

“It is a valuable skill to learn, and while I usually recommend it is taught to children from a young age so they have longer to become accustomed to it, I am aware that you are a highly unusual wizard. I have hoped for many years that Hogwarts would begin teaching more wandless magic, and I think you would be the perfect choice to introduce it.”

While he normally protested claims he was in some way an exceptional wizard, Harry felt himself swell with pride. This was something he would love to get *very* good at. There were so many benefits to wandless and non-verbal magic, he wondered why it hadn't been introduced at Hogwarts earlier.

“If you don't mind putting your wand away for a moment, could you demonstrate the wandless spells you are able to perform?”

Harry obediently placed his wand on Ashworth's desk and then concentrated on summoning his magic into his hand.

“*Lumos*,” he cast, and a ball of bright, bluish-white light burst from his palm.

“Excellent,” Waya nodded, approvingly. “What else?”

“Erm,” Harry looked around the room, trying to find something to summon. Deciding on the Gryffindor flag hanging by Ashworth's bookshelf, he cast, “*Accio* flag.”

The small scarlet flag came zooming towards him. Waya nodded once again.

“Charms are a wonderful place to start. Are you able to do any defensive or offensive spells wandlessly?”

“Only *Expelliarmus*,” Harry said, “and it's really only sometimes.”

“Sometimes? Say more on that.”

Harry wrung his hands, trying to think of how best to explain it.

“I've only been able to do it, well, in battle,” he said. “Out of desperation, I suppose.”

Waya's expression was very serious.

“Does this manifest in other ways?” he asked.

“Er...what do you mean?”

“Do you often lose control of your magic? Does it operate by itself when you become emotional or find yourself in dangerous situations? Similarly to when you were a child, perhaps?”

Harry thought about this.

“Sometimes,” he nodded. “Not often, I don't think. I mean, when I was thirteen, I accidentally blew up my aunt. And last year, sometimes my magic would just come out without me casting a spell.”

Waya still wore that stern expression, his dark skin betraying the lines around his mouth as he frowned slightly.

“Fascinating,” he said, quietly, before looking at Harry. “As I’m sure you’ve heard many times now, you are a very powerful wizard. However, we do have to make sure you have a firmer control over your magic. As an instructor, you certainly do not want your magic acting out in the classroom, and I guarantee that emotions will get high at times. I also think, though, that there is more you are capable of with such strong magic. If you’re able to fully control your magic, I think there is a potential for exploring some Ancient Magic, if you have an interest, of course.”

Harry found that he very much did.

Harry went to the next Quidditch match with Ron. It was Gryffindor versus Hufflepuff, and Ron’s face had completely lit up when Harry had suggested they go together at breakfast.

He was rather glad with his decision, as well. While he dearly missed playing Quidditch, the new Seeker—a fourth year boy named Euan Abercrombie—flew rather well. He was small and quick. The exact right build for a Seeker, and Harry was strongly reminded of his own first time playing Quidditch.

Ron was yelling loudly throughout most of the game, especially when a Hufflepuff Beater pelted Bludger at Ginny and hit her right in the ribs, causing her to double over on her broom.

“Foul!” Ron bellowed, almost louder than the commentary, which was being done by Dennis Creevey. He motioned to Madam Hooch, who didn’t do anything, because it hadn’t really been a foul, and Harry just grinned at his friend.

He only stopped when Ginny shouted, from the air, “That was a clean hit, Ron! Shut up!”

Ron scowled, and Hooch blew her whistle and the game carried on.

“Weasley tells her brother off and Hufflepuff Beater Heidi Winchester laughs and...winks at her? Aaaaand Gryffindor in possession of the Quaffle, Robins passes to McDonald, McDonald to Weasley, Weasley back to McDonald, and—oh!—Carpenter intercepts! And now it’s Hufflepuff with the Quaffle.”

It was a rather intense game, as the Hufflepuff Chasers were formidable, but the new Gryffindor Keeper was very quick.

“Glad she wasn’t trying out when I was,” Ron said, when she made an extraordinary block by hanging upside down on her broom and kicking the Quaffle away with the tip of her foot.

Harry merely grinned, deciding it was better not to agree aloud. He was glad to have this time with Ron, this moment of normalcy in what was one of his most unusual years at Hogwarts—which was saying a lot.

He had been thinking a lot about his conversation with Hermione, about spending energy hating Malfoy. He still felt so tired all the time, and he was still constantly thinking about the war, about all the lives they had lost. Everyone seemed to expect him to move on, to suddenly be alright just because they had won.

And yes, sure, they had won. But at what cost? Could it really count as winning if they had lost so many people, so many lives? Harry still thought about them all, about Remus and Tonks, about Fred, and Moody, and Dumbledore; even Snape. And Sirius. Always Sirius. He thought after three years maybe the pain would start to subside or numb itself out, but it still came at him in harsh reminders, like a quick stab to the chest every time.

Hermione said that talking about it would help, that he needed to get some of the pressure off his chest. But he felt like talking about it just made things worse, just made the pain more present, more focused. And talking always seemed to worry his friends, something that he didn't feel he had any business doing anymore.

It was Valentine's Day, and apparently the Hufflepuffs were throwing a party in the common room at midnight. Harry's immediate thought was that he would much rather go to bed and get some sleep, but Hermione, Ron, and Sophie all seemed to be looking forward to it, and when Hermione looked at him with a smile and bright eyes and asked, "You're coming too, right, Harry?" he knew he couldn't just say no. What kind of a friend would he be if he left her to be a third-wheel with Ron and Sophie?

So that's why he was here now, holding a goblet of pumpkin juice and sitting on one of his armchairs, watching his classmates chatting and laughing amongst each other. He felt a bit stupid, and briefly considered if Ron and Hermione would notice if he slipped away to his dormitory.

Ron was sitting on the carpet, leaning against an armchair occupied by Sophie, who was mindlessly running her left hand through his hair. Around them sat Seamus, Dean, Justin Finch-Fletchley, and Terry Boot, and they all seemed to be having a serious debate about something.

Hermione was chatting animatedly with a dark-haired Ravenclaw, who was nodding enthusiastically, both of them sitting on the window seats usually frequented by the Slytherins. Speaking of the Slytherins, Harry didn't see any of them around. He supposed that made sense, since there were far less of them this year. Perhaps they simply didn't want to attend.

He himself didn't really want to be attending.

He didn't know why he wasn't feeling up to it. He supposed he had never really liked parties, not that he had been to very many.

It wasn't much of a party, to be honest. Not that Harry had known what to expect, but it was much like any other Saturday in the common room, with people relaxing and chatting amongst each other. He was just thinking that he would tell Hermione he was tired and head to bed when a loud noise interrupted his thoughts.

He looked up to search for the source of the sound and saw a group of people atop the staircase leading to the boys' dormitories. Among them, a shock of pale blond hair. *Ah*. The Slytherins had arrived. The loud noise appeared to be coming from a wizard radio, which Greengrass, who was leading the group, was holding in her left hand. As they descended the stairs, Harry recognized it as a Weird Sisters song.

Everyone was watching them now, mostly silent, aside from a few girls sitting by one of the table, who were whispering amongst themselves. Ernie Macmillan had sprung forward to meet them at the bottom of the stairs.

“What are you doing here?” he asked, in a haughty voice.

“We live here,” Greengrass replied, coolly. “This is our common room too.”

“Well, yes,” Ernie stumbled, slightly, but then recovered. “But we’re hosting something at the moment, so if you please—”

“Oh, you mean the party that you purposefully kept a secret from us so that we wouldn’t show up?” Greengrass said, making her voice louder so that everyone would hear.

Almost everyone began whispering at this, and Ernie’s face went rather pink.

“It’s bad manners to show up uninvited!” he protested, and, at this, Hermione jumped in.

“Is she telling the truth, Ernie?” she demanded, standing up so fast that her hair seemed to bounce. “Did you selectively not invite the Slytherins?”

“Nobody wants them here!” Ernie exclaimed, losing all sense of his originally calm composure.

Harry couldn’t help but look at Malfoy, who was standing at the back of the group of Slytherins and staring determinedly at the ground, looking very much as though he’d like nothing more than to just disappear.

“I want them here,” Harry said, and everyone’s head whipped around to look at him. He didn’t know what made him say it. He supposed it was rather unfair, to invite everyone but the Slytherins, especially considering the fact that they were all sharing a common room together.

“Wha—What?” Ernie stuttered, seemingly blown away.

Harry shrugged.

“We’re all just sitting here talking, why shouldn’t they be able to join in? They’ve brought a radio.”

Greengrass was beaming at this point and pushed Zabini, who looked rather apprehensive, forward.

“And Firewhisky!” she declared.

More murmurings commenced among the rest of the common room, most people suddenly looking much more welcoming.

“They’re Death Eaters,” said a Ravenclaw girl, coldly, which stopped all murmurings immediately, and wiped the smile off Greengrass’s face.

“Slytherin does not mean Death Eater, Lisa,” Hermione said, turning towards the girl. “They’re not.”

“Malfoy is,” Ernie argued.

Harry looked at Malfoy again, who was still looking down at the ground, but whose jaw was clenched so tightly that Harry could see the bone sticking out in his pointy face.

“Malfoy was judged by the Wizengamot and given the appropriate sentence,” Harry said, finally standing up from his chair. “Unless you think your opinion matters more than the Wizengamot’s?”

Looking rather intimidated, Ernie shook his head.

“Why don’t we bring it to a vote?” Hermione said, facing the rest of the common room. “All those who want the Slytherins to stay, raise a hand.”

Harry raised his hand in the air, and watched as more hands steadily began to rise. Only a few people kept their heads down—Ernie, the Ravenclaw girl Lisa, the Patil twins, a Hufflepuff girl, Seamus, and...Ron.

“That’s decided then.” Hermione said, in an official tone of voice. “The Slytherins stay.”

The Slytherins looked like they hadn’t expected this victory, given the surprised expressions they sported.

“Thank you, Granger,” Greengrass said, somewhat quietly, and Hermione gave her a smile, before returning to the window seat and the Ravenclaw boy. Greengrass pushed Zabini forward again, who revealed a rucksack he was carrying and began to pull bottles out of it. The room began to buzz again, with people leaning forward interestedly. Zabini placed all the bottles on a nearby table and Summoned several dozen goblets from the other side of the room.

“Help yourselves,” Greengrass said, with a nervous-looking smile, setting the radio down on the same table.

People started to stand and walk over the table, some offering smiles and ‘thank you’s to Greengrass, who was looking more confident. Harry was still looking at Malfoy, who hadn’t moved from his position at the back, and hadn’t lifted his head. His friend, Foxblade, was standing next to him, holding his arm in what could either be a comforting gesture or to prevent him from sprinting back to the dormitories.

He seemed to realize he was being watched, because he finally looked up and met Harry’s gaze, pulling his face into a frown as he did so. Tugging free of Foxblade’s grip, he walked over to where Harry was standing by his just-vacated armchair.

“You didn’t have to do that, Potter,” he said, shortly.

“Do what?”

Malfoy scowled at him.

“You know exactly what.”

Malfoy often didn’t make any sense to Harry. Not that he had been expecting him to be grateful or anything, but no matter how much progress they seemed to make, it appeared as though there was always going to be this underlying animosity between them.

Harry realized he was tired of it. Hermione had been right, he just didn’t have the energy in him to hate Malfoy anymore. Moreover, he didn’t have the *desire* to hate him anymore.

“I know I didn’t have to,” he said, calmly. “I wanted to. It was the truth. It was the right thing to do.”

Malfoy just stared at him blankly, until Harry nodded towards the table.

“I’m going to get some Firewhisky. Do you want some?”

i think you like me out of focus and i think i like you in the moment

Chapter Summary

“Excellent work, as always,” Slughorn said, approvingly as he passed by their table. “And you used a gold cauldron! Ah, Harry, my boy, you remind me of your mother. Take ten points for Gryffindor.”

Potter made his usual uncomfortable-looking face, glancing from Draco to Slughorn, but surprised Draco when he spoke up.

“Well, sir, Malfoy actually said we should use the gold cauldron. He knew a lot more about Amortentia than I did,” he said.

Draco, to his own horror, felt himself flush as Slughorn’s eyes fell on him.

“Is that right?” he asked, and Draco forced himself to meet his head of House’s eyes.

“Yes, sir,” he said, in his most polite tone of voice. Slughorn looked at the potion once again, from which steam was rising in perfect, characteristic spirals, and then back to Draco.

“Very well done,” he said, after a beat. “Twenty points to Slytherin.”

Chapter Notes

this chapter was SO fun to write !! and its loooooong too so I hope you guys enjoy it!! let me know what you think <3

chapter title is from the song Devil's In The Backseat by lostboycrew

Draco had begun insisting that Potter at least pay attention to what he was doing in their Potions classes. He had told Potter—and attempted to tell himself—that it was because he was tired of doing all the work while Potter sat around doing nothing and taking all the credit.

Truthfully, Draco didn’t really mind doing the work. He enjoyed brewing Potions. It just made sense. It was precise, methodical work, and he liked how he had to focus his whole mind on it, leaving no room for other, unsavoury thoughts to creep in.

However, it was when Slughorn reminded them on which potions were likely to be on their N.E.W.T.s that Draco realized Potter had absolutely no idea how to make any of them. Initially, he thought, well, that’s Potter’s problem, isn’t it? But then he started feeling somewhat guilty. Slughorn favoured Potter, there was no question about it, but even the Saviour of the Wizarding

World couldn't get away with passing a Potions N.E.W.T. without knowing how to draft a simple Pepper-Up.

So, unfortunately, now Draco was actually attempting to teach Potter how to brew the potions they were assigned, which was proving rather difficult. Thankfully, there were no longer at each other's throats quite as much, however Draco was still finding Potter's ineptitude challenging his patience. When Slughorn announced that today's potion was Amortentia, Draco felt his heart sink slightly. Amortentia was an exceptionally difficult potion to brew, and talking Potter through it was not going to be easy.

Potter himself was looking somewhat nervous, however, which—for some reason—lifted Draco's spirits slightly.

"Fetch the ingredients, would you, Potter?" Draco said, in a somewhat resigned voice. Whether this turned out to be an utter catastrophe, he supposed he would just have to wait and see. "And do *not* touch any of them with your bare hands."

Potter mumbled something that sounded like, "I know, I know," and ambled off to the ingredient storage. Meanwhile, Draco went to back of the classroom to trade the pewter cauldron for one of solid gold.

When they both returned to the table, Potter gave him a funny look.

"Why do we have a gold cauldron? That wasn't in the instructions, was it?"

Draco sat, looking over the ingredients dumped on the table by Potter to make sure they were all correct, before answering.

"No, it wasn't, however Amortentia brews much stronger in a gold cauldron. Sometimes, during the brewing process, when the Valerian root is added, the potion can reach extremely high temperatures, and some of the pewter from the cauldron can melt and mix into the potion, which dilutes it. However, gold has a much higher melting point, so it doesn't carry the same risk."

To Draco's surprise, Potter actually looked interested.

"How come Slughorn didn't mention that?" he asked.

Draco shrugged.

"Because you can still use a pewter cauldron without really damaging the potion. But if you swap for gold during your N.E.W.T., you're bound to score a few extra point."

Potter nodded, and Draco couldn't help but feel his mood slightly brighten. There was something about holding Potter's attention that was very powerful. Draco tried to tell himself it was because Potter was a dolt who couldn't keep his focus on anything for more than a few seconds, but he knew that wasn't the truth.

"I thought Amortentia took like a month to make," he said. Draco shook his head.

"No. The Ashwinder eggs need to steep in the rosewater for exactly thirty days, which is why the process usually takes that long, but Slughorn's already done that for us."

Potter nodded again, seemingly understanding, and Draco felt a bit better. Maybe this wouldn't be as draining as he thought.

By the time class was nearly over, however, he felt very differently. He had tried to patiently walk Potter through the process of Amortentia, but Merlin, Potter was *slow*, seeming to have a hard time when it called for doing two things as once, such as stirring while adding the Veela tears, or adjusting the heat after every drop of moondew was added.

Draco had tried not to snap at him, because he knew that would lead to an argument or at least some snarky exchanging of words, which they really couldn't afford while working on a potion this complicated. He was rather proud of himself to have accomplished this feat, especially since Potter had *not* made it easy.

"Excellent work, as always," Slughorn said, approvingly as he passed by their table. "And you used a gold cauldron! Ah, Harry, my boy, you remind me of your mother. Take ten points for Gryffindor."

Potter made his usual uncomfortable-looking face, glancing from Draco to Slughorn, but surprised Draco when he spoke up.

"Well, sir, Malfoy actually said we should use the gold cauldron. He knew a lot more about Amortentia than I did," he said.

Draco, to his own horror, felt himself flush as Slughorn's eyes fell on him.

"Is that right?" he asked, and Draco forced himself to meet his Head of House's eyes.

"Yes, sir," he said, in his most polite tone of voice. Slughorn looked at the potion once again, from which steam was rising in perfect, characteristic spirals, and then back to Draco.

"Very well done," he said, after a beat. "Twenty points to Slytherin."

Draco's eyes widened and when he caught Theo's eyes across the room, Theo grinned at him. Draco felt himself go even pinker.

Once Slughorn was at the front of the room, he addressed the class.

"I have to say, I am very impressed with you all today!" He spoke with a broad grin on his face and his arms out as if he were inviting them all to embrace him. "You all brewed a highly advanced potion to a relative degree of success."

Draco couldn't help but wonder how relative the degree of Weasley and Finnigan's success was. His eyes were just wandering over to look at Zacharias Smith and the other seventh-year Hufflepuff at the front of the class when he realized Slughorn was inviting them to name what they smelled from their potions.

He frowned. He didn't find that entirely appropriate; after all, Amortentia was meant to smell of the things one found most attractive, something that Draco found to be...well, rather personal. He shifted in his seat slightly as the fumes of the potion wafted temptingly into his nose.

"...and peaches, and the leather of a Quaffle," girl-Weasley was saying, leaning forward in her seat next to Luna, who said nothing more than "it smells like friends and stars and happiness," when it

was her turn to speak.

He paid a bit more attention when it was Theo's turn. His feelings regarding Theo were rather confusing, and he had never really been the best at understanding his emotions even when they were simple. He knew he had had strong feelings towards Theo, whatever they might have been. He had hoped desperately for Theo's survival and safety during the war, though he hadn't been the only one Draco had worried over. But Theo was the one that caused a funny sort of flutter in his stomach whenever he gave him that half-smile of his. At the same time, Draco didn't think he wanted anything else. After the disaster on Theo's birthday, Draco had thought about it, had thought about what had motivated him to launch himself at Theo in that way. He thought about whether he was disappointed with Theo's response, whether he wanted...well, whether he wanted to kiss Theo again. More. Regularly.

But he didn't think he did. He liked being his friend. He liked that he could now talk about the true nature of his apprenticeship with him, that conversation rarely turned to the war, that Theo was smart and well-read and could easily keep up with Draco.

And, well, if Theo was rather good-looking as well, it wasn't Draco's fault he felt that little flutter. That flutter was a purely physical reaction that had nothing to do with Draco's thoughts or desires. Draco didn't *really* desire Theo, he just...admired him. Found him interesting. And attractive.

But maybe, just maybe, Draco would like it if *Theo* desired *him*. Perhaps it was a bit selfish, but was that so wrong? Was it so wrong to want to feel wanted by someone, especially when it was abundantly clear every day that his very presence and existence was so thoroughly *unwanted* by everyone else around him?

Draco didn't feel like he deserved much of anything anymore, but he did feel like he deserved the right to be a little bit selfish in that regard. And...and maybe he did want to kiss Theo a bit, but perhaps it was more that he wanted to kiss *someone*. His teenage years had been somewhat lacking in that regard, and perhaps he was a little *antsy* for it.

"I smell...cold mountain air and eucalyptus," Theo was saying, his face one of concentration. "And...something more fragrant...grapefruit, I think? It's...oh. It was my mother's perfume."

His voice seemed to get small at the end, and Draco saw Blaise reach over and squeeze his arm comfortingly. Blaise then described scents of leather and pipe-smoke and cognac, and then it was Weasley and Finnigan's turn.

"Frying bacon," were the first words out of Weasley's mouth.

Draco couldn't help but smirk—how predictable.

"And Christmas trees, the pine needles, I mean. And ground coffee," Weasley went on, leaning further over the cauldron.

Finnigan went on to describe the smell of a campfire and green tea and liquorice, and then they were the only table left. Draco felt all eyes swivel to look at him and Potter at the back of the classroom, and immediately looked at Potter to avoid making eye contact with anyone else.

Potter was looking at their cauldron, with a strange expression on his face, as if he was reading a complex and difficult book and struggling to understand it.

“Harry?” Slughorn prompted, shaking Potter from his reverie.

“Right, er, yeah,” Potter said, characteristically eloquently. “I smell treacle tart, and broomstick polish, and Firewhisky. And...er...some sort of flower, I don’t know what kind.”

Draco suddenly felt a burning curiosity to identify the flower Potter was smelling. Where had he smelled it? What did it remind him of? What did it symbolize? Did it have a Muggle meaning as well? Did Potter know if it had a meaning? Probably not, since he couldn’t even name the flower.

“And you, Mr Malfoy?” Slughorn was saying, and Draco’s attention was brought back to the intoxicating steam rising from the pearlescent potion.

He still felt it was rather personal to talk about, and he spoke in a quiet voice, but he revealed it nonetheless.

“I smell freshly baked bread,” he said, softly. “And rain on the pavement...cashmere sweaters and chardonnay and—”

He stopped abruptly, not wanting to say anymore, but realized the whole class was waiting for him to finish.

“And fish and chips,” he mumbled, almost inaudibly, staring determinedly at his lap. When he finally looked up, the class was facing the front again, but Potter’s green eyes were fixed on him.

Draco stared at the wand before him, hardly able to believe what he was looking at.

“Outstanding job, my boy, simply outstanding,” Ollivander was saying, but Draco was far too distracted by the wand he held in his hands. It wasn’t a particularly handsome wand, but it was a *wand*, and he had *made* it.

“Go on then, try it out,” Ollivander urged, and Draco gripped the handle of the wand a little tighter.

“*Aguamenti*,” he cast, and a jet of water shot out from the tip of the wand. Perhaps it was not as much as it should have been, but it didn’t matter, because *he* had made this wand and it *worked*. More than that, his theory on wand cores had been right, and here was the proof—twelve inches of walnut wood and dragonfly wing.

“Excellent!” Ollivander said, clapping a wizened hand on Draco’s shoulder. “You are making tremendous strides, my boy. Your theory on the cores was *revolutionary*; no such thing has been accomplished in wandlore yet, Draco, no one had even considered it. You should be very proud.”

Draco couldn’t help it—he was grinning. He felt a sudden rush of gratitude towards Minerva McGonagall, for having suggested he pursue wandlore as he had never felt so fulfilled in his life.

“Come sit,” Ollivander beckoned him, and Draco obediently went to sit in the chair across from the old wandmaker, placing the wand—the wand *he had made*—on the table beside them.

“How are you feeling?” Ollivander asked him, a small smile on his face.

Draco didn’t know how to properly describe what he was feeling. He didn’t know if he had the vocabulary, if he had a past feeling he could relate it to.

What came out of his mouth was the word, “grateful,” and he found it was very true. Ollivander’s silvery eyes softened slightly.

“Do you still believe yourself unworthy of forgiveness?” he asked, his voice much gentler.

Draco fidgeted in his seat.

“Some things cannot be forgiven, sir,” he said, and he couldn’t help but think he sounded so small.

“That may well be true,” Ollivander nodded slowly, “but others can be, and it is important you know that I have forgiven you long ago. You have proven yourself to be a dedicated and hard-working student who understands the complexities and nuances of wandlore, and your ideas come from a place of curiosity and a thirst for knowledge, and I believe that has pushed you to open your mind.”

Draco didn’t understand how he could feel like his heart was sinking and soaring at the same time. He wanted to interrupt, to argue, to shout that it didn’t matter how open his mind was becoming now, as it hadn’t been open when it mattered. He hadn’t learned fast enough.

But another part of him didn’t want Ollivander to stop talking. He wanted to hear this, *craved* it almost, searching for something positive to think about himself again after so long, wanting *someone* to think something good about him, to be *proud* of him.

“I want to discuss the subject of wand allegiance some more,” Ollivander said, his tone becoming more serious. Draco immediately shoved down the emotions that were bubbling inside of him and focused his attention.

“It is a facet of wandlore that is particularly difficult to study and thus, difficult to understand. Magic can be fickle at the best of times, and since wands are imbued with a special form of magic, but are not sentient beings, what can cause a wand to bend its allegiance is not always clear or constant. As you know, certain wand woods are more faithful than others, and generations of wandmakers have tried to understand why that is. When purchasing a new wand, it is largely a matter of trial and error, testing wands until one chooses to yield its allegiance. Where it gets more tricky is when wands are won or inherited. Wands form strong bonds with their original owners and these bonds are not given up on easily. Even when wands are won, there is no guarantee that it has been completely mastered. Wands have different personalities, and many have various conditions that must be fulfilled before their allegiance will switch over.”

He was repeating a lot of information they had covered previously, but sounded like he was building up to something, so Draco remained silent and listened. When Ollivander paused, and looked off to the distance, Draco realized he had been holding his breath.

“The Elder Wand is a fascinating case to consider,” said Ollivander, quietly. “Not much is known about it, as it is a wand of legend. Prior to last year, I was not certain it truly existed. I must admit, I thought it to be merely a folk tale. The allegiance of the Elder Wand is unsentimental and faithless. It is only loyal to strength, switching its allegiance entirely when won in a duel or battle. That is not to say that it is *easily* won, as it is the most powerful wand in existence and those in possession are, of course, aware of its valuable nature and go to extreme means to prevent others from obtaining it.”

There was another pause as Ollivander seemed lost in thought. Draco felt like his heart was beating somewhat faster. He didn’t know where Ollivander was going with this, but he was desperate to.

He hadn't really been able to follow Potter's speech to the Dark Lord about the Elder Wand during the Battle, it wasn't as if that was where his full attention was focused, but he wanted to understand. He wanted to know how it was possible that *he* had, at some point, held ownership of the Elder Wand, when he had never even laid a hand on the blasted thing.

"It is curious that you held the Elder Wand's allegiance for a brief period of time," Ollivander said, as if reading Draco's thought. "The method of victory was subtle, a simple Disarming spell, one that would not gain the allegiance of many more faithful wands."

Draco felt the familiar guilt and self-loathing fill him as he remembered that terrifying night at the top of the Astronomy tower, the look on Dumbledore's face, the strange utter peace that he seemed to hold in his pale blue eyes.

He shook his head slightly, commanding himself to pay attention.

"It is this that makes me wonder over the status of the hawthorn wand."

Draco hadn't been expecting that.

"What?" he asked. "Why?"

"If we follow the chain of allegiance of the Elder Wand, we see that young Mr Potter won it from you with a similar subtle method, a Disarming spell or something of that nature, causing no significant harm to you. The Elder Wand, not being especially loyal, thus transferred allegiance to him. However, hawthorn is not a wood that makes for easily-won wands, as you well know. When Mr Potter gained control and possession of your wand, there was a shifting of allegiances—of that, there is no doubt. Whether that allegiance was of *both* the Elder Wand and the hawthorn wand, however, I must say that I am not certain."

Draco's heart thrummed against his chest.

"How can we find out?" he asked. To his surprise, Ollivander let out a soft chuckle.

"Come now, my boy. You know very well how to ascertain the allegiance of a wand. You must test it."

"It's bloody useless, Potter, I'm never going to get it," Draco threw himself into a chair, frustrated.

"It was your *third* try, Malfoy, you can't give up that easy," Potter said, rolling his eyes. "What memory were you thinking of?"

"That's none of your business," Draco retorted, automatically. Responding to Potter with snark almost seemed like a basic instinct at this point.

"I'm trying to *help* you, Malfoy. I need to know if the memory was happy enough to even produce a Patronus. Just tell me what it was."

"Fine!" Draco grumbled. "I thought about the first time I flew on a broomstick."

Potter stared at him. It was a few seconds until it started to feel quite strange to Draco and he was just about to ask what the prat was doing when suddenly, Potter started laughing. It was Draco's turn to stare, as Potter threw his head back and guffawed, loudly.

“I don’t see what’s so funny about that!” Draco declared, getting to his feet and preparing to stalk off. He didn’t come here to get made fun of by Potter, that was for *damn* certain. As he walked towards the door, however, Potter’s hand reached out and grabbed his arm, his fingers wrapping right around where, under his robes, Draco’s Dark Mark was.

“No, wait, I’m sorry,” Potter said, still grinning. “I’m not taking the piss, it’s just...that’s exactly the memory I chose the first time I tried to cast a Patronus.”

“Oh,” said Draco, unable to articulate anything else. Mentally, he cursed himself for being so ineloquent, but aloud he just said, “Well.”

“It didn’t work for me, either,” Potter continued. “You need something much stronger than that. Think about it. What’s a memory that brings you pure joy? That makes you feel warm and safe and happy inside?”

Draco searched through his brain, trying to conjure up a memory that fit Potter’s description, and then it dawned on him, and he couldn’t stop a smile from crossing his face.

“My ninth birthday.”

Potter looked at him, curiously.

“What happened on your ninth birthday?”

Draco looked back at Potter, and considered repeating that it was none of business, but it seemed so trivial a thing to say. After all, Potter was actually doing something nice for him here, and he had to make sure the memory was suitable anyway.

So, he thought, what the hell?

“My father was away on business. At first, I was terribly upset with him. He’d never missed my birthday before, you see. I sat in my room, sulking, refusing to come down for breakfast or even open the presents he’d left for me.”

“So you were being a brat, as usual,” Potter interrupted, a stupid, wide grin still on his face. Draco scowled at him.

“Do you mind, Potter? I’m telling a story.”

Potter mimed locking his lips and throwing away the key. Only then did Draco continue.

“But then my mother came into my room and she said that if I wanted, she would take me to go play by the creek.”

Potter’s eyebrows furrowed and he immediately broke his promise of staying silent.

“What’s so special about the creek?”

“The creek is just outside of the Manor’s grounds, it runs through the forest a few miles away. Father never let me play there because he said I would get all muddy, which was ‘unbecoming’ for a proper young man. But I’d *always* wanted to; there were frogs in the creek, and these beautiful red and white fish with those flowing fins, and all these different-coloured rocks at the bottom. So

Mother said that if I promised not to tell Father, she'd take me out to the creek and I could play there as long as I wanted."

Draco didn't even realize how much had tumbled out of his mouth until he was done. He couldn't decipher the expression on Potter's face, but he could see that his bright green eyes were shining.

"So, did you? Play in the creek?" he asked. Draco nodded, smirking slightly.

"It was glorious. I caught two frogs, and found twelve different rocks and a Muggle twenty-pence coin to take home."

Potter laughed, and, this time, Draco didn't feel alienated by it. It was a warm sound, comforting even.

"Did your father ever find out?"

"Never," Draco shook his head, the memory dying away. "He still doesn't know."

Potter seemed to pick up on Draco's thoughts drifting to his father, who was now sitting in a cell in Azkaban, as he spoke up again.

"That seems like a good memory to use. Want to give it another go?"

Draco nodded and lifted his wand. He focused on the memory, on the sound of his mother's laughs as he'd splashed around in the creek, on the wonderment he'd felt as the beautiful fish swam around him, tickling his feet.

"Expecto Patronum!"

A wisp of silvery mist shot out of his wand, twisting and spinning. Draco watched it, transfixed, as it danced around him before slowly fading away.

Behind him, Potter let out a loud whoop.

"That was brilliant, Malfoy!" he said, and clapped a hand on Draco's shoulder, hard.

Draco shook his head, despite how amazed he had been at the mist.

"It didn't take a form."

"Well, you can't expect it to the first time around! You gotta practice, that's all. This is a big step, Malfoy, good job."

Potter smiled at him, and Draco was suddenly struck by the thought, *how bizarre. Harry Potter is smiling at me.*

Perhaps spending time with Luna Lovegood was having some sort of effect on him, because Draco did something spectacularly odd—he smiled back.

i'd like to be my old self again, but i'm still trying to find it

Chapter Summary

“Sometimes they’re like the old visions I used to get, in fifth and sixth year, where it’s like I’m actually him, or Nagini. But they’re different, they’re not...they’re not memories.”

He pauses, feeling like all of his insides are twisting and pulling, shaking him from the inside out. He wrings his hands anxiously in his lap and avoids meeting Hermione’s eyes.

“Sometimes I see him and he’s...he’s hurting people, but I can’t move, I can’t help. It’s like I’m paralyzed in my body and I can’t do anything but watch as he tortures people. Over and over again. And they’re people he never...I see Sirius, all the time,” he feels an overwhelming urge to scream, to yell, to throw something, but more than anything else, he wants to cry. “And Remus and Tonks and Fred and you and Ron and Dumbledore and...and even Sophie and Neville and Malfoy and Ginny and...”

Chapter Notes

Harry is just going THROUGH it, y'all. Hope you enjoy the chapter <3

chapter title is from the song All Too Well by Taylor Swift

Harry's nightmares had reached a level that rivaled fifth year, and considering that he no longer had a piece of Voldemort's soul inside of him to blame them on, it was becoming a major point of concern.

They seemed to come and go—for several nights, he would have a restful, dreamless sleep, and then suddenly, the next night, he would jolt awake in a cold sweat, reaching for his wand in the darkness.

He had been avoiding talking about them with Ron or Hermione. He didn't want to bother them, especially since they both seemed to be doing so well.

Ron and Sophie were spending a lot of time together, but it was often with the four of them as a group, unlike when he had been with Lavender and had somewhat abandoned Harry and Hermione. He seemed so happy, the two of them were constantly making each other laugh until they doubled over, and even with all the additional work that preparing for the N.E.W.T.s brought, Ron was always going on about Auror training and how great it was, and he didn't even seem to *mind* doing homework for it.

Hermione, of course, delighted in homework, even with all of the classes she was taking on top of her already demanding apprenticeship. Harry thought that her desire to work in the Department of

Mysteries was smart; he knew there was no mystery that Hermione didn't want to be a part of solving and he was glad for her, even if she couldn't reveal much to him about what she was learning.

She also seemed to be getting along very well with the dark-haired Ravenclaw boy who was apprenticing with her. Harry knew he wasn't the most observant person, but even he could recognize the bright-eyed expression on her face whenever he smiled at her while passing in the Great Hall, or whenever he saw them talking animatedly—usually over several open books—in the common room.

He had asked her about it once, mentioning how excited she had seemed while talking to him, and Hermione had flushed slightly, but said, “Oliver and I were just discussing precedent for establishing elvish welfare in wizarding law, Harry,” as if that somehow discounted anything he had said.

She was also very friendly with Sophie, in a different way to how she was with Harry and Ron. Hermione had never had very many female friends, except for Ginny and Luna, with whom Hermione didn't really have much in common. Sophie, on the other hand, was rather similar to Hermione, which Harry frequently liked to point out to Ron, earning himself a smack on the back of his head every time.

The two were in Arithmancy together, and often spiralled into debates on the topic that Harry and Ron could not follow no matter how hard they tried. Sometimes they would also break off from the boys to discuss...well, Harry didn't really know. Whatever girls discussed in private. He didn't really want to think about that too much.

All in all, Hermione and Ron seemed to have moved on from the war. If they had not moved on entirely, then they were certainly doing a better job of putting it behind them than Harry was.

He felt angry with himself, angry that he was letting Voldemort consume even more of his life, as if the past seven years had not been enough. Really, the past seventeen years, even if he hadn't known about it prior to his eleventh birthday. Voldemort had taken his parents, had taken his chance at a happy childhood, had consumed his adolescence, had taken so many people that he loved and cared about.

Voldemort was *dead* and somehow, he was still not gone from Harry's life. Harry often found himself wondering if he ever would be. His and Voldemort's destinies had been woven together in many complicated ways, their fates had been bonded, and sometimes Harry didn't know if he would ever be free from that bond.

The nightmares sometimes felt like they were Voldemort himself, haunting Harry from beyond his grave. He knew that was silly, the voice in his head that always sounded like Hermione reminded him that Voldemort couldn't come back as a ghost even if he wanted to, since he had split his soul so many times, but that didn't stop those intrusive thoughts from entering his head.

He had taken to casting a Silencing Spell around his bed so that he wouldn't wake anyone up if he awoke screaming, but it didn't really help him feel any better about having the nightmares in the first place. At first, it wasn't so bad, as there were still nights that he managed to have a restful sleep, but as time went on, those nights seemed to become few and far between.

For a desperate moment, he had even tried Occlumency, racking his brain to try and remember what Snape had taught him three years prior, but then he reminded himself that even if he wasn't

rubbish at Occlumency—which he definitely was—it was intended to block Legilimency, not real nightmares.

It took about a week of almost a complete lack of proper sleep until Harry finally gave up and decided to talk to Hermione about it. He didn't want to worry her, but he also knew that she was bound to notice how exhausted and moody he was becoming sooner or later, so there was really no point in avoiding it any longer.

He had tried to keep it casual, bringing it up as he sat beside her in the common room, simply asking if she still got any nightmares about the war. Predictably, she had looked up from her book with furrowed eyebrows and a concerned expression on her face.

"Sometimes," she said, slowly. "Have yours gotten worse?"

He wanted to say no, to reassure her that he was fine and just get up and walk away. He was tempted to. He felt such helplessness inside him, and then anger at himself for that helplessness. Why couldn't he just be okay? Everything was *fine* this year, no one was trying to kill him or his friends, the only things he had to worry about was his apprenticeships and his N.E.W.T.s, so *why* was he still experiencing this?

"Yeah," he said. "I don't know why."

Hermione's expression softened slightly.

"What have they been about?" she asked, in a quieter tone.

"Voldemort," he responded, hating himself as he said it. "Sometimes they're like the old visions I used to get, in fifth and sixth year, where it's like I'm actually him, or Nagini. But they're different, they're not...they're not memories."

He paused, feeling like all of his insides were twisting and pulling, shaking him from the inside out. He wrung his hands anxiously in his lap and avoided meeting Hermione's eyes.

"Sometimes I see him, and he's...he's *hurting* people, but I can't move, I can't help. It's like I'm paralyzed in my body and I can't do anything but watch as he tortures people. Over and over again. And they're people he never...I see Sirius, all the time," he felt an overwhelming urge to scream, to yell, to throw something, but more than anything else, he wanted to cry. "And Remus and Tonks and Fred and *you* and Ron and Dumbledore and...and even Sophie and Neville and Malfoy and Ginny and..."

He trailed off when his voice hitched dangerously and he stared ahead, not really seeing anything. He could feel Hermione staring at him and he willed himself not to tear up, but his eyes were already watery from the lack of sleep and the pain in his eyelids and he clenched his fist and wished, out of nowhere, that he had just stayed dead in the Forbidden Forest and let this thing end once and for all, and that thought scared him.

"I'm sorry, Harry," Hermione said, in the softest voice, as if he was a deer she was afraid of frightening off. "I didn't know it was still so bad."

Harry just nodded, feeling numb.

"Have you been to see Madam Pomfrey?"

At this, Harry looked at her.

“Pomfrey? No. Why would I go see Pomfrey?”

“She could give you something to help you sleep better,” Hermione said.

“Oh,” said Harry, suddenly feeling stupid for not having thought of that.

“Harry,” Hermione starts, pausing to scan over Harry’s face. “Have you thought about seeing a Mind Healer?”

“A what?”

“They’re sort of like...Muggle psychologists, but for wizards and witches. You know what psychologists are, right?”

Vaguely, Harry thinks. He only knows what he heard from Uncle Vernon, which was that crazy people went to psychologists so naturally it wasn’t a topic often discussed in the Dursley household. But then, Harry also knew to take what Vernon said with a grain of salt.

“Well,” Hermione said, “I visited one in Australia. Ron did too, but a different one, and not as long as I did. And it was...it was really helpful. We would talk—about the war, about everything. They’re bound by confidentiality spells, so I just felt free to talk, to confess all the things that were eating away at me. The war...we all did horrible things in the war, to survive but also to win. And horrible things happened to us. To you. It’s not healthy to just have all of that in your head, in your heart.”

Harry considered this.

“What do they do?” he asked. “The Mind Healers. Is there a spell? A potion you take?”

Hermione paused.

“Some people take potions,” she said, and looked like she was steeling herself to go on. “Sophie is on some potions. Mood stabilizing potions. They keep her functioning, you know. Getting out of bed in the morning, having enough energy to shower and do her homework. That’s part of why she’s apprenticing to be a Healer, because of how much her Mind Healer helped her. But I mostly talked with mine. They’re trained to listen, to ask the right questions, to help you sort through your messy thoughts and memories. It takes some work, lots of introspection, but it really helped me.”

Harry didn’t want to think about this right now. He normally felt rather capable of communicating his feelings, but sitting down with a stranger and unloading everything that was weighing him down sounded like a daunting process. He wouldn’t even be able to find someone unbiased. He *was* Harry Potter, after all.

“Harry?” Hermione was looking at him, expression becoming worried again.

“What? Oh, er, yeah,” Harry attempted a smile. “I’ll think about it.”

“Please do,” she said. “And you know you can always talk to me, right?”

“Yeah,” Harry nodded, not feeling particularly reassured. “Thanks, Hermione.”

Malfoy had been holding him to a higher standard in their Potions classes, and while Harry knew it was for his own good that he try to listen and learn, he felt so exhausted that he could barely keep his eyes on what Malfoy was doing, let alone pay any actual attention.

“Potter. Potter!”

He blinked and refocused to see that Malfoy was inches from his own face, and he jerked back in surprise.

“Oh good, you’re alive,” Malfoy said, in a dry tone, straightening back up. “Is my instruction boring you, Potter?”

Harry sighed. He didn’t really want to deal with Malfoy’s sarcasm today.

“Just didn’t get a lot of sleep last night,” he mumbled, truthfully. Malfoy gave him an odd look, as if he had not been expecting an honest answer, which was probably fair, since they mainly communicated in jibes, even if they were much milder than the insults they used to use on each other.

“Well, wake yourself up, because Slughorn is coming this way,” Malfoy said, his eyes back on the potion they were making. Or rather, that he was making.

Harry looked up, and sure enough, Slughorn was walking around inspecting the tables, heading in their direction. He sat up a bit in his seat and Malfoy snorted.

“Yes, very attentive-looking, Potter, well done. Pass me the goosegrass.”

Harry scanned the table and reached out to pick what he hoped was the right ingredient.

“Thank you,” Malfoy said, taking it from him and causing Harry to stare at him. Even operating on practically a week of no sleep, Harry was aware enough to realize that Draco Malfoy had just *thanked* him.

Malfoy didn’t even seem to realize what he had said, still focused on the potion. Harry wasn’t sure if he should bring it up, he figured it would be rather obnoxious if he did, but Malfoy was constantly obnoxious, so if Harry had something to tease him with, what was wrong with that?

“Wonderful, wonderful, boys,” Slughorn’s booming voice interrupted Harry from his sleep-deprived thought process, looking down at the cauldron on their table, from which a gentle steam was rising. Harry tried to look like he was involved in the process.

“Hmm,” Slughorn was saying, looking thoughtful and then directing a question at Harry, “Did you do something different with the etharica?”

“Er...” Harry stumbled, not even sure what was being asked of him.

“Fifteen drops just like the textbook says,” Malfoy cuts in. “But frozen together and put in as a block so that it melts in the potion.”

Slughorn looked at Malfoy as if he had just realized he was there. A second passed, and then he absolutely beamed.

“Ingenious. Simply ingenious, my boy! Take ten points for Slytherin. Class, I want you to come see this. Everyone, put a Stasis Charm on your potions and gather round.”

Malfoy’s face had gone a deep pink and he immediately looked down at the potion again. This didn’t seem like Malfoy, who normally preened at any praise directed his way. Harry looked at him, somewhat confused. Surely Malfoy enjoyed the attention—he always had. Why was he acting like he didn’t want to meet anyone’s eyes?

Slughorn was pointing out to the class the soft periwinkle colour of their potion and explaining Malfoy’s method of freezing the etharica, but Harry was still looking at Malfoy, even when Slughorn dispersed the crowd and instructed them to go back to their own potion.

“...didn’t I think of that?” Hermione’s voice mumbled as she and Sophie walked back to their table, and Harry smiled to himself—of course Hermione would be beating herself up about that.

“Did we even add the etharica yet?” Ron was asking Seamus, who shrugged.

“Oh, go on then, Wilkins, give us a smile,” came another familiar voice from Harry’s left. “Such a *pretty* smile it is, too.”

“Leave her alone, Smith,” came Malfoy’s sharp tone from beside him, and Harry looked up to see Zacharias Smith standing at the table next to them, where Nadine Bellemore and the tiny Slytherin girl—Wilkins—were working on their potion. Wilkins looked impossibly young, and she was staring determinedly at the ground, her cheeks pink and her bottom lip quivering. With a sharp stab to his gut, Harry saw that there was a wound on the right side of her face—a scar going from the side of her lip an inch up her face and then turning slightly downwards toward her jaw. He racked his brain, trying to remember if she’d always had it.

Smith barked out a laugh.

“Look at that, Wilkins, got yourself a boyfriend. Didn’t know Death Eaters were your type.”

Malfoy made a sound, and Harry could’ve sworn it was a growl. Harry took a look at him—a proper look—and saw that Malfoy’s hands were clenched tightly into fists at his side, but he didn’t flinch, didn’t make a move for his wand.

“Back off, Smith,” Harry said, quietly. He didn’t want the rest of the class to realize what was going on back here, they didn’t need to start a fight.

Smith looked at Harry like he was going to argue, but he deflated under Harry’s gaze.

“Whatever,” he said, instead. “The slag isn’t worth it.”

He cast a dirty look at Wilkins and walked off. Harry looked at her again and saw that tears had begun to slide down her face.

“Oh, pull it together,” Bellemore said to her. “Let’s just finish the potion.”

Wilkins nodded, wiping her face with the sleeve of her robes, but she looked up and Harry locked eyes with her. She blinked and immediately looked away, but Harry felt another sharp pain go through him. Somehow he knew he’d have that look in her dark brown eyes keeping him up tonight.

“Tosser,” Malfoy was mumbling under his breath. “Bloody bastard.”

Harry looked at him, still stirring the potion with one hand and shelling iguana eggs effortlessly with the other.

“Do you know her?” he asked, jerking his head towards the table beside them. Malfoy looked at him like he was an idiot.

“She’s a Slytherin,” he said, like it was the most obvious thing in the world.

“I don’t know *all* the Gryffindors,” Harry said, defensively.

Malfoy sighed, focusing back on the potion, but answered, in a low voice.

“She’s been having a bit of a hard time recently. That’s all you need to know, alright?”

This wasn’t really alright with Harry, but he didn’t have the energy it would take to argue with Malfoy, and certainly not when he seemed to be...emotionally involved.

Seeing Malfoy’s emotions was rare—he was normally cool and composed, unless he was angry or spiteful, but mostly impossible to read.

That was why Harry hadn’t been surprised to learn that he was so good at Occlumency, he seemed to be able to shut himself off at a second’s notice. But with emotions, he was unpredictable, because Harry had very little frame of reference to compare it to.

The memory of the bathrooms came to him suddenly, of Malfoy bending over a sink, of his red eyes, his hair wet from sweat, and then the blood—so much blood.

Harry gripped the table tightly and squeezed his eyes shut, trying to force the memory down, trying to push it into the crevices of his mind, where he didn’t have to deal with it.

His eyes shot open when a weight landed on his shoulder. He looked up to see Malfoy had put a hand on his shoulder and was looking at him with an expression that looked somewhat close to... apprehension? Worry?

“Are you quite alright, Potter?”

“What? I...er—yes.”

“Because if you faint on me, I don’t think Slughorn will give us any more points for this potion, and frankly, it deserves at least twenty more for Slytherin.”

Harry scowled at him.

“Prat.”

Harry was sitting in one of the armchairs in the common room, feeling like ants were crawling all over his body. He had come up and sat down after dinner, but he had no idea how much time had passed since then. It could have been ten minutes or four hours, Harry had no idea.

He could feel all of his nerve endings at once—and none at all. Was that possible? Was it possible to be completely numb and completely aware of his body at the same time?

His eyelids were burning, but every time he closed them, he saw flashes. Flashes of him, of Voldemort. Sometimes it was Voldemort. Sometimes it was Tom Riddle—young, handsome Tom Riddle. Sometimes it was Bellatrix, her laughing face as Sirius fell through the veil. It was Bathilda Bagshot morphing into Nagini; the locket burning, *burning* through his chest and into his heart; Arthur Weasley lying in pools of his own blood in the Ministry; his mother screaming; Dumbledore falling from the Astronomy Tower; the piercing, stinging pain of the Basilisk fang in his arm; the snakelike face underneath Quirrell's turban; the flash of green and the screech of Hedwig as she hit the bottom of her cage; Hagrid's wounded roar as he collapsed in the Forbidden Forest; the cold, empty feeling that the Dementors brought with their scent of death; the heat chasing him as he flew from the fire-breathing Hungarian Horntail; Hermione's agonized screams as Bellatrix tortured her; Ron convulsing as he bled from his Splinched arm; the blood spreading over Dobby's chest; Bill's scarred face; Fred's limp body; the utter darkness and suffocating tightness of the cupboard under the stairs, and—

“Oi, what're you—”

“*Stupefy!*”

Harry cast on instinct, his magic bursting out of him like an explosion. He wasn't even aware he had stood, or that he'd whipped out his wand, he hadn't made the decision to cast the spell, it had just *come out of him*.

And Ron shot backwards, clean through one of the tables and splitting it into a million pieces, with a catastrophically loud bang.

Everything happened very fast after that. Or maybe, like it was in slow motion. Could it be both? Harry couldn't move, he was frozen to the spot. His ears were ringing wildly, painfully. His breathing was heavy and quick and he felt even more tired from it. He didn't know how he was standing, he felt like he could collapse at any second.

It was chaos.

People had rushed to see what the noise had been, and they had flocked around Ron. Harry's ears were still ringing and he could barely hear the commotion going on around him, only vaguely registering Hermione's voice.

“*Rennervate* isn't working, Sophie, you're going to have to take him to the Hospital Wing,” she instructed clearly, and Sophie nodded, wide-eyed. “Dean, Seamus, help her take him, would you? Everyone, it's alright, go back to bed, he'll be fine, Pomfrey will sort him out.”

Hermione's voice stayed constant, giving orders, and settling to a soft hum in Harry's ears.

He became aware that he was shaking from head to toe. His entire body was trembling, his knees the worst of all, and he was certain that they would soon give way. He tried to look at something, to give himself some kind of anchor, and his eyes found Malfoy, staring at him with an unreadable expression on his face. He just looked blank. His face betrayed nothing, but there was something behind his eyes, something that Harry was far too tired to understand.

And then he turned away and walked back up the stairs with the rest of the boys. That's when Harry realized it was only him and Hermione left.

He was still standing, his wand held slack in his right hand. He looked at her, at her soft brown eyes and her hair, even bushier than usual as she'd clearly been in bed before this.

And then his knees buckled and he fell to the ground, choking, before the sobs overtook him.

all of the love in the world couldn't make me less alone

Chapter Summary

He had tried to make sense of it, because that's what he was good at. He was good at analysing, at figuring out the logic behind people's actions, but things always got messier when emotions were involved. He told himself it was the power, that Lucius felt weak and out of control and needed to assert his dominance over something. Draco could understand that. He could even relate—the loss of control in his own life led him to be capable of things he never thought he could be.

But that didn't explain the perverse sort of pleasure Lucius seemed to get from seeing him in pain, the way his lip would curl into something of a smile when Draco panted and whimpered after the curse was removed. His face almost resembled Bellatrix's in its triumph and it was that face that invaded Draco's nightmares.

Chapter Notes

this was meant to be a short scene in a longer chapter but then it ended up being super long so I decided it deserved a chapter of its own. enjoy<3

sorry about the shabby photoshop quality of the tattoo, I am not exactly a photoshop wizard.

chapter title is from the song All Of The Love In The World by Lily Kershaw

April brought with it some pleasant weather, the sun gentle but present, and the breeze soft and cool. Everything was green and blooming and beautiful, and Draco tried to focus on these good feelings instead of the fear and stress eating away at his stomach.

“Will it hurt?” he asked, biting his tongue immediately at the childish question. Luna smiled softly at him.

“Yes, it will some,” she said, with her characteristic honesty. “But not terribly.”

Probably not at all compared to the Dark Mark, Draco thought to himself, feeling a shudder run down his spine at the mere memory of the Dark Magic searing into his flesh. He squirmed slightly, feeling the nervousness turn his stomach.

“Look, Draco, someone's here to see you,” Luna said, brightly, and Draco turned to follow her eyes.

He smiled when he saw the young Thestral approaching him. He had somehow bonded with the young male, which he hadn't known was possible with Thestrals. Luna assured him that while they

would never desire constant human companionship the way Crups or Kneazles did, they could form attachments with humans they trust.

Draco had been rather overwhelmed by this, and had nearly lost his composure as the Thestral had pushed its head under his hand and nestled in his lap. By now, however, it had happened enough times that Draco was used to it, and he was always pleased to see the animal.

“He’s without his mother though,” Draco said, as the adolescent Thestral sat beside him and rested his head in his usual position in Draco’s lap.

“That’s alright,” Luna said. “They’re getting bigger now, they have to start being independent.”

Draco began to run his right hand through the Thestral’s mane, smiling when the animal closed its eyes and leaned into his touch.

“Have you named him?” asked Luna. Draco looked at her in confusion.

“Do Thestrals take to names?”

“Depends on the name, I suppose. Pick one and ask him if he likes it.”

Draco scratched the Thestral softly behind its scaly ear.

“Hmm, how about a good old Malfoy name? Abraxas?”

The Thestral let out a heavy snort and Draco couldn’t help but laugh.

“I suppose not, then.”

Luna smiled.

“I’m sure you’ll think of something, Draco. He’s a special creature, he deserves a name that’s out of this world.”

Sometimes Luna said things that seemed rather odd, but then later Draco would find they held spectacular meaning, if perhaps not in the way he had expected. He had asked her if she had had any Seers in her family, but she’d merely shrugged and said, “the future isn’t ours to inspect.” To Draco, this sounded suspiciously like something a secret Seer would say.

He hadn’t told Luna that he was learning about Muggles with Violet, however the more time he spent with her, the more he realized that Luna often seemed to just *know* things—like the secret nature of his apprenticeship. Violet and Theo remained the only two people who knew the whole truth, however Luna had instantly known that Draco had been lying when he’d claimed it was a Transfiguration apprenticeship, and continued to believe so, even though she never pressed Draco on what it really was.

He didn’t know if she had intended it, but Luna’s words reminded Draco of his odd and embarrassing conversation with Granger about the Muggle contraptions that flew to the moon. After she’d given him some information, he had taken to the library to try to learn more, but as much as he read, he simply couldn’t understand how they had managed to do it without magic. It had frustrated him to no end that he couldn’t figure out, and he spent a long while trying to come to terms with the fact that it was possible certain Muggles were smarter than him.

Not an easy thing for a Malfoy to accept.

However, once accepted—albeit reluctantly—it certainly raised Draco’s respect for them, and he decided it was far better to be in awe than to be angry. The Muggles who went on that mission had to put so much trust into what they had built. They must have been told so many times that it was impossible, that their ambition was far too great, but they did it despite that, and ended up making history.

There was something rather Slytherin about that.

“How about Armstrong?” he said, looking down at the Thestral in his lap. The animal nudged his knee with his snout, and opened its eyes long enough to blink slowly at him. Draco smiled, pleased.

“That looks like a yes.”

“That’s a lovely name, Draco,” Luna said, serenely, smiling at him. “Are you ready?”

Draco swallowed and took a deep breath. He wanted this, and there was no turning back now, but he couldn’t help but feel nervous nonetheless. Armstrong opened his eyes again and looked up at Draco. The all-white eyes, that used to frighten Draco, now comforted him. He smoothed his right hand over the Thestral’s head, and Armstrong gave a low, satisfied whine.

“I’m ready,” Draco said, pulling up his sleeve all the way to his shoulder and offering Luna his left arm. “Do your worst.”

He didn’t want to watch her do it, so he kept his eyes down at Armstrong, who had closed his eyes once again and was leaning into Draco’s hand.

He heard Luna cast a spell, and then felt an odd vibrating sensation in his arm, almost as if it were coming from within his bones. She’d been right, it *did* hurt, but not badly. It was more discomfort than real pain, and he simply gritted his teeth a little tighter, and continued to pet Armstrong.

He didn’t know what to expect. He had decided on several flowers and Luna had smiled and approved his choices and that had been that. He hadn’t asked how it would look, whether they would completely cover the Mark or simply frame it. It was hard to talk about, most personal things still were for Draco, and he was grateful that Luna never pushed him on anything. He supposed perhaps he should have had more fear about how it would turn out, since he barely specified any details, but he found he was rather ambivalent about the whole thing. Perhaps it was because he had a certain level of trust in Luna, but he knew there was a bigger reason.

It wasn’t like it could get any worse than it already was.

He hadn’t told Violet, or anyone really, for fear that he would be too afraid to go through with it and then have to take it back. However, he had used the Muggle flower book from the library for some inspiration. Madam Pince had given him a suspicious look, as it was his fourth time checking it out, but he always returned it in perfect condition, so she didn’t have anything to tell him off for.

He was finding Muggle botany rather fascinating. It was a subject he never thought he’d be interested in, although that was more to do with the Muggle part than anything else. The Muggles were far more symbolic about it, as many of the flowers served no other purpose to them to look beautiful and smell fragrant. There was something special about that, about them ascribing meanings based on nothing other than the emotions the flowers invoked.

It was also fascinating how many of the meanings were shared between Muggles and wizards. He wondered how that was, whether Muggles with magic spouses had brought that over, and it made him think that perhaps wizarding history was not as pureblooded as he had always thought.

That idea made him think of his father, which brought with it images Draco didn't want in his mind. Images of his red sunken eyes, that seemed to look less and less like his own as the days dragged on, images of him flinching under the gaze of the Dark Lord, of his blank face peering over him from above as Draco screamed in agony.

His father had always treated him well. He had been a spoiled child, and he knew it, too. The only Malfoy heir, he received anything he desired as a child, and his parents were loving and devoted. His father may have been more stern and particular, but he always explained himself and Draco was always kept very aware of how proud they both were of him.

When the Dark Lord decided to make Malfoy Manor his headquarters, that drastically changed. He could tell that his father was afraid—but then, they were all afraid, perhaps with the exception of Bellatrix, who seemed Draco like she was too insane to even feel fear anymore. Lucius had already failed the Dark Lord before, and he was constantly being reminded of that. Offering up Malfoy Manor was meant to be part of making that up, not like Lucius was given much of a choice about it. And then his want had been taken, and there was nothing more humiliating for a pureblood than being wandless in one's own house.

Narcissa had quietly offered up her own to Lucius, who had snatched it without a word, but his ego had already been sufficiently beaten down. The Dark Lord seemed to enjoy Lucius's silent suffering, and frequently gave him tests to prove his loyalty. Draco, already terrified and regretful and almost certain of his own death, had been horrified to watch his father become more and more like Wormtail, desperately doing whatever he was told in order to prove himself to his master.

And then the Dark Lord had questioned him, over whether his loyalty to his family was as great as his loyalty to the cause, and Lucius had hesitated just a little too long, and thus was issued a challenge.

That was the first time Draco endured the Cruciatus Curse under his father's hand. His mother had gasped and recoiled, but stayed in her seat after Draco threw her an expression to indicate it was alright.

Of course it wasn't alright.

Lucius had looked at him with dead eyes, raised Narcissa's wand, and cast, "*Crucio!*"

And Draco had tried to keep quiet, had tried to grit his teeth and survive it, but it just kept going and going, and the pain was unlike anything else, like the Dark Mark was being seared into his whole body, and the scream seemed to come from somewhere deep inside him, ripping through his throat without his permission.

The other Death Eaters had cheered and the Dark Lord had watched, curiously, before telling Lucius he could stop, after what felt like, to Draco, hours.

As Draco panted and trembled on the floor, the Dark Lord gave Lucius a nod and allowed him to take his seat next to Narcissa, who was motionless, but blinked back tears.

Draco had forgiven his father, of course. He hadn't even really needed to, because he hadn't thought forgiveness was necessary. When the Dark Lord told you to do something, you did it, and there was no questioning or hesitating done.

But it hadn't been a solitary incident. Lucius seemed to find some sort of power in it, in having someone under his control like that, and since all the other Death Eaters had lost respect for him, the only person that could be was Draco.

And Draco endured it, because what else could he do? Fight back? Against his own father? What good could that possibly do? He even learned to hold his tongue after a few times, not wanting to give his father the satisfaction of hearing him scream.

He didn't know what had made his father like this, what had been the proverbial final straw that broke the camel's back, but Lucius had seemingly snapped, going from a stern yet caring father to one who enjoyed causing his son pain.

Draco had said nothing, not even to his mother, for fear that she would confront Lucius and then receive the same treatment. He suspected she knew regardless, large as the Manor may have been.

He never talked about it with his father either, not even after the war as they awaited trial. He hadn't brought it up to anyone, hadn't even spoken the words aloud; it seemed far too difficult. It was easier just to shove it all down, to try and pretend like it had never happened, like it had all just been in his head.

He found that this father's face joined the Dark Lord's in his nightmares sometimes, however, and in the beginning of the year, when the boggart had appeared in Lucius's shape, he had to confront the truth.

It had all been real. On top of the war, and the task of *murdering* Dumbledore, and repairing the Vanishing Cabinets; on top of having Death Eaters invade his home, and the Dark Lord seeming to be hovering outside of every room; on top of *everything*—he had been tortured by his father.

And he had to try to find some way to live with that. Like he always did, he compartmentalized—put it in a box somewhere in his brain with a promise to deal with it later so that he could focus on other things. But things like that refused to stay hidden for long, and the memories would often come back to Draco with a jolt in the most random of times, as if trying to force themselves back into the front of his mind.

He had tried to make sense of it, because that's what he was good at. He was good at analysing, at figuring out the logic behind people's actions, but things always got messier when emotions were involved. He told himself it was the power, that Lucius felt weak and out of control and needed to assert his dominance over *something*. Draco could understand that. He could even relate—the loss of control in his own life led him to be capable of things he never thought he could be.

But that didn't explain the perverse sort of pleasure Lucius seemed to get from seeing him in pain, the way his lip would curl into something of a smile when Draco panted and whimpered after the curse was removed. His face almost resembled Bellatrix's in its triumph and it was that face that invaded Draco's nightmares.

Perhaps that was part of the reason Draco had been so much more willing to listen to differing opinions on Muggles and Muggleborns this year than years prior. His entire image and perception of his father had been shattered and with it had gone the confidence in all that he had taught him.

“Draco,” came a soft voice, snapping him back to reality. He looked up to see Luna peering at him from his left side.

“Pardon me,” he said. “What did you say?”

Luna gave him a gentle smile.

“It’s done,” she said, releasing his arm. Draco suddenly realized that the vibrating sensation had stopped and Luna had set her wand down.

“Oh,” he murmured, pulling his arm back and looking down at it.

“Do you like it?” she asked, and for the first time ever, Draco could sense a bit of uncertainty in her voice.

Draco felt himself go speechless, finally withdrawing his right hand from Armstrong’s mane to trace his fingers faintly over the tattoo. The parts that Luna had just added were slightly raised and tender and he could feel the delicate lines.

She hadn’t really *covered* the Dark Mark—he supposed the Dark Magic of it prevented anything to go directly over it—however the flowers appeared to be growing from its hard line, out towards the sides of his arm.

The flowers were beautiful, drawn with thin lines and excellent detail. The stems of the narcissi sprouted from the snake’s head, the zinnia beside the skull but larger and pulling the attention towards it. Two tulips sat on the other side of the skull, with a blooming hyacinth right below them. The skull and snake were no longer the focus, despite their thick black ink.

“Thank you, Luna,” he finally managed to rasp out. “Thank you.”





there's not a night that I sleep quiet and complacent without my medication

Chapter Summary

He was still constantly exhausted, his nightmares not having ceased. He was just functioning automatically, and Ashworth and Waya had clearly picked up on his odd behaviour. He had cancelled on Malfoy, simply not having it in him to conduct a session with such little energy.

Malfoy hadn't brought it up in Potions, and had simply reverted back to handling the potion by himself, instead of attempting to explain the process to Harry.

And that, more than anything, made him feel like a failure. Was he now so pathetic that even Malfoy was feeling bad for him? Was he truly so incapable that he had to be treated so delicately, like he might explode at any minute?

After a particularly brutal nightmare that broke through the heavy Silencing Charms he'd cast around his bed woke Ron, who immediately came over to check that he was alright, he decided to follow Hermione's advice and go see Madam Pomfrey.

Chapter Notes

chapter title is from the song Thanks To You by All Time Low because it deserves more than one chapter named after it

Harry had reached what Hermione would call, "a breaking point."

All of his friends were walking on eggshells around him, as though anything might set him off. He wanted to be angry, but after what he did to Ron, all he could feel was guilt.

And exhaustion. He was still constantly exhausted, his nightmares not having ceased. He was just functioning automatically, and Ashworth and Waya had clearly picked up on his odd behaviour. He had cancelled on Malfoy, simply not having it in him to conduct a session with such little energy.

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follow Hermione's advice and go see Madam Pomfrey.

He faltered when talking to her, unsure of how much he should say, but she seemed to understand after he mumbled out something about being unable to sleep due to nightmares.

"Ah," she said, clicking her tongue and nodding. "You're not the first to come to me with nightmares, Mr Potter, but I daresay you have even better reason than most."

She stood and walked to the back of the Hospital Wing, still talking as she began to open and search through her drawers.

"I would advise one drop into your pumpkin juice at dinner per night, and after two weeks I'd like you to come back and check in with me about how you're feeling."

She returned carrying a thumb-sized vial full of a pale lavender-coloured liquid.

"Is it Dreamless Sleep?" Harry asked, suspiciously.

Madam Pomfrey gave him a stern look.

"Who do you think I am, young man? I don't go handing out Dreamless Sleep to any student who comes in complaining of nightmares. No, this is a Lullaby Tincture. Previously not very popular, as it was mainly used for children who experienced night terrors, however after the war, it seems everyone has a vial at home."

Her voice drifted slightly at the end of her sentence, but she quickly recovered and handed him the vial before giving him another serious look.

"I have to impress on you the importance of only using one drop per night. While it has no addictive properties, unlike Dreamless Sleep, it can be dangerous if consumed in large amounts. I promise you that one drop will be plenty."

"Yes, Madam Pomfrey," said Harry, obediently. He suddenly found himself looking forward to the night, desperate as he was for a good night's sleep. He was sceptical over whether the potion would work, but so exhausted that he wanted to believe it would.

At lunch, he quietly informed Hermione that Madam Pomfrey had given him something to sleep. She'd beamed at him and nodded encouragingly, and Harry felt increasingly condescended to.

Ron was giving him a smile as well, but not his regular grin, rather a sort of nervous one, and Harry just felt even more tired. He couldn't blame Ron for feeling uncomfortable around him; he knew he was acting odd, he *had* thrown Ron into a table with a powerful Stunning Spell. He let out a small sigh.

"You know, I think I might just go now," he said.

Hermione's plastered-on smile immediately vanished, replaced by a worried expression.

"And miss classes?" she asked, as if she couldn't picture anything more horrible.

"It's just Potions," Harry shrugged. "Malfoy does all the work anyway. I wouldn't be much help to him like this anyway."

“You’re right, mate,” said Ron, in a forcibly cheery tone. “You should get some rest.”

Harry just nodded, withdrawing the vial from his robes, letting a drop fall into his pumpkin juice and then gulping it all down in one swallow.

“See you,” he said, and stood up to leave the Great Hall.

It felt like...a cloud. Like a soft, pillowy cloud. That was...shaking?

Harry’s eyes blinked open to see a red blur. He blinked again to see Ron’s head looming over him.

“Sorry,” he mumbled. “Did I wake you up again?”

He reached out with his left hand to grasp for his glasses.

“No, mate, you were quiet,” said Ron. “I just thought you might want to come for dinner.”

“Oh. I’ve been asleep?” Harry asked, shoving his glasses on his face.

“Yeah, for ages. I didn’t wanna bother you, but I thought you’d be hungry.”

Just as Ron said the words, Harry realized they were true. He sat up in his bed, looking around him to reorient himself.

“Yeah, I am, thanks.” He swung his legs out of bed and stood up to stretch.

“Did you sleep alright?”

Harry blinked again. Then, with a smile slowly growing on his face, he realized that yes, yes, he had actually slept, and he didn’t have a single nightmare.

“Yeah, I did.”

“Brilliant, mate. Come on then, let’s get some food.”

Hermione was already waiting for them at dinner, with Sophie by her side. When they saw Harry, they both smiled brightly and waved. Well, Harry supposed, it would take a few more nights of sleep before his friends started treating him normally again.

He did feel much better after some hours of sleep though, so he chewed his food relatively happily and nodded along as the other three chatted. When they all finished, and began walking out of the Great Hall, Hermione pulled him aside and asked him if he felt any better.

“Not entirely, but I did get a good three hours of sleep. Hopefully I’ll sleep tonight as well and I’ll see,” he said, the prospect of getting back into his four-poster sounding utterly delightful.

“Good,” Hermione said, nodding slightly, and Harry felt another pinch of guilt at feeling irritated over how she’d been treating him. Clearly she was worried about him and wanted to help by finding a solution, as that was what Hermione did best.

“And I think I’m going to try and find a Mind Healer after school’s over,” he said, decisively, reasoning that if he told Hermione he would do it, she would hold him to it, even if he couldn’t

hold himself to it.

Hermione beamed.

“That’s wonderful, Harry, I’m so glad.”

Harry still doubted how much it would help him, but he figured he might as well give it shot, and after all, Hermione was rarely wrong, so odds were she knew what she was talking about.

“Potter.”

Harry turned at the sound of his name to find Malfoy standing a few feet behind him, standing very straight with his arms crossed.

“Er...Malfoy?”

Harry glanced at Hermione, who was looking at Malfoy with her eyebrows furrowed, and then back at Malfoy, who looked supremely uncomfortable.

“May I have a word?” he said, in a clipped tone, as if he were putting an inordinate amount of effort into being polite. Knowing Malfoy, he probably was.

Harry nodded.

“I’ll meet you in the common room,” he said to Hermione, giving her a reassuring smile in order to calm the worried expression on her face.

“Alright,” she said, shooting another cautious glance at Malfoy. “See you later, then.”

After Hermione had walked off in the direction of the Founder’s Tower, Harry turned back to Malfoy, who hadn’t moved an inch. As soon as he made eye contact, Malfoy launched into speech, talking so quickly it seemed like he was trying to get it over with as soon as possible.

“I understand that you are the mighty Saviour of the Wizarding World and can do no wrong, and unlike us mere mortals, do not need to worry yourself with inconsequential activities such as actually brewing potions or making any effort whatsoever, however you could at least have the *decency* to show up to class and *pretend* like you’re contributing.”

When he finished his speech, he broke eye contact, fixing his eyes on the nearest wall.

Harry just blinked at him. That was certainly unexpected.

Not the sarcasm and digs about being the “Saviour,” no, that was classic Malfoy. But Harry hadn’t expected to be confronted about missing Potions. After all, like Malfoy said, Harry wasn’t exactly much help with brewing, so why would he care if Harry missed class?

Maybe it wasn’t about Potions. Maybe it was about their sessions. Harry had promised Malfoy he would teach him to cast a Patronus, and he was getting rather close. His mist had started to attempt to twist into a proper shape.

“I’m sorry,” he said, surprising both himself and Malfoy, whose eyes shot back to him. “I know you don’t care, I’ve just not been getting much sleep. I should have come to Potions, though.”

Malfoy stared at him as if he'd grown a second head. There was a long moment of silence, as though he was trying to figure out how to reply when Harry had neglected to insult him whatsoever.

"Nightmares, right?" Malfoy finally said, in a quiet tone, and now it was Harry's turn to be surprised.

"Yeah," he nodded.

Malfoy seemed to be struggling through some sort of internal argument, his jaw clenched and his eyebrows creased. He looked rather constipated, and he was staring determinedly at the wall.

"Do you...I can...I mean, well. I've been taking Lullaby Tincture. Slughorn lets me use the Potions classroom for extra brewing practice."

Harry stared at him and it took a solid moment before he realized what Malfoy was offering him.

"Oh. Thanks, that's...thanks. Madam Pomfrey gave me some today though. That's why I missed Potions, I was asleep."

"Oh. Yes. Right. Well, then. Good. I suppose I'll be going then," he said shortly, and briskly turned around to walk away.

"Wait, Malfoy!" Harry called after him. Malfoy paused and only half-turned his head.

"Do you want to have a session tomorrow? Around eight?"

Malfoy gave the smallest of nods before hurrying off.

i hate to see your eyes get darker as they close, but i've been there before

Chapter Summary

He didn't know what it was like—to be in love—but he could recognize it when he saw it. Or perhaps, it was only the pain of love that he could recognize. That sadness, somehow desperate and longing and hopeful in all its complexity.

He saw that look in his mother's eyes, growing darker and sadder as the war raged on.

"I don't know," he never liked saying those words, but even less so now. He wanted to give Violet answers, to give Violet hope. "I've never heard of anyone breaking it before."

Violet nodded and turned her head away. Draco could swear she was hiding tears.

Chapter Notes

what???? uploading another chapter this quick??? I know, it's very out of character for me. but idk man this one just came to me. hopefully that's not a bad sign for the next one. thank you all for your kind comments, they seriously make me grin like an idiot <3 hope you enjoy

chapter title is from the song Hate To See Your Heart Break by Paramore

Something was bothering Violet.

Draco certainly wasn't the best at recognizing emotions—especially not his own—but he liked to think he was reasonably sharp and observant. Observant enough to notice that, although Violet's eyes were fixed on her book, they were unmoving, and she hadn't turned a page in over five minutes.

"Would you like to talk about it?" Draco asked her gently. Her eyes snapped to him as if she'd just realized he was there.

"Oh. Draco. Sorry, I just...lost myself for a moment," she gave him what she clearly meant to be a reassuring smile, but Draco wasn't fooled.

"You don't have to tell me if you don't wish to," he said. "But if you'd like to talk, I'm here."

Violet let out a heavy sigh and closed her book.

"I don't want to bother you," she said. "It seems so trivial, but I just..."

She trailed off, looking down as if embarrassed, and Draco patiently waited for her to continue.

“It’s about Daphne,” she finally said, in a tiny voice.

“Alright,” he said, encouragingly. “What about Daphne?”

Violet squeezed her eyes shut tightly.

“She’s lovely,” she said, as if the words pained her. “She’s so lovely, Draco.”

Draco couldn’t help but feel slightly confused.

“And the problem with that is...?” he questioned, letting it hang in the air.

Violet scowled at him.

“The problem is I fancy her.”

“Yes, Violet,” Draco said, rolling his eyes. “Anyone with a pair of eyes can see that you fancy her.”

“I *can*’t fancy her, Draco!” Violet said, sounding rather desperate. “Don’t you understand?”

Draco didn’t want to admit that frankly, no, he didn’t understand.

“Because she’s a woman?” he asked, guessing, and Violet smacked him on the arm.

“No, you dimwit! Because she’s the eldest and the Greengrasses have no male heir, so Daphne is expected to marry into another Sacred Twenty-Eight family in order to keep their line pure.”

Draco stared at her.

“Oh,” he said, softly. “You *really* fancy her.”

Violet let out a sort of strangled groan and let her head fall onto Draco’s shoulder.

“The Sacred Twenty-Eight is dying out,” Draco said. “Avery, Carrow, Lestranger, Rowle, and Travers are all in Azkaban. Ollivander has no descendants. Burke is ancient and Slughorn is...well, I don’t even want to think about that. Hardly anyone’s left.”

He had to pause to remember his pureblood genealogy lessons.

“There’s Marcus Flint, I suppose, but he’s horrible. Ernie Macmillan, arguably even worse. Theo, of course. Longbottom’s a war hero now, he might be considered desirable from a reputational standpoint, perhaps.”

Violet lifted her head from his shoulder to shoot him a glare.

“You are not helping,” she said, in a dark voice, and Draco flushed, feeling bad.

“Sorry,” he said. “As knowledgeable and well-read as I am, I don’t know too much about relationships, to be honest.”

“Have you never had one?”

This time, Draco was the one glaring.

“When would I have done that, Violet? When my father was carted off to Azkaban the first time? When I was tasked with the mission of assassinating the Headmaster by the most evil wizard who ever lived? During the *war*?”

Violet held her hands up in surrender.

“Alright, alright, don’t get cheeky, I was just asking. We all thought you and Pansy had a bit of a thing back in fifth or sixth year is all.”

Draco grimaced.

“I suppose we sort of did, but it wasn’t anything real. Just me wanting to live up to my father’s expectations and pretending I liked her more than I did because of her name.”

Violet laughed lightly.

“Oh, good. I never wanted to say anything because she was your friend, but she was a desperately unpleasant person.”

Draco snorted.

“Pansy’s an acquired taste.”

They sat together in silence for a moment before Draco returned to the topic at hand.

“Have you told Daphne how you feel?” he asked.

Violet wrung her hands and looked away.

“I...sort of,” she mumbled. “We kissed.”

She said it so quietly that Draco was almost sure he misheard her.

“You *what*?” he exclaimed.

“Shh!” she cast a panicked look around, even though the only other people in the common room were Oliver Rivers, curled up in an armchair with a book, and Hannah Abbott, hunched over one of the tables and scribbling aggressively with a quill.

“When did this happen?” Draco interrogated, though lowering his voice.

“The night after Valentine’s,” muttered Violet, her face reddening.

“That was almost two months ago, Violet!”

“I told you, I didn’t want to bother you!”

“We’re friends, Violet. You’re not bothering me. Tell me what happened.”

Violet took a deep breath.

“Right, well, we were talking about the Hufflepuff party and I was just telling her how impressive she was and then she looked at me, and I don’t know, it just...happened.”

“And then what?”

Violet continued to fidget in her seat.

“And then nothing. I stared at her like a mug and she ran off. And I tried to talk to her about it and she wouldn’t look me in the eye and she said that she was sorry but she couldn’t do this with me, but she didn’t specify what ‘this’ *was*. She started going on about her family and about *expectations* and *prior commitments*.”

Draco felt something cold yet familiar inside of him. He knew all too well what Daphne had meant by “prior commitments.”

The Sacred Twenty-Eight had made a pact, long ago, to do whatever was necessary to keep the pureblood families alive. It required an oath to be taken, a vow to only marry someone of pure blood, to never reproduce with one whose blood was ‘tainted’. The pact was magical, but it was bound in ancient magic, and much like the Dark Mark, consent had to be given voluntarily, usually when one came of age.

Draco had taken the oath on his seventeenth birthday. He hadn’t even resisted, hadn’t even thought twice about it. It was just something he had to do.

That was still before Draco questioned anything his father told him.

He could sympathise with Daphne. He was certain she had agreed to the pact, especially considering the Greengrass name would die out with Daphne and Astoria, since there were no male heirs. She had a responsibility to maintain the Greengrass reputation, to keep the line pure despite the name dying out.

He was also certain that his name was on the Greengrass’s list of potential suitors. He was, after all, one of the only age-appropriate males of the Sacred Twenty-Eight left. He was sure he wasn’t high on the list, what with his ex-Death Eater status. Theo must be up there, and perhaps Longbottom, although he doubted that Longbottom had taken the oath.

He knew Violet was a pureblood too, though he wasn’t sure if she was descended from any of the Sacred Twenty-Eight.

He asked as much.

“The Shafiq family,” Violet nodded. “They were Arabian, and they married into an ancient Persian family that eventually found its way to England. What’s that got to do with anything?”

“You didn’t...you didn’t take the oath, did you?”

“What oath?” Violet asked, and Draco was about to start explaining when a look of realization crossed her face. “Oh. People still do that?”

She sounded incredulous.

Draco nodded.

“I did,” he said. “I would wager that Daphne did as well.”

Draco expected Violet to get outraged, to begin one of her rants about preposterous pureblood traditions and their dangerous nature, but she didn’t. Instead, her shoulders merely slumped.

“There’s no getting out of that, is there?” she asked, sounding morose.

“Well, it’s not like an Unbreakable Vow, I don’t think.”

“So what happens when you break it, then?” she looked up at him, hazel eyes wide, and Draco felt his heart ache for her.

He didn’t know what it was like—to be in love—but he could recognize it when he saw it. Or perhaps, it was only the pain of love that he could recognize. That sadness, somehow desperate and longing and hopeful in all its complexity.

He saw that look in his mother’s eyes, growing darker and sadder as the war raged on.

“I don’t know,” he never liked saying those words, but even less so now. He wanted to give Violet answers, to give Violet *hope*. “I’ve never heard of anyone breaking it before.”

Violet nodded and turned her head away, clearly on the verge of tears.

“Alright, what’s wrong with you?” Draco demanded, crossing his arms.

“What? Nothing!” Potter replied, already looking defensive.

“Don’t give me that. You’re completely distracted, I disarmed you *twice*.”

“Maybe you’re just getting better,” said Potter, mulishly.

“Shut up, Potter. What is it? It’s the sleep, isn’t it?”

Potter let out a sigh and ran his fingers through his hair, leaving it even messier than it already was, which Draco hadn’t thought was possible.

“Yeah, I suppose. I slept through the night though, and even had a kip in the afternoon.”

“You can’t catch up on weeks of lost sleep overnight, Potter.”

Potter scowled at him.

“I know that, you swot,” he fell into a chair, absent-mindedly twirling his wand in his hand. “I just want everything to be normal again, you know?”

Draco snorted, taking the other seat.

“When was your life ever normal, Potter?”

He expected to be called a name again, but Potter just offered a grim smile.

“Yeah, you’ve got a point. I just mean, how everyone’s been treating me...since Ron...” he trailed off, but Draco didn’t need him to finish. He had been there, he had seen what Potter had done to Weasley, had seen the thousands of wooden splinters the table had exploded into.

“Not that I’m typically one to defend the Weasel, but if you threw me into a table, I’d be reasonably ticked off at you as well.”

Potter rolled his eyes.

“He’s not angry with me. It’d be better if he was angry with me.”

“How would that be better?”

“Because he should be! I Stunned him!” Potter exclaimed.

“Well, yes, but you didn’t mean to,” Draco paused for a moment and then added, “Did you?”

“No, of course not,” sighed Potter. “I wasn’t even thinking, it was just automatic, like a reflex. And now they’re all handling me with kid gloves, all smiles and ‘Yes, Harry,’ ‘Great thinking, Harry!’ as if I’m a toddler that could dissolve into a tantrum at any minute.”

Draco couldn’t help but snort at Potter’s poor impression of Granger. Potter didn’t look amused, however, just tired. He took his glasses off for a moment to rub at his eyes before shoving them back on.

“I didn’t think it would be like this,” he said, his voice much softer all of a sudden. “I don’t know what I thought it would be like, but it wasn’t this. I thought killing Voldemort would be the hard part, and well, yes, it was bloody hard, but I thought once it was over, it would be *over*. And everyone else seems to be acting like it is, but for me, it isn’t. It doesn’t feel *finished*.”

Draco listened, quietly. He had always thought that everything had come so easily to Potter, it was one of the many reasons why he hated him so much. He seemed to have all the luck in the world, friends who were constantly saving him, teachers who favoured him. But Potter was clearly feeling fraught here, and Draco—though he never thought he would—found himself relating to him.

Potter had gone silent, and Draco wasn’t sure if he was expecting a response, but he spoke nonetheless.

“When you’re told something your whole life, over and over, it becomes reality,” he said, trying to sound more sure of himself than he felt. “It’s ingrained in you. It’s a part of you. You almost become blind to anything that contrasts it or outside of it, because the tunnel vision can get so strong. When all of a sudden, the belief—that purpose—vanishes, it can leave you feeling lost. Even if it was...horrible and wrong and something you’re glad to be rid of, you can still feel like it’s missing from you, like you need to search for it. Like it’s just around the corner waiting for you.”

Potter was looking at him now, his eyes impossibly bright and pensive.

“You sound like you’re speaking from experience,” he said, slowly.

What Draco had actually been doing was trying to phrase it so that he didn’t sound like he believed he knew more about Potter’s problems than Potter himself, however he had to admit that yes, it

applied to him as well.

“My father was wrong about a lot of things,” Draco said, after a deep breath. “And I idolized him and believed everything he said. And I make no excuses for my behaviour, I was old enough to know better, but my actions were based on what my father had taught me. Realizing he wasn’t the man I thought he was pulled the rug out from under me and I was forced to confront the true reality.”

“And what was that?” Potter asked, barely louder than a whisper.

Draco swallowed.

“That I had cocked up,” he said, in a sudden attempt to lighten the mood. He didn’t like talking about this, didn’t like how vulnerable and open it made him feel, didn’t like how he was starting to feel disconnected from his body again and had to scratch at his palm harshly to keep himself present.

Potter smiled, but it didn’t last long.

“Can I ask you something?” he said instead, sounding hesitant.

“I suppose,” Draco said, thinking the topic couldn’t get darker than this.

When Potter spoke again, he realized he had been wrong.

“Why did you do it? Take the Dark Mark, I mean?”

Draco froze in his seat, and it took all of his effort to force himself to remain in his body. He tried to focus, on the hard wood of the chair, on the solid stone under his feet, on the sharp pain in his palm from where his nails were digging into his skin.

“I just mean,” Potter continued, not seeming to realize the struggle Draco was going through right beside him. “I can’t imagine what I would—what was going through your head?”

Draco took another deep, steadying breath, trying to ignore how it shook inside of him.

“I was thinking of my mother,” he said, honestly. “I was thinking I would make my father proud, and I would keep my mother safe. I was thinking I didn’t want her to be punished for my mistakes. I was thinking my father knew what he was doing and he would never make me do anything that wasn’t right for me.”

He felt himself go cold thinking about it, especially after Lucius’s betrayal. How foolish he had been to continue to trust this man. He may have been his father, but he had been showing Draco what kind of man he was for years, and Draco had been too blind with admiration and love to see it.

“I tried to remove it, you know,” he heard himself saying, almost involuntarily.

Potter’s eyes widened in shock.

“What? How?”

Draco shrugged.

“All sorts of ways. Erasing Charms, Healing Charms, even *Reparo*. I pored over books on Dark Magic in the Manor all summer, trying to find something that would take it away.”

Now that Draco had started speaking, it felt like the floodgates had opened. Normally so private and reserved, something inside of him had snapped and he felt the words pouring out of him faster than he could control.

“I was desperate. I even tried covering it up, just wanting to *shower* without having to look at it, but nothing stuck. The Dark Magic embedded in it is too powerful, and the fact that it’s accepted voluntarily only makes it stronger. I tried, Potter. I tried everything. I even—” he felt his breath hitch. “I even tried to cut it out of my skin.”

Potter was still staring at him, his mouth slightly open and his eyes the size of Pygmy Puffs. Draco realized, with a jolt, that his right hand had moved up from his palm and was now scratching at his left forearm from over his robes. As quickly as he became aware of it, he stopped, and the motion caused Potter’s eyes to cast downwards at his arm.

“Do you...can I...?” Potter mumbled, as though in a trance.

With his heart thundering against his chest and every muscle in his body fighting against the action, Draco slowly rolled up his sleeve and presented his left arm to Potter.

He didn’t hate looking at his Dark Mark as much anymore, not since Luna had added the flowers. It still made him think of the war, and of Voldemort, and of his father, and the scars reminded him of his agonizing desperation to remove it, but now it also made him think of Luna, of Armstrong and the other young Thestrals, of friendship and healing and recovery and change.

Potter was quick to notice the flowers as well.

“When did you...how...?”

“Luna,” Draco offered as an answer. “She couldn’t cover the Mark, but she added the flowers so that I would focus on them instead.”

“Are they...are they like the flowers in the common room?” Potter asked.

Confused at the unexpected question, Draco furrowed his eyebrows.

“What do you mean?”

“Do they have any secret meanings?”

“Oh,” “Draco paused. He didn’t know what was going on with him today. He was so afraid of opening up, so incapable of adequately expressing his emotions, so adept at bottling everything deep inside, and here he was, baring his soul—to Potter, no less.

“You don’t have to tell me,” Potter said suddenly, leaning back, as if realizing the reason for Draco’s hesitation.

Draco looked at him, at the heavy bags under his eyes, at the sunken look of his cheeks, and the dull colour of his skin.

“No, it’s alright. You’re woefully uneducated about botany and symbolism, so clearly you’re in need of some instruction from an expert.”

Potter snorted, and Draco felt a thousand stone lighter. This was easier, this back-and-forth of sarcasm and taunts, this he could handle. As long as he threw in a few insults to Potter here and there, he was sure he could get through this. Probably.

Draco looked back at the Mark, unsure where to start.

Tentatively, he traced his right index finger over one of the flowers.

“*Narcissus poeticus*,” he murmured. “Grave flowers, planted near tombs. Sometimes people consider them unlucky or a symbol of vanity because of the legend of Narcissus. But they’re beautiful. They’re a sign of spring and rebirth and self-love. In Ancient Greece, they were considered sacred to Hades to Persephone, and they grew along the banks of the river Styx in the underworld. A single one foretells misfortune, so there are two. One for me and one for my mother.”

He felt his throat starting to close, as if his own body was trying to prevent him from speaking anymore. He refused to look at Potter, knowing that if he did, he would completely lose his nerve. Instead, he continued to stare down at his own arm, tracing another flower with his finger.

“The zinnia...means a lot of things. Endurance. Remembrance. Affection. The memory or lost loved ones, absent friends,” he didn’t know how much more he could say, he felt hot all over and his insides were twisting inside of him uncomfortably. He coughed in an attempt to clear his throat and when the thought of Crabbe attacked his mind, he quickly moved on.

“Er, right, and tulips. All of them are black and white, but they’re meant to be white tulips.”

He stopped, as breathing had suddenly become difficult. He was drawing breath quickly and heavily and he felt his chest ache with the effort of it and panic rose inside of him at his abrupt inability to properly inhale enough oxygen.

A hand closed over his wrist and squeezed gently and he looked up to see Potter peering at him with his emerald eyes.

“What do white tulips symbolize, Malfoy?” Potter asked, in a calm and steady voice.

Draco gulped, swallowing down as much air as he could.

“Forgiveness,” he breathed. Potter nodded, slowly.

“What about this one?” he asked, withdrawing his hand from Draco’s wrist to gently place his thumb on the final flower. “I’ve seen these somewhere.”

“A hyacinth,” Draco managed. “Blue means sincerity. Purple mean sorrow for a wrong committed and...and deep regret...and asking for forgiveness.”

Potter blinked at him.

“After what felt like an eternity, but what must have only been a few seconds, Potter gently rubbed his thumb over Draco’s Mark.

“I forgive you, Draco.”

what a match, i'm half-doomed and you're semi-sweet

Chapter Summary

His friends were all looking at him. Hermione had a soft smile on her face, while Sophie's big blue eyes seemed to be appraising him, and Ron still looked rather dumbfounded.

After a moment's pause, Ron groaned.

"Fine, but there's no way in hell Lucius is redeemable. First Snape turns out to be on the right side, now Malfoy, I can handle them two, but I draw the line at that slimy bastard."

Harry cracked a smile at this.

"I think Draco would agree with you on that, to be honest."

He felt a thousand stone lighter, and when Hermione looked at him and mouthed, "Draco?", questioningly, he cast another glance over to the Slytherin table and shrugged.

They were something like friends now, weren't they? He supposed it was time he started calling him Draco.

Chapter Notes

can you believe this is already longer than the Philosopher's Stone?? WILD. I always worry about my pacing but y'all have left such nice comments about it which I SO appreciate and makes me feel a lot better! these two boys just NEED a slow burn cuz like...trust has gotta be BUILT. but we're making major moves here! okay I'm going to stop talking now. enjoy!

chapter title is from the song Disloyal Order of Water Buffaloes by Fall Out Boy. this line is SO drarry to me (Draco = half doomed, Harry = semi sweet!)

Harry was eternally grateful to Madam Pomfrey. He vowed to never doubt her abilities again, as he was finally sleeping through the night again, and actually feeling relatively well-rested when he woke in the mornings.

He had finally given Ron a proper apology for what had happened, and Ron had slung an arm over his shoulders and told him not to worry about it.

"Besides," he had said, with a cheeky grin. "It got me an extension on that Defence essay!"

Harry had smiled, relieved, knowing that he was forgiven. Hermione had easily picked up on the fact that he was feeling better as well, and since he had promised her that he would begin visiting a

Mind Healer in the summer, she had stopped looking so worried all the time.

He was feeling more like himself again, and his friends were treating him more like as well, and he felt overwhelmingly glad. He also, however, felt confused.

His conversation with Malfoy during their last session really got him thinking. Everything he thought he knew about the Slytherin boy was being challenged, and he simply couldn't make sense of it. He had always thought Malfoy had been *proud* to be a Death Eater, that he had been *honoured* to take the Dark Mark. That was the narrative that all the Death Eaters pushed, that only those who proved their loyalty and devotion to Voldemort were *worthy* of the Mark, than it was something to be yearned after.

But the way Malfoy had described it had sounded like it was a punishment for him. He had sounded terrified for his family, for his life, and more than anything, he had sounded as if he hadn't had a choice.

The more Harry thought about it, the more he realized that he probably *hadn't* had a choice. Lucius Malfoy had been disgraced after the fiasco in the Department of Mysteries, and Harry knew that the task of killing Dumbledore had been given as penance, as no one had believed Malfoy was truly capable of it.

So it only made sense that the Dark Mark was similar in nature. Lucius had failed, and Draco was given the responsibility of making up for the sins of his father.

Harry didn't like the way this insight made him feel. He found himself obsessing over sixth year again, over all the memories he had of Malfoy sneaking around. At the time, he had been sure Malfoy was up to something, and while he had been right, looking back with the knowledge that Malfoy was very much operating against his own will with the threat of his parents' deaths looming over him made Harry's stomach churn.

The worst was recalling the *Sectumsempra* incident in Moaning Myrtle's bathroom. Yes, it was true, Malfoy was about to cast an Unforgivable on him. But Harry just as easily could have disarmed him, or Stunned him, or cast a *Petrificus Totalus*. Instead, he had sliced him open.

He remembered the self-inflicted scars on Malfoy's Mark, the way they shone even whiter than Malfoy's skin, and he wondered, with horror, whether he was also scarred from Harry's curse. He felt his stomach coil at the thought, and like that, he recognised he no longer wished Malfoy any harm.

There was no point in denying it anymore, he and Malfoy were steadily approaching something akin to friendship. He was teaching him various spells in their sessions, and Malfoy was helping him in Potions, and while Malfoy was helping him in Potions, and while their conversations still consisted of a sarcastic and sharp back-and-forth, it lacked any real malice, and was more bitingly humorous than genuinely cruel.

This realization dawned on him at a rather inopportune moment, however, as he was just unpacking this information in his head at breakfast, and without thinking, spoke aloud.

"I think me and Malfoy are sort of mates now," he said, more to himself than anyone in particular. A fork clattered against a plate, and Harry looked up to see his friends staring at him.

“That’s nice, Harry,” Hermione said, from beside him, giving him a smile before returning her gaze to the book in her lap. It made sense that this wasn’t exactly news to her; he had had most of his Malfoy-themed conversations with her, and she was far quicker and picking up things than he was, so she had probably sussed out everything he just did months ago.

Ron, however, gaped at him.

“When did that happen?” Sophie asked from beside Ron, since Ron seemed momentarily incapable of speech.

Harry shrugged.

“I dunno,” he said, honestly. “Between Potions lessons and our sessions, I think we just sort of moved on from being horrible to each other and now we’re relatively friendly.”

“Friendly?” Ron breathed, sounding incredulous. “*Malfoy* is *not* friendly! He’s the opposite of friendly! He’s *unfriendly*! As in, don’t be friends with him!”

At Ron’s increasing volume, Hermione’s attention was brought back to the conversation from her book and she frowned at him. She was clearly about to respond, but Harry beat her to it.

“I know, I thought that too, for the longest time. We’ve been doing the sessions since January and it’s taken me this long to see.”

“See what?” asked Sophie, her eyebrows knitted, looking more curious than anything else.

“See that he was just another tool,” Harry sighed. “He was being used by Voldemort and lied to by his father and he has so many regrets about the war and it just seems so *pointless* to hate him when he’s just trying to recover and move on like the rest of us.”

He felt, rather than saw, Hermione’s eyes on him.

“What made you think about that, Harry?” she asked him. The question somewhat surprised him, seeing as she had said almost the exact same thing about Malfoy after they’d gone to the Quidditch match together.

Harry cast a glance over to the Slytherin table, easily finding Malfoy’s pale hair among the crowd. He was sitting next to his friend, Foxblade, and he was smiling at her—a genuine smile—and Harry saw, with an unexpected jolt in his stomach, that for the first time he could remember this year, the sleeves of his robe were rolled up.

“He tried to get rid of his Dark Mark,” Harry said, now sure that Malfoy was clearly not hiding what he had done to the Mark. “And when he couldn’t, he had Luna tattoo flowers around it, to remind him of his mother and his mistakes and how he’s trying to make up for them. More than anything, he just wants to be forgiven.”

His friends were all looking at him. Hermione had a soft smile on her face, while Sophie’s pale blue eyes seemed to be appraising him, and Ron still looked somewhat dumfounded.

After a moment’s pause, Ron groaned.

“*Fine*, but there’s no way in hell Lucius is redeemable. First Snape, now Malfoy, I can handle them two, but I draw the line at that slimy bastard.”

Harry cracked a smile at this.

“I think Draco would agree with you on that, to be honest.”

He felt a thousand stone lighter, and when Hermione looked at him and mouther, “*Draco?*”, questioningly, he cast another glance over to the Slytherin table and shrugged.

They were something like friends now, weren’t they? He supposed it was time he started calling him Draco.

“*Damn it*, Harper, Alcott’s *right* behind you! On your *left*, you dolt, watch your—oh, bloody hell, they got the Quaffle.”

Harry just snorted as Malfoy—*Draco*, he reminded himself—yelled at the players. It was a Ravenclaw and Slytherin match today, and while normally Harry would be on Ravenclaw’s side, he found himself feeling rather neutral about it.

He did find Draco’s side-line commentary to be highly amusing though, and while he didn’t dare say it, it sort of reminded him of Ron’s.

“Harper’s always been a bloody idiot,” Draco muttered, looking put out.

“He was Seeker, wasn’t he? When you were...” Harry trailed off, realizing a little too late that bringing up Draco’s mission to assassinate Dumbledore might not be the best idea at the moment.

Luckily, Draco just waved his hand dismissively.

“Yes, briefly, and he was terrible at it, I have no idea why they made him Captain this year.”

“At least he isn’t Seeker now,” Harry reasoned.

The actual Slytherin Seeker was a fifth year girl by the name of Emma Dobbs, with long curly brown hair and a remarkable level of agility, as she effortlessly wove through players around the pitch.

The Slytherin team wasn’t bad, Harry thought, but the Ravenclaws certainly weren’t making it easy for them. Their strongest assets were definitely their Beaters—seventh years Martin Penn and Ruby Sullivan—who seemed to *always* find the Bludger and pelt it powerfully at their targets, several times causing the Slytherin Chasers to drop the Quaffle.

He said as much to Malfoy—*Draco*—who nodded quickly, his eyes never leaving the pitch.

“The Slytherin Beaters are useless. Pritchard’s alright, but he’s not that strong, and Baddock’s aim is shite. Hawkins and Walsh essentially carry the entire team,” he replied, referring to the Chasers other than Harper.

Harry grabbed Draco’s shoulder suddenly and pointed.

“Look, isn’t that the Snitch?”

Draco snorted.

“Leave it to you to be the first to spot the Snitch even when you aren’t playing, Potter.”

Harry looked at him in surprise. Was that meant to be a compliment? It *sounded* like a compliment. He was just debating the merits of teasing Draco about it, when he was elbowed by the other boy in the gut.

“Dobbs sees it!” Draco hissed, and sure enough, the Slytherin Seeker had her eyes on the Snitch and began to speed towards it. Just as she did, the Ravenclaw Seeker—who had been watching her—sped off in the same direction.

“Dobbs and Armstrong are neck and neck!” Dennis Creevey exclaimed from his place at the commentator’s podium. “It’s just a question of who’s faster! Armstrong has the advantage of the better broom, but Dobbs is smaller and lighter and—*oh!* Sullivan knocks a Bludger their way and—*amazing*—Dobbs dodges, and Armstrong is taken out by his own team! And Dobbs has got the Snitch! Slytherin wins!”

Most of the Quidditch stands erupted in boos and jeers, but Harry didn’t even notice, because Draco was jumping up and down and screaming, his cheeks pink and his eyes sparkling, and Harry couldn’t help but grin.

you think you know what you're looking for til what you're looking for finds you

Chapter Summary

Even after the Patronus had faded away, Draco was rooted to the spot. He was still in awe at what had happened. He had done it. He had cast a corporeal Patronus. There was something so striking about Patronuses, but it felt even better looking at his own. He felt a surge of joy and pride at the sight.

“Woah,” said Potter, from behind him, reminding Draco of his presence.

“I did it,” Draco said, still somewhat in shock, turning to look at Potter, who nodded slowly, still looking at the spot where Draco’s Patronus had been.

“You did,” Potter said, sounding a little odd. After a brief pause, he asked, “Was that a Thestral?”

Draco couldn’t help it, he smiled. It must have been strange for Potter to see—an adolescent Thestral couldn’t be a very common Patronus.

Chapter Notes

I wasn't going to post this right away since I literally JUST updated, but I figured why not? it was so so so much fun to write and I love reading y'all's thoughts! enjoy!

chapter title is from the song When The Right One Comes Along by Clare Bowen + Sam Palladio

"Draco? Could I speak with you a moment?"

Draco looked up to see Daphne standing in front of him, her arms wrapped tightly around a book that she clutched protectively to her chest. She looked *nervous*, for someone who normally looked utterly confident and sure of herself, and this was enough to give Draco pause.

“Of course,” he said, and patted the spot next to him on the window seat, as an indication for her to sit.

She sat, delicately laying her book down beside her and smoothing down her robes. Draco waited, but she was silent, her brow furrowed as she folded her hands in her lap and stared down at them. Draco didn’t speak, but simply sat there, waiting for Daphne to work herself up to say what she wanted to say.

“I was wondering,” she finally spoke, in a tremendously soft voice, tucking a lock of golden hair behind her ear. “If you don’t mind my asking...have you taken the Oath?”

Ah. Yes. Any questions regarding pureblood tradition and ritual were bound to come to Draco—the same way he aimed any questions about Muggles to Violet, even though she reminded him every time that she wasn’t from a Muggle family and thus, wasn’t an authority on the subject.

“You are referring to the Oath of the Sacred Twenty-Eight, I presume?” Draco asked. He was certain that she was, however there were a not-insignificant amount of magical oaths purebloods were historically rather fond of.

She nodded, looking almost desperate.

“Yes, I have,” he answered. “Have you?”

She nodded once more, wringing her hands in her lap.

“Has it—do you know if anyone’s ever broken it?”

The last two worked were spoken in a whisper, even though the Common Room was mostly empty and its few occupants were not paying any attention to the two of them over by the windows.

Magical oaths were not easily broken, and often had deadly consequences, similar to that of the Unbreakable Vow. Ancient pureblood rituals were especially nasty at times, and he had heard plenty of cautionary tales from his parents about those foolhardy enough to attempt to simply break an oath.

“I’m afraid I haven’t ever heard of it being broken,” Draco said, and Daphne looked visibly disappointed. After a pause, Draco decided he would ask. He wasn’t customarily the type to pry, however this was the second conversation he’d had about the Oath in a short amount of time, and he cherished Violet, and cared for Daphne, and well, being around Luna and Potter so often was rubbing off on him.

“Is this about Violet?” he asked, in a gentle voice. Daphne’s head snapped up, her big blue eyes suddenly looking terrified.

“What? Why? What did she tell you?” Daphne asked, her breath shallow. Draco placed what he hoped was a calming hand on her upper arm.

“I know she cares deeply for you,” he said, truthfully. Daphne looked close to tears, and Draco hoped against hope that she didn’t start crying. He could handle a conversation, but he didn’t know what he would do if she began to cry. Emotions still didn’t come easy to him, after all.

“I care for her, too.” Daphne’s voice was sad, but Draco was glad to hear it was clear and not close to breaking. “I know she’s your best friend. But my family...you know, Astoria and I are the last in the Greengrass line, and my parents always expected me to marry someone in the Sacred Twenty-Eight, so of course I took the Oath.”

She sounded defensive, and Draco squeezed her arm in what he hoped was a comforting gesture.

“You don’t need to explain, Daphne. I understand.”

She gave him another desperate look.

“What do you know about the Oath? About the magic behind it? About its conditions?”

“Well,” Draco paused, considering the question. It had been a while since he had read up about it, but he racked his brain to try and remember as much as he could. “The primary purpose was to keep the pureblood families alive. They were growing paranoid about blood-mixing and were convinced that they had to prevent the Sacred Twenty-Eight from dying out. So most of the magic is regarding heirs; the Oath prevents you from bearing a child that isn’t a pureblood. And it prevents *me* from impregnating anyone who isn’t a pureblood.”

Daphne nodded, listening raptly.

“What about marriage?”

Draco wavered. The marital part of the Oath was a little less clear, however he wasn’t entirely certain he knew all the details and he didn’t want to give Daphne any false hope.

“Marriage tends to be rather vague, as pureblood marriages require their own, separate oath to be taken. However, many couples nowadays forego the ancient marital ritual, as they find it outdated and unnecessary. My father used to go on about how disgraceful it was that the Weasleys never performed the ritual.”

Draco could practically see how quickly Daphne’s mind was running.

“So is the Oath of the Sacred Twenty-Eight connected to the marital oath?” she asked.

“I *think* so,” Draco said, with a soft sigh. “But Daphne, I’m not certain. It’s possible that as long as you don’t perform the marriage ritual, you may be able to get around the Oath as long as you don’t have any children, but I can’t be positive.”

The downtrodden look on Daphne’s face made his gut twist, and before he knew it, he was adding, “I can look into it for you.”

Her eyes lit up.

“Would you?”

“Of course,” he said, somewhat resigned. He had never thought he would be this kind of person, the kind of person who willingly sacrificed his time and effort to help a friend, but he found himself *wanting* to be that kind of person. He found himself proud that he was trying.

“Thank you,” she said, and pulled him towards her to wrap her arms around him in an embrace.

“You’re very welcome, Daphne,” he said, feeling a bit flustered when she released him. “But I have to remind you, that would mean the line will end with you completely. It won’t merge with another pureblood family, unless or until Astoria gets married.”

Daphne looked down, chewing on her lip, and Draco wondered what suddenly made her embarrassed.

“Well, I was thinking about that and...it’s obviously silly to think about marriage at this age anyway, but just...*hypothetically*, if it’s true that the Oath really only applies to producing an heir, and if Violet—or, I mean, whoever I marry—were to take my name, and a male of the Sacred

Twenty-Eight would be willing, it's still *possible* that I could carry an heir, and maybe even keep the Greengrass name alive?"

It was preposterously modern, what Daphne was suggesting, however if their hypothesis about the Oath was correct, it *was* conceivable. Barely.

"I suppose," Draco said, slowly. "But you'd have to have a male of the Sacred Twenty-Eight agree to that, and it *is* a rather unusual proposal. I suppose Theo—"

"I was actually thinking of you."

Draco stared at her, and Daphne's cheeks went furiously red. When it was clear Draco was unable to speak, Daphne launched into nervous speech.

"I don't mean to—it's all conjecture, of course, and I wouldn't presume to...I don't mean to make assumptions, but I thought, since you're, you know..."

Draco gained enough of his composure to snort.

"Bent?" he suggested, and Daphne's blush spread up to her ears.

"Well," she stammered. "I thought that...if you did not wish to marry a witch, but still desired a Malfoy heir, we could...help each other."

Draco's brain was whirring, this was a *lot* to consider, and he felt rather overwhelmed. Daphne seemed to notice this, as she leaned back and began to crack her knuckles anxiously in her lap.

"Let me look into the Oath," he finally said, trying to sound as unruffled as he could.

Daphne nodded emphatically and grabbed her book once more, bringing it back up to her chest and standing up.

"Thank you, Draco. Truly, thank you. You're a wonderful friend."

It was Draco's third consecutive hour in the library when he saw them. He had ambled over aimlessly to the historical section, having not found anything in the shelf with ritual books, and there they were, seated at a corner desk. Granger was hunched over with her face so close to her parchment, Draco was amazed that her explosion of hair wasn't getting caught in her quill. Potter was sitting across from her, gazing off into nothingness, parchment in front of him, but clearly not holding any of his attention.

He debated with himself mentally for almost three full minutes before he finally decided to swallow his pride and walk over to them.

He had finally acknowledged that it was possible Muggles were far smarter than he ever gave them credit for. He allowed himself to be impressed by Muggle innovations and even found himself agreeing with some of Violet's ideas for the further integration of Squibs into Wizarding culture.

He could do this. It wasn't as big of a deal as it seemed. Besides, he had already asked her for an explanation before.

His legs seemed to move of their own accord, and before he knew it, he was standing right in front of Potter and Granger's desk. The two of them, alerted by his presence, looked up at him.

"Draco?" Potter asked, sounding confused. And well, *that* certainly wasn't helping. For whatever reason, Potter had decided that he was going to call Draco by his given name. The first few times he had done it in regular conversation, Draco had shot him a glare and sharply asked him who he believed he was talking to, but Potter had just barked that atrociously loud laugh of his and continued to call him Draco. And it continued to be distracting and unnerving, and Draco felt his stomach do an uncomfortable flip.

"Potter," he said, with a nod, before turning to Granger. "Granger. I'm sorry to interrupt."

"Malfoy," Granger replied, sounding like she was ready to ask him a thousand questions.

"I was rather hoping you'd be willing to help me with something."

This seemed to surprise both of them. After a silence far too long to be natural, Granger picked up her wand from the table and smoothly Conjured a chair.

"Please, sit."

Draco nodded graciously and took a seat. Instead of allowing another lengthy pause to fall over them, he began speaking at once.

"How much do you know about the Oath of the Sacred Twenty-Eight?"

Granger obviously wasn't expecting this question, but she was ready with an answer nonetheless.

"Not very much, I'm afraid. I know what it's for and I know that it was the Fawley, Shafiq, and Abbott families who initially came up with the idea. I know what taking the Oath consists of, in theory, of course, but I don't know of anyone actually taking it."

"I've taken it," Draco said, curtly, and Granger's eyes widened. "The ritual is moderately simple, and I'm sure whatever you've read on it has captured it all. However I'm more curious about the intricacies of the magic behind the Oath."

Granger hesitated, and when she spoken again, it was slowly and carefully, as if one of her words could send Draco into an uproar.

"What in particular are you curious about? I thought the Oath was meant to be relatively straight-forward."

"Sorry, but what is the Oath of the Sacred Twenty-Eight?"

Both Draco and Granger blinked at Potter. Draco had nearly forgotten he was there, and by the look on Granger's face, she had as well.

Draco answered first.

"You're familiar with the Sacred Twenty-Eight, I presume?"

Potter nodded.

“They’re the big pureblood families, right?”

“Correct. The heirs of the Sacred Twenty-Eight swear an Oath, when they come of age, that they will keep their bloodline pure by only marrying into and procreating with other pureblood families.”

Potter scoffed.

“That’s rubbish.”

Draco felt himself bristle at this. Yes, he was learning a lot about Muggles, and yes, he was trying to be more open-minded this year, however he had been raised on pureblood traditions and some of the rituals were beautiful and full of complex, intricate magic, and Potter didn’t know a thing about them.

“And that’s precisely why I asked Granger for help and not you, Potter,” he snapped, turning back to Granger and carrying on as if Potter hadn’t spoken. “When you take the Oath, you recite a passage, a verse that binds the magic together. It specifically refers to keeping the bloodline pure and keeping the Sacred Twenty-Eight alive through marriage and children. But the marriage part is where it gets a little grey.”

“How so?” Granger asked, and Draco was glad that she seemed interested. He hoped she would be able to find some answers, since the past three hours had been fruitless for him.

“I think it’s connected to the pureblood marriage oath and the bonding ritual. I believe that anyone who takes the Oath would only be able to complete the marital bonding ritual with another member of the Sacred Twenty-Eight. However, as I’m sure you know, many magical couples these days decline to perform the ritual. Keeping the bloodline pure is clear, the Oath prevents one from creating a child that isn’t of pure blood. However, I’m unsure over whether or not it prevents a *marriage* to someone of mixed blood.”

Granger’s eyes were alight and she stood from her chair.

“Let me get some books,” she said, and hurried off without another word, leaving Draco sitting awkwardly beside Potter.

“Why do you still care so much about this pureblood nonsense?” Potter asked, sounding disdainful.

Draco sighed. He didn’t want to bring Daphne and Violet into this, it was none of Potter’s business what they were going through.

“I’ve taken the Oath,” he said, instead. “I’d like to know what exactly I swore to.”

“Isn’t it a bit too late?”

Draco shot him a murderous look.

“Unfortunately, Potter, I am not in possession of a Time-Turner, and therefore am not able to go back and change the many wrong decisions I have made, so if you *don’t* mind, I would like to find out if my list of potential spouses is restricted to approximately ten people or not.”

Potter stared at him for a long moment.

“Sorry,” he said, suddenly looking abashed. “That makes sense. I just don’t get why people do this kind of stuff.”

“Oh, really? You can’t imagine why someone would feel immense pressure to perform the duty they were always expected to, perhaps even *destined* to?”

“Er...well, when you put it like that...”

“Exactly,” Draco felt a rush of triumph swell up inside him. It may have been small and insignificant, but he had just won an argument against Potter, and it felt *glorious*.

A loud *thunk* of books on the desk alerted them both that Granger was back.

“Blimey, Hermione!” Potter exclaimed, jumping in surprise at the sound. To Draco’s surprise, Granger actually looked apologetic.

“Oh! Sorry, Harry! The noise, I forgot—”

“It’s okay,” Potter said, quickly, looking discomfited. “It’s fine. Really, Hermione.”

Granger nodded, but cast another worried look at Potter before sitting and turning to Draco, who wondered if Potter’s aversion to loud noises had anything to do with his accidental attack of the Weasel.

“Ready to dig in?” Granger asked, and Draco looked at the tall stack of books in front of them.

“Let’s,” he said, and picked up the book off the very top of the stack.

Several times over the past hour, Draco had wondered why Potter was still there, since he didn’t seem to be doing much other than procrastinating on his homework and doodling nonsense with his quill.

Draco almost snapped at him to make himself useful and help him and Granger with their research, but he doubted Potter would prove to be particularly helpful in this situation.

“Have you nothing better to do on a Saturday, Potter?” he asked, half-way through a tremendously difficult-to-read passage in an ancient pureblood history book.

Potter merely shrugged, charming his drawing to move back and forth on the parchment.

“Sophie and Ron are in Hogsmeade today,” Hermione provided, not looking up from her book, the text of which looked miniscule.

“And you have no other friends, of course,” Draco nodded, smirking slightly. Potter shot him a scowl.

“I wanted to study for Potions,” he finally said, and Draco stared at him, incredulously. Yes, Potter had their Potions textbook on the table, but it wasn’t even open.

“Looks like it’s going well,” said Draco, dryly. He expected another scowl, but Potter just sighed.

“I don’t even know where to begin,” he said. “None of it makes any sense.”

“It’s not bloody Mermish, Potter, it’s just Potions,” Draco rolled his eyes and looked back at his book. “If we manage to unearth something here before nightfall, I’ll help you with Potions.”

Potter brightened, looking at Draco in surprise.

“Really?”

“Don’t sound so shocked. What have I been doing for the last two months, Potter? Yes, I’ll help you. But for now, let me read.”

Potter nodded quickly and Draco tried to focus back on his text, but at that moment, Granger reached out and grabbed his right arm.

“Malfoy!” she exclaimed, her brown eyes widening.

“What?” he asked, not even registering how odd it was that she was touching him. “Did you find something?”

Granger nodded and began to read, “*“The Oath of the Sacred Twenty-Eight, similar to familial bonding oaths, was devised to carry on the legacy of the influential pureblood families. The Oath can only be taken by descendants of the Sacred Twenty-Eight, whose bloodline remains pure and who still bear their family name. The Oath prevents them from finalising a marital ritual or bearing a child with anyone who does not meet these same conditions. However, the Oath does not restrict one from bearing children with someone outside of the marriage bond, as long as they are also a pureblood member of the Sacred Twenty-Eight, as was discovered in 1304, when Gunnhilda Travers, after delivering four stillborn infants, instructed her husband, Reginald Travers, to attempt to continue the line through a different woman. Fearing that he would otherwise be the final member of the Travers line, Reginald successfully impregnated Agnes Flint, Maud Shacklebolt, Edith Rosier, Ida Rowle, Margery Macmillan, and Tille Selwyn, fathering a total of forty-three children.”*”

“That’s *disgusting*,” Potter said, looking at Granger with a horrified expression.

And yes, having forty-three children by six separate women *was* rather foul, but Draco was far more focused on what this story meant for the Oath.

“So it’s all about the children,” he muttered, speaking more to himself than to either of the Gryffindors. “The marital ritual is just ancient tradition, the important bit is the *children*.”

“Well, many of those pureblood marriages were arranged. They were marriages of convenience and often expressly for the purpose of continuing the line. That was always the most important part,” Granger pondered. “And I don’t think they expected that people would simply stop performing the marriage ritual either.”

Granger was making good points, but Draco was distracted by a sudden lightness in his stomach. He wouldn’t have even thought of researching it if it weren’t for Violet and Daphne, but this directly affected *him* as well. He didn’t actually have to marry a woman. He didn’t actually have to marry within the Sacred Twenty-Eight. Considering he was a former Death Eater, his options for marriage were already rather limited, however there was that sudden feeling of freedom nonetheless.

And just as Daphne had said, that didn't necessarily mean the Malfoy line would have to die either. She had already offered to *carry his children*, provided that she could also have her own.

"Draco?" Potter voiced, bringing Draco's attention back to the table.

"Yes?" he asked, looking from Potter to Granger.

"I was just asking if that's what you were looking for," said Granger.

"Oh! Yes, that was extraordinarily helpful, thank you for your assistance," he said, graciously, and Granger gave him a shrewd look.

"You took the Oath over a year ago, didn't you?" she asked.

Draco didn't much like sharing information about himself, and Potter already knew far more than he would have liked, however Granger *had* just spent an hour helping him research, and he'd never been remotely nice to her, so he supposed he owed her some answers.

"Yes, on my seventeenth birthday," he confirmed.

"Who were your parents hoping you'd marry?" she asked, and he couldn't help but admire that she went straight for the point.

"They never specified," he smirked slightly. "But my options were fairly limited, weren't they? Pansy, Millicent, Hannah Abbott, Rosalind Fawley...the Greengrass girls, the Carrow twins...oh, and Girl-Weasley; they're the only living female descendants who bear the original names of the Sacred Twenty-Eight. Well, there's also Alecko Carrow, but she's a murderous lunatic and in Azkaban. My father most certainly wouldn't have approved of Weasley, so I suppose they were hoping for one of the other eight."

"I don't suppose you actually *wanted* to marry any of them, did you?" Granger continued.

Draco snorted.

"I was ready to do it, for my father, for the Malfoy name. But to be frank, I'm relieved to know I won't have to."

"Would you still want to marry a pureblood, though?" Granger's questions seemed unceasing, especially since Draco was actually answering them.

At this one, he hesitated.

"I...don't think it matters anymore," he said, and at Potter and Granger's stunned silences, went on, "I can't afford to be overly selective, can I? I was a bloody Death Eater, it isn't like people are lining up at my door for my hand in marriage."

Potter snickered.

"But you can't have children with anyone else," Granger said. "Would you actually want to have children with a woman other than your wife?"

Draco couldn't help but grin.

“There’s no wife, Granger. There will be no wife. You have just granted me the fantastic news that I will not have to force myself into marrying a woman.”

Both Potter and Granger looked stunned once again. Granger, as expected, gained her composure first.

“Sorry, Malfoy, are you saying you’re—?”

“Bent, yes. As a silver Knut.”

Draco’s heart was pounding violently against his chest, but his voice remained cool and casual, and for that, he had to be grateful.

“Thank you again, Granger,” he said, when it was clear neither of them were going to say anything. “Now, Potter, you won’t learn anything with your textbook closed. Bring it here.”

Even after the Patronus had faded away, Draco was rooted to the spot. He was still in awe at what had happened. He had done it. He had cast a corporeal Patronus. There was something so striking about Patronuses, but it felt even *better* looking at his own. He felt a surge of joy and pride at the sight.

“Woah,” said Potter, from behind him, reminding Draco of his presence.

“I did it,” Draco said, still somewhat in shock, turning to look at Potter, who nodded slowly, still looking at the spot where Draco’s Patronus had finally disappeared.

“You did,” said Potter, sounding a little odd. After a brief pause, he asked, “Was that a Thestral?”

Draco couldn’t help it, he smiled. It must have been strange for Potter to see—an adolescent Thestral couldn’t be a very common Patronus.

“Yes, I think it was meant to be Armstrong. He’s one of Hogwarts’ Thestrals,” he confirmed.

Potter blinked at him.

“Armstrong,” he repeated.

“Yes.”

“As in...Dominic Armstrong? The Ravenclaw Quidditch Captain?” Potter sounded immensely confused. Draco rolled his eyes at him.

“No, you knobhead. As in Neil Armstrong, the Muggle astronaut who walked on the moon.”

Potter continued to stare at him, and when he spoke, he still sounded rather perplexed.

“You named a baby Thestral after a Muggle astronaut?”

Draco scowled at him.

“I feel like you’re perhaps focusing on the wrong thing. Shouldn’t we instead be celebrating that I just managed to cast a Patronus?”

At this, Potter seemed to become himself again, and offered Draco a grin.

“You’re right. That was a great Patronus, you’ve come really far,” he sounded sincere, and Draco felt a swell of something in his chest.

He had somehow gotten used to Potter’s presence, in these sessions and as his Potions partner, and loathe as he was to admit it, there was something about Potter that made his respect and his approval so desirable. It was strange, sometimes Draco could barely stand him—especially when he was being obtuse during Potions—but he still felt an exhilarating rush whenever Potter said something positive about him.

Perhaps it was also because for years they had hated each other, and had only hateful things to say to one another. Draco could barely believe it, but now...they were almost *friends*. Draco had a lot of difficulty wrapping his head around that, however when he considered how drastically his life had changed this year, he knew he simply had to accept it. His friendship with Luna and Violet had been unexpected as well, and while his history with Potter was far more volatile, he supposed he had to stop being surprised when strange things like this happened.

However, what did surprise him was the urge he would get around Potter to test these new waters. He and Potter were on unfamiliar ground here, and he knew that unless he took a big step forward, he would just be tip-toeing around in an attempt to keep everything calm and alright.

Draco did not trust easily. He was taught from a very young age that trusting people was dangerous, that they would always let you down. His father had told him, time and time again, “*The only person you can trust is yourself.*” He knew how to wear a mask, how to hide everything he was feeling and give nothing away in his face or body language. He knew how to close himself off, how to switch his brain to work automatically, and separate himself from his body. Exposing one’s emotions was a sign of weakness and vulnerability, and Draco was taught never to look vulnerable.

This year had somewhat changed that. It was the first year without his father looming over his shoulder and critically watching every move he made. He still shut himself off sometimes, kept his face blank and emotionless, but it was more out of instinct now than anything else.

What had really changed was that he was trying to trust people more. After Crabbe had died and Goyle had left, Draco had had the heart-wrenching realization of how lonely he truly was. He felt so much pent up anxiety and stress and no one he felt like he could talk to about it. He had never been good at making friends, and his parents had never taught him. He was a bratty kid and felt very self-important, as he had spent his childhood hearing how esteemed the Malfoy name was, and how inferior non-pureblood wizarding families were. He quickly learned that no one really wanted to be friends with someone who thought they were better than everyone else.

But this year, Draco had found people. He had found violet, who he trusted more than anyone else. She was highly unusual, with almost everything she believed in going against what Draco had been taught as a child, but she was passionate and determined, and a fiercely good friend to Draco, even though he often felt he didn’t deserve it. And there was Luna—eccentric, odd Luna—who was ready to march off into the Forbidden Forest with a man who had assisted in holding her hostage. Luna, who took him to see the baby Thestrals and inked beautiful flowers around his horrendous Dark Mark, and who always seemed to just *know* things about him and yet never pushed him to tell her more than he was comfortable with. There was Theo, with whom he had entrusted the knowledge of his apprenticeship, someone who perhaps didn’t talk as much as the girls, but always

had a smile for Draco. Daphne and Blaise were far friendlier to him this year as well, now that he wasn't as atrocious a bully as he had always been.

He found that he wanted to trust Potter. Everyone did. Potter was the trustworthy type. The kind of man people confessed their secrets to, the kind of man people left their children with, the kind of man everyone was somewhat in love with, the kind of man who saved the world and didn't even want to be thanked for it.

So why was it so hard? Why did Draco feel his heart beating faster as he simply *thought* about broaching the topic with Potter? This was the *Chosen One*, there was no one more chivalrous on earth. And yet, Draco kept stopping himself. He felt uncomfortable. He liked to keep his life private, and while he had admitted he was gay, his apprenticeship was something that seemed even more personal, perhaps purely because of how guarded it had to be. He had trusted Violet and Theo with it, but secrecy spells bound him to only be able to reveal the truth to three people. If he told Potter, that would be it. He wouldn't be able to tell anyone else until he officially began working. There was something very final about that. Something that seemed important. Did he want Potter to be the last? To have that power?

"Potter," he blurted, before he could stop himself. "Do you still have the hawthorn wand?"

Potter looked at him in surprise.

"Er...yeah, I think so. How come?"

"Could I—do you think..." Draco stumbled, not sure how to phrase his question without sounding like he was pleading for it. "Would it be possible for me to take a look at it?"

Potter's expression became somewhat guarded, but his eyes were curious.

"I suppose," he said, tentatively. "Why?"

Here it was. Here was the moment of truth, did he make up a lie or tell the truth, and risk one of his secrets being in Potter's hands, for him to decide what to do with?

"There's something I would like to tell you, Potter," said Draco, pulling out one of the chairs and sitting down, with Potter following suit. "It's about my apprenticeship."

"What about it?" Potter's voice had gone from tentative to downright suspicious. Draco wasn't sure whether to feel insulted that Potter was immediately suspicious of him, however it further supported his decision to tell the truth. This was a display of faith, he was showing Potter that he trusted him enough to reveal this secret and hopefully proving that he didn't have anything malicious to hide.

"I'm not actually studying Transfiguration with McGonagall."

"Then what are you studying?"

"Wandlore."

There was a pause as Potter seemed to digest this. Then he faced Draco again, looking confused.

"How do you study that?"

“With lots of secrecy spells and confidentiality agreements,” said Draco. “It’s a highly secretive art, and much of the knowledge of how to craft wands has remained solely in the old wandmaking families for generations. If the wrong people got their hands on some of the information, it could be exceptionally dangerous. I’m limited on how much I can actually reveal about what I learn.”

An even longer moment of silence followed this, and Draco tried to keep himself from squirming nervously as he waited to see what Potter’s real reaction would be. This was the problem with Potter; he would take a long time to fully absorb what was being explained, and his reactions seemed delayed. It was starkly different to how he duelled, with the quickest reflexes Draco had ever seen.

“Who’s instructing you?”

“Ollivander,” replied Draco.

Potter widened his eyes at that.

“Ollivander? Even though you...he...”Potter trailed off, and Draco felt the ever-familiar pinch of guilt hit him in the stomach. He looked down, feeling rather ashamed.

“Ollivander has been incredibly gracious and forgiving of my many transgressions, and he has been an excellent mentor in the field.”

“That’s...wow. I didn’t even know that was possible, studying wandlore,” Potter said, looking wondrous, and after a glance, Draco decided it was safe to look up again.

“I hadn’t known at first either.”

Potter looked at him.

“So why do you need the hawthorn wand then? For your apprenticeship?”

Draco nodded and quickly considered how much he could actually reveal.

“We’re studying wand ownership, and the case of the hawthorn wand was brought up. You don’t have to give it back to me, I just need to test it. You can be there while I do, if you wish.”

Potter seemed to weigh this and then nodded, slowly.

“Alright. When should I give it to you?”

i wanna be normal, i wanna be sane, i wanna look at you and feel something other than pain

Chapter Summary

“Wait! Potter!” Draco called, and Harry turned around, questioningly. “Thank you.”

Harry blinked. If he hadn’t seen Malfoy’s lips move, he might not have believed he had really just said that. Malfoy...stopping to thank him? Thanking Hermione, sure, but him? Surely not.

“Er...you’re welcome, Draco.”

“See you in Potions,” Draco added, a small smile tugging at the corner of his lips.

Harry just smiled back.

Chapter Notes

a short chapter, but an important one nonetheless! enjoy <3

chapter title is from the song Panic Attack by The Glorious Sons

He didn’t know why, but Harry still found himself rather reluctant when it came time to handing over the hawthorn wand to Malfoy. Perhaps it was the years of enmity between them that made Harry’s instincts go against handing over a weapon or perhaps because he still felt an odd fondness for the hawthorn wand; either way, Harry felt a strange pulling sensation in his stomach as he reached out to hand the wand to Draco.

Draco took it very gently, as though fearing it might explode, and when nothing happened, breathed a soft sigh of relief. He examined the wand, twirling it in his fingers.

“It feels different,” he said, quietly.

“Is that because I won it?” Harry said, wincing when he realized how that sounded. Merlin, it was still hard being nice to Draco sometimes.

Luckily, Draco didn’t bristle at this, as his attention was still on the wand in his hand.

He shook his head.

“No, it feels...it feels right, just...not the same as before. *Lumos!*”

The wand immediately lit up, a bright white light glowing from its tip.

Draco's eyes went wide.

"Potter," he said, and Harry was surprised to hear excitement in his voice. "Here, cast the same spell."

He shoved the hand back in Harry's hand and Harry, not knowing what was going on, obediently cast, "*Lumos!*"

The wand lit up again, the same as it had for Draco. He didn't really understand the significance of this, but Draco looked as though Christmas had come early.

"How did that feel?" he asked at once.

"Er...normal?" Harry said, not really understanding the question.

"Did it feel like your wand? Like it yielded completely to your magic?"

"Yeah," Harry nodded slowly, wondering what that had to do with anything.

"Potter, this is incredible!" he declared in an amazed whisper. "Do you know what this *means?*"

"Er...no, not really," Harry replied honestly, giving the hawthorn wand back to Draco, who seemed so excited he didn't even take the opportunity to insult Harry's intelligence.

"You know the phrase, '*the wand chooses the wizard*', I presume?" Draco asked, and at Harry's nod, continued, "Well, it's more literal than people believe. Wands don't change their loyalty easily—of course some woods are more faithful than others, but for the most part, a wand's allegiance is hard won. Once it *is* won though, a wand then belongs to *that* wizard. For lack of a better term, it forgets its previous owner."

"Alright," Harry said, slowly, trying to see where he was going with this.

"Don't you see, Potter? Have you ever tried to use someone else's wand? Just as a loaner, not one you won off of someone."

"Yeah, Hermione's," Harry confirmed, remembering practicing basic spells with Hermione's wand after his had been snapped in Godric's Hollow.

"How did it work for you?" Draco continued, and Harry was briefly distracted by how brightly his eyes seemed to be shining.

"It was okay, I suppose. Not as good as mine. The spells weren't as powerful."

"Exactly!" Draco declared, nodding quickly. "That's because it was still loyal to Herm—Granger."

Harry wanted desperately to question his little slip-up there, but he was speaking at such a rapid pace, Harry couldn't get a word in.

"But this wand—*this* wand—doesn't respond better to you! It doesn't respond better to me, either. It is *equally* faithful to both of us! Potter, this wand chose *two* wizards!"

"Wait, but can that even happen?" Harry asked. Somewhere in Draco's explanation, he found himself interested.

Draco looked even more delighted.

“I’ve never heard of it happening before! I have to ask Ollivander,” he trailed off, his eyes still wide and sparkling.

Suddenly remembering that this was actually Draco’s apprenticeship, Harry took this as his cue to say goodbye.

“Alright, well, good luck,” he said, somewhat awkwardly and turned to make his way to the door.

“Wait! Potter!” Draco called, and Harry turned around, questioningly. “Thank you.”

Harry blinked. This was the second time now that Draco had thanked him.

“Er...you’re welcome, Draco.”

“See you in Potions,” Draco added, a small smile tugging at the corner of his lips.

Harry smiled back.

Ashworth and Waya had been delighted when Harry had reported that Draco had managed to cast a corporeal Patronus. Waya also gave him a knowing look at Harry’s use of Draco’s given name, and he didn’t quite know what to make of that.

Thanks to his and Waya’s extended sessions, Harry had gotten rather good at wandless, nonverbal spells, and every time he mastered another one, he felt himself bursting with pride.

He had told Hermione he was able to cast a Stunning Spell wandlessly and nonverbally just the other day and she had gasped and gushed over how technically challenging and difficult that was. Meanwhile, Ron had grinned and joked that he hoped Harry wouldn’t be practicing on him any time soon.

He tried to avoid mentioning Draco too much around Ron and Hermione, as he knew that while Ron was being tactful about their unusual new friendship, he didn’t particularly understand it and it took a decent amount of effort from him to avoid tossing out an insult.

Hermione, however, had already mentioned him twice while discussing certain research she had begun for her apprenticeship.

“I couldn’t tell him what it was *for*; of course, but he already knew so much on the topic, he’s practically got all ancient magical curses memorized.”

“Probably because dear old daddy taught them to him,” Ron mumbled, but Hermione just ignored him.

“He apologized to me the other day in the library,” she continued, looking pensive.

“For what?” Harry asked.

“For everything,” she took a small bite of her toast and chewed thoughtfully.

“Mainly for all the times he called me a Mudblood. He also told me he was always jealous that I did better than him in classes. He went rather red at that.”

Ron snorted at this, and Harry couldn’t help but smile as well.

“You’re right, Harry,” Hermione went on, giving him a warm smile. “He’s changed.”

“Great, now you’re *both* chummy with Malfoy,” Ron groaned. “Shall I invite him to the Burrow for Easter?”

He was clearly being sarcastic, and Hermione rolled her eyes good-naturedly at him, but it reminded Harry of what Draco’s actual Easter plans were.

“He’s going back to the Manor for Easter,” he said. “He hasn’t been since the summer.”

“What about Christmas?” Hermione asked.

“He stayed at Hogwarts,” replied Harry. He himself had been surprised at that when Draco had told him. “Apparently Narcissa is trying to purge the Manor of Dark Magic.”

“Good luck with that,” Ron said, darkly.

“What are we talking about?” Ginny slid in to sit beside Harry, stealing a piece of bacon off of his plate.

Before Ron or Hermione could mention anything related to Draco, Harry quickly answered, “Easter.”

Ron was one thing, but Ginny was a completely different case, and he didn’t particularly want to see how she would react when he told her he was friends with a Malfoy now.

“Ah,” she nodded, and addressed Ron. “I won’t be at the Burrow this Easter, by the way.”

“What?” Ron asked, looking confused. “Where will you be?”

“A few Quidditch recruiters want to fly me out to see their training pitches and stadiums. A couple of us are going.”

“Have you gotten an offer?” Harry asked. Ginny flashed him a wide grin.

“Four!”

“Gin! That’s brilliant!” he exclaimed, pulling her into a hug.

“What teams?” Ron asked at once.

“The Wigtown Wanderers, the Montrose Magpies, the Ballycastle Bats, and the Holyhead Harpies,” she listed off, her eyes sparkling brightly.

“Your top choice was the Harpies, right?” Hermione asked.

“Yeah, but I’m keeping my options open. Hopefully this trip will narrow down my choices.”

“Who else is going? Other seventh years, yeah?” Ron asked.

“Yeah, those who have received offers from the regional teams. Ruby Sullivan from Ravenclaw is deciding between the Falmouth Falcons and the Tutshill Tornadoes. Simone, who plays Keeper for us, got *six* offers, which is the record.”

“How come she didn’t try out years ago?” Harry asked, hoping Ron didn’t take offense at the question.

“She didn’t even start playing Quidditch till this year. She’s Muggleborn, and she grew up playing football. She played it every summer when she was home, so she’s athletic. I suggested she try Quidditch and she loved it.”

“She’s a beginner?” Ron exclaimed, clearly impressed. Harry was surprised as well; he had witnessed Simone Wexler bat away a Quaffle with her fingertips while *standing* on her broom.

Ginny grinned.

“No wonder she got all those offers, right?”

“Is it just you three then?” asked Harry.

“No, Clarence Redding from Hufflepuff also got offers from the Kenmare Kestrels and the Wimbourne Wasps, and Heidi Winchester, also from Hufflepuff, was approached by the Falcons, the Harpies, and the Cannons.”

“The Cannons!” Ron practically yelled, for no reason other than they were his favourite team.

“Didn’t Winchester nearly put you in the Hospital Wing?” Harry asked, remembering the Gryffindor and Hufflepuff match he and Ron had watched.

Ginny grinned and gave Harry a very obvious wink.

“She’s got a hell of an arm, I’ll tell you that.”

“What’s that supposed to mean?” Ron asked.

“Oh, Ron,” Hermione let out a giggle and Ginny directed her next wink in her direction.

“What?” insisted Ron.

“Heidi and I are going out, Ron,” Ginny said, seemingly taking pity on her brother.

“What?” repeated Ron. “But...what? I thought you liked men?”

Ginny rolled her eyes.

“I can’t like both?”

“Wait, you can do that?” Harry interjected. Ginny looked at him and her expression suddenly softened.

“Of course, Harry. You can like whoever you want.”

“And you like a girl who nearly made you vomit while thirty feet in the air?” Ron asked, and Ginny grinned at him.

“What can I say?” she shrugged. “That’s one way to give someone butterflies.”

in the chill of your stare, I am painfully lost, like a deer in the lights of an oncoming bus

Chapter Summary

Draco entered the common room feeling light and—dare he say it—happy. Spending time with Potter did that to him, and he tried not to think about that fact too much, lest it ruin the good mood.

His thoughts always tried to shove their way in, with obnoxious questions and doubts and worries. They crept around in his brain, taunting him. Why would spending time with Potter make you so happy, Draco? Wasn't he your sworn enemy, Draco? Certainly you cannot build such a close friendship so quickly, Draco. Surely you don't need his friendship or approval, Draco.

He knew it was dangerous to need people, because you couldn't rely on anyone. You can't trust anyone but yourself. And yet here he was. He had entrusted Violet, Luna, Theo, Daphne, and now Potter with deeply personal, private information about himself. Information that, prior to this year, not a living soul outside of the Malfoy family had known. And suddenly, it was out there, and he had to simply believe that it wasn't in the hands of someone who would use it against him.

Chapter Notes

it's 3 am and I'm exhausted but HAPPY cuz I finished this chapter! enjoy!!!

chapter title is from the song A Love Like War by All Time Low, ft. Vic Fuentes

“HOW WAS YOUR EASTER?” was the question Potter decided to greet him with in their first Potions lesson after the holidays.

Now that they were friends—and Merlin, was that still impossible to wrap his head around—Draco was becoming more aware of Potter's odd conversational habits, mainly his constant questioning.

He had already revealed far more personal information to Potter than was like him, and yet Potter seemed to continually be asking more and more. Initially, Draco had been suspicious, wondering if Potter was trying to dig something up on him, but then he reminded himself that there was nothing terrible he had done that Potter didn't already know about. That in and of itself was a rather freeing feeling.

“Ingredients first, Potter. Questions later.” Draco tapped his fingers against the open Potions textbook on the desk before them.

“Right,” Potter nodded, picking up his own textbook and walking over to the storage closet. Draco, meanwhile, tried to think of how to answer Potter’s question.

He’d originally tried employing his usual method—short answers that gave little to no useful information. That didn’t work on Potter. He only asked more questions, even more insistently, as though he was trying to uncover some great mystery. It was easier and quicker to just give Potter what he wanted, which always seemed to be more information about himself.

What bothered Draco, when he really thought about it, was how *willing* he suddenly was to just divulge. He had recounted Potter with stories from his childhood, with insights he learned from Violet, with more of his emotional turmoil than he had told anyone, even Luna. And it all came so easily, which it *never* did. Even acknowledging his emotions to himself sometimes felt like an impossible task, and yet Potter had him spilling secrets like a schoolgirl. Sometimes he felt as though he’d been unknowingly dosed with Veritaserum.

“Here,” came Potter’s voice, as he unloaded an armful of ingredients onto their table. Draco decided starting on the potion right away was the best way of keeping Potter successfully, if momentarily, distracted. He instructed Potter on what to do, keeping his own hands firmly in his lap. He was still trying to teach Potter how to properly brew their Potions, and he had realized that Potter was very much a hands-on learner. Despite his terribly slow chopping and his lack of stirring skills—both of which drove Draco’s patience up the wall—Potter was improving, and at least he seemed to be learning, which was all Draco could hope for at this point.

Once Potter had the potion simmering over a low flame and sat back to wait the allocated two minutes before stirring, however, Draco had nothing else with which to distract him.

“How’s your mother?” Potter asked, turning to look at Draco again.

“She’s well,” he said, sighing. There was really no point in trying to distract Potter, he was always ready with more questions.

“Is she still cleaning the Manor?”

“Yes.” After a pause, Draco continued. “It feels different, being there. Less...heavy, somehow.”

“That means it’s working then, right?”

“I suppose,” Draco sighed. “I lived my whole life there—it’s time to stir now, go on—but it doesn’t feel...right, being there. It’s like I can still feel him there.”

His voice grew quiet at the mention of the Dark L—Voldemort. Potter, after carefully stirring the potion six times counter-clockwise, nodded slowly.

“It wasn’t that long ago. It’ll take some time,” he said, sagely.

“How long?” Draco asked, rhetorically, and felt himself losing control of his tongue. “How many Cleaning Charms does it take to remove the stench of rotting flesh from the dining room? How can elf magic stop that feeling of freezing cold fear every time I turn a bloody corner? I had *years* of memories in that house—maybe not all good, but all relatively *normal*—and they’re all meaningless compared to what he did there.”

Potter was staring at him—he could feel it—but he didn't dare meet his eyes. There was something about the way Potter would look at him that was unnerving. He was certain he wasn't the only one Potter had fixed with this intense gaze, so surely *someone* had told him how uncomfortable it was? Then again, he *was* the Chosen One, so who would dare?

"Stop staring and add the beetle eyes, Potter."

Potter easily did as he was told, but looked right back at Draco when he was done.

"Your memories aren't meaningless," he said, softly but firmly. "Bad memories stick to you, they replay in your head over and over. They're almost clearer in your memory than the good ones. Voldemort is the cause of most of my bad memories too. But, well, Hermione always says that he'd already taken up enough of my life and that I shouldn't let memories of him take any more of it."

Draco pondered this.

"I suppose that's all well and good, Potter, but it's easier said than done."

Potter shrugged.

"I know. I think what your mum is doing is great, trying to get rid of any remaining Dark Magic is smart. But I think that when it comes to memories, it might make sense to just...create new ones."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean...if you had more good memories, new ones, in the Manor, maybe the bad ones will fade to the back after a bit. It's like Hogwarts, right? It was almost a year ago that we fought a *battle* here, and people *died*, and here we are brewing a potion and eating dinner and going to Hogsmeade on weekends and watching Quidditch matches. And it's hard, but that's life, right? It just keeps going."

Draco blinked at him.

"When did you get so wise, Potter?"

Potter smirked slightly, but it didn't meet his eyes, and he darkened. He stayed silent for a moment, stirring the potion once again and then sitting back and staring at the low flame flickering underneath the cauldron. When he spoke again, it was in a voice so soft, Draco had to lean towards him to hear properly.

"I'm a hypocrite for saying it, honestly. I still get nightmares on and off. I still think of the Battle. Of those we lost. I still reach for my wand when I hear a loud noise, or when something surprises me. I have good memories here, but I have the bad ones too. And sometimes, I don't know which ones to pay attention to. Sometimes I feel guilty for carrying on, for sitting in the Great Hall and eating and laughing with my friends when there are students who died—who died *for me*—who will never get to do that again."

It was Draco's turn to stare.

Potter's guilt was another new concept Draco had to adjust to. Draco, himself ridden with guilt over his various sins and missteps, had been rather incredulous at first, thinking that Potter was...faking or lying or *something*. What did the Saviour have to feel guilty about? He had rescued the entire

wizarding world from a psychotic murderer. But the more time he spent with Potter, and the more they conversed, Draco realized that Potter didn't play the hero—he bloody well *was* one. He felt some sort of responsibility for every death of an innocent that had occurred during the war, as if it was somehow his fault that Voldemort and the Death Eaters were terrorizing people. Especially those who had died during the Battle of Hogwarts, it seemed like Potter carried their deaths upon his shoulders, letting the overwhelming guilt weigh him down constantly. Draco had tried to tell him it wasn't his fault—albeit in a snarky, condescending way, implying that Potter was making everything all about him—but Potter had just shaken his head slowly, like Draco couldn't possibly understand, which of course made *him* feel like the idiot.

“They didn't die for you, Potter,” Draco found himself saying. “They died for what they believed in. Whether it was peace between Muggles and wizards, or that the Dark—Voldemort was an evil bastard, or revenge, or justice, or even if they believed in the mystical heroism of Harry Potter, they didn't die *for* you. No one dies for you, except...”

Draco trailed off, his brain catching up to his mouth, but it was too late. Potter was looking at him, expectantly.

“Except for?” he prodded, even when Draco didn't finish.

“Well, except for...your mother. As I've heard,” Draco said, lamely. “And if she could have somehow known that you would survive, I doubt she would want you to feel *accountable* for her death, Potter.”

Potter's eyes didn't leave Draco's and, though he felt the strong urge to flinch, he didn't look away. Finally, Potter gave a short chuckle.

“I never thought I'd say this, but you're right, Malfoy.”

“I'll have you know I am often right,” Draco said, in his usual haughty voice, now that the conversation was shifting back to some semblance of normal—although Draco doubted that speaking to Potter would ever feel normal to him. “Besides, I thought I was Draco now?”

Potter raised his eyebrows at him.

“Well, you continue to insist on calling me Potter.”

Draco rolled his eyes.

“You're just so...Potter-ish,” he complained, and to his delight, Potter let out a real laugh.

Draco was once again sitting beside Potter in the Quidditch stands, watching as Ravenclaw and Gryffindor battled it out in the pitch. The two Houses were neck-and-neck in the race for the Quidditch Cup, making it a rather intense game.

Potter alternated between yelling out cheers and unsolicited advice at the players and talking to Draco about their apprenticeships, a conversation that mainly consisted of him asking questions that Draco wasn't allowed to answer, which seemed to really challenge Potter's patience.

“If you can't tell me about what you're learning, then what about your plans for after school? Will you open your own—Demelza's open, Ginny!—your own wand shop?”

“Oh no, I’ll still need far more instruction,” Draco said, watching as Gryffindor lost the Quaffle to Ravenclaw Chaser Stewart Ackerley and Potter cursed under his breath. “Wandlore is no simple art. I’ll continue to apprentice under Ollivander in his shop until he believes I am ready to take over.”

“So you’ll run Ollivander’s then? You won’t change the—at *Cartwright*, aim for Cartwright!—you won’t change the name?”

“Why would I do that?” Draco asked. “Ollivander has an impeccable reputation. His family has been in the wandmaking business for years, I wouldn’t want to be responsible for ending their line.”

“But Ollivander *is* the end of the line, isn’t he?”

“Well, in terms of the Ollivander family, yes, but that doesn’t mean the wandmaking business has to die with him.”

Potter had an unusual expression on his face, and Draco had the distinct impression that he had just impressed him somehow. He felt his heart life slightly. Impressing Potter was such an addictive feeling, and while he could never, ever admit it aloud, he often found himself craving the boy’s approval and praise.

“What about you?” Draco asked. “Will you start working at Hogwarts right away?”

“What?” Potter said, distractedly, chewing on his bottom lip in worry as Ravenclaw scored another goal. “Oh, blimey, no. Hogwarts wouldn’t hire me right out of an apprenticeship, Chosen One be damned. Ashworth recommended I start at local day schools, maybe even magical preparatory schools for children under eleven.”

Draco hesitated. He was immediately reminded of a topic he and Violet had discussed related to her proposals for the Wizard-Muggle Relations office, but he wasn’t sure if she wanted him to talk about it. Although...Potter would only be able to help, wouldn’t he? And would it be so wrong if Potter and Violet were to work together?

“Violet had this idea,” he said, slowly, trying to sound it out in his head first, “of creating a magical preparatory school for Muggleborn witches and wizards.”

Potter looked at him, for the first time completely withdrawing his attention from the match.

“What?”

“She thought that throwing the idea of magic at them and their parents all at once and immediately whisking them away to boarding school was rather overwhelming, and that it may benefit them to integrate sooner, to teach them how to control their accidental magic the way the rest of us are taught by our parents. It would also help the parents come to terms with it if they’re able to understand earlier on, while their child is still at home.”

Potter’s eyes bore into him in that deep, chilling way of his, and despite the warm weather, Draco felt a chill rush down his spine and arms.

“What do you think?” Potter asked.

“What do you mean?”

“Of the idea. What do you think of that idea?”

Draco didn't really know why Potter cared what he thought, since he was suggesting it for *him* to look into, what with his apprenticeship for teaching and all, but Potter was always asking questions for reasons that Draco didn't understand, and he was starting to get used to it.

“I think it makes a lot of sense,” he said. “I used to...well, I used to think a lot of think a lot of things, many of which were wrong, so don't get your wand in a knot, but I used to always think it didn't make any sense that we were put in the same classes as children who hadn't even known magic existed before Hogwarts. I'm not saying it's their fault,” he quickly added, when it looked like Potter was about to interrupt. “They just have a disadvantage. Honestly, I'm surprised no one's thought of this before.”

“But how do you know which kids are magical if their parents are Muggles?” Potter asked.

“The Book of Admittance, of course.”

When Potter just blinked at him, Draco realized this was a perfect example of one of the many aspects of the magical world that those raised by Muggles didn't necessarily know about.

“Each major magical school has a variation of this; in Hogwarts, it's called the Book of Admittance, written by the Quill of Acceptance. It records every time a witch or wizard in Britain or Ireland first exhibits sufficient signs of magic, which is usually before the child turns three, though in rare occasions it can take longer than that. That's how they know who to send Hogwarts letters to. And typically the Headmaster or someone in his place will go to explain the situation to Muggleborns' families, but if they know their names from such a young age, there's no reason why we can't introduce it to them far earlier.”

Potter continued to stare at him, until Draco started fidgeting from foot to foot, feeling uncomfortable, and then suddenly, he broke into a wide grin.

“Draco, that's *brilliant*.”

Though Draco felt his cheeks flush pink at the praise, he was quick to give credit where credit was due—something that before this year wouldn't have even occurred to him.

“It was Violet's idea. *She's* rather brilliant.”

“Do you think she'd mind if I talked to her about it?” Potter asked, his green eyes shining beautifully in the pale sunlight.

“Do I think she would mind if Harry Potter expressed interest in supporting her proposal? Of course not, Potter, she would be chuffed to bits.”

All at once, the stands around them exploded into screams and cheers, causing Draco to jump and Potter to look around quickly.

“What?” he exclaimed. “What happened?”

Draco scanned the situation quickly and grinned devilishly.

“Dominic Armstrong caught the Snitch. Ravenclaw won.”

Potter let out a very dramatic groan.

Draco entered the common room feeling light and—dare he say it—happy. Spending time with Potter did that to him, and he tried not to think about that fact too much, lest it ruin the good mood he was in.

His thoughts always tried to shove their way in, with obnoxious questions and doubts and worries. They crept around in his brain, taunting him. *Why would spending time with Potter make you so happy, Draco? Wasn't he your sworn enemy, Draco? Certainly you cannot build such a close friendship so quickly, Draco. Surely you don't need his friendship or approval, Draco.*

He knew it was dangerous to need people, because you couldn't rely on anyone. *You can't trust anyone but yourself.* And yet, here he was. He had entrusted Violet, Luna, Theo, Daphne, and now Potter with deeply personal, private information about himself. Information that, prior to this year, not a living soul outside of the Malfoy family had known. And suddenly, it was out there, and he had to simply *believe* that it wasn't in the hands of someone who would use it against him.

There was a lot that was fully capable of grabbing his happiness by the throat and suffocating it. But Draco forcefully shoved those thoughts aside and did his best to occupy his mind with pleasant, meaningless images, so as to allow himself to feel this warmth without any intrusion. He walked automatically towards his usual spot on the windowseat, and as he walked, he saw that they were occupied by Violet and Daphne, which was often the case, as the Slytherins had somewhat claimed that spot as their own.

What was *more* unusual, however, was the fact that the two were holding hands. Draco approached them, the smile on his face widening almost unnaturally.

“Good evening, ladies.”

The girls turned to look at him and Violet's face spread into a beam.

“Hi, Draco!” she said, brightly. Daphne offered him a pleasant smile.

“Is this new?” he asked, gesturing to their intertwined hands.

Daphne blushed slightly, but Violet's beam only seemed to grow.

“Yes, partially thanks to you.”

“Me?”

“Your help, researching the Oath,” Daphne explained, looking at Draco with an expression so raw and sincere, Draco almost took a step back. “I cannot tell you how much that meant to me, Draco. I am truly in your debt.”

Draco didn't know what to say. He wasn't particularly used to people *thanking* him, especially not this genuinely, and about something so serious.

“I—you're welcome,” he said, somewhat awkwardly. “If I ever want a child, I suppose I'll come collect.”

He winced when the words came out, because it sounded terrible even though he had meant it jokingly, but he was glad when Violet laughed and Daphne blushed harder.

“Yes, well, I think children are a long way away,” Daphne said, delicately, not meeting anyone’s eyes.

“Of course,” Violet said, and pulled their joined hands up to her mouth, pressing a kiss against the back of Daphne’s hand. It was such a sweet, tender gesture, and for some reason, Draco’s heart just ached.

“I’m utterly exhausted,” Draco said, not dishonestly. “So I’m off to bed early. Have a lovely night, ladies. I am very happy for you.”

“Thank you, Draco,” Daphne said, graciously.

Violet reached out her free hand and gave Draco’s a squeeze.

“Really,” she said, firmly. “You’re the best friend I ever had. I love you.”

Draco stared at her for a mere moment, before saying, whilst praying his voice didn’t crack from the emotion that tumbled out of him, “I love you too, Violet.”

so what's it mean when every dream I have is about you now?

Chapter Summary

Harry nodded and the two of them both sat back in their seats and watched as the potion continued to boil with a satisfying rumbling sound. Harry watched as more and more bubbles floated to the surface, all the while his mind whirring.

“Draco,” he said, impulsively. “Can I ask you something?”

“If I said no, would that stop you?”

“Probably not,” Harry admitted.

Draco sighed heavily and looked at him.

“Then certainly, Potter, ask away.”

Chapter Notes

sorry about the long wait, this chapter was so hard to get through. at first I felt like parts were out of character so I rewrote it about a hundred times until I was satisfied with it lol.

I also wanted to ask you guys something! I was originally going to make this chapter much longer with other scenes, but then I thought it would take me way too long so I decided to save it for the next chapter. do y'all prefer getting shorter chapters sooner or long chapters with a bigger wait? let me know! hope you enjoy <3

chapter title is from the song Criminal by State Champs

Heidi Winchester was sitting at the Gryffindor table, sitting right beside Ginny, who had her arm slung casually around her shoulder. Heidi was chatting animatedly with Simone Wexler, the Gryffindor Keeper, who sat across from her, and while Ginny occasionally threw in a comment or two, she mostly just looked at Heidi with a fond expression or else a wide grin.

Hermione had clearly noticed Harry staring, and nudged him in his side gently. She glanced across the table—where Ron and Sophie were having a heated debate over whether bacon or sausages were the superior breakfast meat—and then murmured in a low voice, “Are you alright, Harry?”

Harry nodded, because, well, of course he was alright. As alright as he ever was.

“Is...” Hermione hesitated, looking over at Ginny, who had chosen that moment to press a loud kiss onto Heidi’s cheek, causing the other girl to laugh and jokingly swat her away. “Is it hard? Seeing Ginny with someone else?”

Oh. Right.

Yes, that made sense, that would be an understandable reason why Harry couldn't stop staring. Or thinking about what Ginny had said, about how she had announced she was dating Heidi. He was jealous. Right?

"I don't know," he said, finally looking away from the pair and at Hermione. "I don't think so? I'm not sure."

Hermione looked at him with a peculiar expression, like he was a particularly difficult Arithmancy problem to solve.

"It's not hard for you, is it?" he asked her, nodding his head very slightly towards Ron and Sophie, whose argument had gotten even louder.

"Black pudding is *entirely* different," Sophie was saying.

"But it's a type of sausage!" countered Ron.

Hermione rolled her eyes.

"Not at all," she said, with a little smile. "But that doesn't mean it can't be for you."

Harry looked over at Ginny and Heidi once more, and yes, there was an odd feeling in his stomach, but no, it wasn't pain or heartache or jealousy. He was glad for Ginny, she looked to be happy, and Heidi seemed, so far, to be a good match for her.

"No, it isn't that," mused Harry, turning back to Hermione when Heidi caught Ginny staring at her and scrunched up her face jokingly. "I don't know."

Hermione still looked somewhat worried, but she nodded slowly.

"Alright," she said. After a long pause, during which Harry assumed the conversation had ended and he returned his full attention to his breakfast, she spoke again, her voice measured and careful.

"Harry, you know that you don't have to marry your childhood sweetheart just because your father did, right?"

Harry stared at her.

That thought hadn't even occurred to him, truth be told, although of course there had been a few comments here and there when he and Ginny had been together about how similar they looked to James and Lily, most of which had been by Remus and Molly.

"I know," he said, honestly. He supposed it made sense that some of the inexplicable pressure he had been feeling to stay with Ginny could have been because of this, but now that they were no longer together, he felt no desire or responsibility to get back with her.

Looking at Ginny and Heidi once more, he felt something fall into some sort of place. It didn't quite click perfectly, but it had to be right, didn't it?

"I think maybe...I'm just not used to seeing her with a girl?"

Hermione's eyes widened.

"Oh," she said, and her sudden speechlessness had Harry hastening to clarify.

"Not that there's anything wrong with that!" he said, quickly. "I just wasn't expecting—or I suppose it's surpris—well, no, it's just—"

"Don't worry, Harry, I know what you meant," Hermione reassured him, holding a hand up.

"Okay," Harry said, not sure if *he* knew entirely what he meant.

Harry couldn't quite believe it, but he was managing to brew this potion with minimal commentary from Draco. Admittedly, the Slytherin's jaw was clenched so tightly that the bone protruded so sharply that it looked ready to break through his delicate skin, however he refrained from verbally correcting—or insulting—Harry, instead shooting him sharp glances when he got something wrong, and nodding shortly when Harry fixed the error.

Harry had been sure that Potions was a subject he was simply destined to never understand, however he was actually starting to pick up on things. The textbook simply outlined the recipe for each potion, however Draco would make connections—he explained the distinction between tinctures and elixirs, he detailed the need for both magical components and herbal components, pointed out how properties of the ingredients mixed together and supported or counteracted each other. He would never ever admit it to Hermione, but Draco was a far more efficient tutor. Unlike Draco, however, Hermione was relatively patient, and even when she lost her patience, she didn't usually resort to the taunts and insults that seemed to come rather naturally to Draco, however Harry considered this to be a small price to pay for passing his Potions N.E.W.T.

Draco reached out and grabbed Harry's arm suddenly, when he had been about to add the sliced pygmy blossom petals.

"What?" Harry asked. "Am I doing something wrong?"

"No," Draco replied. "It's only...do you remember what I said about petals, seeds, and stems?"

"Petals provide the faintest effects, however are also less reactive. Stems are likely to produce a wider variety of effects, however are also less reactive. Stems are likely to produce a wider variety of effects, and seeds are the most potent but also the most reactive," listed Harry, feeling distinctly proud of himself when Draco nodded.

"The reason many potionmakers stay away from seeds is because of their tendency to mix poorly with certain ingredients, however this potion does not include any elements of an animal, blood or horn or hair, so the seeds have nothing to react dangerously with."

"So why aren't we using seeds?" Harry asked.

"Because nobody bothered to question the original recipe," replied Draco, sneering at the textbook as though it had personally offended him. "However, if we were to add approximately two seeds instead of the fourteen petals, we would simply have a more efficient Finder's Friend."

"Got it," Harry said, understanding now. "I'll go get some."

“You do that, Potter,” Draco smirked, and sat back as Harry hurried to the supply closet. The pygmy blossom seeds took a moment to find, as they were in an extraordinarily small jar, however Harry retrieved them and turned to walk back to their desk, where now, Theodore Nott, chatting with Draco.

Harry returned to the desk with an inquisitive look for Draco, who waved his hand at Nott casually.

“Theo was about to go to the closet to retrieve the seeds,” he explained. “I told him to wait a moment and we would hand them over.”

“Great minds think alike, huh?” Harry said, placing the jar down and watching as Draco carefully extracted two seeds to add to the potion.

“But fools rarely differ,” he mumbled, dropping a miniscule seed into their cauldron, and Harry didn’t know who this comment was directed to.

“You only say that because you love to argue,” Nott said, with a wide smile on his face. Harry, who had never seen Nott so much as smirk, was rather taken aback.

“I only argue when I’m right,” Draco responded easily, looking up at Nott and smiling back at him. “Here you are.”

He presented the tiny jar, which Nott took with his thumb and fore-finger.

“Thank you,” Nott said, nodding graciously, and then walking back to his shared desk with Zabini.

Harry watched him go before looking back at Draco, who was peering at their potion with a satisfied look on his face.

“Look, Potter, see how it’s bubbling?”

Harry leaned over the potion and saw that, indeed, it had begun to bubble and froth where the liquid met the cauldron.

“Now just wait until it starts to turn a dark orange and do the final stirring routine.”

Harry nodded and the two of them both sat back in their seats and watched as the potion continued to boil with a satisfying rumbling sound. Harry watched as more and more bubbles floated to the surface, all the while his mind whirring.

“Draco,” he said, impulsively. “Can I ask you something?”

“If I said no, would that stop you?”

“Probably not,” Harry admitted. Draco sighed heavily, as though Harry were putting him through some sort of trial.

“Then certainly, Potter, ask away.”

“Are you...I mean, do you...are you, er, and Nott...as in, are you, er, together?”

Draco gave him an incredulous, wide-eyed look.

“Excuse me, Potter, did you just inquire about my *romantic* affairs?”

Harry felt a hot blush growing up his neck and face. He hadn’t meant to *pry*, it had just...popped into his head, and Draco didn’t talk *too* much about Nott, but well, it was possible, wasn’t it?”

“Sorry,” he said, feeling tremendously awkward. “That’s really personal, I didn’t mean to...”

To his surprise, he saw that Draco’s pale face was tinged with pink and he was determinedly not meeting Harry’s eyes.

“Well, Potter, the answer to your question is no, Theo and I are not in a relationship.”

He looked somewhat put off, and Harry weighed the benefits of asking more questions. His friendship with Draco was still rather fresh, and he didn’t know where the lines were, how much he was allowed to ask. Draco was a remarkably private person, always pausing and looking like it took incredible effort to reveal any information about himself.

“But, would you want to be?” Harry asked, hoping he wouldn’t come across as too nosy. Draco’s jaw visibly clenched again and he turned to look directly at Harry.

“Why are you asking me this, Potter?” he hissed. Harry didn’t really have a good answer to this.

“I dunno,” he said, honestly. “I guess I was just...curious.”

“You’re too curious for your ow good,” Draco huffed, and began stirring the potion, which, as Harry saw as he glanced over, had turned a deep orange colour. Harry watched him stir, and spoke, barely realizing what he was saying as the words tumbled out of his mouth.

“Ginny’s seeing someone, you know.”

Draco gave him a slightly dirty look.

“And why would I care about this?”

“I dunno,” Harry repeated. “I didn’t think I would care either.”

“But you do,” said Draco, in a matter-of-fact tone.

“I don’t know why,” Harry said, which was the truth. He didn’t have feelings for Ginny anymore, he hadn’t had them in a long time. So why was the thought of her and Heidi now constantly floating around in his head?

“You’re jealous.”

“No, I’m not,” Harry said, confidently. He knew the feeling of jealousy well, the roaring of the monster in his chest he had always felt when he saw Ginny with Dean in his sixth year. This definitely wasn’t that.

Draco snorted.

“Of course, the Saviour of the Wizarding World never gets jealous,” he said, putting on a pompous tone. “No common man could *possibly* compare to the Chosen One.”

“It isn’t a man.”

Draco looked up from the potion.

“Pardon?”

“Ginny isn’t dating a man. She’s dating Heidi Winchester. You know, the Hufflepuff Beater?”

Draco blinked at him and then a wicked looking grin spread across his face.

“Of *course*,” he said, as if it was the clearest thing in the world. “Of *course* littlest Weasley likes women, it seems so obvious now.”

“What do you mean, ‘of course?’” Harry demanded. “How does it seem obvious?”

“Ah, is this what’s bothering you, Potter? The fact that Weasley wasn’t ever able to truly love you?”

“What are you talking about, Malfoy?” said Harry, frustrated. “She did love me. She said she likes both men and women.”

Draco raised his eyebrows.

“Hmm,” he said, in a wondering tone. “Fascinating.”

“What’s fascinating?” insisted Harry, trying to keep himself from raising his voice. He felt like he was missing a big piece of the picture here.

“I’m merely thinking aloud, Potter,” Draco said, breezily. “If Weasley did love you, and you’re not jealous, then what’s the problem? Perhaps you simply think it’s unnatural for two women to be together?”

His voice went slightly cold near the end of his question, and Harry immediately shook his head.

“No, of course not,” he said. “I don’t care about that.”

“I don’t know!” Harry exclaimed, and Nadine Bellmore looked up at him from the table beside theirs in shock at the sound. He murmured a quick apology to her and lowered his voice. “I guess I just...I didn’t know you could do that. I didn’t know you could be interested in women *and* men.”

Draco had a very strange expression on his face, looking as though someone had just clubbed him in the head. What followed was a stretch of silence so long that Harry almost thought Draco had just decided to ignore him, until he spoke.

“Potter,” he said, slowly. “Do you mean to tell me that the concept of bisexuality is foreign to you?”

Harry didn’t want to admit that this was the first time he was hearing the word ‘bisexuality,’ so instead, he just nodded.

Draco took a very deep breath as he returned his attention to the potion long enough to add an ingredient and quickly step back as the potion hissed and sputtered.

“Well, Potter, it is true: many people fly for both teams, as they say, and it appears as though Girl-Weasley is one of those people. Many witches and wizards throughout history experienced attraction to both men and women, as well as wizards to only men and witches to only women. The reason marriages were mainly between a man and a woman was for the purposes of reproduction, however many witches and wizards had relationships on the side with members of their preferred sex.”

“Is that what you thought you’d have to do?”

Draco looked up from the cauldron to shoot him a glare.

“Is there a reason you’re suddenly so interested in my relationships?”

Harry flushed again, however before he could respond, Draco went on to answer the question.

“Yes, I suppose I had considered it. As you well know now, however, I don’t have to worry about that anymore.”

“Yeah,” nodded Harry, his mind swimming. Draco was staring at him, and through his peripheral vision, Harry could see he had an odd expression on his face, as though Harry was some sort of puzzle he was trying to figure out.

it took a couple weeks, last night i finally cried

Chapter Summary

“For the record, no, there were no scars,”—this was a lie, but he didn’t feel like watching Potter drown himself in guilt and self-pity—“and you do not owe me an apology, seeing as I was about to cast an Unforgivable on you.”

“You weren’t,” Potter interrupted.

“I beg your pardon?” Draco raised his eyebrows at him. Not that he was particularly proud of the moment, but he distinctly remembered being in the midst of casting the Cruciatus.

“You were trying to. You wouldn’t have cast it,” Potter spoke matter-of-factly. “I know how those spells work, Draco. You have to really mean it.”

Did Potter really think him above Unforgivables? Violet, Luna, Ollivander, they all seemed to believe he was hiding some heart of gold under all of his abysmal decisions, but Potter had seen him, Potter knew first-hand how cruel Draco could be, how little humanity he treated people with.

Chapter Notes

I have returned with another chapter! Thank you for your comments as always! It looks like most of you prefer the longer chapters so I'll try and feature more of those instead of the short ones! To be honest, Draco's chapters are pretty much always longer, Harry's often give me a lot of trouble!

I also wanted to mention, I've been debating it in my head for a while, but I've finally decided and there will be a sequel. Don't worry, I won't leave this unfinished, but I've sort of fallen in love with this universe and the characters and their development and I want to tell more of their stories, so yes, when this story ends, a follow-up is on its way.

Once again, thank you guys so much for reading and for commenting, it truly makes my day and I love that you're enjoying reading this as much as I'm enjoying writing it. Now that's enough from me! Enjoy the chapter!

chapter title is from the song I Don't Wanna Love You Anymore by LANY

N.E.W.T.s were steadily approaching, and the level of stress and panic in the older students was rising at such a rate, one could practically smell it in the air. Draco, however, found himself surprisingly unconcerned about the upcoming exams. He was far more devoted to the studies of his apprenticeship.

His discovery about the strange dual-ownership over the hawthorn wand between him and Potter had astounded and impressed Ollivander, and the senior wandmaker had taken the wand in order to further study it. Draco was eager—and somewhat impatient—to hear what the wand revealed. Meanwhile, however, Ollivander continued to instruct him in the intricate art of wandlore and wandmaking.

He had just given Draco a heavy and intimidating looking book that was laden with secrecy spells so elaborate that Draco could practically feel the magic of them emanating outwards. If anyone other than Draco were to attempt to open it, it would be disguised as a magical cookbook, and if anyone attempted to steal it, it would let out a blaring alarm. Ollivander had also recommended Draco pick up some Muggle books on physics from the library, and had sort of mysteriously implied they'd be helpful. Ollivander was often like that—he enjoyed handing out hints and allowing Draco to figure out the information on his own, rather than spoon-feed it to him.

The books were practically impossible to get through, with some parts almost looking as though they were in another language, and Draco had the feeling he was missing a substantial amount of background information needed to understand them. He had asked Violet to take a look at them, but she'd frowned at the book and then shook her head.

“I'm sorry, Draco,” she said, sounding it. “We don't cover much of what the Muggles actually study, we only do a surface-level amount in order to understand how they function and what they do in day-to-day life. This seems like a far more advanced specialization of Muggle science.”

Draco then considered Granger.

While he and Potter had built an odd yet functional friendship, he and Granger shared no such thing. There was coldness between them, apprehension and years of dislike that hadn't vanished, but had merely faded slightly. However, Granger seemed accepting of his and Potter's friendship, and she seemed pleasantly surprised that Draco had a newfound interest in Muggle topics and was no longer as abrasively intolerant as he had once been.

Draco still wasn't sure how he felt about Granger. On the one hand, she was far politer to him than he deserved, given the horrible things he had said to her over the years—not to mention the torture she had suffered at his aunt's hand in his own house—and he had long since accepted that she was the most intelligent student in their year. However, he still didn't *like* her. She was still a bossy know-it-all who brown-nosed all the professors, and *yes*, perhaps Draco did still think a little less of her for being a Muggleborn. He tried to reason with himself in his head, tried to tell himself he had learned better this year, but a tiny nagging part of his brain was rather insistent on it.

Granger was well-versed on all sorts of magic that could be read about, however there was magic and magical history that couldn't be learned from a book; spells and rituals that were passed down from generation to generation in magical families. No, he supposed, it wasn't Granger's *fault* that she was Muggleborn, but he'd have maybe felt a bit better if she could admit that she wasn't in fact an authority on all things magical.

Although, a voice that sounded suspiciously like Violet's reminded him in his head, his annoyance could largely be due to the fact that he and Granger were rather similar in that respect, tending to assume they were the smartest person in the room at any given time. If he expected Granger to admit her gaps in knowledge, he would have to admit his own.

So, on a Thursday afternoon, he approached her in the library.

“Granger? I don’t suppose I could disturb you for a moment?” he used his most polite voice, the one his mother had taught him.

Granger’s head shot up and she cast wild brown eyes at him. The intensity in them was so strong, Draco almost took a step backwards.

“Hmm? What? Oh, Malfoy, yes, sit, sit,” she grabbed at her book bag from the chair next to her and Draco tentatively sat.

“Are you certain?” he asked. “You seem rather occupied.”

He looked at the mess of parchment and textbooks strewn across the table in front of them. Granger let out a breath sounding partially like a laugh and partially a sigh.

“Yes, well, I could do with a break. I’ve been talking myself into circles with this.”

Draco still didn’t understand how Granger could be so nice to him. Yes, he was being extraordinarily gracious to her now, but there was still no reason for her to grant him her time. He supposed maybe she liked knowing something Draco didn’t.

“I was wondering whether you knew anything about Muggle physics.”

She blinked at him, his question clearly unexpected.

“Why do you want to know about *physics*?” The way she phrased it sounded like the topic wasn’t a highly desirable one.

“I found this book,” he said, withdrawing it from his bag and placing it on the table. “And I can’t understand it. It’s exasperating.”

Not being able to discuss how it was meant to relate back to his study of wandmaking, he gave her the bare minimum, while remaining honest. This honesty thing was still quite new to him, but he was actually trying to stick to it. Violet had quoted a Muggle author at him once, something about there being so much less to keep track of if you never lied.

Granger reached out for the book and flipped through the first few pages. She hummed thoughtfully as she perused through it.

“Well, this isn’t *highly* advanced, but you would definitely need contextual information to understand it. Physics is a broad field, it studies how the universe behaves and what everything is made up of. I’m not sure if any wizards have thought to combine physics with a magical understanding of the world, though that would make for some fascinating theories,” she trailed off, seemingly distracted by her tangent for a moment. Draco let her wonder without interruption, only softly clearing his throat after a long pause.

“But how can it study *everything*? Surely this book doesn’t contain the Muggles’ theories on *everything*?”

Granger quickly refocused, laughing lightly.

“No, no, not like that. Drat, I’m not explaining this very well, am I? Honestly, I’m not the best person to talk to about this. I don’t exactly have the best Muggle education,” she frowned and looked off at nothing, chewing on her lip in thought.

Draco looked back at the book in front of him, *Energy in Physics*. The title seemed simple enough, but he had hardly been able to get through the first chapter. What any of this had to do with wandmaking, he had no idea.

“Oh, you know who would know more about this?” Granger exclaimed, her eyes immediately snapping back to Draco. “Oliver!”

“Rivers?”

“Yes! You room with him, don’t you? He’s a half-blood, and his mother is a software developer, that’s sort of like...never mind, basically she insisted he still get somewhat of a Muggle education, so he took summer classes every year.”

Draco couldn’t hide his surprise at this.

“He studied magic all throughout the year and then had to do Muggle studies during the summer? Poor chap.”

“I wish I had done that,” Granger said, wistfully, and Draco resisted the urge to call her a swot in his head. “But anyway, I’m sure he’d be able to tell you more than I would.”

“Brilliant,” Draco said, freshly motivated with new steps to take. “Thank you, Granger.”

She offered him a half-smile.

“You’re welcome, Malfoy.”

As it turned out, Oliver Rivers *was* able to give Draco more information. He had been rather taken aback when Draco asked him for help in the morning, however when Draco had showed him the book, his face had split into a massive grin.

As soon as they sat down at one of the desks in the common room, he had launched into speech and Draco had struggled to put a word in edgewise.

“Okay, so the main idea here is that energy always exists, right?” He was leaning so close to the table that he kept having to push his shoulder-length hair back behind his ears. “You can’t create new energy or destroy it, you can only change its form. That idea is called the law of conservation of energy. It’s a little more complicated, but that’s the gist of it. Muggles classify different forms or types of energy and how they can go through transformations; so, for instance, there’s sound energy, which of course relates to sound and vibrations, and there’s thermal energy, which is in essence just heat. The way Muggles explain it is that thermal energy comes from a rise in temperature, which causes an object’s atoms to vibrate at a higher frequency and—” he took a look at Draco’s face and paused. “Okay, you have no idea what I’m saying.”

Draco wanted desperately to deny this, but he simply couldn’t.

“I think I understand the idea of different types of energy,” he said, slowly. “It’s sort of like... Transfiguration, perhaps? It’s systematic and precise, you have to consider all factors of the object and its structure in order to adequately Transfigure it into another object. So that’s like a transformation of energy, no? I suppose Conjunction and Vanishment wouldn’t work with that law of energy or whatever it was called.”

Oliver was nodding enthusiastically, his already large eyes growing wider in excitement.

“Yeah, exactly! But you know, even wizards don’t fully understand how Conjunction and Vanishment work, because no one can really explain or prove where Vanished objects go. And even with Conjunction, it isn’t like you’re creating energy out of nowhere, is it? Because you’re using your magic—that is, your *magical energy*—to Conjure! And Conjured items don’t last very long anyway.”

“That has to do with Gamp’s Law of Elemental Transfiguration, doesn’t it? That’s why Conjured items don’t last and aren’t particularly strong or sturdy. I’ve never fully understood that, come to think of it, but if you consider it as a form of energy being drawn from your own magical core and then returning once the Conjured item ceases to exist...”

This was...rather lovely, sitting here and having an intellectual conversation, with someone on the same academic level, without being reminded of his past or his family or the war or death.

“Gamp’s Law is so *frustrating*,” Oliver tucked a wayward strand of dark hair behind his ear again. “The way it’s presented is as though magic itself is energy, right? But that doesn’t make sense to me, because the five Principle Exceptions seem like types of energy to me. If magic *was* energy, it would be able to Conjure other forms of energy.”

“I never thought about it that way,” said Draco, slightly astounded. “But you’re right. Food, oxygen, yes, of course.”

“I suppose my point is I think magic is merely the system we use to interact with energy in the world. The energy has always existed and can’t be created or destroyed, the way Muggle physics states. We, as wizards, simply have an additional tool to manipulate that energy that Muggles don’t.”

“A tool to manipulate energy...” Draco repeated, more to himself than to Oliver, and it was this phrase that brought his mind back to *wands*, which was what brought him down this rabbit hole in the first place.

He brightened, feeling something click in his brain and shot Oliver the biggest smile he had felt on his face in a long while.

“Brilliant!” he exclaimed. “Thank you!”

“Wandless and non-verbal?” Draco rolled his eyes so hard he could feel it in his head. “Merlin and Salazar, and you wonder why I hated you for seven years, you can just do bloody everything, can’t you?”

Potter gaped at him, as though in disbelief that Draco had just complimented him, though of course, Draco had wrapped it in an insult, because that seemed to be the only way he was able to communicate with Potter.

“That’s not true!” Potter finally got out. “I can’t do Occlumency like you can!”

Draco wanted to roll his eyes again, but refrained. If he rolled his eyes every time he was tempted to around Potter, he would have a constant headache.

“You can’t just *do* Occlumency, it takes intense study from someone highly skilled in the art. I only know Occlumency because my crazy aunt Bellatrix taught me.”

“Snape tried to teach me in fifth year,” Potter countered, and Draco actually paused, as this was new information.

“He did?”

Potter nodded.

“Dumbledore thought I needed to learn it in order to better block Voldemort from getting in my head,” he paused and looked slightly embarrassed. “Remember how Snape told you I was taking remedial Potions?”

A grin started to form on Draco’s face as he remembered, however he was slightly disappointed now knowing that Potter hadn’t really been taking remedial Potions.

“And even he couldn’t teach you?” he asked.

Potter shrugged.

“To be honest, I don’t think he really wanted me to learn it.”

“I thought Snap turned out to be on your side in the end. Secretly a good guy all along, and all that rot.”

At this, Potter snorted slightly and shuffled his feet under his chair slightly.

“I suppose,” he said. “He protected me because he loved my mum and Voldemort killed her. But I don’t know if that makes him a good guy. He was a Death Eater before, and my mum dying was the only thing that changed his mind and made him switch sides. I think...” Here, Potter paused and scrunched up his face, as if he was thinking very hard. “I think that he did the right thing, but for the wrong reasons. And even if he did change his mind about what the Death Eaters believed at some point, he was still a slimy old bastard who was bitter and cruel to all his students. Well, besides his precious Slytherins, of course.”

Potter gave a little smirk at the last line, trying to bring a little humour into the conversation, but Draco had something else Potter said echoing in his head.

“The right thing for the wrong reasons,” he repeated, looking at Potter curiously. “Isn’t that still better though?”

“Better than what?”

Draco looked away just as quickly. He didn’t know how this happened so often, how easily Potter got him into these emotional conversations that normally he would stay miles away from.

“Than doing the wrong thing, for the right reasons,” he said, his voice sounding small and far away. Potter’s green eyes drilled into him.

“I don’t think so. Not always.”

A long period of silence followed Potter's words, with neither one of the boys knowing where to go from there. This was the trouble with talking about the war. It wasn't as though there weren't plenty of horrific things they could talk about, it was that neither one knew what could set the other off. What was an untouchable topic? Draco often felt like it was all taboo. He was reminded every day of the many wrong decisions he had made in his past, the mistakes he had made, and the cruel and incorrect beliefs he'd held for far too long to blame solely on his father's misleading guidance.

Meanwhile, Potter hadn't just been on the right side, he'd been what the right side had been fighting for all along. What authority whatsoever did Draco have to bring up the war around Potter? As much as Potter seemed to truly hate the attention people paid him and as much as he denied the title of Saviour of the Wizarding World, there was no denying that he had been fighting off Voldemort since he was a child and had been the one to finally defeat him.

"Does it bother you?" Potter asked, and Draco looked up to find his bright eyes watching him carefully. "When I talk about the war?"

"No," said Draco, and it was the truth. It felt somewhat surreal, sitting here with Potter on a Saturday afternoon, going from practicing defensive magic and poking fun at Potter's ridiculous scarlet jumper to this dark, heartfelt conversation about the war and his dead parents and right and wrong. It was all strange, but it didn't *bother* him.

"I don't suppose it makes any sense," he said slowly, "but no one else seems to...understand."

He paused and fidgeted, feeling like he wasn't expressing himself correctly. He still wasn't good at this, this exchange of emotions and vulnerabilities. This openness and honesty. It still felt like he was speaking a foreign language.

"The war was...Everyone suffered. And people have lost far more than I have, but...not everyone felt that *pressure*. That responsibility. We all have scars, but...some of us earned them."

He cast his eyes downwards, and automatically began pushing against memories that were threatening to flood his brain. He always tried to hide them away, keeping them behind what he pictured as a locked door, but sometimes they fought back, and pounded against that door over and over again, so loudly and so powerfully that he was afraid they'd break it down.

Potter was looking at him in that inquisitive way of his, as if trying to see inside of him, his eyes big and blinking, and Draco felt naked and afraid, and was struck by the strong urge to flee the room, to hide in his dormitory and never speak another word to Potter.

Potter seemed to realize this, as Draco felt his muscles tense up, and looked away before speaking in a quiet and gentle voice, as if Draco were a startled deer he didn't want to scare off.

"I felt so alone, when we were out there last year. Even though Ron and Hermione were with me, or Hermione, when Ron had—I still felt alone. Like no one could possibly grasp what it was like for me. I was the one who had Voldemort in my head all the time, who had the whole bloody wizarding world counting on me to save them. I *had* to. And Hermione and Ron would say they had to as well, but it wasn't the same. They *felt* like they had to. They felt a *moral* responsibility. But it wasn't about that for me. I would tell myself I was doing the right thing. I always wanted to do the right thing. That's what everyone knows me for. '*Oh, that's Harry Potter, he'll do the right thing.*' But I didn't hunt down and kill Voldemort because it was the right thing to do. I did it because I had no other choice."

Draco pulled his sleeves down, stretching them around the tips of his fingers as far as they would go, feeling chills all across his body. His stomach was swallowing itself over and over, turning inside-out and twisting into knots and he felt sick with it, and a part of his mind was wailing like an alarm, *Get out! Get out! This isn't safe! Shut up and get OUT!*

Potter unfolded his hands, which had been woven together and clenched tightly in his lap, and reached for the neckline of his horrendous jumper, yanking it down. Draco couldn't help but look as Potter revealed a smooth, perfectly oval-shaped scar on his chest. It looked like it had been seared there, like Potter's skin had been burned through.

"I got this from one of Voldemort's Horcr—from his...well, a part of his soul," said Potter, sounding grim. "It's hard to explain, but it was in a locket and we were trying to destroy it. And it nearly drowned me, pulling me down like a weight. And when I was down there, struggling to breathe, all I could think about was... 'if I die, Voldemort wins'. I didn't...I didn't think about Ron or Hermione or the Weasleys or Hagrid or Remus or anyone I love. I just thought about Voldemort, about how it was my job to kill him. My responsibility."

Draco felt as the words hit him, as though they were jabs to the gut. His mind was still fighting the horrendous thoughts pounding against that locked door, but it was a losing battle, and they were beginning to squeeze under the cracks and through the keyhole.

"I always expected him to cause pain," When he spoke, it was as though the words were coming from somewhere else. He could feel his lips moving, hear his own voice, but there was something distant about it, everything coming out without conscious permission. "No matter what, I always braced myself around him. It was never enough, but...it was always expected. Never surprising. It sounds...it sounds horrible, but he was predictable in a way. At a certain point, I think I just became numb and desensitized to it all. It stopped being shocking, the dreadful things he did, because he didn't have any lines he wouldn't cross. There wasn't an evil he wouldn't commit, not a human being he wouldn't kill—man, woman, or child. He could cause excruciating pain, but...but I think...it hurts more when you don't expect it. When it's caused by someone who isn't *supposed* to cause pain like that. It's like, it hurts more than once. It leaves a different kind of wound."

When he finally dared to meet Potter's eyes, he looked utterly appalled, and Draco immediately bit hard on his tongue, regretting opening his mouth, regretting saying anything, regretting agreeing to these stupid meetings and helping Potter with Potions, regretting stepping foot on the Hogwarts Express in the first place...

"Draco, I know it's no excuse, but I didn't know what that spell did, I'm so sorry, and I never even asked you if it scarred or if you were okay or..."

Potter was rambling and Draco stared at him, not understanding what the bloody hell he was talking about until the memory of Potter pointing a wand at him in the bathroom flashed in his head. There was a brief jolt in his stomach, but then, almost instinctively, he snorted loudly, completely cutting off Potter's speech and causing him to stare in surprise.

Suddenly feeling far more like his usual snarky self, Draco gave him a little smirk.

"*That's* what you think I was talking about? Honestly, Potter, not everything is about you."

Potter just continued to gape at him, so Draco continued.

“For the record, no, there were no scars,”—this was a lie, but he didn’t feel like watching Potter drown himself in guilt and self-pity—“and you do not owe me an apology, seeing as I was about to cast an Unforgivable on you.”

“You weren’t,” Potter interrupted.

“I beg your pardon?” Draco raised his eyebrows at him. Not that he was particularly proud of the moment, but he distinctly remembered being in the midst of casting the Cruciatus.

“You were trying to. You wouldn’t have cast it,” Potter spoke matter-of-factly. “I know how those spells work, Draco. You have to really mean it.”

Did Potter really think him *above* Unforgivables? Violet, Luna, Ollivander, they all seemed to believe he was hiding some heart of gold under all of his abysmal decisions, but Potter had *seen* him, Potter knew first-hand how cruel Draco could be, how little humanity he treated people with.

“I’ve cast Unforgivables before,” he murmured, thinking of Rosmerta and Katie Bell. He didn’t mention that he had never successfully cast the Cruciatus, even after Voldemort had ordered him to, on Dolohov and Rolfe. He had *tried*, but he couldn’t. So his father had pushed him aside and done it instead.

His father.

“So have I,” said Potter, his tone almost nonchalant. “More than once.”

Draco stared at him.

“When?” he said, his voice hoarse.

“When we broke into Gringotts,” Potter replied. Draco had heard about that, of course, through Bellatrix’s incoherent screams about ‘the Potter boy’ and ‘filthy goblins’ and ‘the Dark Lord’s trust’, but hearing Potter say it so plainly was still a shock.

“I used *Imperio* on one of the goblins, and on Travers,” Potter continued, his eyes still focused on Draco’s face. “And I used the Cruciatus on Amycus Carrow. I still don’t think you could have cast it that day.”

Draco didn’t argue, because the more he thought about it, the more he realized Potter was right. He couldn’t have done it. As much as he had hated Potter at the time, as angry as he had been, he hadn’t wanted to torture him. Stupefy him, perhaps. Give him another good punch on the nose, definitely. But not the Cruciatus.

Without warning, the door in his mind flew open and the image of his father’s face, of that bizarre grin, as he stood above him with his wand pointed just split his head open. To his horror, he felt his throat begin to close, and a pressure behind his eyes that warned him that tears were coming and he swallowed, hard, pushing them back down.

“How do you do it?” he asked, in barely a whisper. “How does someone *enjoy* seeing that kind of pain, that kind of suffering? How do you look at someone in agony and *smile*?”

His fists were clenched tightly, his fingernails digging painfully into his palms with the effort it was taking him to keep tears back, to keep his body from trembling.

“I don’t know,” Potter said, his voice quiet now as well. “With Carrow, it was...he’d spat at Professor McGonagall. *Spat* at her. I can’t explain it, there was just this anger, this hatred, that welled up inside of me. But the way that Voldemort and Bellatrix and...” he sighed heavily and looked away. “I think it’s just hatred, and sadism, and heartlessness. The Death Eaters thought so little of the people they were torturing, of Muggleborns and supporters of the Order, blood traitors, anyone who fought back. Voldemort thought of everyone as beneath him, as unworthy, as disposable, so what did it matter what pain they were in?”

“And when it’s someone they claim to care about? A pureblood? When it’s someone they’re meant to prote—respect?” The words were coming out automatically again, tumbling out of his mouth before he could stop them, and he stumbled to try and repair his slip of the tongue, but it was too late.

Potter was looking at him again, with horror in his eyes.

“Draco, you don’t mean that...that Lucius...?”

And then it didn’t matter how many doors Draco had built up in his mind, how hard he stabbed his palms with his fingernails, how hard he swallowed, how tight and tense he kept his muscles, none of it mattered, because here was Potter, looking at him with those terrible green eyes, and he folded into himself and he wept.

we are alone with our changing minds

Chapter Summary

“I suppose it just...clicked,” she said. “I guess I didn’t think about it too much, because I liked blokes too, so I thought that the feelings I had about girls didn’t really matter, or that everyone had them. But after talking to my friends about it, I figured that no, not everyone felt the same way. I started paying more attention, and I realized I was attracted to girls just as much as I was to blokes. And I just sort of thought, okay, well, if I do meet a girl that I like and that I’m attracted to, then why not see where it goes? And you know, it’s been going really well.”

Harry paused for a minute, absorbing this. He wasn’t sure what Ginny meant about the feelings she had, the ones she said she thought everyone had. What kind of feelings were they? He didn’t exactly have much of a frame of reference when it came to romance. The brief, disastrous relationship he had with Cho didn’t include a lot of romance, and when he thought of his relationship with Ginny, the feelings he remembered most were jealousy, and desperation, and fear, and sometimes, a sweet relief, when he held her in his arms and felt warm and content and safe.

“You know you can talk to me about anything, right, Harry?”

Chapter Notes

I kept trying to make this longer, 'cause most of you guys said you preferred the longer chapters, but then I realized it's been like three weeks so like...it's not super long but it's here!

also I'm going to be going back and editing chapter names because I dont like that they're just numbered, just telling y'all so you dont get confused :)

chapter title is from the song State of Grace by Taylor Swift

Ginny looked extremely put out when she sat down at the Gryffindor table for dinner and, having had first-hand experience with an angry Ginny, Harry was apprehensive to question her about her bad mood, however, after a minute of stewing in silence, Ginny started speaking without any prompting.

“Ron, are you bothered that Harry’s not joining the Aurors with you?”

Ron looked from Ginny to Harry, as if worried that he was going to give the wrong answer.

“Er...no? I mean, I thought we would both be doing it at first, but he’s got his teaching thing and I reckon he’s much happier with that,” Ron gave a little shrug and looked at Harry again, who grinned at him.

Ginny made an irritated clicking sound with her tongue. “Well, alright, but what about...what about if Harry~~did~~ become an Auror with you, but then insisted he didn’t want to be your partner? He worked as an Auror just like you, but refused to be working *with* you?”

“Why would he do that?” Ron just looked confused, but Hermione, who had been nose-deep in a book as usual, seemed to gather that something was going on, and set down her book.

“What happened?” She asked, looking at Ginny, who then sighed heavily.

“Heidi and I both got offers from the Harpies, right? It’s the only team that bid on the both of us and we both love them, so I thought she’d want to join them with me, but we were talking and she said she’s leaning more towards taking the Falcons’ offer and I just feel sort of...narked about it.”

“Hmm,” said Hermione, thoughtfully. “Did she say why she prefers the Falcons?”

Ginny waved her hand dismissively.

“She said she fit better with their style of play and that they seemed more interested in her than the Harpies did so she thought she’d get off the Reserves faster.”

“That...makes sense, doesn’t it?” Harry said, cautiously, looking from Ginny to Hermione to Ron and back again.

“Well, yeah, but she’s a great player, she wouldn’t be on the Reserves for the Harpies for long, especially since Gia Harding has been talking about retiring because she wants to start a family.”

“What if it were reversed, though?” Hermione asked.

“What do you mean?”

“Well, what if you had both gotten offers from the Falmouth Falcons, and she was excited about it and wanted you both to join, but then you also got an offer from the Harpies, who were your favourite team and your first choice?”

For someone who didn’t really get or appreciate Quidditch, Hermione was certainly handling this particular dilemma better than Harry and Ron, who were mostly sitting in silence, afraid of saying something that would set Ginny off.

Ginny slumped in her chair slightly.

“Yeah, alright, I see what you’re saying,” she said, though she didn’t sound very happy about having to admit it. “Maybe I just got it in my head that we would be playing for the Harpies together. You’re right, she should join the team she feels best about.”

Hermione gave her a comforting pat on the arm.

“Don’t worry, Ginny,” she said, warmly. “I’m sure you’ll still make time for each other.”

Ginny smiled gratefully at her.

“Thanks, Hermione.”

“Anytime,” Hermione offered, easily. “But now, I do have to go, my apprenticeship starts at seven.”

“Blimey, is it seven already?” Ron exclaimed, earning himself an exasperated look from Hermione. “I have Auror training. Where’s Seamus?”

He cast glances up and down the Gryffindor table, but Seamus was nowhere in sight.

“Bugger, he must have already gone,” said Ron, quickly reaching for his pumpkin juice and glugging down as much as possible before letting out a hollow belch. “See you later!”

He and Hermione both rose from their seats, Hermione offering them a wave, and exited the Great Hall, with Ron at a sort of half-jog and Hermione at a brisk walk.

Harry and Ginny watched them go with mild amusement.

“Can you imagine if they had stayed together?” Ginny asked in wonderment.

“You didn’t like them together?” Harry asked. He had never really figured out what Ginny’s opinion had been on Ron and Hermione as a couple.

Ginny shrugged.

“Don’t get me wrong, I love Hermione,” she said. “But they’re just too different. They say opposites attract and all, but I don’t think they want the same things in life. I’m glad they did give it a try, though.”

“How come?” asked Harry, curiously. “I mean, if they weren’t good together, why is it good that they *were* together?”

“Because they wanted to be,” Ginny said, like it was the most obvious thing in the world. “They had all these pent up feelings for each other and if they didn’t at least try to see where those feelings would take them, they’d be left wondering what could have been for the rest of their lives.”

Harry was immediately struck with the question of whether this referred to Ginny’s feelings about the two of them as well. Ginny seemed to realize where Harry’s mind had gone and offered him a soft smile.

“But once you give it a try, and see where those feelings lead you, you might end up being better off as friends.”

He smiled back at her. He loved Ginny, he always would, but she was right, they *were* better off as friends and he was glad they had been able to remain as such. Besides, she seemed to be happy with Heidi—aside from this new Quidditch conflict.

“How did you and Heidi start going out anyway?” He asked, wondering if this was perhaps too personal of a question.

Ginny shrugged. “We just started talking after a Quidditch match Hufflepuff played with Slytherin, I complimented her on nearly knocking that Harper prat off his broom, and we just got on really well, and it went from there.”

This seemed like an oversimplification to Harry, but then again, he didn’t have much first-hand experience in how girls communicated with one another, so he nodded slowly. Ginny cocked her head and watched him for a moment.

“How come?” she asked.

“Just curious,” Harry replied, though there was more to it than that. He didn’t know how to properly address what he was really wondering, he hadn’t even figured out how to phrase it in his own mind.

After a long moment’s thought, he spoke again, his words coming out slowly and carefully.

“How did you know?” he asked, barely aware of how his volume had lowered. He expected Ginny to ask him to elaborate, but she just looked at him, her eyes sparkling in a way that made her look even more like Fred and George.

“I suppose it just...clicked,” she said. “I guess I didn’t think about it too much, because I liked blokes too, so I thought that the feelings I had about girls didn’t really matter, or that everyone had them. But after talking to my friends about it, I figured that no, not everyone felt the same way. I started paying more attention, and I realized I was attracted to girls just as much as I was to blokes. And I just sort of thought, okay, well, if I do meet a girl that I like and that I’m attracted to, then why not see where it goes? And you know, it’s been going really well.”

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“You know you can talk to me about anything, right, Harry?” Ginny asked, her brown eyes crinkled at the edges as she furrowed her eyebrows.

He nodded, somewhat baffled.

“Yeah, of course, Gin. You too.”

She gave him another warm smile.

“I suppose I should go apologize for being a bint to Heidi. I definitely don’t want her taking it out on me in the next Quidditch match.”

She offered him a cheeky grin and then jumped up to find Heidi at the Hufflepuff table. Harry took a long sip from his tea and sat, replaying the conversation he had just had in his head.

Hermione was spending more and more time with Oliver Rivers, her partner in her apprenticeship. They would talk to each other at a million miles a minute, breaking off into various tangents and eyes alighting at each new idea. Whenever Harry witnessed their conversations, he couldn’t keep up for more than a few minutes, though he doubted many others could either. Hermione always looked bright and excited, her pupils quite large and her hair bouncing as she nodded quickly.

Oliver was really not at all similar to Ron, but Harry could still understand why Hermione would be interested in him, as he was clearly on her intellectual level and the two seemed to be able to talk for hours.

He was a lanky bloke, taller than Harry but not as tall as Ron, and very skinny. He had soft features—a small nose and thick lips and just a smattering of freckles over his face. His dark, shoulder-

length hair always seemed to be falling into his face, as every few seconds or so, he would lift his hands to tuck it back behind his ears. He looked somewhat feminine, with his long hair and his smooth face and Harry wondered.

He had been doing that a lot the past few days, looking at people and *wondering*. Ginny's words from dinner the other night echoed around in his head, about "paying more attention" and "not everyone felt the same." He felt like eighteen perhaps was too old to discover a new side of him so significant, but at the same time, it wasn't like he had had much free time during his adolescence. He had been far too preoccupied with Defence professors trying to kill him and Voldemort storming the castle.

But now...well, with his nightmares slightly—if not entirely—abated, and no Dark wizards currently threatening him or his friends, Harry's priorities were somewhat different. He had N.E.W.Ts to stress over, certainly, and his apprenticeship with Ashworth as well as the additional advanced magic Waya was teaching him, but this...whatever this was seemed to be preoccupying him as well.

It was all rather confusing. He could look at Oliver and see how Hermione could be attracted to him, but that was all. So that solved it, didn't it? But then he'd be leaving the Quidditch pitch after watching a game with Ron, and see rugged Dominic Armstrong, Captain and Seeker of the Ravenclaw Quidditch team, shaking his head like a dog to rid his dark hair of sweat, and he thought, *well*.

It was the same the other way around, however. Sophie was a beautiful girl, dark hair and pale eyes and a slender figure, but she was definitely more Ron's type. Harry didn't really know if he had a type. He supposed he didn't have enough experience to have a type. Hermione would know. She always knew.

"Do I have a type?" he asked her at breakfast, causing her to stop dead in the middle of buttering her toast. She furrowed her eyebrows at him for a moment and then resumed her buttering.

"Well, I wouldn't want to assume," she began diplomatically, but Harry just narrowed his eyes at her. "Oh, alright. People always said I liked my Quidditch players, but I think you do more so than me. Particularly Quidditch players that can actually *beat* you."

Harry pondered this. He supposed it made sense—Ginny and Cho were both excellent Quidditch players, and it would explain the slight lurch in his stomach he had gotten at the sight of Dominic Armstrong heading into the changing rooms. Hermione hadn't mentioned anything about them being *girls* though, and well...that was good, then, wasn't it? Harry chewed on his lip, trying to figure out what this all meant.

"Not that there's many of those," Ron chimed in, joining their conversation after speaking to Sophie by his side.

Harry grinned at him. Ron could always be counted on to cheer him up.

"I dunno," Sophie said, though her voice was teasing. "There were a few brilliant finds this year."

"Ginny's already taken the Winchester girl," Ron commented. "There's always the new Gryffindor Keeper, Wexler, but she scares me."

Harry chuckled. Simone Wexler was rather intimidating—beyond just her formidable skills on the pitch, she had wild and curly auburn hair and dark eyes that could make anyone squirm under their gaze.

“What’s the name of that Ravenclaw Beater?” Sophie asked. “You know, she’s kind of small, has really long hair? She’s pretty.”

“Ruby Sullivan,” Ron answered. “Ginny said she’s signing with the Tornadoes.”

“I think the Ravenclaw Seeker is rather fit,” said Hermione, casually, shooting Harry a knowing look. He could have kissed her.

Ron glanced from Hermione to Harry, looking slightly confused.

Harry swallowed loudly.

“Yeah,” he said, his voice only slightly croaky. There was a long pause, as Hermione looked at him patiently, and Ron just continued looking confused.

“He’s good-looking,” Harry managed, somewhat pathetically, but Hermione beamed at him nonetheless.

Ron blinked for a moment and then his blue eyes widened slightly.

“O-Oh,” he said. “Sure, mate. I mean, I still want Gryffindor to beat them, but Ravenclaw’s last match against Slytherin was mad impressive. He caught the Snitch in ten minutes tops! Go for it.”

Harry’s heart thrummed in his ears.

should we forget about the past, is that how you cope?

Chapter Summary

“That was brilliant, Draco,” Potter said from the ground, his breath coming out in quick, heavy pants.

Draco ducked his head, willing the heat that bloomed in his cheeks to disappear. He couldn’t help but feel proud of himself, having just cast a Shield Charm so powerful it knocked Potter backwards.

Draco walks over to him and held a hand out to Potter. Potter eyed it for a moment, looking somewhat surprised, and then took it, letting Draco help him up.

“Want to go again?” Draco asked, shooting Potter a cheeky smirk. Potter huffed, but grinned toothily back.

Chapter Notes

hello, lovely readers. thank you so much for your kind comments, as always, I'm so glad you're enjoying the story <3

I wanted to ask something I hope is alright. a few of you have used the word "q***r" in your comments, and I know that that word has been reclaimed and that you're using it in a positive way and if you are a part of the gay community, that is 100% absolutely your right.

I personally have a lot of bad experience with that word as it was often used as a slur against me. I came out when I was 14 in Tennessee, and dealt with a lot of homophobia in high school. hearing that word just brings back a lot of negative memories and anxiety and I try to avoid it when possible. i really dont want to be an asshole and tell people what to do/say, as of course you can say what you like, I just wanted to ask please if you would consider not using it in the comments for this story.

I know you all mean well and your comments are so wonderful and make my day and I hope I haven't discouraged you from writing with this, it was just eating at me and I wanted to mention it.

chapter title is from the song All Love by FLETCHER. hope you enjoy the chapter, let me know what you think <3

It was only the second time Draco had come out to visit the Thestrals by himself, but he felt incredibly comfortable nonetheless. Having once been so fearful of the Forbidden Forest, and rather apprehensive about Thestrals themselves, sitting in this clearing within the Forest with a juvenile Thestral’s head in his lap was another moment that felt rather indicative of how different Draco was as a person from what he used to be.

Armstrong was far bigger than he had been when Draco had first seen him, but he wasn't fully grown yet—he wouldn't be until he was three years old. Draco wondered if he would be allowed back on the grounds to visit him. He wondered if Armstrong would remember him. Luna had assured him that he would, that Thestrals had good memories and while they didn't often bond with humans, when they did, the bond was a strong one.

Draco hoped she was right.

He had become surprisingly attached to the animal, feeling a sense of warmth pool in his stomach whenever he would arrive in the clearing and Armstrong would trot up to him as soon as his milky white eyes caught sight of him.

He liked to talk to Armstrong, and while he was sure that a lot was lost in translation, the animal seemed to understand him quite a bit, and was a wonderful listener. He had nuzzled right up into Draco's face when he had been told that he was Draco's Patronus, which had filled Draco with a sense of affection so strong he didn't even know what to do with it.

The other Thestrals had also become accustomed to Draco's visits and greeted him with soft snorts or else a sort of benign indifference. Armstrong's head was comfortably nestled in Draco's lap and enjoying the way Draco was scratching him behind his ears.

"I'm not certain anymore," Draco was saying, smoothing Armstrong's thick and growing mane back. "Although I suppose I'm rarely certain of anything these days."

Armstrong let out a heavy huff.

"Yes, I know, a lot of it is merely my fear talking, but it's difficult *not* to be afraid at times. And it's *Potter*, you know."

Armstrong just blinked his white eyes.

"Bloody Potter," Draco muttered under his breath. "How does he do that anyway? Is it some sort of Prat-Who-Lived mind game? By the end of this year, he'll know my entire life story down to the colour of my baby blanket."

Armstrong immediately lifted his head from Draco's lap and opened his eyes wide. Startled, Draco looked at him, unsurely, and rose to his feet.

"Are you alright?" he asked, never having seen him behave this way. As he looked around, he saw the other Thestrals had also begun standing, alert. A minute later, he realized why—there were footsteps approaching—loud, booming footsteps getting nearer and nearer.

Draco's hand clenched around his wand in his robes, feeling his heart rise up into his throat. This *was*, after all, the Forbidden Forest, and any sort of creature could come barrelling into the clearing at any moment. Draco began making a mental list of what spells he could use that wouldn't be questioned at his probationary hearing this coming July.

In the next moment however, an enormous man emerged from the trees a wheelbarrow full of slabs of meat trailing behind him.

The Hogwarts gamekeeper looked as surprised to see Draco as Draco was to see him.

“Malfoy? What’re yeh doin’ here?” He asked, his voice gruff and suspicious.

The Thestrals were clearly very interested in the meat Hagrid had with him, but Hagrid was sufficiently distracted by Draco’s presence to properly notice.

“Er...I’m visiting,” Draco said, unsure how to adequately explain this. He had never been fond of Hagrid, and at times had been quite scared of him.

“Visitin’?”

“The Thestrals,” Draco said, gesturing to the animals and feeling more than a little stupid.

“Yer visitin’ the Thestrals?” Hagrid asked, looking entirely confused. Armstrong chose that exact moment to nudge his head against Draco’s arm and Draco instinctively scratched at the creature’s skeletal nose.

“Blimey,” Hagrid muttered, looking at Draco like he’d grown a second head. “Alrigh’, then, yeh can help me feed ‘em.”

Hagrid then turned toward his wheelbarrow and began tossing the chunks of meat towards the Thestrals, who gathered around it and began to eat.

Confused and slightly disgusted by the prospect of handling raw meat in a rusty old wheelbarrow, Draco took a tentative step forwards.

“Not afraid, are yeh, Malfoy?” Hagrid asked, looking at him expectantly.

Draco had the fleeting thought of, *When did my life become so strange?*, but then approached the wheelbarrow and withdrew a cold, slimy piece of meat. Armstrong remained right at Draco’s elbow, waiting for him to place the food on the ground.

“He likes yeh,” Hagrid said, looking at Armstrong curiously.

“Er, yes,” Draco replied, watching as Armstrong began to gorge on the meat. “Luna brought me to see them several months ago. We’ve forged somewhat of a bond.”

When he looked back up, he saw that Hagrid was staring at him.

“I suppose I should be going,” Draco said, feeling tremendously awkward. Armstrong looked up at these words and once again sought Draco’s hand on his nose. “Goodbye, Armstrong. I’ll be back. Enjoy your treat now.”

Armstrong huffed softly and returned to eating the meat upon the ground.

Aware of Hagrid’s eyes still trailing him, Draco withdrew his wand and departed the clearing.

“That was brilliant, Draco,” Potter said from the ground, his breath coming out in quick, heavy pants.

Draco ducked his head, willing the heat that bloomed in his cheeks to disappear. He couldn’t help but feel proud of himself, having just cast a Shield Charm so powerful it knocked Potter backwards.

Draco walks over to him and held a hand out to Potter. Potter eyed it for a moment, looking somewhat surprised, and then took it, letting Draco help him up.

“Want to go again?” Draco asked, shooting Potter a cheeky smirk. Potter huffed, but grinned toothily back.

“I think I’m done for the night,” he said. “But we could have another session tomorrow night if you want?”

“I’m meeting with Ollivander tomorrow evening,” Draco replied, as they departed from the third floor corridor. “But I should have time on Thursday if that would work for you?”

Potter hummed, agreeably.

“Thursday’s good,” he said, shoving his hands in his pockets. “How is it going with Ollivander, by the way?”

Draco opened his mouth and then closed it again, hesitating. He was slipping into a dangerous habit of just answering any question Potter asked him, and he *had* to start being more careful about it. Several of the secrecy spells associated with his apprenticeship barred him from revealing certain secrets, even if he wanted to, however even certain things that weren’t exceptionally confidential, Ollivander had recommended he keep to himself for the safety and the preservation of the craft. He pondered over how much he could comfortably disclose to Potter.

“Very well, thank you,” he said. “We’re meant to go over his findings on the hawthorn wand tomorrow.”

“Oh, that’s cool,” Potter replied, glancing up at Draco for a moment and then quickly turning away again. He was behaving strangely all of a sudden, not making eye contact but shiftily shooting Draco odd glances.

“What is it, Potter?” Draco asked, raising his eyebrows at him as they reached the top of the stairs on the fourth floor.

“I was just wondering if—” Potter suddenly stopped in his tracks, looking alert.

“What?”

“Shh!” Potter held up a hand. “Do you hear that?”

Draco listened for a moment before hearing it, a sort of sniffing coming from their hall to their right. He shot Potter a concerned look, and followed him as he walked towards the sound, turning the corner when they reached it.

A girl was sitting on the floor, just barely tucked into an alcove in the wall, her knees pulled towards her chest and her face buried against them as she cried softly.

“Ella,” Draco murmured, dropping to the floor without thinking.

Ella’s head shot up at the sound of her name and Draco felt his stomach churn. The scar she had, from the corner of her mouth up to the middle of her right cheek hadn’t ever gone away, merely faded into a pinkish white even paler than Ella’s skin.

“Oh,” she mumbled, quickly wiping her face with the palm of her hand. “Draco, I’m sorry, I didn’t think anyone would be here.”

“You don’t need to be sorry,” Draco said, quietly, feeling his heart ache.

He didn’t know what to do, what to say. He wasn’t particularly good at dealing with tears, he didn’t even know what to do when he himself was crying, let alone someone else.

“What happened?” he asked, withdrawing his handkerchief from inside his robes and offering it to Ella. She took it, pressing it against her eyes.

“Nothing,” she mumbled, sniffing, but when Draco just waited, continuing to look at her, she let out a sigh. “Some boys were just teasing me. I’m not hurt.”

“What did they say?” Draco asked, knowing it definitely wasn’t as benign as Ella was making it seem. She flushed and looked away, and her lip trembled.

“Ella, is it?” said Potter in a gentle voice, kneeling down beside them. Ella looked up, as if just noticing Potter was there and her eyes grew wide.

“Oh, er...yes, Mr Potter,” she said, looking thoroughly embarrassed.

“You can call me Harry,” Potter said, still in that calm, kind tone. “I know it’s probably hard to talk about, but it’s important for us to know what happened, okay?”

A few tears escaped from Ella’s eyes, but she nodded.

“I was in the library,” she said, her voice cracking slightly and her eyes focused on a spot on the ground. “And I didn’t notice they were coming until they were all there and they were commenting on my face and I told them to leave me alone, and then they were saying that I should be glad they were paying attention to me because no man would ever want to be with a damaged Death Eater whore and then they were joking that they would take me back to their dorms and take turns. Then Madam Pince came over to see who was making noise and I ran away when they were distracted.”

She mumbled all of this very quickly, but Draco felt fire flood through his blood with every word. He was about to speak, but Potter beat him to it.

“Who were they?” his voice was quiet, but Draco had known Potter long enough to recognize the rage hidden in his low tone.

Ella looked from Draco to Potter and then back at the ground, chewing on her lip.

“Was it Smith?” Draco asked, remembering how Smith had been bothering her during Potions.

Ella shook her head. After another moment’s pause, she took a deep breath and began to speak, in an almost inaudible and shaky voice.

“Eubanks, Sutton, Lynch, and Quiller.”

Potter looked at Draco, and Draco couldn’t help but notice how tightly his jaw was clenched.

“Do you know them?” he asked.

Draco nodded.

“Seventh years,” he answered. “Two Gryffindors, one Hufflepuff, one Ravenclaw.”

Potter gave a curt nod and turned back to Ella.

“Do you need to go to the Hospital Wing?” he asked.

Ella’s eyes snapped to him and she immediately shook her head insistently.

“Let me at least walk you back to the Slytherin Common Room,” Draco said and Ella squeezed her eyes shut tightly before opening them again and nodding.

Draco helped her to her feet and began walking her back towards the stairs, only stopping when he realized Potter wasn’t following them.

“Potter?”

Potter looked at him, his jaw still set and something burning behind his eyes.

“You go ahead. I’ll see you in the Common Room. I’m going to see McGonagall.”

can't tell if we're a masterpiece or catastrophe

Chapter Summary

“Everything alright?” Harry asked. He could tell Ron was just barely restraining himself from interrupting, so he shot him a quick look and nod.

“You were responsible for McGonagall’s speech, weren’t you?” Draco asked, eyes light and piercing.

“Er, I mean...”

“You told McGonagall, didn’t you? About the boys who were harassing Ella?”

“Yeah,” Harry confirmed, unsure whether Draco would see this as a good or bad thing. His expression was unreadable and he remained silent, as though appraising Harry for a moment.

“Thank you,” he finally said. “She’s been suffering for a long time. I don’t think she would have given up the names if you hadn’t been there.”

Chapter Notes

it's short but I'm updating real soon after the last one so I hope that makes up for it <3

chapter title is from the song Easy by Alice Merton

“It’s a day school,” Ashworth said. “You don’t hear about them often, because Hogwarts is far more popular of course, but some young witches and wizards need to be closer to their families for health reasons. Some parents think eleven is too young to leave the house for so long. Other students can’t keep up with the Hogwarts curriculum and need to learn at a different pace. There are a variety of reasons why day schools are chosen over Hogwarts and there are a number of excellent magical day schools across Britain.”

Harry looked down at the brochure in his hands. From what he could gather, it was a small day school in London, for students between eleven and fifteen.

“I taught there for my first three years out of Hogwarts,” Ashworth provided. “The class sizes are small, which allows you to focus on individual students, which I think would be great for you, especially as you’re starting off.”

“Sounds brilliant,” Harry said, honestly. He was definitely starting to feel nervous, but there was an excitement with the feeling as well.

“The first year you’ll be a trainee,” Ashworth went on. “As you won’t be fully qualified until you pass your teaching exams. I think you’ll enjoy it, I loved my time there.”

Harry was still gazing at the brochure in his hands, at the smiling young witches and wizards, in a smattering of robes of all colours and Muggle clothing.

“Think about it,” Ashworth said. “You’ll need three letters of recommendation in addition to your N.E.W.T.s if you want to apply. I’d be happy to write you one.”

“It is shameful behaviour,” said McGonagall, her stern voice carrying through the silence of the Great Hall. “And I expected better of you all.”

Harry sat, his fists clenched tightly under the table. He believed it to be an exemplary show of self-control that he chose to report the boys that had harassed Ella to McGonagall instead of going after them himself. McGonagall had assured him that she would take swift and appropriate action against the boys in question. Harry wasn’t sure what that action had been, but tonight at dinner, she had begun a speech. She hadn’t specifically named anyone, nor described the particular incident, however she mentioned instances of mistreatment of Slytherin students.

“I want to believe we are better than this,” McGonagall went on. “And I will not have my students tormenting each other in this castle. We have seen enough harm, we have seen enough pain. It’s time to move on. We should be helping each other heal our wounds, not creating new ones.”

Hermione, who had been glancing at Harry several times throughout McGonagall’s speech, seemed to realize he knew more about what was going on than she did. She was quick to question him as soon as they were dismissed from dinner.

“Do you know what she was talking about?” Hermione asked. Ron and Sophie were both following closely, leaning in to hear Harry’s response.

“I’ll tell you in the Common Room,” he replied, aware that there were always people listening in on his conversations. As they head into the Founder’s Tower, someone was waiting for them by the Persian rug that guarded the entrance to their Common Room.

“Draco.”

“Potter,” Draco said, in a clipped tone. He was standing up straight, his hands tucked into the pockets of his robes.

“Everything alright?” Harry asked. He could tell Ron was just barely restraining himself from interrupting, so he shot him a quick look and nod.

“You were responsible for McGonagall’s speech, weren’t you?” Draco asked, eyes light and piercing.

“Er, I mean...”

“You told McGonagall, didn’t you? About the boys who were harassing Ella?”

“Yeah,” Harry confirmed, unsure whether Draco would see this as a good or bad thing. His expression was unreadable and he remained silent, as though appraising Harry for a moment.

“Thank you,” he finally said. “She’s been suffering for a long time. I don’t think she would have given up the names if you hadn’t been there.”

Harry could practically feel the shock of Ron, Hermione, and Sophie from beside him.

“Well, it wasn’t right,” he said. “What they were doing to her. She didn’t deserve that.”

Draco nodded slowly, still looking at Harry with that curious expression.

“Good on you, Potter,” he said. “At least all that fame is good for something.”

Harry snorted and was pleased to see the corner of Draco’s lip quirk upwards in a smirk before he turned around and spoke the password to the Persian rug, which promptly unfolded and the bricks of the wall began to unfold to reveal the entrance of their Common Room.

“After you,” Draco said, gesturing towards the newly revealed hole in the wall. Ron gave him a highly suspicious look, but followed the girls as they entered the Common Room. Harry hung back for a moment, looking at Draco.

“Are you planning on going in at some point today?” Draco asked, raising an eyebrow.

“You were really kind to her,” Harry blurted out. He wasn’t sure what made him say it, other than the fact that it was true, and that from up close, he could see just how delicate Draco’s skin looked, almost translucent in its paleness.

Draco looked surprised at the comment, but recovered quickly.

“Isn’t that a shock?” he said, his voice cold. “The Death Eater is capable of human kindness.”

“I didn’t mean it like that,” Harry amended. “I just—you were—she was scared and you were really good at talking her through it. It was impressive. You were impressive.”

Draco stared at him.

Waya’s beetle-dark eyes gleamed as Harry’s stag Patronus faded away.

“A nonverbal Patronus,” he said, his gravelly voice carrying in the air. “Excellent.”

“D’you think I could manage a wandless one?” Harry asked, the excitement causing his heartrate to pick up.

Waya considered this.

“Patronus charms are exceptionally difficult. Many grown wizards are unable to cast one. Spells that require much less power are typically those you would want to try to do wandlessly, as wandless magic in itself is quite challenging. However, given that you learned to cast a Patronus at only thirteen and have demonstrated immense skill at both wandless and nonverbal spells in our sessions thus far, I cannot say that it is impossible.”

“Wow,” Harry murmured under his breath. These sessions he was having with Waya always made him feel powerful, like he could sense his magic running through his veins like a bolt of electricity.

“I did want to ask, Harry,” Waya spoke again, and Harry focused his attention on him. “If you would be interested in continuing our sessions after you have finished your schooling.”

“What? But...how?”

“Well, it would require you to Floo into Hogsmeade and come up to Hogwarts, of course. Professor Ashworth has told me that he has recommended a daily school for you in London. Perhaps during the weekend, we could find time to meet. I must say, I have a selfish sort of curiosity to see what your magic can do.”

That spark inside of him hummed pleasantly and Harry found himself nodding.

“That would be brilliant.”

Harry stared at the hawthorn wand, loosely held in a pale hand and offered up to him.

“Go on, Potter, take it,” Draco said, his voice snappy and impatient. Harry looked up at him, but Draco wasn’t meeting his eyes.

“But...why?”

“I told you, Ollivander finished his study of it, you can have it back now,” Draco said, listlessly, and Harry still didn’t understand.

“But it’s yours.”

At this, Draco’s eyes snapped up. No matter how much more time he spent with Draco this year, Harry never stopped feeling taken aback by the sharpness in his pale eyes.

“It’s not,” he said. “Not really.”

“What did Ollivander find out? Or can you not tell me?” Harry crossed his arms, attempting to make it clear that he wasn’t taking the wand. Draco gave out a long-suffering sigh, and put the wand back into the robe pocket he had withdrawn it from.

“I suppose I can tell you some of it,” he said, sounding more like himself again. Harry sat down in one of the chairs, gesturing for Draco to do the same. The two continued meeting in the third-floor corridor for sessions, however it was just as likely these days that they would just end up talking rather than practicing any sort of magic.

Draco sat.

“It’s mainly to do with magical energy,” he began, somewhat chewing on his lower lip. Harry found himself watching the movement. “Magical energy is a deeply complex field, and it’s barely understood. I suspect it’s being studied in the Department of Mysteries, come to think of it. When we say a wand is tied to its wizard, we mean his magical energy. That’s why you’re able to cast spells with your wand, because it’s connected to your magical core.”

Harry wanted to ask what a magical core was, but he suspected that would lead into a tangent, and he was more curious to know about the wand.

“When you...when you won it—the wand—it recognised you as its new owner, and tied itself to your core and your magical energy,” Draco continued, and here he scrunched up his face slightly. “But the way Ollivander explained it, the wand didn’t completely switch over allegiances.”

“Right,” Harry nodded. “That’s what you said that night, that the wand belonged to both of us.”

Draco was back to biting down fiercely on his lip and Harry’s eyes were locked on his mouth.

“It *shouldn’t*, though, which is what I asked Ollivander. If you won it, it should completely belong to you. That’s how you gained ownership of the Elder Wand.”

Harry was somewhat surprised that Draco remembered his speech to Voldemort about how he had become the rightful owner of the Elder Wand by disarming Draco.

“But Ollivander said that the hawthorn wand was different,” Draco said, and his voice seemed to be lowering in volume as he spoke. “It was more faithful than the Elder Wand, and it was tied to my magical core at the time, and Ollivander said that...”

A very long pause followed Draco’s words, as he seemed to be steeling himself to say something.

“He said that the hawthorn wand recognised that I was somewhat willing to give it up, and that’s why it didn’t completely switch allegiances,” Draco’s voice was barely above a whisper, and his eyes were focused on his hands, which sat crossed in his lap.

Harry stared at him. He had already known that Draco had lied, back then in the Manor, when he had been asked to identify him. He knew that Draco was well aware it was Harry, Stinging Hex be damned, and yet he had lied and said he couldn’t be sure.

But this was something else. Draco had been *willing* to give up his *wand*? For *Harry*? Why on earth would he be?

“You mean you *voluntarily*—?”

Draco cut him off before Harry could finish his question.

“No,” he said, firmly. “I didn’t just hand it over. If I had, you wouldn’t have actually gained allegiance as it would have still seen me as its rightful owner. But the wand recognised that...well, that I wasn’t fighting as hard as I could have to keep it, I suppose.”

Harry didn’t particularly know what to say to this, but it had his mind whirring.

“So...so who does it belong to now? Still the both of us?” he asked.

Draco lifted one shoulder up and down in a half-shrug.

“I don’t know. I’m not going to use it anymore, I have a new one,” he patted his other robe pocket, where his new wand must have sat. “I suspect the Ministry would take it, as some sort of artefact, maybe. The wand that defeated the Dark Lord.”

He said the last sentence in a snooty voice and then snorted slightly.

“Draco,” Harry said, hesitantly, and finally, Draco looked up at him.

“What?” he asked, clearly trying to sound like his usual pompous self but his voice shaking slightly.

“Thank you.”

Draco furrowed his eyebrows in confusion.

“For what?”

Harry shrugged.

“For everything. I dunno. I never thought I’d be sitting here having this kind of conversation with you. I never thought we’d be friends at all. But here we are. And I’m glad. So thank you.”

for every step that I take, I take two steps back

Chapter Summary

“It’s still strange,” Draco insisted, as Potter cheered when Slytherin Chaser Angela Hawkins managed to snatch the Quaffle from the much larger Daniel Alcott.

“It’s not that strange,” Potter argued and this time, Draco rolled his eyes. Despite having buried the hatchet, Potter still seemed to have this need to be contrary about everything Draco said, even though he didn’t always notice he was doing it.

“You’re arguing again, Potter,” Draco reminded him, keeping his eyes on the players.

“But it isn’t!” Potter insisted. He then said, conspiratorially, “I almost was a Slytherin, you know.”

Draco snorted.

“Right, and Flobberworms can fly.”

Chapter Notes

hello friends! sorry about the long wait - as this story is sort of coming to a close, I've been avoiding writing it because I don't want it to enddddd haha. but don't worry, the sequel will be coming shortly as well. this ended up being more of a character study than a real romance, but there is some drarry coming up PLUS the sequel is going to be much more heavily focused on their relationship. I worked hard on making this seem like a realistic continuation of the series more than anything else. anyway I'm rambling. enjoy the chapter!

chapter title is from How It Feels To Be Lost by Sleeping With Sirens

Violet was a lot more relaxed after she took her History of Magic N.E.W.T. She had been going on and on about how she kept mixing up things from her Muggle Studies class with her History of Magic class. Draco didn’t see how that was possible, because nothing he learned through her about her Muggle Studies reminded him of History of Magic.

Nevertheless, he was glad she was no longer as stressed and frenzied. She had only three left, whereas Draco still had four to go. They were sitting in their usual window seat, exchanging notes on Potions. Daphne had been with them for a while, happily curled up in Violet’s arms until she left for her Arithmancy N.E.W.T.

There weren’t many people left in the common room, and it was mostly silent, as everyone was frantically trying to get some last minute studying in. Michael Corner and Anthony Goldstein were

seated at one of the tables with books spread out in front of them, and the Gryffindor Patil girl was sitting in an armchair and practicing Self-Transfiguration spells.

Draco and Violet also worked in relative silence, only speaking to ask each other for versions of their notes. Draco was copying potions instructions over and over in hopes that they would stick in his brain. He had had another session with Potter last night, and it led to a significant part of his brain nagging him about it. While Potter was still teaching him some spells and techniques of defensive magic, a large part of their sessions these days were just devoted to the two of them talking. What with their apprenticeships and N.E.W.T.s coming up, there wasn't a lot of free time outside of class, and while Draco was long past trying to deny that Potter was his friend, he wasn't the kind of friend he willingly spent too much time with. Outside of Potions, their sessions, and the occasional Quidditch game, Draco kept to his Slytherin friends and Potter kept to his Gryffindor ones.

But he *liked* spending time with Potter, oddly enough. Perhaps he wasn't the most intellectual person Draco had ever met, but he was interesting, far more interesting than Draco had always thought. He carried this strong energy with him, beyond just the power of his magic, although that in and of itself was a sight to behold. So he kept going to the sessions, but the logical part of his brain continued to remind him that there was no real reason to continue them, beyond just his own desire to be near Potter.

It took the loud noise of the bricks unfolding as someone entered the common room for Draco to realize he had been staring at his parchment without writing a word as his brain had wandered off to think about Potter.

He sighed and set his quill down before rubbing at his eyes. They had been at this for ages, perhaps it was time for a break.

He looked up to see who had come in to the common room and saw Weasley and his girlfriend, the Gryffindor girl with dark hair and freckles whose name Draco could never remember. Weasley looked towards the window and met Draco's eyes before Draco could look away. He said something to his girlfriend, and not a second later, he was marching towards Draco with a determined look on his face.

Even Violet had looked up from her notes in alarm as Weasley stood merely a foot away from them.

"Whatever it is you think I've done, I haven't," Draco said in a dull tone.

He remembered how enjoyable it had always been to poke fun at Weasley—sometimes even more than Potter, and so much *easier*, too, but Draco found that he didn't even have the desire to anymore.

As annoying as Draco still found him, the man was practically a war hero now and now that Draco actually got along with Potter, antagonizing his best friend wasn't exactly the smartest move.

"Look, Malfoy, I don't like you," Weasley said, sounding as though it was taking intense effort for him to keep from clenching his teeth.

Draco blinked at him.

"You came all the way over here to tell me that?"

Weasley carried on, acting like Draco hadn't spoken.

"*But* I know Harry's friends with you now, for some reason, and even Hermione says you've 'changed' or whatever, so I thought we should...I dunno, clear the air or something."

Violet was openly gaping at him now, and Draco couldn't blame her. This was certainly unexpected.

"You know, like Harry says, the war's over and it's time to move on and all that." Weasley awkwardly grabbed fistfuls of his own robes as his hands looked anxiously for something to do.

"Erm," Draco said, gracelessly. "Well. Yes. I don't particularly like you either, Weasley, but I appreciate that. And for whatever it's worth, I am sorry for the harm my family and I have caused you, truly. I know I can't take it back, but I do sincerely apologize."

Weasley's face looked rather constipated, but he stuck out a freckled hand nonetheless. Still completely bewildered at what was happening, Draco shook it.

Once Weasley had turned his back and marched resolutely back over to his girlfriend, Violet finally spoke.

"Did that really happen or is my sleep deprivation causing me to hallucinate?"

"I still can't believe you're rooting for Slytherin," Draco shook his head incredulously. It was his umpteenth time expressing the statement and Potter just rolled his eyes, an amused look on his face.

"I just don't want Ravenclaw to win the Cup!" Potter exclaimed once again, but Draco continued shaking his head and looking scandalized.

They were in the Quidditch stands again, watching a rather intense game between Slytherin and Ravenclaw. Since Ravenclaw and Gryffindor were in the top spots for the Quidditch Cup this year, with Ravenclaw just edging out over Gryffindor, this game was a big one. If Ravenclaw won by over a hundred point lead, Gryffindor no longer had a chance of overtaking them. But if Slytherin won, or if Ravenclaw won with less than a hundred point lead, then Gryffindor was still in the running.

"It's still strange," Draco insisted, as Potter cheered when Slytherin Chaser Angela Hawkins managed to snatch the Quaffle from the much larger Daniel Alcott.

"It's not that strange," Potter argued and this time, Draco rolled his eyes. Despite having buried the hatchet, Potter still seemed to have this need to be contrary about everything Draco said, even though he didn't always notice he was doing it.

"You're arguing again, Potter," Draco reminded him, keeping his eyes on the players.

"But it isn't!" Potter insisted. He then said, conspiratorially, "I almost was a Slytherin, you know."

Draco snorted.

"Right, and Flobberworms can fly."

“I *was*,” Potter continued. “The Hat said Slytherin could lead me down the path of greatness, or something.”

“Oh?” Draco raised his eyebrows, tearing his eyes from the pitch to look at Potter sceptically. “Then why aren’t you a snake?”

“Because I asked not to be.”

Draco sputtered. “What? You can’t just *ask*—why would you *ask* not to be—?”

At this, Potter flushed slightly and looked away.

“Well, you were going on about Slytherin and you were a right tosser.”

Draco clenched his teeth and immediately turned his gaze back to the game. Potter leaned against him and gave him a sort of shove with his shoulder.

“I’m teasing. Well, sort of,” he gave a sort of long-suffering sigh and leaned back on his elbows. “Honestly, it was mostly because Hagrid had sort of told me it was the bad House. And that Voldemort had been in it. He said, *‘there’s not a witch or wizard who went bad who wasn’t in Slytherin.’*”

Draco recalled his encounter with the gamekeeper in the woods. He had tried to be more polite, dedicated as he was now to reshaping all of his opinions and relationships after the war. But maybe he could keep disliking Hagrid.

“That’s spectacularly inaccurate,” he sniffed. “There are plenty of witches and wizards who were evil and not in Slytherin. Grindelwald didn’t even go to Hogwarts. And even the Death Eaters weren’t all Slytherins. Rookwood was a Ravenclaw, and so was Yaxley. Rowle was a Gryffindor. Pettigrew—”

He stopped himself, because he could feel his blood starting to boil, and perhaps bringing up the person who had betrayed Potter’s parents and gotten them killed was going a little bit too far.

“I know,” Potter said softly. “I know that now.”

There was a long moment that weighed over them like snow. The noise of the game was loud and unceasing but Draco felt like it could have just as well been silent.

Finally, he cleared his throat as quietly as he could.

“Slytherin’s eighty points ahead. You might just get your wish, Potter.”

Just like that, the discomfort and heaviness of the past conversation was gone. Potter easily slid back into game commentary and Draco tried not to think about what it would have been like to have Potter as a roommate down in the Slytherin dormitories.

“If the Ravenclaws don’t get the Snitch soon,” he said.

“Do you see it?”

Potter squinted, eyes scanning the pitch back and forth, but then he leaned back and shook his head.

“Not from here, no.”

“Dobbs is sharp,” Draco said, referring to the small and devious fifth-year that served as Seeker for the Slytherin team. “She’s got a good eye. Slytherin hasn’t lost a single game to Hufflepuff this year because of her.”

“Yeah, but Zacharias Smith is also bollocks at Seeking,” Potter replied. “Armstrong is actually a strong competitor.”

Draco looked at Armstrong, the Ravenclaw Seeker who shared a name with his favourite Thestral, who was circling above the pitch, chest pressed down onto his broom as his eyes searched for a glint of gold.

“He’s decent,” Draco allowed. “I think he’d make a better Chaser. He’s got the body for it.”

Potter shot him a glance, but when Draco looked back at him, his green eyes were back on the pitch already.

“He’s rather fit, don’t you think?”

If Draco hadn’t seen Potter’s lips move as he spoke the words, he would’ve been sure someone else had said it.

“I beg your pardon?”

Potter went marvellously red in the face, but made a valiant effort at pretending he hadn’t.

“You don’t think so?” he asked.

Draco felt like this was missing the bigger point.

“Do *you* think so?”

Potter shrugged.

“Yeah,” he said, casually.

Draco stared at him. He was sure that Potter was aware, too, as he wasn’t being subtle, but Potter’s eyes remained on the pitch.

“What is this, Potter?” he asked, suspiciously.

At this, Potter looked back at him, raising his eyebrows and sighing slightly.

“What is what, exactly? I can’t think he’s attractive?”

“But...but you were dating the Weaslette,” Draco mentally cursed himself for sounding so muddled. He liked to think he was quite intelligent, but Potter always confused him. His obliviousness was probably contagious. Yes, that must have been it.

“Yes, I know,” Potter replied, slowly. “You were the one who was telling me it’s normal to, er, fly for both teams, or however you put it.”

“Yes, of course, but that doesn’t mean *you*—”

Potter cut him off at once, his green eyes shining in the sun and Draco had a momentary lapse in which he couldn’t decide whether it was intimidating or magnificent.

“Why not me?” said Potter, indignantly.

Draco didn’t really have a good answer for this.

“Because...I mean, you didn’t *know*? All this time?”

Potter bristled slightly at this.

“I’ve been a little busy, you know.”

“I know, I know, I’m sorry,” Draco said, quickly. “It’s just...unexpected, I suppose.”

Potter’s face opened slightly and he grinned.

“To be honest, I did need Hermione’s help figuring it out. And Ginny’s.”

Draco couldn’t help but crack a smile.

what's the point in playing a game you're gonna lose?

Chapter Summary

“I know you’re friends with Malfoy, Harry, and it’s fine. Obviously I don’t like the git, but even I can tell he’s not as much of a prick this year.”

“How did you know it was about him?”

Ginny just gave him a look.

“I’m not stupid, Harry, honestly. Who else could it be about?”

“Right, okay, well,” Harry wrung his hands nervously in his lap. “I don’t really know what’s happened, but he’s sort of avoiding me, I think? I don’t know if it’s all just, er, in my head, though, if it’s just because of N.E.W.T.s or if I did something wrong. And I don’t know why it bothers me so much, because obviously he doesn’t owe me any of his time or anything, I just sort of...” want to be around him, Harry’s mind supplied for him, but he didn’t say the words.

Chapter Notes

hello all! apologies for the long wait for this chapter, the end of the semester was very stressful for me school-wise and then I had to prepare for my trip since I'm visiting family over christmas. its also so hard to write when I know it's gonna be over so soon!!! but no worries, I'm planning on releasing the first chapter of the sequel at the exact same time as the last chapter of this one, so you'll be able to move right on to the continuation of their story! if you want to, of course. enjoy the chapter <3

chapter title is from Lies by MARINA

Ashworth had decided to wrap up their apprenticeship early, telling Harry to focus on his N.E.W.T.s and complete his application to Keswary, the day school he had suggested.

Harry was supremely grateful, and had made sure to already ask McGonagall and Waya for letters of recommendation so that he wouldn’t fall behind. All he had to concentrate on now was studying for his remaining N.E.W.T.s.

Not everyone was as lucky—Hermione always tended to panic around exam times, but N.E.W.T.s had taken it to a new level; she had barely spoken to Harry or Ron in days, instead holing up in the Library or at one of the common room tables any free second she got to study. She also still had work to do for her apprenticeship, and it was so secretive that she couldn’t even tell Harry or Ron what it was about. The only person she seemed to talk to was Oliver Rivers, who was apprenticing with her, and even he knew better than to approach her without being invited.

Ron was far more laidback, of course, but even he was rather stressed, having a host of exams to study for. Sophie had also buried herself in her studies, though perhaps not nearly as crazed as Hermione when she did.

Harry felt like the only one who wasn't losing his mind over N.E.W.T.s. He supposed, if he was still training to be an Auror, like Ron, he would be more worried, but he didn't have to be. Of course he hoped to pass them all, and he *did* make an effort to study, but he knew that he had Defence and Transfiguration down pat and he was confident about Charms and Herbology.

The only two he had been a little less sure about were Astronomy and Potions, and last night he had taken his Astronomy N.E.W.T. He hadn't been very confident, but he felt like he had done well enough to pass and he was happy with that. Potions was harder, but with Draco's help, he was getting the hang of it, and he had at least memorized the potions that Draco had instructed him would definitely be on the exam, even remembering a few tips and tricks Draco had given him to help gain extra points.

Draco had been acting oddly recently. At first, Harry had thought he was just nervous about N.E.W.T.s like everyone else, but Draco didn't seem nervous and he wasn't particularly rushed to study. He was patient and meticulous in Potions class like always, but he had told Harry he didn't have time for their sessions anymore, what with exams coming up and his apprenticeship with Ollivander. That made sense, Harry supposed, and besides, they hadn't really been doing much other than talking in their sessions recently anyway. Harry felt a little guilty about that, since the sessions were technically an assignment for Ashworth, but he had taught Draco how to cast a Patronus, along with a good amount of other spells he hadn't known before, so he still considered it a success.

Maybe Draco was just very focused on his apprenticeship. He wasn't allowed to tell Harry much about what he learned, but Harry already knew that wandlore was an old and complex form of magic, so he imagined there were a lot of challenging aspects that took a lot of attention and concentration to properly learn.

What was more odd was the fact that he was feeling...*strange*, not spending as much time with Draco. He hadn't realized when he had become so used to the other boy's company and now that it was suddenly gone, he found himself *missing* it. He knew it wasn't unusual to miss a friend, he had missed Ron and Hermione dearly every summer when he had had to go back to the Dursleys, but this felt different somehow.

For one thing, it had only been a little over a week since he and Draco had gone to the Ravenclaw-Slytherin Quidditch match. It had ended with a Slytherin victory, and Harry had been even more excited than Draco about this, yanking him into a celebratory hug and cheering loudly. Draco had come out of it with wide eyes and a few hairs out of place and Harry had laughed at his shocked expression and reached out to ruffle and mess up his hair even more. He had expected Draco to make some snide comment about touching his hair, smirking in that way that let Harry know he was joking, but he had just continued to look at Harry, his face looking slightly surprised and slightly bemused.

He knew Draco must be busy, so he didn't want to *bother* him, but he also just...wanted to see him and talk to him. Which didn't really make much sense, because he didn't have anything specific he wanted to *say*. Normally, this would be a question for Hermione. He could sit down and ask her, "Hermione, why do I want to hang out with Draco so much?" and she would put down her quill and make that little frowning face where a crinkle would appear between her eyebrows, the one that

meant she was thinking hard, and then she would say something like, “Well, Harry, it may be that a part of you is still suspicious of Draco, so you want to be around him because you want to know what he’s up to all the time.”

He had actually started following Draco’s dot on the Marauder’s Map again, despite the uncomfortable feeling it gave him in his stomach reverting to sixth-year habits. He reassured himself that it wasn’t the same, that he was just curious, but he still felt like it was something he probably shouldn’t have been doing. But he didn’t know what to do with himself and with this strange feeling he was having.

So he brought it to Ginny.

Ginny had never commented on Harry’s friendship with Draco, not once. Harry had been grateful for this, because he had always suspected that Ginny’s feelings about the entire Malfoy family hadn’t changed at all over the year.

It made it slightly awkward, then, when Harry sat across from her at dinner and tried to bring up the subject of Draco without actually mentioning his name.

“Harry,” Ginny finally said, with raised eyebrows. “You said you wanted my advice. Are you going to tell me what’s going on or not?”

“Right, er, sorry,” Harry stumbled, unsure why he felt so nervous all of a sudden. “I just know you don’t really—”

“I know you’re friends with Malfoy, Harry, and it’s fine. Obviously I don’t like the git, but even I can tell he’s not as much of a prick this year.”

“How did you know it was about him?”

Ginny just gave him a look.

“I’m not stupid, Harry, honestly. Who else could it be about?”

“Right, okay, well,” Harry wrung his hands nervously in his lap. “I don’t really know what’s happened, but he’s sort of avoiding me, I think? I don’t know if it’s all just, er, in my head, though, if it’s just because of N.E.W.T.s or if I did something wrong. And I don’t know why it bothers me so much, because obviously he doesn’t owe me any of his time or anything, I just sort of...” *want to be around him*, Harry’s mind supplied for him, but he didn’t say the words.

Ginny’s thick eyebrows were furrowed and she looked rather thoughtful.

“Well, have you talked to him about it?” she asked.

“About what?”

“Have you asked if he’s actively avoiding you?”

“No,” Harry admitted.

“You should probably do that, then, Harry,” Ginny said with a smile playing at her lips.

Harry sighed. It was, of course, the obvious answer, but it was also the one he was avoiding. He didn't know why, but he felt nervous about bringing this up to Draco. He was terrified that he would look weird or crazy for it. The friendship between them was still so new and it felt...shaky sometimes.

There were times when they'd be talking, and Harry felt more at ease than he did with anyone else, even Ron and Hermione, like he could say anything he felt or thought, without worrying about being judged or belittled, without feeling like he would cause concerns for his wellbeing.

But there were other times when Harry wasn't sure how much he could say or what was okay to mention. He and Draco had never had a proper conversation about boundaries, about what was an acceptable topic. Whenever the subject of the war was brought up, the conversation shifted, often into one that was dark or miserable, and Harry could feel that they both became somewhat tentative, choosing their words carefully.

"Harry," Ginny said, her voice slow and cautious. "Do you...*like* Malfoy?"

Harry blinked at her, confused for a moment. Hadn't she just said that she knew they were friends? What else could she—*oh*.

"I—what?—no! I mean, er...I don't know?" He felt himself flush as his thoughts began whirring at a much higher speed. "I hadn't...considered that."

Ginny shrugged, but she was smiling as well.

"Consider it."

Harry did. The thought seemed to follow him; even when he was consciously trying to focus on something else, it was still there, obnoxiously shoving its way to the front of his mind. It didn't even matter that it was exam season, or that he needed to sleep at night, somehow for the following 48 hours, his mind was quite fully occupied with thoughts of Draco Malfoy.

He didn't feel much clearer on what it *was* that he felt, but it was...strong. He supposed it had always been, when it came to Draco. In retrospect, it was rather bizarre that he had been the target of an evil and demented Dark wizard for all of his life, and had still considered a mouthy bratty classmate his worst enemy.

Draco had *always* brought out the strongest of Harry's emotions, usually anger, but he couldn't deny that it was clear Draco had always had power over him in that sense. It seemed to go both ways, too, Harry seemed to be the only one who could really *get* to Draco, not that he was trying to anymore.

So maybe...maybe it was possible. Harry liked to think he was rather in touch with his emotions. He never felt the need to push them down the way Ron sometimes did, or grapple with the logic of them the way Hermione would.

He had been through terrible things in his life, and felt indescribable pain and heart-breaking sadness. He had also felt joy—relief and love and harmony. But this...this was confusing. He'd never been very good with girls. There had been the chaos of the Yule Ball with Parvati, and then that disastrous date with Cho. Even Ginny...they'd really just been like friends the whole time anyway. Well. Friends who snogged. He had felt jealous when he saw her with Dean back in sixth year, and a blissful fluttering when he first kissed her after that fateful Quidditch game.

This felt chaotic. Trying to think about his feelings for Draco gave him a knot in his stomach and the more he tried to make sense of it, the more tangled the knot became. He found it even started keeping him up late at night, his thoughts would start running in circles and he didn't know how to calm himself down.

He had to finally admit to himself that, while this wasn't a feeling he was familiar with, and while it felt...rather unpleasant at the moment, being around Draco seemed to make him...*happy*, which in and of itself felt like such a foreign emotion. It wasn't something he could have ever predicted happening, and he snorted to himself at the thought of his sixth-year self being told this is how he would end up, but it turned out that Harry Potter was rather fond of Draco Malfoy.

I love you, ain't that the worst thing you ever heard?

Chapter Summary

But Potter.

Somehow, this thing about Potter, this drawer of untouched, unanalysed...feelings...it felt different than everything else. Stranger. Deeper, as if sparks of it were running through his blood, built into his very bones. It scared him, and his first instinct was to find another drawer to throw it back into. But that technique no longer seemed to even be an option. After the war had finally ended, it was as though he'd just realised how much effort he'd been putting into keeping these abscesses of his mind shut, and his brain simply could not sustain it any longer. He'd stretched the rubber band too far, and the tension had disappeared all at once—as it had snapped.

It seemed there was no escaping from this anymore, no hope of hiding.

“Yeah,” he said, his voice coming out almost hoarse. “It’s about Potter.”

Chapter Notes

AHHHHH!!! AHH!

Ahem. Okay. I'm fine.

Apologies for the long wait, this chapter kicked my ass. As you may have noticed, I have a really hard time finishing stories, I don't know if it's that I get too attached or if I get paranoid that I'm not tying up all the loose ends or whatever.

But it doesn't matter.

BECAUSE IT'S DONE!! Here is the final chapter to The Wand That Chose Two Wizards!

AGH. It's taken me a year and a half to write this story and I'm so, so, so happy that people are reading it and that people like it and ugh, it's 2:48 am and I'm getting emotional. Anyway, enough about that.

Regarding the SEQUEL, I am posting the first chapter as soon as I post this! It's called The Strange & Marvelous Story of Our Revival. If you want to check it out, I'd love that, but I also made sure this story was wrapped up with a proper ending, so you don't feel like you HAVE to read the sequel.

With all that said, I'll shut up now, enjoy the chapter!

(Chapter title is from Cruel Summer by Taylor Swift)

It was at dinner that she approached them, walking with her head down until she reached where they were sitting at the Slytherin table.

“Hi,” she said, in a soft voice. “Can I sit for a minute?”

“Ella,” Violet said, warmly. “Of course, join us.”

“I won’t stay long,” Ella promised, sliding in to sit across from Draco and Daphne and beside Violet. “I just wanted to say thank you.”

“You don’t have to thank us for anything, Ella,” Daphne assured her with a gentle smile. Daphne and Violet, who both had younger sisters, seemed to have taken Ella in, in that protective, elder-sisterly way, and it was clear that while, initially, they may have just been looking out for her as a fellow Slytherin, they had come to deeply care for her.

“I want to,” Ella insisted, wringing her hands in her lap. “This year was really hard and I know it would’ve been impossible to get through if you hadn’t helped me as much as you did.”

“You didn’t deserve what was happening to you,” said Violet, frowning slightly.

“I know,” nodded Ella. “But no one really cared besides you. And you got those boys in trouble for me, Draco.”

Draco smirked a bit.

“You’ll have to thank the Chosen Prat for that, not me.”

“He wouldn’t have even known I existed if he wasn’t friends with you,” Ella said, which left Draco speechless, silence falling over all of them for a moment before Ella broke it again. “Anyway. That’s all. I just wanted to say thanks.”

“You’re welcome, Ella,” said Violet.

“It was the least we could do,” added Daphne. “We snakes look out for our own.”

Ella supplied a weak smile at this, the white-pink scar tissue wrinkling on her cheek, and then bid them a quick goodbye before taking off. The three of them watched her go, a sombre sort of air remaining even after she disappeared from view.

“Poor girl,” Violet said, quietly.

“They messed her up this year,” Daphne said, bitterly. “I don’t think we even know the half of what was done to her.”

“Do we know what she’s doing after Hogwarts?” Draco asked. “Can we keep an eye on her?”

Violet gave him a soft smile, one that was usually reserved for when he asked an insightful question about her Muggle Studies class.

“I’ll ask her,” she said.

Draco had come to sit on the windowseat voluntarily, but under Violet’s intense gaze, he was beginning to feel quite cornered.

“What?” he asked, aware of how tetchy he sounded.

“I’m trying to figure out what’s wrong with you,” Violet responded, her eyes still drilling into Draco.

“We’ll be here for a while then,” he said, shortly. Violet just rolled her eyes.

“Yes, yes, you’re the embodiment of evil, very frightening, blah blah. Seriously, did something happen?”

Draco sighed. He liked to think he was mysterious and hard to read, but Violet seemed to always be able to tell when something was bothering him.

“Yes,” he said. “Well, no, not exactly, but…”

Violet regarded him patiently as he floundered.

“I think I’m having a *feeling*,” he finally said, shuddering theatrically. “How do I make it stop?”

“You’re so dramatic,” Violet replied, shaking her head.

She was right, of course, but it couldn’t be helped. This year had been a relief in countless ways, all of which were undeniably related to the fact that the war was over, but it had also been full of challenges. Draco found that changing one’s opinion didn’t come without an internal fight every time, and he had spent much of his time this year agonizing over what he really thought, and trying to form answers to questions he hadn’t even known he’d had. His life had become even stranger, if that was possible, and he often felt like he’d lost his sense of identity somewhere.

It wasn’t that he particularly missed who he used to be. He just didn’t know who he was now.

He looked at Violet, who was watching him quietly with her deep-set hazel eyes, and thought about how he had barely known her back in September. He thought about how close they had become, about how much he cared for her, about how he’d never had a friend like her before. About how he had always wanted one.

“Thank you,” he said, suddenly, taking her by surprise.

“For what? Calling you dramatic?”

“No,” Draco shook his head, unable to keep a slight smile off his face. “For being my friend. For teaching me what you learned in class even when you didn’t have to. For trusting me and for letting me trust you. For everything.”

Violet’s face morphed into something almost sad.

“You don’t have to thank me, Draco.”

“Yes, I do,” Draco said, firmly. “And I want to. It’s important.”

“Okay,” Violet said, slowly. After a long pause, where she seemed to be thinking seriously, she added, “You know that just because the school year’s nearly over doesn’t mean you need to say goodbye to me, right?”

“What?”

“I just mean, well, we’ll both be in London next year, won’t we? It isn’t goodbye.”

“I know,” Draco said. It was true, of course; as soon as she said the words, it seemed glaringly obvious, but he felt a strange sense of relief regardless. “I’m not saying goodbye. I’m just saying thank you.”

“Okay,” Violet nodded, smiling slightly. “That’s not what your mysterious feeling was about though, was it?”

Draco shot her a glare, all soppy sentiments pushed aside now. She just narrowed her eyes at him.

“Is this about Potter?”

Draco sighed. It always came down to Potter, didn’t it? Ever since they had first met, it had all become about Potter. He remembered eavesdropping on his parents the summer after first year, his mother somewhat uneasily asking, “But is it *normal* for him to hate a boy his age so much?” And his father had shrugged it off and said something about rivalry being healthy or whatever nonsense that Draco had completely internalized.

It had been hatred at first—anger at being snubbed that evolved into steady dislike as the hostility between them increased in magnitude. Underneath it all had surged a feeling of envy and hurt pride. He would lash out at Potter’s friends, because he had chosen them over him, and the more he told himself it was for other reasons—Weasley’s poverty, Granger’s blood status—the more he believed it.

It had felt like everything went Potter’s way; everyone wanted to be his friend, Dumbledore favoured him, all the teachers adored him—with the notable exception of Severus Snape—and he seemed to get away with all of his rule-breaking, for he always had the convenient excuse of some necessary heroic deed he had had to perform.

And so Draco had hated him. Emphatically. Insistently. Almost obsessively.

It hadn’t taken long for even Draco to get the nagging feeling that there was something beyond that hate. It had to have been fourth year, during the Triwizard Tournament, that Draco caught the first glimpse of what lay buried underneath it all. At first he had felt that familiar twinge of anger and jealousy—of course Potter didn’t have to adhere to the age rules and of course he would be selected as champion. But then questions began to arise. Even Potter, in all his foolhardy Gryffindor recklessness, seemed to be apprehensive and afraid of the daunting tasks ahead of him. He had had some near misses with the Hungarian Horntail, and it was during that task that Draco had felt a strange rush of worry. He had dismissed it as just being caught up in the moment, in the spectacle of the thing. But nevertheless, he had had to wonder. Why would Potter want this, when his own best friend wasn’t speaking to him? Why would Potter, who Draco had always thought loved the spotlight, go to such lengths in an attempt to avoid Rita Skeeter and the press? And why would Draco feel such an uncomfortable rush of spite at the site of a stumbling Potter at the Yule Ball with Patil, when he had no designs on the girl in the first place?

It was at the end of that year that everything had gone mad. He had been forcefully shoving down any of these stray thoughts that occurred to him about Potter, but that didn’t stop the flood of them from invading his mind. He had always been fixated on Potter, and now it was like his brain was leading him to *why*. He was slowly realising that he had no interest in girls and much preferred boys, but he refused to acknowledge that his hatred of Potter had anything at all to do with that, even though the back of his brain kept pushing that conclusion at him. He hated how anxious he

felt about the third task, how anxious he felt about Potter, and he hated Potter even more for giving him that feeling. When Potter had returned, crying and bleeding and clutching Diggory's lifeless body, Draco had felt a sharp, twisting pain in his gut, followed by a horrific sense of relief that accompanied the realisation that it wasn't *Potter* who had died. But as quickly as that relief had come, it had been forced away, shoved back into the corners of Draco's mind, because there were far more important things to focus on now. The Dark Lord had returned and was none too pleased with Lucius and the other Death Eaters that had supposedly abandoned him. Once school had resumed, Potter was treated as a pariah, and Draco had felt a vindictive pleasure in having power over him for the first time. It was almost as if the realisation of the attraction he had towards Potter had made him more hateful towards him, more cruel.

Despite all the horrific things he had done during the war, he still felt a deep sense of shame and anger at himself for how he had behaved during his fifth year. For the spite that had driven him to align himself with someone as vile and despicable as Dolores Umbridge. But of course, it had only gotten worse from there. After his father was caught at the Ministry and imprisoned, his brain had sufficiently forced whatever feelings of desire or attraction he had for Potter into one of the drawers he kept in his mind and locked it shut. All there remained room for was fear and hatred.

But this year, the drawers were opening. There were many of them, it seemed, many memories and emotions Draco had repressed that were now resurfacing, now that the primary danger had subsided and survival was no longer something he felt he needed to focus all his energy on. Draco didn't know quite what to do with all of it now. The dreadful things his father had done to him during the war, they were painful to think about. The inability to trust and fear of making himself vulnerable, as taught to him by his father; he was proud that he had made strides to conquer that fear, in his new friendships with Luna and Violet, and even in strengthening the bond with his other housemates, Theo and Blaise and Daphne. The doubts and misgivings he had had about his upbringing regarding Muggles and Muggleborns, that had thankfully been something he had been able to at least start working through, thanks in large part to his friendship with Violet.

But Potter.

Somehow, this thing about Potter, this drawer of untouched, unanalysed...feelings...it felt different than everything else. Stranger. Deeper, as if sparks of it were running through his blood, built into his very bones. It scared him, and his first instinct was to find another drawer to throw it back into. But that technique no longer seemed to even be an option. After the war had finally ended, it was as though he'd just realised how much effort he'd been putting into keeping these abscesses of his mind shut, and his brain simply could not sustain it any longer. He'd stretched the rubber band too far, and the tension had disappeared all at once—as it had snapped.

It seemed there was no escaping from this anymore, no hope of hiding.

"Yeah," he said, his voice coming out almost hoarse. "It's about Potter."

"Now, as this is our last session of the school year," Ollivander said, his face looking serious. "I have a proposition for you."

Draco felt his curiosity spike.

"You have done an excellent job this year and have, I believe, a firm grasp on the fundamentals of wandmaking," the old man said, in a matter-of-fact voice. "Wandlore is a subject which you never truly stop studying, of course, but it takes several years of study to become a skilled wandmaker in

one's own right. I would very much like to continue to oversee your education in wandlore, should you be amenable."

Draco found himself nodding before Ollivander had even finished speaking.

"Yes, of course," he said, at once, to which Ollivander gave a warm smile.

"I'm glad to hear it," the wandmaker said. "I was hoping you would accompany me at the store come July, as that is when I find myself busiest, in preparation for the new Hogwarts students who will be needing their first wands."

Draco hesitated for a moment.

"I...yes, I would love to," he started, and Ollivander seemed to sense that there was more coming, so he waited as Draco pondered how best to continue. Finally, he decided simple honesty would be the best course of action, as Ollivander had never been anything but kind and accommodating.

He took a deep breath.

"My probation doesn't officially end until August the first," he said. "At Hogwarts, I'm considered to be under the supervision of Professor McGonagall, however as soon as I leave here, I will have to report to the Aurors. I'm unsure what, if any, restrictions will be placed on me."

Ollivander just nodded, looking far too understanding.

"Of course, my boy, no trouble at all. Why don't we keep in contact and you can let me know once you have more information? I understand you have an owl?"

"Yes, that would be perfect, thank you."

"Not at all. If it would help at all for me to speak on your behalf, in regards to the validity of the work we will be doing."

Draco was struck once again by the generosity and kindness of his mentor and felt another surge of gratitude at the opportunity he was given to work with the man.

Draco felt a shiver down his spine and his arms that he knew the gentle warm spring weather wasn't causing. He didn't know why he had come up here anyway. It was a stupid idea, one he hadn't thought through at all.

He hadn't been up here since that night. It had been one of the worst nights of his life, comparable only to those during the following war, with Voldemort in his home and his father grinning manically as he cast the Cruciatius.

He still had dreams of this night. Nightmares, rather. He could still see Dumbledore's face when he closed his eyes, wrinkled and worn-looking. He had looked so frail. But his eyes had still been kind, had looked at Draco searchingly, and Draco had felt so raw, so bare, so *terrifyingly* vulnerable.

Potter had been there that night, Draco had found that out this year during one of their sessions. He had felt a familiar anger surge through him at the thought. Of course Potter had been there. He was *always* there. Even during one of the worst moments of Draco's life, he had to be there. He had to

witness Draco's fear, his failures. He had walked in on him in tears in Myrtle's bathroom. He had seen him skulking around at Slughorn's party. He had seen him fail in his attempt to assassinate the Headmaster.

Draco slid down to the floor of the Astronomy Tower, feeling the stones in the wall push against the muscles in his back.

He felt exhausted. He had no reason to be; N.E.W.T.s were over, classes were wrapping up, he was even sleeping at night, but nonetheless, he felt completely drained. His body was sore everywhere and he felt himself get out of breath with no cause. It had been *too much*.

Everything—his whole life since he had just turned fifteen and Voldemort had returned—had been an intense pressure on him, like a boulder had been dropped on his chest, and all this time, his only goal had been just barely lifting it so it didn't pierce his lungs or stop his heart. And now the weight had lifted, so he should be *fine*, but instead all he could feel was fatigue and pain, from the effort it had taken to balance that pressure for so long. There was no energy left in him for anger, for hatred, for resentment. There was hardly enough energy left in him for anything. More than anything, he desperately wanted *peace*, and rest.

Potter had never been synonymous with peace; quite the opposite, in fact, the boy seemed to attract chaos no matter what.

Draco had always been drawn to Potter, there was no denying that. And this year, as the animosity between them had somehow melted away and an unlikely friendship had bloomed, Draco had been very careful in how he acted around Potter. Potter had this strange ability to make Draco open up, to make him feel comfortable in sharing his feelings and his past. He was a good listener, and he was inherently trustworthy, but more than that—Draco *wanted* to trust him. It was confusing, and *petrifying*, because Potter casually *coming out* to him had given him this strange flicker of something, something he hadn't felt in a long time, something he dismayingly identified as *hope*.

He tried to crush it, to silence it, to ignore it. He could not be *hopeful*. Hope was foolish. Hope was incapacitating. Hope was *dangerous*.

But it was like that tiny little flicker had triggered something in him, something that had all of these emotions coming at him at once, like an enormous wave crashing over him, and no matter how hard he tried to swim to the surface, it just kept pulling him down.

He felt himself start to panic. He couldn't deal with this, it was too much. He couldn't put himself in this position; allowing himself some vulnerability was one thing, but submitting to the terrible, desperate feelings he knew were buried inside of him. The feelings for *Potter*.

He had to stop them from rising up, had to push them back down into the darkness, back where they couldn't hurt him.

So—as he always did, as he had always done, as he had been *taught* to do—he turned to anger. He told himself he was angry at Potter. Violet was wrong, Potter didn't *care* for Draco. Potter didn't trust him. He just needed someone to vent to, someone to spill his feelings out to, someone other than his friends that would jump down his throat with worry.

Potter didn't come out to him because he was his friend, he did it to *taunt* him. To one-up him, the way he *always* did. It wasn't enough that he had won the war, that he had taken Draco's wand, that he had saved his life again and again, that he had singlehandedly spared him a sentence in

Azkaban. No, all of that wasn't *enough* to lord over Draco's head, he had to have *more*. He always had to have more than Draco, had to know more than Draco, had to be *superior* to Draco.

It wasn't enough for him to win, Draco also had to *lose*.

"Hey."

Draco's head snapped up,

"Potter," he said, hearing how dead his voice sounded. There was no bite, no snarl, none of the acrimony that had coloured his tongue for years in interactions with Potter. He just sounded resigned. The thought made him even angrier.

"How did you know I was here?" Draco asked, purposefully inserting accusation into his tone. Potter looked surprised at the question.

"I just—I figured that—I—" he paused, and sighed. "I have a map. Of the castle. It shows me where people are."

Of course he does, Draco thought, and how strange it was that the familiarity of resentment felt *comforting* to him.

"Naturally," he said, dryly.

"Draco," said Potter, sounding pained. "What's wrong? Why are you avoiding me?"

"My, my, a little self-involved, are we, Potter?"

There was hurt in Potter's eyes, and Draco ignored the sharp pulling sensation in his stomach, focusing instead on the heat of the anger, the anger that was rising in him like bubbles in a boiling cauldron.

"Are you alright?" Potter asked. "Did something happen? Did someone hurt you?"

Draco snarled.

"Why?" he spat. "Are you in need of someone to protect? Someone to *save*? Feeling empty without an enemy to hunt down?"

"Stop it, Draco," Potter said, frowning. His voice had become more serious, but it wasn't entirely steady. "I don't know what's going on with you, so just *tell* me instead of being a prick about it."

"I don't *owe* you anything," Draco retorted, feeling himself getting up to his feet almost as if his legs were doing it of their own accord. "I don't have to tell you what I'm thinking all the time, I'm not a bloody Hufflepuff, I'm not going to sit down and braid your hair and share my *feelings* with you. I don't know what made you think we're *bosom pals*, Potter, and quite frankly, I think I've heard more about you than I'd ever care to know."

Potter looked as though he'd been slapped across the face.

"Is this..." he sounded hesitant. "Is this about...about what I told you at the Quidditch game?"

Draco couldn't help but be taken aback. How did he know it was about...except *no*, no, it *wasn't* about that. It wasn't about that at *all*. It was about *Potter* always having to take everything from Draco, it was about Potter always winning, Potter always coming out on top.

Draco sneered quickly, covering up his initial surprise.

"*Please*, Potter, like it even matters at all. You're the bloody Chosen One. Regardless of your bisexuality, everyone knows the Saviour can't be bent, and you'll end up with a pretty witch like everyone expects and have loads of little Potter babies that'll grow up to be perfect little Gryffindors."

"What are you *talking* about?" Potter exclaimed. "Are you *mad* that I'm bisexual?"

"No!" Draco shouted, but he didn't know *what* he was mad about anymore, he was just *mad*. "Yes! I don't—*Merlin*, Potter, you're infuriating!"

Draco stalked towards the entrance, slamming his shoulder childishly against Potter on his way. When he felt Potter turn his body, likely to walk after him, he stopped, not looking back, terrified of seeing the look in those sharp green eyes.

"Don't follow me," he said, warningly, and hurried away. Every nerve in his body felt like it had been lit on fire. The soreness he had been feeling in his muscles a mere half-hour ago had been replaced by a buzzing sensation. He suddenly felt *awake*.

He also felt like the most despicable creature on earth.

"Come on, Draco, we're leaving tomorrow," said Potter, and it was clear he was somewhat pleading.

"I'm aware of that," Draco replied, his tone distant and cold.

The last few days had been overwhelming, with Draco feeling like he had gone through almost every emotion possible. He kept trying to return to anger, to focus on it. It had been how he had deflected all other feelings for Potter for *years*, but somehow, it just wouldn't *stick* anymore.

He had felt guilty, for how he had yelled at Potter in the Astronomy Tower, had felt the familiar shame and self-loathing at his behaviour. He had been sad and pathetic and self-pitying, telling himself that Potter would never forgive him, and that he didn't deserve to be forgiven anyway, and that he was doomed to live a friendless, loveless, meaningless life. Violet had smacked him out of that one rather quickly.

What he had ended up with was what he had been feeling before all this chaos had started—tired. He supposed exhaustion wasn't really an emotion, but after everything, it was all he could feel anymore anyway.

It was all Potter's fault, really. Potter was the one who had gone and thrown in a whole new dimension to this strange friendship they had and had brought up old, buried feelings Draco didn't know how to handle. He was the one who changed everything with one conversation, leaving Draco at a loss as to how to conduct himself. He had barely known how to conduct himself before this bombshell.

“You can’t seriously be this upset with me,” Potter exclaimed, his eyebrows scrunched together and his eyes looking bright and beseeching. Draco felt an ache pinch his heart, like a soft crack in a glass window.

“Watch me,” Draco said. Alright, it wasn’t one of his most mature moments.

“What do you care if I like blokes?” Potter burst out, his hands flying up in the air. “*You* like blokes too, in case you’ve forgotten. And *don’t* say this is about ‘the Chosen One can’t be bent’ either; we *both* know that’s rubbish.”

Draco looked at him, really looked at him, with his wild mane of black hair sticking out in every direction as always, and his cheeks reddened from his yelling, almost looking crazed. He looked like the old Potter, before the war had dampened his spirit, had dragged him down to the same exhausting depression that Draco felt. He looked vibrant and alive and *beautiful*.

“It isn’t that,” Draco said, quietly, feeling his heart beat in his ears as Potter took a step closer to him.

“What is it then?” Potter asked, his voice lowering as well, seemingly subconsciously, as he took another tentative step forward, as if Draco were an easily-startled unicorn.

Draco stared at him. He was close enough now that Draco could see a stray eyelash on the bridge of his nose, and a smattering of sun freckles splashed across his cheeks, and his pink lips slightly open as he let out a breath, his tongue poking out so briefly that Draco may have imagined it.

“Oh,” said Potter, and Draco’s eyes flew back up to meet his, as he suddenly realized he had been staring at Potter’s mouth.

Before Draco could respond with a scathing remark, before he could take a step backwards, before he could tell Potter to sod off, Potter’s hand reached up and grabbed onto Draco’s arm, and Draco found himself quite frozen.

He had heard this could happen—in instances of shock. It was the third, not-as-well-known reaction to stress. Everyone knew fight-or-flight—and in a few, extraordinarily rare and cited cases, actual spontaneous *flight*—but there *was* a third option: freezing. And Draco was frozen, physically unable to move, seemingly only able to concentrate on Potter’s hand wrapped around his bicep, on the proximity of Potter’s body, on the sensation of Potter’s breath coming out hot and gentle against his face, on the vivid green of his eyes.

Potter leaned in, his thick black eyebrows furrowing again slightly as if he himself were confused by what he was doing, and he pressed his lips onto Draco’s.

Draco’s eyelids slid closed without permission, his heart pounding at a rabbit’s speed against his chest.

Potter was kissing him. *Potter*. Kissing him. *Kissing* him.

The hand around his arm tightened, and Draco’s own arms rose, reaching for Potter like it was as natural as breathing. His hand found itself on the small of Potter’s back, pulling him closer, and the other slid up Potter’s torso and wove itself into that maddening hair.

Potter let out a surprised sort of sound from the back of his throat that Draco *felt* more than heard, the softest vibration against his own mouth, and Draco couldn't help the slight whimper he released. His lips interlocked with Potter's, he pulled Potter's bottom lip further into his mouth and there was a sudden heavy, warm, pooling of *something* in his stomach and chest and gut as Potter traced Draco's lip with his tongue.

It was all just too *much*, and Draco had the mad, fleeting thought that he should've *known* it would be like this with Potter, even the most innocent kiss so intense he could feel his skin burning with it.

His mind was blank; the feeling of Potter's lips, of his hand gripping at Draco's arm, of his hair between Draco's fingers, it was too overwhelming. Every other thought, every other sensation, had vanished. All he could feel was Potter, his warm mouth moving so deliciously against Draco's, and nothing existed but this, the minor push of the rim of Potter's glasses against his cheekbones, and the tangled hair he wove through with his fingers, and the heady taste of Potter's tongue.

Potter pulled away, slowly, one hand still holding Draco's arm, the other clenching a fistful of Draco's robes at his chest. He breathed heavily, his eyes still shining.

"Oh," he repeated, his voice almost hoarse.

Draco could do nothing more than nod.

"Yeah," he exhaled softly. "Oh."

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