

Safe Words

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Safe Words

by [felix_atticus](#)

Summary

Draco discovers his husband has been keeping a secret from him. At first he's amused. Then he's curious.

The problem? Harry's always had a hard time saying no.

Notes

All praise to my beautiful, perfect beta Cymbelines, without whom everything is a disaster.

See the end of the work for more [notes](#)

Chapter 1

It bordered on obscenely late in the day when Draco finally heard footsteps on the staircase. A smirk unrolled across his face, which he tried to smother. Sipping at his coffee, he flipped the page of his book and waited.

Harry was very slow in coming down the stairs. Draco could practically feel his reluctance. It shouldn't have amused Draco as much as it did, but there were some things in life that he enjoyed beyond all reason. Teasing Harry was among them. That the man had given him so much material this time was an unexpected gift.

Harry reached the bottom of the stairs, still in his pajamas, rumpled. He looked wary, but pretended to be casual. "Mr. Potter," said Harry.

From his place on the window sill, Draco responded, "Mr. Malfoy."

Shuddering, Harry walked past Draco towards the kitchen. "Not for all the gold in Gringott's."

"It has a certain ring to it," Draco remarked. "Harry Malfoy. Finally gives you that bit of elegance you've been missing all these years." Draco absentmindedly tapped his ring against the cover of his book. He was a great admirer of jewelry, but rarely wore the same piece two days in a row. The one on his finger, though—he had recently committed to wearing it for life.

Coffee was poured into a cup. It had to be cold after sitting out so long, but Harry was a barbarian. He would drink coffee regardless of its temperature. "My parents would roll over in their graves."

"Your parents would roll over in their graves at a lot more than that, Harry." There was a pause from the kitchen. Draco leaned his head against the wall, saying, "Come sit with me." He felt like the cat with the canary.

Harry cleared his throat. He walked back into the front room, giving Draco the side eye. Draco smiled innocently, the picture of a dearly devoted husband. Harry's eyes narrowed, not trusting it for a moment. He sat down on the other end of the window sill.

Draco let him squirm a little. He turned another page in the book. The perfect moment would come. The perfect moment was usually after you let someone twist a bit.

He could feel Harry getting more and more tense. Draco gave his fingertip a lick and slowly—slowly—used it to turn the next page.

When Harry was near to implosion, Draco said, "So."

Harry let out a growl. "Go ahead," he muttered. "Take the piss." He hunched over his coffee cup like a vulture.

Draco closed his book, relishing the whole thing. “Get much sleep?”

“You know what,” Harry said, but didn’t finish the thought.

“Funny that. The two of us going to sleep at the same time.”

The night before, Draco had woken in the middle of the night to find half the bed empty. That was fine and well enough—needing to empty one’s bladder didn’t cease due to the hour of the day—but after a moment he realized he could see lights down the hall. Now that *was* peculiar. Harry slept like the dead. There was no way he would be up watching television in the middle of the night. Then Draco remembered that they didn’t even have a television upstairs. So he got up to investigate.

“Were you just *pretending* to sleep?” Draco asked.

“Could we not?” Harry said, now turning to pleading.

“You *were*, weren’t you. Waiting until I fell asleep before you ran off to—” Draco wiggled his eyebrows meaningfully.

Harry’s brown skin began to reveal a reddish undertone. “You could just put me out of my misery. Seriously. Find your wand. End my life.”

“You didn’t look like you were suffering last night.” Draco waited a beat, then quipped, “Your lads on the laptop, though—”

Harry covered his face with a hand. “Oh God.”

Draco set aside the book, leaning over his knees. “Imagine what the world would think,” he said in mock admonition. “What would they say if they knew the Chosen One was such a pervert?”

“I want a divorce,” Harry moaned.

“You don’t want a divorce. My solicitor would leave you penniless.”

“No, I definitely want a divorce.”

“Hush.”

Harry dropped his hand, gazing miserably at Draco. “Look. Sometimes I watch porn. It’s just something I do.”

Draco gave it a moment, then arched a brow. “Yes. Completely normal, that.”

Blushing even deeper, Harry said, “It doesn’t mean I’m not—satisfied—”

“Harry. I don’t give a niffler’s fart that you watch pornography. It is entirely inconsequential. If you think that I’m thinking about you every time I masturbate, you’d have to be just remarkably naïve.”

Indignant, Harry asked, “Do you not think of me sometimes?”

“Don’t be greedy. I think of you when we fuck. I’m under no agreement to think of you when I fuck myself. I’d ask if you think of me when you’re having a wank, but—” Draco waggled his brows again. “Clearly you have something else in mind.”

“How about we stop talking about this?”

Draco thought about it, then said, “But I’m having so much *fun*.”

“I can’t believe that I thought marrying you would stop you bullying me.”

“Oh please. You’d need an act of God for that. In all honesty, I’m all for you having your private wank.”

“You...are?”

Rolling his eyes, Draco said, “If *that’s* what you’re into, you’re only ever going to have the fantasy. If you think I’d let you put me on a chain and have me call you sir, I’d assume you were confunded.” Harry looked on the verge of aneurysm. Draco snorted, and picked up his book, finding his page. “Harry Potter. Leather daddy.”

Voice strained, Harry said, “Please don’t—ever use those words in conjunction. Ever again.”

“I’m endlessly amused that it would turn you on to have me as some sort of submissive sex slave. Unfortunately, if there’s one thing I’m not, it’s submissive.” Draco waved Harry away. “So off you go. Dream big, love. Tis only ephemera.”

Harry sat there and Draco ignored him, returning to his book. Harry cleared his throat and said, “So you’ve done taking the piss.”

“Oh no,” Draco said. “We’ll be returning to this topic for many years to come.”

“Fantastic,” Harry said glumly.

He pushed himself up and walked back to the stairs. Draco glanced up from his book, smiling crookedly at the sight of his beloved, peculiar man. He was supremely amused to discover, after all these years, that Harry’s hidden fantasy was fairly perverted. Unattainable—Draco would have eaten his own tongue before getting on his knees in some little leather get up like one of the men in the video—but priceless, nonetheless.

Harry was nearly at the top of the stairs before he leaned over the side and said quickly, “By the way, we’re going to the Burrow for dinner.”

Draco slammed his book shut, but Harry had already scampered up the last of the steps.

“I can feel you stewing over there.”

“I’m not *stewing*,” Draco said shortly. He faced the mirror as he manipulated his tie into an intricate knot. “I’m putting the bare minimum into my appearance. I’m allowed a moment of concentration.”

Over his shoulder, he could see Harry watching from the doorway. Harry was clad in jeans and a jumper. No effort there. “It’s just dinner at the Burrow. You don’t need to wear a tie.”

“I’ll do it for the look on Molly’s face.” Harry dropped his head, sighing. Draco frowned, then said, “I’m teasing. I rather like this tie. Haven’t had a chance to wear it yet. It complements my eyes.”

“It does at that.” Harry rubbed his arm, uncomfortable. “We don’t *have* to go.”

“You already accepted the invitation on both our behalf, yes?”

“Well, yes—”

“Then we’ve committed. I’m too English to back out now. Love, stop lurking there. Either come inside or bugger off.”

Harry pushed off the doorframe. He came into the bedroom and took a seat on the bed. “It won’t be that bad. We really don’t have to stay that long.”

“Harry. We’ve been together seven years. Do you think that at this point I don’t know what dinners at the Burrow are like?” Draco shook his head. He pulled the knot apart, then started over. He would go to the Burrow wearing his flawless appearance like armour. “We’ll be lucky to get out of there by ten. I have to be at work early tomorrow. You knew that.”

“I could go by myself.”

“Yes, and you could hear all the little digs about me. And next time I’d have to sit through all the backhanded compliments as my penance.” Draco took a moment, then said, “I don’t mean to be miserable about it. I know you love these dinners.”

“I do. I just wish you did as well.”

Thick as a board. As if the problem was some deficiency on Draco’s end. “You think I haven’t made the effort.”

“No,” Harry was quick to say. “No, you’ve gone above and beyond. I’m not sure what you want me to say.”

“I’d like you to tell me that next time you’ll work up the courage to tell Molly no, that we can’t attend dinner at the last second. I’d like you to actually say no and mean it.”

“It’s just dinner,” Harry said weakly.

“You know what—let’s not talk about this. We’ve gone over it a hundred times at this point. I know you can’t tell her no. You’re just not built for it.”

“Well, what would you rather be doing instead?”

Turning to Harry, Draco said, “Literally anything else. What about having dinner with our friends?”

“Ron and Hermione—”

Exhaling, Draco motioned between them both. “*Our* friends. Our mutual friends. Radical idea, Harry—what if we spent the evening with people who could stand the sight of me?”

“That’s not fair—”

Draco put his hands up to his face. “We have to stop. This is never going to be solved. I don’t want to fight, so let’s just...let it go.”

Harry frowned, clearly unsatisfied. But he said, “All right.”

Draco went back to finishing off his tie. “You have to make me a promise.”

“What’s that?”

Tugging and adjusting, Draco said, “You know what.”

“Oh come on. It’s been two weeks.”

“Yes, and I’m sure Molly’s over it,” Draco muttered. He turned back to Harry, setting his hands on his hips and giving his husband a hard look. “We made it very clear that we didn’t want any fuss over things. There’s a reason we eloped. She’s going to have something planned just to be contrary, and the second there’s even the whiff of it, *you* are going to shut it down.”

Harry pulled his head back. “Why me?”

“Because I am sick and tired of being the bad guy. She’s your family, she’s practically your mother. It’s your responsibility to take the lead when it comes to her. So promise me—if Molly has some surprise—Merlin forbid, if she decides to throw us a wedding—you’ll tell her no.” Harry look away, queasy. Draco snapped his fingers, quickly drawing Harry’s attention back to him. “Promise me.”

“I promise.” Draco wasn’t sure he believed him. Harry insisted, “I *promise*. I don’t want anything either. I don’t give a shit about weddings, and I certainly don’t need any more publicity over the whole thing. I just want to be married to you.”

“Okay. Good.” Draco waited a moment, then held his hand out to Harry. “Shake on it.”

“You must be kidding.”

“I need every assurance. Despite this secret fantasy of yours being some confident leather master—”

“Just don’t say the word ‘leather’ anymore. Let’s just cut it from your vocabulary.”

“It doesn’t translate over to your actual track record in this regard. So. Shake on it?”

Rolling his eyes, Harry shook Draco’s hand. “You bloody lunatic.” He pulled Draco closer. “Give us a kiss.”

Wrapping his arms around Harry’s neck, Draco bent down to kiss Harry’s mouth. He had a sudden wave of reminder. *I’ve married this man*, Draco thought, and it was still an amazement. When Harry’s hands moved up to his rear, Draco slipped away. “None of that. Get me through this dinner with some shred of dignity in tact and we’ll discuss it.”

Harry sighed, and Draco cast him a wink.

Draco tried very hard not to be a snob about things. But he *despised* the Burrow.

It was cramped and chaotic and nothing made sense. Draco would not have lived in Malfoy Manor again for all the silk shirts in the world, but at least it was spacious. Tasteful. Everything had a logical place. It was all of a piece. He had brought that sensibility into their home, and much as Harry had balked at first, he did eventually admit that it was nice to have that sense of order. There was absolutely nothing ordered about the Burrow. It was an overflowing disaster that always had too many people in it.

Invariably, it was always filled with people who couldn’t abide his existence. Add in the fact that it was Draco’s first time seeing these people since Harry and he had eloped, and there was a whole new tension to deal with.

When they came through the fireplace, Molly came bustling out of the kitchen. Everyone else parted so that she could get through. “Harry!” she said happily, opening her arms.

Draco stood back, very aware that every person in the room was avoiding looking at him. Harry gave Molly an enthusiastic hug, swaying her from side to side. “Hello there. Something smells delicious.”

“I made your favourite chicken.” She drew back a bit, still holding onto Harry’s arms. Molly looked over at Draco. Her eyes narrowed imperceptibly. “Draco.”

“Molly. Thank you so much for the invitation.”

“Oh, it’s just a little get together.” A little get together was every Weasley save the one who lived in Romania, all their spouses, and their children. Molly clucked. “What a— lovely tie.”

“Yes, I’m rather fond of it myself.”

“You know,” Harry said, “I’m thirsty. Perhaps I’ll get us drinks.”

Don’t leave me with these people, Draco thought. But Molly practically swung Harry around and hustled him off to the kitchen. “Come with me, Harry.”

Harry gave him an apologetic look and Draco sighed. He put on his most polite smile, preparing to make small talk. But every single person in the room turned away from him, blocking him from their conversations.

Draco was not cowed by this. He’d been through years of outright hostility from this clan. Being ignored was not going to scare him. Draco found a spare chair and picked it up. He took a look around, searching for a place to set up. George and his wife Sandrine had a space left beside them.

Draco plopped the chair down beside them and took a seat, facing them directly. “Good evening.”

George looked like he had a mouthful of lemons. Sandrine, who was ridiculously out of her husband’s league, smiled sweetly at Draco. “Lovely to see you again, Draco. Congratulations.”

“Thank you so much. Good to see a friendly face.” Draco shifted on the lumpy chair. He was tempted to perform a spell on the thing to make it bearable, but he’d hear a lot of comments about how he thought he was above them all.

He wasn’t. At least not in all regards.

“So,” George said. “It’s official, then.”

Draco arched a brow. “It wasn’t before?”

That set the tone for the evening.

Draco got through dinner with sheer Malfoyan perseverance.

Ron and Hermione were not speaking to him. He caught them both glaring at him throughout the meal. Hermione had the good manners to look away, but Ron kept at it, like a pair of eyes lost in a sea of freckles. Draco didn’t blame them. They had not been invited to the ceremony, and found out like everyone else—after the fact. Draco didn’t bother telling them that he had asked Harry to invite them, only to have Harry insist that he wanted it to be just the two of them and the clerk. Better that they be upset with him than hurt by Harry.

Any time Arthur was reminded of Draco’s presence, he would immediately drop his eyes and begin mumbling. “Yes, well, erm.” He’d push some food around his plate, then abruptly change the topic, usually to something about Muggles. Once Draco had the audacity to correct Arthur about one of his ridiculous claims about Muggles—after all, Arthur only

knew about them in the abstract, and Draco had actually lived with Muggles throughout his twenties—and it had been a terrible mistake. Draco had been right, of course—Muggles did not, in fact, discount the roundness of the earth—but everyone was furious that he'd dared say anything in disagreement with the *pater familias*. The remarks that night had not been subtle. Draco would have preferred people be outright mean, because he was quite adept at countering that. It made Harry quite sad, however.

The only person at the table who ever seemed to enjoy Draco was Hugo. The other children were old enough to have absorbed their parents' prejudices, but Hugo was still a baby. He was fascinated by Draco. Any time he got close enough, he would try to grab his hair.

Everyone avoided the topic of the marriage for the first bit, then Ginny finally broached it, because she was the bravest amongst them. "Was it for the tax perks?" Ginny asked Draco, an edge to her voice.

"Oh, entirely," Draco said, picking at his overcooked chicken. "The forms are a nightmare otherwise."

Then came the questions. Polite questions about procedure and bureaucracy. No one asked either of them how they felt about the whole thing, or how happy they must be (over the moon, was the honest answer). Draco let Harry field most of the questions, stepping in only when Harry looked frustrated or flustered. Team effort, after all.

Molly, however, did not say a word about it.

That was the mother of all red flags. Molly did not keep her opinions to herself. She was the undisputed ruler of this house, this family, and if she was holding her tongue, then they should all be nervous. When she finally cleared her throat, everyone went still, leaned slightly away from her.

"Pass the butter, will you, Ron?" she asked.

She's going to go bloody nuclear, Draco realized with horror, and emptied his drink.

When Harry mentioned that they needed to be going, Molly stepped forward.

Here we go, Draco thought, equally relieved and apprehensive.

"Before you go, dear," Molly said. She stepped between the two of them, only she was mostly facing Harry. It gave Draco the perfect opportunity to look over her head at Harry, trying to convey his potential displeasure if Harry wouldn't stand his ground.

Harry smiled at him weakly, then looked down at Molly. "What is it, Molly?"

Molly rubbed a hand up and down his arm, taking a moment before saying anything. *I swear by all the stars in the sky*, Draco thought at Harry. Molly said sweetly, "Well. This has been such a big change in your life. We were all sad that we couldn't be there."

Draco watched Harry's face fall with guilt. *We made this decision together! I asked you repeatedly if you wanted them there and you said you didn't, so don't you dare—*

Harry opened his mouth, ostensibly to apologize, but Molly cut him off. "But never mind that. It's all done, and now we need to celebrate. So."

Draco began to shake his head ever so slightly, not caring that the rest of the Weasleys were all watching this with various levels of queasiness. Harry was watching Molly like he was expecting the ceiling to drop on him.

Molly said cheerfully, "We're going to throw a party! Everyone will be there. I've sent out the invitations today, and we'll make a big event of it. The Minister has already RSVP'd. I put a notice in the paper as well. It's traditional, of course. It's not really a proper marriage unless the notice is in *The Prophet*. We'll need some time to prepare, so we'll have it next month, on the 18th. We'll do this right. Proper."

What she was really saying was there would be dozens of people, if not more, showing up to ogle and make snide comments and pass judgment on their union. Reporters would likely be there. Draco and Harry would be on display, their relationship, their marriage. Literally everything they had fought to protect themselves from these past seven years.

She was also saying that she had just alerted the whole world to the fact that they'd gotten married.

Draco caught Harry's eyes. Harry looked absolutely blasted clear. *No*, Draco mouthed vehemently.

"We've already put quite the down payment on everything," Molly said.

Draco shook his head at Harry. *Don't you dare—*

Harry looked back at Molly, then said, high pitched, "What a lovely surprise!"

Draco dropped his head back as Harry threw his arms around Molly. Malaysian resting eels had more backbone. Harry looked at him over Molly's shoulder, abjectly remorseful, and Draco glared at him. Harry had promised him. He had actually said the words.

"You're not upset?" Molly asked. "I know you don't like a lot of fuss. But you'll indulge an old woman on this, won't you?"

Pulling back, Harry smiled at her, but it was a smile that could only charitably be described as painted on. "No! No, this is so sweet. Thank you, Molly, this is so kind."

I'll kill him, Draco thought.

Molly turned back, putting a hand to Draco's arm. "And you, Draco?" Her smile bordered on saccharine, but her eyes were hard as flint.

If he said what they were all thinking—this was a punishment, not a celebration—it would be just one more excuse for the whole clan to hate him. Draco, the monster, who said no to the party after the notoriously poor Weasleys put down money on the thing. Everyone would conveniently ignore the fact that he was trying to protect Harry. He would be the villain. Again. Always.

So Draco smiled politely and said, “What a lovely gesture.”

Molly’s smile spread further with triumph, and she wrapped her arms around him. Despite the fact that she was a round, soft woman, the embrace was like holding a board. “I’m so glad,” Molly said, and patted him on the back. Only it was more like a blow, to the point where Draco lost his breath a moment.

He looked at his husband. The Chosen One. Well, the Chosen One was a coward. Harry raised his shoulders, apologetic, and Draco sighed.

A damned coward.

When they stepped through the fireplace into their house, Draco immediately went to the front door. He checked the locks, same as always. He was seething.

He could feel Harry behind him, and he didn’t care how badly Harry felt about the whole thing. The man had thrown him under the bus.

Harry said, “Draco.”

Without looking at him, Draco said, “Splendid job, Harry. You really know how to keep a promise.”

He bounded up the stairs. He left Harry downstairs alone.

Chapter 2

It was the next night. Draco was in bed, under the covers, when he finally heard the front door open. Frowning, he tried to focus on his book.

A few minutes went by before the bedroom door hesitantly opened. Harry poked his head inside. "Hello," he said softly.

Draco glanced at him. "If it isn't the man who can't say no," he muttered, bringing the book up close to his face.

He heard Harry sigh. Harry walked across the room to him, still in his jacket. Taking a seat on the bedside, Harry ran a hand over Draco's thigh. "Love, please don't be upset with me."

Draco laid his book on his chest. "I *am* upset with you. You can't tell me not to be."

Harry looked tired. Draco had a fairly set schedule at Gringott's, save the occasional early morning. Harry, however, went in to the Department of Magical Law Enforcement only when they called him. Sometimes he would be gone for over a day. Once for three.

Feeling a twinge of sympathy, Draco asked, "Long day?"

"It was fine," Harry shrugged. "To be honest, I was more worried about you than whatever was in front of my face. I couldn't tell you what the case was about if you paid me."

Draco put his book on the bedside table, pushing himself to sit up a bit. Harry gave him plenty of grief about his reading in bed. He would be practically horizontal, chin on his chest, book brought right up close to his eyes. If Harry asked one more time whether Draco needed glasses, he was going to get his muscular bottom hexed off.

"I'm so sorry," Harry said. "I said I was going to do something, and I didn't. And I'm sorry."

"I don't need you to be sorry. I need you to tell Molly that we're not doing it."

Harry dropped his head. "I can't," he said, miserable.

"It's a terrible idea. For everyone."

"It's only a party."

"*Harry*. We talked about how we wanted to do this for nearly a year. No fuss, no parties, just getting it out of the way so that it can be legal. No one even knew until she put this bloody notice in the paper. She had no right to do that. None."

"I know, I'm sorry—"

“Stop it. I don’t want apologies. I want you to take care of this.”

“I can’t.”

“Do you know how many reporters security had to throw out of Gringott’s today? I had to bloody polyjuice myself to get out of there.”

“The Ministry was a bit of a disaster as well.”

“It was supposed to just be ours. It was private, it’s *our* business, not theirs, and we told them that, we said it, only she’s gone and blown that to smithereens, hasn’t she. And you’re just going to sit by and let her.”

“You could have said something—”

“Don’t—” Draco cut himself off before he could get really upset.

Harry closed his eyes briefly. “Sorry. Sorry, that’s not fair. You’re the one who always has to tell them no. I’m too much of a coward for that.”

“Harry. Come on now, I don’t need to see you looking like a beaten dog. You’re the bravest man I’ve ever known. Out there. In the world, at least. But once it has anything to do with your family, you fall apart.”

“They’re the only family I’ve got.”

“Yeah, and *you’re* the only family I’ve got. And I tell you no, don’t I? What’s so bloody scary about the word *no*?”

Harry shook his head, looking a lot younger than his thirty-two years. “I don’t know.”

“Well, I know. You had a terrible childhood, an abusive family, and once you found yourself a family that actually treated you like a human being, you became absolutely terrified of losing them. So it’s twenty years on and you can’t tell them no to save your life.”

“You should have gone into mind healing.”

“I wouldn’t have the patience. Harry, if they weren’t going to leave you in a ditch after you took up with me, they’re not going to abandon you for telling them no every once in awhile. Come on. You waited until we were living together before telling them that we were dating because you were so terrified, and they didn’t cut you off, did they?”

“Molly cried for a week,” Harry said dolefully. “Arthur couldn’t look me in the eyes for six months.”

“But they got over it. Harry, please tell them that we can’t do this.” Harry looked studiously at the floor, playing with his fingernails. Draco put up his hands. “Harry, this is a bad idea for everyone. This isn’t a celebration. Only our friends are happy that we got married. No one at this so-called party will be happy about it. Molly is doing this to punish us, nothing more or less.”

“People have parties when they get married.”

“We talked about this. We agreed—if we wanted to have something small with the family once things blew over, that would be fine. Anything more is just putting what we have on display for other people. Do you like it when people make comments about us?”

“Of course not.”

“Do you really, honestly think that anyone at this party will be happy for us?”

“No.”

“Then why do it?”

“Maybe—I mean, we have nothing to be ashamed of. So what if they don’t bloody understand? They’ve never understood, they never will. It doesn’t mean that we have to hide.”

“We’re not hiding, we’re choosing not to engage.”

“Six of one, half dozen of another.”

“It’s not just us that suffers because of this. Molly’s really shot herself in the foot with this one. She’s invited two *hundred* people, Harry, and if only half show up, that’s still a hundred. How are they going to pay for this? They can’t. I’m a banker, Harry, I can guess their disposable income based on Arthur’s salary, and they cannot afford this. They’re going to put themselves in a hole because Molly’s upset we kept her in the dark about this.”

“She’s thrown a party whenever any of us got married—”

“Yeah, and she had the bride’s family to chip in half. And there weren’t a hundred people at the thing.” Draco blew out a breath. “If we *have* to go through with this, we need to help. I refuse to let Molly lord it over us that they went into debt on our account.”

“I already offered,” Harry admitted.

“And?”

Harry shook his head. “She was offended. It was like I’d told her I’d resurrected Voldemort for the sole purpose of sucking his cock.”

“Oh, fantastic. She’s that determined, is she? She’s that set on embarrassing us.”

“You don’t always have to think the worst of people.”

“There’s a difference between thinking the worst of people and being realistic. You know this has nothing to do with us being happy. Celebrating what we have.” Draco pulled the blankets up a bit. He was getting a bit sad, honestly.

“Hey.” Harry laid a hand on Draco’s belly, bending down to catch his eyes. “It’ll be a few hours. We’ll drink too much and have some food and embarrass ourselves on the dance floor.”

“We’ll listen to people make backhanded speeches about our impossible union.”

“Yeah, but you’ll get to wear some really beautiful new dress robes.”

“I could do that whenever I want,” Draco said petulantly.

Harry smiled a bit. “So we’re doing this,” he said, resigned.

Draco rolled his eyes. “Since you lack the courage of your convictions, I suppose so.”

“You know I love when you twist the knife. Are you going to be cranky about this for the next two months?”

“No. I’m just disappointed.” Harry looked more stricken than ever before. Draco took his hand, backpedalling. “I’ll be a little cranky. No more than usual. So bordering on unbearable, but not quite.”

“I am sorry.”

“Stop that. Come here.” Draco pulled Harry down beside him. He turned Harry so that he rested back against Draco. Slipping an arm under Harry’s neck, Draco kissed behind Harry’s ear. “Enough of this. Tell me about your day.”

“There were reporters.”

“Tell me about literally anything other than that.” Draco ran his thumb and down over Harry’s ribs, listening to the story of Harry’s day, and he wondered if his man would be like this forever.

“Draco.”

He woke, startled. Immediately, Draco reached out to put a hand on Harry. Once he felt that solid warmth beside him, Draco asked, “What time is it?”

“I don’t know.”

“What’s wrong?” When Harry didn’t reply, Draco lifted his head higher. “Harry?”

The room was dark. It was the middle of the night. So Draco wasn’t able to see Harry’s face, but he heard his sigh. “Can we talk about something?”

“It can’t wait until morning?”

“I’ll lose my nerve if we wait until morning.”

“Are you leaving me?”

“Fuck right off, I would never do that—”

“Sorry. I’m trying to think of why you’d possibly wake me up at this hour.” Draco turned onto his side. He pushed a hand under the pillow, already starting to fall back asleep. With a yawn, Draco said, “What do you want to talk about?”

Draco began to drift off. He was on the grounds of the Manor. It could be beautiful in winter, in a bleak way.

“You know the videos I was watching?”

Draco rose from sleep for a moment. “What videos?” he murmured.

Snow. Peacocks covered in snow.

“The porn.”

That woke Draco up.

“We’re talking about this now?” he said incredulously. “Harry, it’s the middle of the night, we have to work tomorrow—”

“Would you shut up? I’m trying to tell you something, so if you could just not be *you* for a few minutes and listen to me, I’d appreciate it.”

Draco raised his brows, pushing down the blankets a bit. If he had a chill, maybe he would stay awake. “All right. I’m awake. Tell me about porn.”

His eyes adjusting to the light, he made out Harry’s profile in the dark. Harry was lying on his back, staring at the ceiling. It was anyone’s guess how long he’d been like this. Had he even fallen asleep yet?

“I think maybe a part of me wanted you to see it. I’ve been watching videos like that for years, and I’ve always been careful about it. But this time, I left the doors open. It was like I was almost daring you to find me having a wank.”

This was all exceedingly peculiar. “Before we get any further, is this leading to you telling me you’ve cheated on me?”

“Merlin’s saggy tits, would you let me talk?” Draco glared at him, unblinking. Harry sighed, and said, “I would *never* cheat on you. For one thing, I wouldn’t want to. For another, you’d be more likely to end my life permanently than the Dark Lord ever was.”

Draco settled down a bit. “All right. So it’s something about these videos. You like what you’re seeing.”

“Yes.”

“And it’s all this leather thing.”

“It’s not about...leather is just part of the trappings. It’s more about...” Harry sighed. Draco waited for him to continue. Harry tapped his hands against his chest. “Domination. Submission.”

Why they needed to talk about this now and not over drinks at the end of the day was beyond Draco, but he wanted to be a supportive partner. “And that’s something you’ve been interested in awhile?”

Harry nodded. “I just found some of the videos a few years ago. When I was looking at more tame ones. And I don’t know. It sort of ...clicked.”

Draco raised a brow. Harry obviously felt like he needed to get this off his chest, so Draco had to be careful about letting him down. “You like the idea, of one person dominating the other?”

“I suppose so. The idea of...one person willingly surrendering control to another. Another person being responsible for...instruction. I’m not saying that I don’t like just sex—I mean, I’m happy with what we have, that’s never been an issue. I just sort of...I don’t know how to explain it.” Harry suddenly said, “It’s a fascination. Maybe an obsession.”

“Strong words.”

“Do you think there’s something wrong with me?”

Softening, Draco said, “No. Of course not. Everyone has their own peculiarities when it comes to sex. Plenty of people like this. I’m actually relieved that you’ve got your own little thing. Makes me feel less weird.”

No missing how Harry’s lips made a smile. “You mean how you love it when I stress eat—”

Draco put his hand to Harry’s mouth. “Hush. Do not shame me. I like when you actually have an arse to grab onto.”

“Pity I’ve never gotten that opportunity with you.”

Draco laid his arm across Harry. “Alas, I’m cursed with this slender frame.” He circled one of Harry’s nipples with his fingertip. “So why are we talking about this in the middle of the night? You were making me nervous, thinking something’s wrong.”

“I, ah...I wanted to ask you something.”

“All right.”

“What would you think about...trying...some things...with me?”

There it was. *Let him down gently*. With all the restraint he was capable of, Draco said carefully, “I don’t think I can, love.”

“Right,” Harry said quickly.

“I’m fully supportive of you having your private time with your computer, and I even promise to do my very best to not harass you to the point of tears. I just...” Draco cringed, raising a shoulder. “It does absolutely nothing for me. The idea of saying ‘yes sir’ and ‘no sir’ to my husband while you beat me with a riding crop or whatever it is these people do. I’ve an issue with authority at the best of times. I can say with a high level of certainty that I would never, ever be turned on. I mean—if you wanted to do something special for your birthday, I’d give it a whirl, but other than that, you could not pay me enough.”

He waited for Harry’s reply. The idea didn’t thrill him, but he would put on something skimpy and crawl around for Harry’s birthday if he was really keen. It was over two months away, so he’d have plenty of time to shed his dignity.

Harry tapped his fingers against Draco’s hand. “I, ah...wasn’t thinking about you being hit with a riding crop.”

“No? What other perversions were you hoping to convert me to?”

“More...along the lines of...you hitting me with one.” Harry rolled his head towards Draco, checking his reaction.

It took a moment for the words to sink in, and another for Draco to find the words.

“Fuck right off,” he said in disbelief. Harry looked away with a groan. “You were the Chosen One. You were an *Auror*. What do you mean, you want me to smack you around?”

“That’s not *all* I want, you prick. I half regret saying anything to you now—”

“All right, all right. That was an overreaction. We are all complex snowflakes, with infinite layers—”

“*Divorce*,” Harry said.

Draco nodded. “Okay, all right. I’m listening. I am non judgmental.”

“That would be a bloody first.”

“I will listen to everything you have to tell me. But first—did you really wake me up in the middle of the night to tell me you want me to spank you?”

Harry threw Draco’s arm off him. “I’m sleeping on the sofa.”

Draco snatched him up in his arms, hooking a leg over Harry before he could escape. “I’ve gotten it out of my system. I’m all ears.”

“You’re all mouth, is what you are.”

“Agreed.”

“Can I talk to you now or are you going to continue being a prat?”

“Talk to your heart’s content.”

“I just...it’s not being bloody hit, okay? I just like the idea of not always...being the one to make the decisions. So I was lying here, thinking about that, and I think there’s something wrong with me.”

“You’ve lost me again.”

Sighing, Harry said, “I like the idea of...someone else being in control of me. Not in every day life. I can’t stand that, you know I can’t. I mean, for the most part. But the idea of...allowing someone else to make the decisions, to be the one in charge...it’s so different from how I’m supposed to be, isn’t it. I’m Harry Potter. I’m supposed to always know the right thing, do the right thing. I’m supposed to lead the charge. So maybe I’ve gotten all screwed up, and now my wiring is telling me to be turned on by the opposite. And maybe that’s...leaking into everywhere else.”

“I started to understand and then I got lost again.”

“You were right. I’m the man who can’t say no. At work, it’s fine. I can say no until the cows come home. But with the people I care about...I just cave, don’t I. Maybe because that’s what I really want. For people to tell me what to do. To order me about.”

Draco waited a second, then said, “You mean you want *Molly* to dominate you?”

Harry sputtered, then stopped. “Fuck me blind,” he said, disgusted. “I’m not saying that, am I?” Draco started cackling. Harry gagged and moaned.

Once Draco had himself under control, he ran his hand over Harry’s face. “All right—let me be the voice of reason here, because I don’t want this image to linger in our minds for any longer than is strictly necessary. Wanting to play around a bit in the bedroom has absolutely nothing to do with your inability to tell that woman to piss off. One is about sex; the other is about your desperation for a mother figure. So let’s just put that whole conflation to rest. Correlation is not causation and all that.”

“You’re certain?”

“Yes, I’m certain. So put that out of your head. Let’s go back a step, shall we. You actually want me to boss you around in bed? That’s sexy to you?”

Now that Draco thought about it, they’d moved that way over the past few years. In the beginning, they had switched back and forth pretty freely. They sort of drifted to Draco taking charge of things, but Draco had thought it had to do with getting comfortable, being together for years. He couldn’t actually remember the last time he’d had Harry’s cock inside him.

“Yeah,” Harry admitted. “Only the idea of you doing it more...if you were actually kind of mean about it...I like the idea of that.”

Draco finally took a pause. “Ah...”

Harry furrowed his brow. “What? What did I say?”

“Nothing. No, you tell me whatever you need to say.”

“I just...if you’d consider trying some things with me...bossing me around a bit more...getting a little kinky...I would be into that. Even though I can’t actually see you, I can tell you’re frowning.”

“No. I’m not...frowning exactly.”

“Now I hear it in your voice. You can tell me no, Draco. That’s one of the things I love about you. You’re never shy about telling people no. Tell me what you’re thinking. I feel rather foolish right now.”

“There’s no need to be foolish. I...have some reservations.”

“Such as...?”

Harry’s hand found Draco’s face. Draco gently bit one of his fingers, and thought of how to explain it to Harry. “I know...I still have plenty of sharp edges.” Harry barked, and Draco lifted his head. “Excuse you.” Harry made a conciliatory noise, and Draco settled down. “Even though I’m a bit sharpish, I’ve tried very hard over the years to be better than I was. The idea of ordering you about...bullying you...that seems like a step backwards.”

“I thought that might be an issue.”

“How did you plan on convincing me otherwise?”

“I didn’t. I never thought I’d get up the bottle to tell you any of this.”

“Doesn’t it bother you? The idea of me...being cruel to you?”

“You’re a million years away from the boy you once were. The idea of you pushing me about is what I like. Not repeating old patterns. We came into this with a blank slate, right? That’s what we agreed to. I think about these things, and it doesn’t have anything to do with what happened before.”

“You want it so badly you’re overlooking the past,” Draco surmised.

“No. Maybe. Is that really your only reservation? Worrying about acting like your old self?”

“Don’t be obtuse. It’s a lot, isn’t it? It’s something I’ve never done before, nor you, unless you’ve been hiding that from me. I never really considered it. I don’t know that much about it. And yes, I don’t know if I’m all that enthusiastic about...anything that creates a power imbalance. We’ve always had a partnership of equals. I have concerns about disturbing that.”

Harry breathed in deeply, so that Draco's arm rose and fell. "I know it's a hard sell. I don't want you doing anything that will make you unhappy."

He might have been attempting to sound accepting, but Draco knew Harry inside and out.

"I'll compromise," Draco said. "I'll look into it, form an opinion, then come back to you with my thoughts."

"Oh no."

"What?"

"You're not going into research mode, are you?"

"You'd rather I say no now—"

"You research to your heart's content."

"Good. Glad we're decided. Now...can we go to sleep?"

"Yes. Absolutely."

"You sure there's nothing else you want to tell me?"

"Other than wanting a divorce?"

"You're so funny." Draco buried himself against Harry, shutting his eyes. "You kinky bitch."

Chapter 3

Draco was halfway through the first book when Harry emerged from the fireplace. Without bothering to say hello, Draco said, “Did you know that there’s an actual method called cock torture?”

“It starts,” Harry sighed. Setting down his valise, he took a look at Draco, and presumably the stack of books beside him. “Please don’t tell me you went into a bookstore.”

“A Muggle one. I brought the entire press corps with me.” Draco raised his head and found Harry glaring at him. “Piss off, I was polyjuiced. Do you think I’m stupid?”

“They—had all this in a Muggle bookshop?”

Draco nodded, excited as always to show how thorough he was. “I bought every title they have on BDSM. See? I know the proper phrase now instead of just calling it your leather thing, and I know that it’s not only about leather, because what about the vegans—”

Harry raised both hands and backed towards the kitchen. “Okay, you have fun.”

Draco leaned sideways, calling after him, “Be a little grateful! I’m showing interest in your hobbies!”

Harry was brushing his teeth when Draco bounded into the bathroom. He held up his open book so Harry could see the reflection in the mirror. “Have you seen one of these before?”

Harry choked on his toothpaste.

Not noticing, Draco turned the book around, flipping through the pages. “It’s called a ball gag. Can you imagine that? I could just pop that in your mouth and I wouldn’t have to hear you talk all the time. Why didn’t you tell me about this earlier?” He walked out of the room.

“Bondage looks like a bit of fun, doesn’t it.”

Harry raised his head. “Are you still reading?”

Draco’s hand of glory was tucked under his arm so that he could read after Harry had turned off the light. “Mm.”

“Going a little overboard, don’t you think?”

“What do you mean? Which do you like the idea of more: handcuffs or rope? Or a spell, I suppose. I haven’t gotten my books from Flourish and Botts yet, so I’ll have more

ideas about the magical side of things then.”

“Wait.” Harry turned on the bedside lamp and rolled onto his back, squinting. “What do you mean, Flourish and Botts?”

“Oh, I asked for all their titles on the topic. You know, I thought they would only have one or two, but the young woman helping me practically had a catalogue. You know me, why buy one thing when twelve will fill the emptiness inside.”

“You...you bought kink books at Flourish and Botts.”

“Don’t be such a prude. You should have seen some of the bodice rippers they were marketing to elderly witches. Before you get your knickers in a knot, I ordered them all to one of my mail boxes out in Kensington under a fake name. You never give me enough credit.”

Reluctantly, Harry said, “All right, just...don’t stay up too late.”

“Shan’t.”

Harry reached out for the lamp, then paused. “What did you say about bondage?”

“Look at all these marvelous knots!”

Draco came through the front door hauling a small cart of books. “I got my package!” Harry was kneeled in front of the fireplace. “What...are you doing?”

Harry looked between his wand and the shard of brick in his hand. “Minor error with the Floo.” He put them down and gave Draco a large smile. “Your package came?”

He was obviously hiding something, most likely the destruction of something Draco owned, but Draco wasn’t in the mood to explore further. Shutting the door, Draco said, “I’ve so many books to read! It’s like Christmas came early.”

“You’ve already read how many in the last few days?”

“Ten. No—twelve. I finished that consent one this morning. I still have six more Muggle ones to go through.” Draco dropped on the windowsill and started taking out books. “You wouldn’t believe the terrible titles they’ve come up with. *Hogties and Hexes*. *Submit the Selkie Way*. Turned on yet?”

“Oh, remarkably. Are there any in there that don’t look terrible?”

Draco rooted through them. He held one up in triumph. “*Putting the M in BDSM: An Introduction to Magical Consent-Driven Play*. This looks as good a place as any. Bloody mouthful, though.”

“Why don’t you have a gander at that and I’ll start dinner?”

Draco arched a brow. “What did you break?”

Cringing, Harry said, “The vase your parents gave you.”

Draco thought about it, then said, “Well, I suppose it’s a good thing we’re not speaking to one another or I’d never hear the end of it. If you’re making curry, try not to make it too spicy.”

“I’d never.”

Harry was putting chilis in the pot when Draco stormed into the room.

“This is disgusting,” Draco said, waving the book at Harry. He was so upset that he didn’t even notice Harry had emptied all the chilis in the fridge into their meal.

“Uh—”

“Do you know what this says? Do you know what this bloody says witches and wizards are doing?!” Draco jammed a finger down on the open pages. “This says that people role play as Death Eaters. That they pretend one person is a Death Eater and one is the Muggle who needs to be punished for being so inferior. Anti Muggle *play*. That’s what they call it, Harry, they call it playing. Playing, fucking fetishizing the war, that’s what these people are doing, and it’s disgusting!”

“Draco—”

Draco threw the book at the table, so hard it bounced off. “Fuck this!” he cried out, and whirled around, striding out. “I’m not doing this, fuck all of this!”

After a moment, Harry said, “Okay.”

Draco was shaking his head, jittering his leg. “I’m not doing this, fuck this, I’m not, I can’t.”

Harry said again, “No one’s asking you to. Would you—Draco, would you just look at me?”

Draco had another drag of his cigarette, trembling all over. “These people are insane. They’re sick and insane and I don’t understand. I just don’t understand.”

They were standing in the backyard. Draco only smoked when he was at the absolute end of his tether. This more than qualified.

“Is this what you want?” Draco asked, gesturing back inside, towards that disgusting book.

“No!”

“This is what would make you happy, me acting like a bloody Death Eater, that’s what would turn you on—”

Harry made slashing motions, wide eyed. “Fuck no. Fuck you for even thinking that. Just because some other people have lost their minds doesn’t mean that I have. Now stop it. You are overreacting.”

“Overreacting?” Draco hissed.

“Yes, and you know it. You’ve read a dozen books so far and you know that not everyone likes the same things, and that some people like some pretty fucked up things, but that has nothing to do with us.”

“No, of course not, other than I *was* a Death Eater and the fact that people want to wear it like a costume because it gets them hard—”

“That’s them, not us. Calm down.”

“I cannot calm down, people are pretending to kill Muggles behind closed doors so they can ejaculate—”

Harry grabbed him by the shoulders and gave him one good, hard shake. “Draco. Stop talking and listen to me. Fuck these people, fuck them for whatever they do to get off, but do not think for one second that I would ever expect any of that shit from you. I am repulsed, I am pissed off, and I am telling you that it has nothing to do with us. Regardless of whether it’s appalling or something that I like, I would never, *ever* make you do anything you didn’t want to. We do nothing unless we both agree upon it, and if you don’t agree, that’s the beginning, middle and end of it. You hear me?”

Draco gazed at him. “Okay,” he said in a small voice.

“You’re sure you hear me?”

Draco looked down at his cigarette. “I suppose...I do occasionally get hysterical.”

“No.” Draco looked at Harry, and Harry conceded, “Yes. Oh, love—come here, you fool.”

He wrapped Draco up in his arms. Draco rested his head on Harry’s shoulder, having to bend his head down to do so. He was feeling pathetic suddenly. “Harry.”

“Yes, sweetheart.”

“Do me a favour?”

“Anything.”

“Burn that book.”

Harry said, “*Incendio*,” and the book was no more.

Draco had another book up to his face when Harry came to bed. Harry hung at the bedside table, cautious. "Still reading?"

"Mm. You know me, I'm addicted."

"Don't I know it. You brought an actual cart of books home today." Harry sat down on the bed, sticking his feet beneath the blankets. Scratching at his hair, Harry said, "You sure that's the best thing to be reading right now? You've got a million other books in your library."

Draco dropped *Dominate Like a Draugr* onto his chest and looked at Harry with a tired smile. "I'm not going to stop reading just because I panicked earlier."

"You can, you know. I don't like to see you upset."

"I know that people are all different and that this is obviously an outlier. I need to keep my eyes in front of me instead of obsessing about what other people do. I can't say that I'm not distressed, though. I am."

Harry turned to face Draco. "You should be. It's terrible."

"I don't like that there's...this direct conflation. I don't like the idea of being lumped in with that lot. For anything. Ever."

"No one is ever going to lump you in with anyone." Draco gave him a knowing look and Harry admitted, "All right, yes, a lot of people still think of you as a Death Eater. I know you aren't. Me. Your former arch nemesis. I know you're so far from that I've asked you to play around with this. I get it, if you don't want to. You're being your usual sweet, deranged self with all this research, but you don't have to do it to make me happy. I'm already happy with you."

"You'd have regrets if I didn't even try."

"Everyone has regrets, you lunatic."

"To be honest, Harry, if I don't stop with all this reading, I'll have to think about the party."

Harry groaned and flopped on his side. "Did you get another letter?"

Voice flat, Draco said, "I've been informed that the colours might be orange and red. That crime against taste notwithstanding, orange is the least flattering tone for my colouring. I'll look pink."

"Can't have that."

"No, we cannot, smart arse." Draco hit Harry lightly with his book. "Harry, you know I wouldn't have come this far if I wasn't at least a little intrigued. I would not have bought

twenty-five books on the topic if it was beyond the realm of possibility.”

Taken aback, Harry said, “You did not buy that many.”

“I did. Did you hear what else I said?”

“Yes, I suppose I did. You’re not just saying it to placate me?” Before Draco could open his mouth, Harry said, “Wait, I realized that it’s you we’re talking about. You’d never do anything to placate me. So, at least some of these things...you’d be up for?”

Draco inhaled through his nose, then said, “Yes.”

Obviously eager, Harry cleared his throat and tried to be nonchalant. “Anything particular?”

Draco smirked. “Why don’t you ask me and I’ll let you know.”

Harry chewed his lip, then said, “Bondage.”

“Yes.”

“Humiliation.”

“I could do that in my sleep.”

“Rubber?”

“Rubber *what?*”

“No on the leather—I mean rubber—”

“Freudian slip.”

“Fine, leather?”

“I *knew* you were into the leather thing—”

“Yes, you’re so clever. I know you, you’d only tease me like this if you were going to say yes.”

“Of course I’d say yes to leather. I was practically raised wearing leather. My whole bedroom suite growing up was furnished with leather.”

“Okay, let’s examine the leather question at a later date. Do you know what strappado is?”

“I do, you absolute whore. You want me to string you up like that?”

“Only if you call me an absolute whore while you do it.”

They looked at one another a moment. Then they both started to laugh.

“What would our safeword be?”

Harry stopped. He closed his menu, setting it down on the table, and gave Draco a hard look.

Draco glanced overtop of his menu and rolled his eyes. “The only other people here are on the other side of the room. Calm yourself.”

“Or maybe I’m not comfortable discussing this in a public place.”

Instead of teasing him, Draco nodded. “If you’re not comfortable, then we’ll discuss it at home.”

Harry narrowed his eyes, suspicious. “Just like that?”

“Just like that,” Draco shrugged.

Once Draco was shedding his jacket, he asked, “So what would our safeword be?”

“Can I take my shoes off first?”

“If it’s a condition of your mouth working, I suppose.”

Harry finished unlacing his shoes, then stood up. “Umbridge,” he answered.

Draco felt himself pale. After a moment, he said, “That borders on cruelty.”

Harry raised his shoulders. “Can you think of anything less erotic? Anything else that would stop things dead in their tracks?”

After thinking about it, Draco said, “Touché. Umbridge it is.”

“What would your fantasy be?”

Harry glanced down at their naked bodies. “I mean, this is fine—”

Draco poked him sharply in the side, making him yelp. “I’m asking about your fantasy, not what we’ve just accepted as a Friday night tradition. Cease your demurrals and tell me what you’d like the most. Don’t tell me you haven’t thought about it.”

He was spent and feeling pleased with himself. Another week done, a lazy fuck with his husband after work—things could certainly be worse. He hadn’t responded to Molly’s latest missive, but that could wait for a time when he’d had plenty of alcohol.

Turning on his side, Harry said, “What I’d really like? To be honest...what I’d like the most...” Draco waited, to the point where he nearly started raising his brows. “I’d really like...if you just did whatever you bloody wanted with me.”

Well, that was anticlimactic.

Except Harry continued, “What I mean is, I’d love if you did whatever you wanted without taking into consideration my feelings about it. I want you to be in complete control of everything. Every single thing I do, I want it to be because you’ve told me. Not asked, but told me. I want you to just...take over. I don’t want to be responsible. That’s what I want.”

“So it would turn you on to have the spine of a jellyfish.”

“On certain occasions.”

Draco thought about it and said, “I could do that. What about next Saturday?”

“Really? You want to...plan that far ahead.”

“Harry, you know me, you know I need to have deadlines, I need to have a schedule
—”

“All right. Hey, it’s all about me putting things into your hands—”

“No. It’s about us doing this together. But yes, I will tell you exactly what to do.”

Harry smiled and murmured, “Last of the romantics.”

Chapter 4

An owl hit the window.

Draco dropped his glass, and Harry lunged to the side, snatching it from the air. With a grin, he said, “At least one of us kept his Seeker’s reflexes.”

“It’s adorable, how you never quite let go of your childhood triumphs.” Draco took a look at the owl and said, “No. I will not be letting that inside.”

Harry set down the glass, then went to the window. “Oh good, Molly’s sent another letter.”

“Don’t mind me, I’ll just be over here cutting my throat.” Draco went back to the newspaper. Truth be told, he was a bit excited. He was keeping a calm expression, but he also had concerns. What if Harry hated it? What if Draco accidentally did everything wrong?

Cross that bridge when we get to it.

“Uh oh,” Harry said, taking the envelope from the owl’s beak. “It’s addressed to you.”

“Don’t bother. I already know what it says.”

Harry fed the owl a treat. “Are we speaking generally? Or was there something particular?” Draco conspicuously ignored the question, feigning interest in an article on counterfeit Comets. “Draco?”

“Give me a second, this article is fascinating.”

“Draco Lucius Malfoy—”

“Do not say that name in this household.”

“What did you do?”

“I did something very nice.”

“I doubt that. What did you do?”

Draco tried not to smile. “I found out who was doing the catering. And I paid off the bill.”

When Harry spoke, he sounded horrified. “She’s not going to like that.”

“Mm, the question is if she’s also discovered that I paid for the tent and all the rental furniture as well.”

“Why would you provoke Molly like that?”

Amused, Draco said, “You mean, why would I be so remarkably generous? Why would I step in and put my hard earned money towards an event I have no interest in attending? The answer is that I’m an altruist.”

Harry fastened the window, then turned to Draco with his hands on his hips. “It’s nothing to do with you being nice, it’s you trying to get one over on Molly.”

“You’d rather they go into debt?”

“You do not care if Arthur and Molly go into debt—”

“I do, because you’d never shut up about it. Now, stop frowning at me like a disgruntled British longhair and thank me.”

Harry put a finger to the back of his ear. “Beg your pardon?”

Draco folded the paper in half and laid it on the table. He crossed his legs at the knee, then fixed a cool gaze on his husband. “You should thank me.”

“I thought that’s what you said, but you must have lost your mind if—”

Draco clicked his tongue. “I’d be careful.”

“Are you touched in the head?”

“You should show me the proper gratitude, or I’m going to take it into consideration later.”

Harry finally paused. Cute but stupid. Draco wouldn’t have thought that was enough to keep him interested, but it had carried them this far. Cautiously, Harry said, “What do you mean?”

Draco arched a brow, sucking in his cheeks.

“Oh.”

“We had planned for Saturday, yes?”

“Yeah, but—we’re in our jams. We’re having toast. I thought maybe you’d—forgotten?”

“Should we not—”

“We should,” Harry said quickly. “Yes. We should. Whenever you like. Jams or no jams. I am up for whatever you’d like.”

“Yes, that’s the point.”

“Should I—change?”

“Well, I was just thinking how much I liked you pretty but stupid, so I don’t know why you’d want to change now.”

Rolling his eyes, Harry said, “I’m going to put on clothes—”

“You won’t need to. Sit down, eat your breakfast. You’ll thank me later.”

Harry sat down, then said, “Because I’ll need my energy.”

“You will.”

Nodding, Harry took another piece of toast. “Excellent. Pass the jam.”

Draco led Harry into the front room by the hand. He took him directly in front of the window, turning him to face outside, then bent down to look into his eyes.

“I want to be very certain that you’re comfortable with what we’re about to do. I know the point is to surprise you, but if I do anything that you don’t like, you need to use the safeword. Give me your word that you’ll tell me to stop.”

“I promise.”

“Because it’s not just you going out on a limb here, it’s me. And I don’t want either of us to be hurt.”

“I trust you,” Harry reassured him. “With all my heart.”

Draco frowned, then nodded. “All right.” He took Harry’s chin in his hand, darting forward to give him a fast kiss. Then he straightened, and pulled a scarf from his pocket. “We’ll get started.”

Harry was almost bouncing on the balls of his feet. “Excellent—”

Draco put a finger to his lips. “Shh,” he threatened. Harry nodded, trying not to smile.

He’s insane, but he’s mine. Draco wrapped the scarf around Harry’s eyes, tying it carefully behind his head. He’d looked at blindfolds in a store, but they’d all been fairly cheap. Harry might go through life wearing synthetic fabrics; it didn’t mean Draco was obligated to do the same.

Once the blindfold was secure, Draco pulled Harry’s shirt up and off. Harry visibly shivered. Draco had lowered the temperature in the house by three degrees, just to keep his senses sharp. Casting aside the shirt, Draco slipped his hands into Harry’s pajama bottoms and ever so slowly slid them down his legs. He ran his fingers down Harry’s legs as he went, reminding himself to breathe steadily.

Harry had placed his trust in Draco. It was not a thing he would dishonour.

He prompted Harry to step out of the trousers, then set them on the window sill. Harry was left naked. Draco took a second to appreciate Harry's body. After seven years, you stopped noticing the little details. Like this, though, in the cold light of day, disrupting the routine, there was a clarification. A reminder. The muscles, the scars, the spot on his thigh that had always been purple. He was a beautiful, beautiful man.

Draco stood, and went to the table beside the sofa. Opening the drawer, he took out the wooden contraption. It had been cheaper than anticipated, and he'd insisted on trying it out in the store before buying it. It had worked as its maker said it would, though at the moment it looked like a few thin wooden beams loosely connected to one another.

With a flick of his wrist, Draco threw the contraption down on the ground. The moment it hit the floor, it sprang into shape. It transformed into a three sided frame, stretching tall, attaching itself to the floor. Within seconds, it was two feet taller than Draco, and about half the width of the room.

Harry had jerked at the noise, but he was standing still, though his head tilted backwards. He would be curious, but Harry was always too bloody curious.

Taking out his wand, Draco aimed at Harry's wrist, then stroked the wand abruptly upwards. Bindings appeared from thin air, snaking around Harry's wrist, the other end attaching to the top of the frame. Harry yelped, but Draco was already onto the other wrist. Harry was very suddenly secured to the frame, his body resembling a capital Y.

Setting down his wand, Draco walked forward. He reached up, testing the bindings. They were taut, but tied in such a way to avoid Harry's circulation being cut off. Harry looked nervous at first, but then he set his jaw. He was settling in. He still thought he knew what was coming.

Draco smiled, then pulled open the drapes in a single grand motion.

Harry was naked and bound, facing the window that looked out onto the street. Gasping, he said, "Are you mad?! Get me down—"

"Who asked you to speak?" Draco snapped.

"Right. Right, sorry—"

Draco grabbed Harry's face with one hand and squeezed. "You will only speak when I ask you to speak. Anything otherwise and you'll be punished. Do you understand me?"

Harry gave a sharp little nod. "Yes."

"Yes what?"

He saw the revulsion ripple over Harry's face. Reluctantly, Harry mumbled, "Yes... sir."

"No. I'm not your professor. Not your employer. I'm your husband, and that's the only authority I have. Call me sir again and I'll bloody whip you. Do you get it?"

Harry actually relaxed a bit. “Yes. Yes, Draco.”

Draco knew that Harry would never be comfortable calling him ‘sir.’ Harry wasn’t happy calling anyone ‘sir,’ even the Minister. And Draco didn’t need to be called that. It reminded him of work, and scared underlings, and he didn’t need that entering their sex life.

Releasing Harry, Draco said, “Good.” He glanced back at the window. It had been entirely blacked out beforehand. They might be kinky, apparently, but he drew the line at exhibitionism. It was in bad taste. However, it didn’t mean he wouldn’t threaten Harry with it. Draco walked around Harry, a few inches of clearance between the top of his head and the frame. “I’m going to touch you now. You’re going to be very still and very quiet. And I’m going to do whatever I like.”

Harry nodded fervently. “Yes. Yes please.”

Draco tried not to smirk. The whole situation was patently absurd. There was no denying, however, that he quite liked the image of Harry strung up, completely at his mercy.

Draco stood back. He wrapped his arms around himself, and considered where he wanted to start. Harry’s entire body was revealed to him, for him to play with however he chose. Draco’s eyes raked in the lines and planes of the body before him, momentarily giddy with all the possibility.

Then he stepped forward, and gently ran the back of his fingers down Harry’s spine.

Harry leaned forward, exhaling. Even with his arms tied above his head, all the tension fled from him in seconds.

Draco had no desire to beat Harry with a riding crop or the like. At least not yet. They were a pair who’d been together for years and their sex had always been quite tame. Plentiful yes, enjoyable yes, but decidedly vanilla. Jumping into something else headlong was just asking to go too far. Start slow, figure things out, and move on from there.

Draco let his fingertips trail out to the right of Harry’s back. He kept his touch feather light, keeping things slow. He loved to be touched like this, but it had been a long time since he had been. It could be intense, to be approached like this. It spoke of things to come.

Stepping closer to Harry, Draco lifted his other hand. He gingerly stroked down Harry’s left side. When he did it again, he felt goose bumps raising on Harry’s skin. Draco moved his hands in tandem, lightly exploring skin, feeling the tension make a leisurely return.

He paused after a moment considering Harry’s admittedly perfect posterior. Round and pert. He usually grabbed this arse. This time, he traced a single fingertip over the right cheek. Harry’s breath shivered in his throat. Draco glanced up, then followed the curve with a fingernail. He could see Harry’s thighs flex in response. Interesting.

Draco moved around Harry, fingers slipping around his side as he went. He had a look at Harry’s face. His lips were parted, and yearning was written all over his face. Draco

focused on the front of Harry. He slid his fingertips along the faint lines of abs that came and went depending on the season. He noted Harry's twitching cock, but gave it no attention. His goal was to make Harry aware of his body, not finish things off.

So Draco slowly, methodically continued his exploration of Harry's body, never applying more than the slightest pressure. He let his eyes follow his fingers, taking the time to study his husband's body in a way he hadn't in a long, long time. Like it was new. Like it was a thing to be treasured.

He did this for minutes, more and more aware that this was bordering on torture for Harry. His man had very little patience. Having to wait for a thing, delaying gratification, it simply wasn't in Harry's nature. Harry started to fidget a bit, torn between impatience and arousal. Draco kept his measured pace. Everything was a caress, nothing sharp.

It was all a fantastic tease.

Eventually, when Harry was nearly twisting against his ties, Draco stepped away from him. He walked behind Harry, then crossed his arms, and waited.

Harry responded by tilting his head one way, then the other. His muscles were taut, and he pulled slightly against the ties, unconsciously. He was listening for Draco, trying to anticipate whatever came next.

Draco did absolutely nothing.

It didn't take as long as he thought it might. He thought Harry might last a few minutes before he said anything. But barely thirty seconds passed before Harry said, "Are you there?" Draco didn't reply, and Harry looked around blindly. "If you bloody left me here —"

Taking a stride forward, Draco slapped Harry across the bottom as hard as he dared.

Harry yelped, shocked, and Draco was nearly on top of him, demanding, "What did I tell you? Did I say you could speak?"

"No—no you didn't—"

Draco gave him another vicious slap across the rear, and the noise Harry made started with pain, but ended with a whimper that certainly didn't sound like he objected. "And when you don't do as you're told, what happens?"

"I get—I get punished."

"Yes you do. Maybe I'll put you across my knee and spank you. Can you imagine that? The famous Harry Potter, naked, on all fours. Vulnerable. Exposed. I'll spank you til you're out in bruises and there would be hell to pay if you tried to heal it afterwards. I'd have you walking around for days, wincing when you sat, embarrassed, knowing what you let me do to you. Would you like that?"

"N-No—"

“Yes you would, you filthy bitch” Draco murmured, up against Harry’s ear. He sidled up to Harry’s back, taking Harry’s sides in his hands. “You’d love every second. Tell me you wouldn’t. Tell me that you’re not fucking hard right now.” He splayed a hand over Harry’s belly, breathing into his ear. “Tell me you don’t love this.”

Harry pushed back against him, making a lovely, keening sound from the throat.

“What if I spanked you now? You couldn’t do a thing about it. You let me do this to you. I could do whatever I want. Maybe I want to turn this fat arse of yours purple and blue. What could you do to stop me? What could you do?”

“Nothing,” Harry exhaled.

“Do you like that?”

“Yes.”

“Of course you do. You slut. You whore.”

Harry shivered, top to bottom, then seemed to break. He bent his head back, frantically searching for Draco’s mouth. Draco obliged him, kissing him wet and open mouthed, reaching up to hold Harry’s head in place. He wrapped long fingers around Harry’s throat to pin him there, feeling wordless sounds shuddering from Harry’s mouth. Harry squirmed to get closer, seeming ever more turned on by the fact that he couldn’t.

Draco bit his lower lip, and when Harry cried out in pain, Draco fell back, and began slapping him relentlessly across the arse.

He was a thin man, but he was surprisingly strong, and each strike left a red mark that promised to blossom into something darker. Draco put all his power into slapping those reddening cheeks. It wasn’t fast, but it was unyielding.

Harry was falling apart, and it was remarkable to watch. “This is what you wanted,” Draco reminded him, and slapped again.

“Yes,” Harry whimpered, writhing against the bindings.

“This is—exactly what you asked for. No control. Fucking shameful. A grown man, wanting to be spanked like a misbehaving *child*.” With the next strike, Harry wailed. His whole body was tight and primed. “You’re going to come like this, aren’t you. You’re going to come in front of the whole world from being hit. What’s wrong with you?”

“Draco,” Harry pleaded.

Draco hesitated for just a moment. Did he want to stop? Harry was still squirming, and he hadn’t used the safe word. So Draco slapped him again, and Harry made that noise that only ever emerged when he was on the very edge. “Fucking deviant. If they only knew what a kinky little slut you were. Begging little bottom, never satisfied unless you’re riding my cock, unless you’ve got it in your mouth and you’re gagging on it. You disgust me.

Pathetic. You're going to come like this, aren't you? You are, you can't bloody help yourself, you little bitch—"

He struck Harry on the rear, over and over, quickening his pace as Harry lost the ability to speak. He was just gasping, letting out squeaks and moans, thrashing about. Draco couldn't remember the last time he'd seen him like this.

It was incredible.

"I'm not going to stop," Draco threatened. "I'm not going to stop because I know you don't want me to. You're sick. You're deranged. I'm going to turn this arse into bruises and then fuck it. I'm going to fuck your black and blue arse, you sick little—"

Abruptly, shocking Draco, Harry came.

Draco immediately put his hands up. He hadn't really thought that Harry would come without at least being jerked off a little. Eyes wide, he watched Harry shudder, spurting. Harry was groaning, completely unguarded and animalistic. He'd actually gone weak in the knees, supported only by the bindings above his head.

Concerned about Harry's circulation, or the possibility of his breaking a wrist, Draco moved forward, wrapping his arms around Harry. He kept one around Harry's chest, and used his other hand to gently rub Harry's lower belly, knowing how sensitive he was there.

Harry moaned, shivering, and Draco kissed behind his ear, softly shushing him.

"That's my good boy," he whispered, rubbing his thumb over Harry's skin. Draco nuzzled against Harry's neck. "That's my good, lovely boy."

He kept up with the little kisses, murmuring words of praise as Harry shivered, still jerking occasionally. Draco felt remarkably tender in that moment. Harry was entirely his responsibility. He had to take such good care of him.

I will be so good to you, Draco thought to Harry. I will always keep you safe.

Once Harry seemed to have calmed down, Draco took out his wand, still keeping one arm protectively around Harry. "Let's get you down," he murmured. He pointed the wand upwards, and the bindings released Harry's left wrist. His arm drooped down. Draco made sure he was going to stay upright, then let him go. He released Harry's other wrist, and put away his wand. "Let's see about this."

Draco worked at the knot in the scarf, picking it apart. Once he had it undone, he lifted the scarf over Harry's head, then let it fall to the floor. Harry stood there, swaying slightly. Draco furrowed his brows. Had that been all right? Had he gone too far? Not far enough?

Draco ran his hand down Harry's back and asked, "How was that, love?"

He waited a moment.

Harry turned and pounced on him.

There was no other word for it. One moment Draco was standing upright, the next a fully grown man had leapt onto him and taken him down the way a jungle cat would its prey. Draco hit the ground on his back, the breath knocked from him.

Then Harry was kissing him furiously, fingers tight enough in Draco's hair to hurt, his teeth cutting open Draco's lower lip. Draco yelped, and the thought of the safe word floated in the forefront of his mind.

The thought disappeared as soon as it appeared. He had no desire to stop this.

Why on earth would he?

"Just to...be sure..." Draco swallowed, trying to catch his breath. His brain felt a bit pickled. He was still on his back, after the most ferocious shagging he'd had in an age. He wasn't sure his legs would be too reliable. "Was your reaction an endorsement?"

After a moment, Harry thrust a thumbs up into the air.

Snorting, Draco pushed his hands over his face. His heart was still bouncing about. "Oh good."

"That was...bloody marvelous."

"I didn't hurt your feelings with any of it? I didn't get too cruel about things?"

"No."

He couldn't remember the last time he felt so properly fucked. Harry had practically ridden him into the carpet with his enthusiasm. "So you're happy."

"I'm ecstatic. And hungry. You were right about breakfast. I should have eaten more."

"You were quite ambitious. I didn't think you'd actually climb on me like that after I pummeled your rear."

"It hurts," Harry said, but in a strangely dreamy way.

"And you like that."

"It's a reminder of you. I'm really pleased. How do you feel about it?"

"It came quite naturally. I'm amused that you came just from being spanked. You cheeky thing."

Harry's arm fell against Draco's side. Draco clumsily patted at it, exhausted. "You're the love of my life," Harry said suddenly, sincerely.

Draco looked at him, dark hair fallen across his forehead, looking so purely content. “And you’re mine,” Draco replied. Then he exhaled and closed his eyes. “You can clean all this up. I can’t be arsed.”

“What about equal partners?”

“How about you clean up before I slap that bottom of yours again?”

Harry grumbled, but eventually, he got up. After a stretch, Draco even helped.

Chapter 5

“I’m thinking that I tell you what I want you to do, and you do it, regardless of how degrading it is or how displeased it makes you.”

“That sounds good.”

Half an hour later, Draco heard an unhappy clearing of the throat. He glanced up from his spot on the sofa, where he was laying back with the latest copy of *BusinessWizard Weekly*. Harry stood in front of the fireplace with a feather duster in hand, wearing only a skimpy pair of underpants. Mouth twisting, Harry looked like he was about to protest. “Say it,” Draco commanded.

Gripping the duster ever tighter, Harry said mutinously, “I am an obedient house elf who does whatever Master wants.”

“Excellent.” Draco turned back to the article on broom shares. “You missed a bit on the mantelpiece.”

“I’m going to call you terrible names. Just the nastiest, cruellest things I can think of.”

“Nothing—nothing anti-Muggle, right? No—no, Draco, come back, I didn’t mean that, I wasn’t thinking—”

“I’m going to put this on you.”

“Ah.”

“Do you know what this is?”

“It looks remarkably like a cock ring.”

“Clever boy. Only this one’s magical. Every time that you even think about coming before I tell you to, it will send the smallest shock through your undercarriage. The voltage, of course, gets higher every time. Just to keep you from enjoying yourself too much.”

“Oh—tight fit, that.”

“Well, yes, otherwise it falls off.”

“Yeah, I know that, you git.”

“Now I’m going to tease you within an inch of your life. And you’d better control yourself or—”

“Ouch!”

Harry was still shaking after they were done. Draco hovered around him, trying not to be too much of a mother hen. Harry pointed to the ring, which had been tossed across the room. “Put that one in the regular rotation.”

“You were cursing me something vile near the end.”

“Well *yes*, because my bits were on fire.”

“I don’t understand you,” Draco said, but went to go put the ring in a safe place.

“I’m thinking I spank you senseless. Right now.”

“But...”

“But what?”

“Don’t look all innocent, you. We’re going to lunch with Dulcine and Maribel in two hours. And you want to thrash me now?”

“Yes.”

“Harry,” Dulcine said, halfway through lunch. “Are you all right?”

Draco paused, cocktail halfway to his mouth. Harry looked like he’d just been caught with his hand in the cookie jar. As nonchalant as he was able, Harry said, “How do you mean?”

Not distracted, Dulcine waved a hand at Harry’s groin. “This. You’re squirming around like you’ve sat on a tack. No, that’s not it. Like you have pubic lice. Is that what it is?”

“Oh, stop it,” Maribel said.

Harry was babbling. “Um—well—no, I mean—I don’t know—what you mean—”

“Don’t be shy,” Draco said. He rubbed a hand over the back of Harry’s shoulders. “You can tell them.”

Harry looked at Draco with murder in his eyes. “I...don’t...”

Draco turned back to the girls. “He feels bad about how the office work has given him a bit of a flabby bottom. I told him not to worry—you know me, I like to have a bit of man to grab hold of—but he’s so self conscious. So he’s started this exercise routine to tighten everything up. He’s gone a bit overboard, to be honest. I’m half worried he’ll put his arse out in bruises.” Draco leaned over, giving Harry a kiss on the temple. “I love you just as you are,” he told Harry, his face a mask of sincerity. “You know that, right?”

The look on Harry's face was beyond priceless. "You've hurt your arse by working out?" Dulcine crowed.

Draco could practically see Harry threatening, *when we get home*, but he turned back to Dulcine with a sheepish smile. "You know. Getting older. You find yourself doing the silliest things."

Once they were home, Harry closed the door emphatically and raised his brows at Draco. "Flabby bottom?"

"I didn't want to say anything," Draco said with a straight face. "You know I love your happy weight."

Harry couldn't find the words for a moment. He finally said, "Turn around."

"Why? Are you going to throw something at my head?"

"Turn around."

Rolling his eyes, Draco did.

He was abruptly marched over to the sofa by the back of his trousers. Yelping, Draco found himself slammed down over the back of the sofa. He braced himself as Harry yanked down his trousers, hearing the snapping of seams.

"I'd slap your bony arse, but it would be like hitting angles and nothing else," Harry growled. Draco could hear him unbuttoning his own pants. "And since my fat arse is too bloody bruised for it, yours is going to have to take it."

Draco heard him spit in his hand, and tried to straighten. "Do not—"

Harry slammed him back down. "Don't even think about it. I'm going to fuck you like a barbarian, the way you fucking deserve. You don't want me to, you know what you can do?"

"What?"

"Apologize for embarrassing me in front of our friends."

With very little hesitation, Draco spread his legs and relaxed against the sofa. "Proceed, barbarian."

To their mutual satisfaction, Harry delivered.

"I found this spell."

"And what's this spell do?"

“Something you’ll like.”

“Tell me more.”

Harry sat in the front room on his knees, bare from the waist up. Draco stood behind him with his wand, a touch nervous. This was the first time he’d used a spell like this on Harry.

“I’m going to start now,” he warned. Harry nodded, taking a deep breath. Draco looked at his wand. “*Prurire*.”

Long strands of blue light began to extend from the tip of the wand. They grew until they reached approximately a meter in length. The ends finished in little balls of light. Draco gave his wrist a flick, and the strings reacted, snapping to the side, quick as a whip. There was a gentle fizzing sound.

Curious, Draco stepped forward. He trailed the ends of the strands over Harry’s shoulders. When they made contact with Harry’s skin, they lit up brighter. Harry inhaled, then let out a shaky breath.

“Good?”

Harry nodded, and bent his head.

Stepping back, Draco gave the wand a few experimental flicks. If he turned his wrist a certain way, he could get the things to let out a heart stopping crack. Every time, he saw Harry jump slightly in anticipation.

Pulling the wand back, Draco whipped Harry across the back. Careful, the first time.

The strands lit up white, and Harry let out a low groan. He shuddered, and started nodding, seemingly to himself. Taking that as an encouragement, Draco wound up and did it again, this time with a little more effort. The strands crackled, and for a moment Draco could have sworn he saw sparkles shoot out.

Harry looked like he was enjoying himself immensely, so Draco let go, and hit him. First one side, then the other. He kept a steady rhythm. The spell wouldn’t cause any lasting damage, but he would believe that when he saw it.

As he went on, the sparks became more pronounced. They lingered on Harry’s back. Eventually his back was covered in them, glowing, brightening each time the spell laced across Harry’s skin.

Harry was shivering, still nodding. He was entirely lost in the moment.

With every strike, his back became brighter and brighter, until it was all aglow, and when he finally came, he came with a burst of stars.

Chapter 6

“I thought we were going to dinner,” Harry said.

“We are,” Draco replied, walking down the aisle of the shop. “We’re doing some shopping first.”

The man behind the counter called out, “Help you gentlemen with anything?”

“Oh no,” Draco said blithely, running his fingertips over a harness that was clearly not real leather, despite its claims. “Just having a look about.”

Harry was close on Draco’s heels. Draco had discovered this place during his research, and after a few Saturdays he had decided he was comfortable enough to explore a little further. Besides that, he knew it would drive Harry mad.

Harry murmured, “Shopping for what?”

Draco glanced back with a smirk. “Never you mind.” He let out a laugh when Harry swallowed. “I’m only teasing. I don’t know what I’m looking for. I thought we could see what they had, if there was anything you like.”

“I thought we were going to try that spell.”

“We are. We can do other things as well.” Draco frowned, and lifted a package off the wall. “What on earth is this?”

“That’s a butt plug with a pig’s tail on the end.”

“It’s rather expensive, isn’t it. If you wanted a pig’s tail, I could do that with the flick of my wrist.”

Harry blanched. “I’d rather you didn’t. It would remind me of the Dursleys.”

“Beg pardon?”

“Never mind. I’ll tell you some other time.”

Draco put the package back on the wall, looking over the wall of sex toys. “Muggles have to get quite creative, don’t they. They have to really work for it.” Arching a brow, he took a few steps to point at a massive dildo painted with the colours of the American flag, stars and all.

Harry shook his head, affectionate. “Not if you spanked me into next year.”

Draco looked things over, a bit let down. The store was stocked full with all sorts of things, but the majority of it was cheap and gaudy. If he stuck anything in Harry, it wouldn’t be rubber. Or PVC, whatever that was. “Do you see anything you like?”

“Yeah, I’m looking at him.”

Draco snorted, then smiled when Harry wrapped his arms around him from behind. “Look at you.”

“What about me?”

“Acting like we’ve only started dating.”

“Should I stop?”

“No, you should not.” Draco tilted his head back, giving Harry a peck on the temple. He rubbed a hand over Harry’s, increasingly dubious about the store’s wares. “But really, love, do you like anything?”

“I see a few things.”

“Do you really? It’s all rather poorly made, don’t you think?”

Harry jabbed him in the side. “A little louder, Draco. I don’t think they heard you on the street.” Draco frowned, and Harry reached past him, pointing at the wall. “That one looks all right.”

Draco took the item. Nipple clamps. They were little more than glorified alligator clips attached by a thin chain. “If you want me to torture your nipples, I could do that for free with my teeth.”

“Yeah, I know. You nearly took them off last Saturday.”

Draco growled, turning in Harry’s arms. “I told you, if it’s too much, you have to tell me to stop—”

“Just a second,” Harry said, stepping back and taking out his mobile.

Sighing, Draco crossed his arms. They’d had some good Saturdays. They were neophytes, make no mistake, but they were having some of the best sex of their relationship. Draco was feeling more comfortable as they went on, reassured by how blissful Harry was afterwards.

Still, though, Harry would be left with bruises or giving a wince. He wasn’t saying no to anything. Draco was half tempted to order him to use the safeword at some point, just to make sure he could. He needed to be sure that Harry felt all right about stopping things if they went too far.

Harry was staring at his phone. “What is it?” Draco asked.

“Oh, only *The Daily Prophet* calling to confirm that seventy-five more people have been added to the party’s guest list, and that half of them have declined.”

Eyes widening, Draco hissed, “Seventy-five?”

“She did not tell me about this,” Harry said quickly.

“Of course she didn’t. She hasn’t told you a thing until she’s gone ahead and done it.” Harry’s phone vibrated again, and Draco snapped, “What now?”

Harry’s eyes bugged out. “Oh—nothing—”

Draco snatched the phone from Harry’s hands, looking at the message. ‘Do you have any comment on Minister Slowbit’s statement?’ Below that was an image of said statement from the Minister of Magical Accidents and Catastrophes. ‘I will not be attending this ridiculous affair celebrating the Confounding of Britain’s greatest hero by a Death Eater. Anyone who does should be ashamed for participating in this farce.’

Feeling himself pale, Draco held onto the phone a moment longer, then calmly handed it back to Harry. Harry was leaning back, obviously preparing himself for an outburst.

Draco fought to keep his temper under control. He realized he still had the nipple clamps in his other hand. Taking a breath, he turned to put them back on the wall. “If you want those, I would prefer to have a set made for you. I will not sacrifice quality for convenience. Also, you’ll need to change your phone number again. Now—shall we go to dinner?”

They had ordered their food, passing their menus back to the waiter, when Harry cringed, leaning forward on crossed arms. “Can we talk about this?”

Carefully arranging his napkin across his lap, Draco said, “There’s nothing to discuss. This is merely a function of being placed on display for the whole of England to mock and despise, thanks to Molly Weasley’s perversity.”

“What do you want me to do? How can I make this better?”

Draco looked across the table to Harry. He looked earnest. So Draco did him the courtesy of being honest. “Ask Molly to cancel the party.”

Harry dropped his head. “Anything but that.”

“Then I don’t know what there is to discuss, Harry.”

“It’s just a party.”

“We’ve gone over this—”

“Let’s just get through it. It could be good for us.”

“How on earth could it be—”

“If we just did this in public, for once—maybe we could prove to people—” Harry cut himself off, shutting his eyes.

Draco leapt on that immediately. “Prove ourselves?”

“That was stupid, I shouldn’t have said that—”

“I do not need to prove to anyone, let alone the general public, let alone Molly Weasley, that my love for you is real. That what we have is a marriage, not some trick I’ve pulled on you—”

Harry reached out his hands. “I know that. I know that. You know that I know that.”

Draco patted his hands together, inhaling deeply. “Please. I don’t want to do this. We went through this when we got together. I don’t want to do this again.”

For a moment, Harry said nothing. Then he looked at Draco and said, “I need you to do this for me.” Draco sat back, disappointed. “I know you don’t want to. But I can’t call this off. Molly would be humiliated, and I can’t do that to her.”

Draco paused, then said, “Better that I should be humiliated.”

Harry started to protest, but stopped. He was picking sides, it was obvious. He couldn’t claim otherwise.

“I know that you can take it,” Harry said. “I know this whole thing will be terrible for you, but I also know that you’re strong enough to take it, and you won’t leave me for it. But if I tell Molly that we can’t do this... I don’t know that she’d ever forgive me.”

“Of course she would—”

“I don’t know that,” Harry said. “Could you please—please—do this for me?”

This was the proverbial rock and a hard place. Insist on canceling the party and Harry would resent him for putting him in a difficult position with Molly. Go ahead with this stupidity and have to face yet another round of ‘Draco Malfoy performed Dark Magic on the Chosen One,’ culminating in having to sit in front of dozens upon dozens of people staring at him in judgment.

But there wasn’t a choice. For all his sharp edges, Draco was madly and hopelessly in love with Harry. When Harry asked him to do something, it wasn’t a question at all.

“Well,” Draco said, “since you asked so nicely.”

Harry relaxed. He also looked incredibly guilty. “Is there anything else I can do to make up for this? Anything you want. Vacation? Some new robes that cost more than our house?”

“I do like when you bribe me.”

“Name your price.”

“No. No bribes. I like making you happy.”

Groaning, Harry said, "Twist the knife a little deeper, why don't you." He reached across the table, and Draco let Harry take his hand. Twitching a finger along Draco's thumb, Harry smiled at him. "You sure you don't want to plan some vacation for later in the summer? We haven't gone anywhere since Christmas."

"Let me think on it."

"While you think on it, can I make an inquiry?"

"An inquiry as to what?"

"You said something in the shop that piqued my interest."

"Did I? What was it?"

"That you'd have something made for me."

"Ah. You like that, then?"

"Do you care to go into detail?"

"It's crossed my mind. Your body is far too lovely to subject to subpar treatment." Draco traced a finger over Harry's knuckles. "I have all sorts of notions. Perhaps a harness made from dragon leather?"

"I like how it's evolved from my leather thing to our leather thing."

"We have had no leather yet, and I don't intend to until it's worthy of being worn by you."

"You're such a bloody romantic."

"Try not to sound so stunned."

"You'll never stop surprising me."

They smiled at one another, and separated as the waiter returned with wine.

Chapter 7

“Mr. Malfoy,” a dour voice said.

Without looking up from the parchment, Draco replied, “Yes, Snikclaw.”

“Someone to see you.”

“I have no appointments scheduled. I know this, because I explicitly made this space of time to work on the Forebridge account. You’ll have to tell whoever it is that I’m unavailable.”

Draco continued writing, considering the matter closed. Only Snikclaw said, even more sour, “She was *quite* insistent.”

A hunch abruptly became certainty. Looking up, dread pooling in his gut, Draco said, “Molly Weasley?”

“The very same,” the goblin replied, holding onto the doorknob.

Inhaling through the nose, Draco took a hard look at Snikclaw. His assistant, though never thrilled at working for a human, did his job exceedingly well. If Snikclaw was bothering him about this, it was probably because Molly had threatened to throw a fit in the middle of Gringott’s.

Draco set aside his quill and sighed. “Send her in.”

Snikclaw made a low, guttural sound, clearly displeased by Molly’s victory. *Aren’t we all*, Draco thought darkly.

A moment later, Molly came bustling through the door. “Afternoon, Draco.”

Draco was used to attending titans of industry in his beautifully outfitted office. Molly came in looking like a pile of rags in motion. *Stop it. You’re being a snob. Harry loves her, so stop being miserable and be a good host.* “Molly,” Draco said, rising halfway from his chair. “Lovely to see you. Have a seat.”

Molly was already sitting down in his best chair, directly in front of him. She had a large bag with her. From experience, Draco knew it could practically hold the contents of the Burrow. He had a sudden nightmare of every single thing Molly Weasley had ever owned or discarded strewn across his office.

Draco retook his seat, bracing himself. “This is unexpected.”

“Well, I’ve had some difficulty getting answers from you regarding the party, so I thought a straight forward approach might do it.”

“Harry’s answered for both of us. I honestly would rather defer to him on this.”

Molly smiled. A shark's smile. "Oh, but you should have equal input. After all, the party is a celebration for the both of you."

You should have gone into finance. Or politics. Actually, the thought put him out in hives. "Was there something particular you wanted my opinion on?"

"Just a small thing," Molly said, reaching into her bag up to her shoulder. "I won't take up too much of your time. I know how important you are." Her smile went from predator to sickly sweet in a heartbeat.

Strangely nauseous, Draco answered, "Anything I can do to help."

Molly pulled out a large book and slapped it down on the desk. It was brown and tattered, bursting with pages sticking out the sides. It looked like some sort of scrapbook. As she opened it, Draco realized with horror that it was. The entire book was devoted to the party.

"The party's only two weeks away," Molly said, and didn't Draco know it, "but we haven't discussed the wardrobe yet."

"Did we need to?"

"Oh, you're a card, Draco. We'd agreed that you and Harry would be dressed in the party's colours."

Draco stared at her in disbelief. They most certainly had not. "I don't recall that conversation."

"Really? I'm sure I sent you a letter about it."

"There were quite a number of letters. Perhaps you thought you mentioned it?"

"Maybe I did. I'm an old woman, Draco. Sometimes things slip. Nonetheless!" Molly lifted the book towards him, showing Draco two large squares of fabric. "In case you'd forgotten. I know you're busy."

Draco had *not* forgotten. He could not erase the abomination from his mind. The colours Molly had chosen for the party, after dithering over the initial orange and red, were kelly green and mandarin orange. Not a tasteful olive, or a rich emerald, or a spiced pumpkin. No. Bright, tacky, primary green and orange.

"Still a—bold choice," Draco said faintly.

Lowering the book, Molly said, "Really?" Draco honestly couldn't tell if she was serious or not, and that terrified him. "They were the colours for my and Arthur's wedding. A lot of good memories there. A lot of luck."

Draco was thinking as quickly as he could. His dress robes were made by the finest silk spinners in China, a beautiful black that demanded no colour be added. He usually buttoned the collar all the way up his throat. It made him look wonderfully severe, and yes, a

bit like a dark wizard, but he adored them. They might be a touch too much for the party. If he called his man in Kensington and had a set of dress robes made quickly—yes. Black robes, a white shirt. He could have a green pocket square. He loved green. Maybe he could even wear some eye shadow, liven things up. It was doable.

Harry could wear anything. His light brown skin set off any colour beautifully. He could even get away with a bright orange tie if the situation demanded it.

“I’ll see about getting some ties and pocket squares made,” Draco said, bordering on relief.

Molly blinked at him. “Beg pardon?”

“For our dress robes.”

Molly smiled again. “Oh *no*, Draco. This is what I was thinking.” She flipped the page and turned the book around.

For a moment, Draco could only stare. The dress robes on the page weren’t black with coloured accents. The dress robes themselves were bright orange and green.

“Hm,” he managed to push out.

“They’re quite fashionable, aren’t they?” Molly said, and he could just hear the glee in her voice.

She wanted him to revolt. She was just waiting for him to dig in his heels, so that he was the bad guy, ruining the innocuous party that Molly was throwing for *them*, to celebrate *them*. This was an endurance test, make no mistake about it.

Fine. He could do this. He could have suits made. Muggle-style suits. If they were cut in an extra skinny style, they *would* be fashionable. Draco could just picture himself in a slim fitting green suit. Merlin’s beard, he might actually be the best looking person at the party. Besides Harry, of course.

“That can be done,” Draco said with some determination.

“Of course, Harry will wear green.”

Draco stared at her. Molly gazed back, challenging him.

Eventually, Draco said, “I think...I would look better in the green.”

“Pish posh. Green would go best with Harry’s eyes.”

Draco did not wear orange. He didn’t wear warm colours, period, because they made him look ridiculous. He pictured himself, kitted out in bright orange, on display for an entire party, and by extension the whole of England, thanks to all the reporters who would be present. Draco smoothed his fingers over the edge of his desk, desperately trying to figure a way out of the situation.

I need you to do this for me, Harry had said.

Draco thought of all the hurdles he had needed to defeat to be worthy of Harry. He thought of all the years, all the apologies. The gift of Harry. He had fought so hard to get to this point in his life. He'd not gotten this far by always keeping his dignity.

So Draco smiled slightly and said, "That sounds lovely, Molly. I'll contact my tailor, and see what we can have done." Before she could reply, Draco stood up and began moving to the door. "Now, you'll excuse me, but I really do have a small mountain of work to get through." He opened the door.

Molly paused, then took her book and returned it to her bag. "Of course. Thank you for taking the time to see me." She stood up and walked over to him. Molly looked him up and down, then patted his chest. "Try and get some rest before the party, dear. You're looking tired."

She smiled once more and walked out the door.

Draco closed it after her. One thing they agreed on—he was suddenly exhausted.

"Feast your eyes," Draco said, tossing the paper onto Harry's lap before dropping onto the other end of the sofa.

He made himself comfortable as Harry picked up the sketches from the tailor. "What the fuck is this?" Harry said in disbelief.

"Our outfits for the party."

Harry looked at him in confusion. "Why is the blonde one wearing orange?"

"Because that's what I'm wearing."

"You don't wear orange. You don't wear warm colours."

"According to Molly, yes I do." Draco explained, "She came to see me at work today. She made a proclamation. Behold, our outfits."

"I'll talk to her—"

"Don't," Draco said, picking up a pillow and laying it over his own face. "I don't have the strength to argue with her."

"She shouldn't be bothering you about this at work. I'm sorry."

"Two more weeks and it's over. Then you take me to Switzerland."

"Have we decided on Switzerland?"

“We haven’t decided on anything. *I* have decided on Switzerland.”

“Fair enough. Oi. Let me see your face.” Harry lifted the pillow and smiled at Draco. “How was the rest of your day?”

“I made an outrageous sum of money. The commoners would be sickened if they ever knew the exact numbers. They’d put my head on a pike. You?”

“Didn’t have to go in today. Watched TV.”

“Lazy bastard. Did you make dinner?”

“Waiting in the fridge, whenever you’re ready. Hey.” Harry put a hand to Draco’s ribs and gave him a light shake. “What would you say to shaking things up?”

“We’re not opening this relationship, and if you ever cheat on me, I’ll hex toenails to grow out of your eyeballs.”

“Your insecurities aside, no, that’s not what I’m suggesting. What if we play a bit tonight?”

“It’s a Wednesday.”

“Yeah, I know that. Hence the ‘shaking things up’ bit.”

“It was a long day, Harry. Even setting aside the Molly catastrophe—”

“Then we get rid of today by doing something different. It doesn’t have to be playing. We could go to a movie. Or fuck the casserole I just made, we could order in from that Guatemalan place you like. It just really feels like a Wednesday—regardless of the fact that I didn’t work today, before you drive that point home. I just have an itch to do something other than what we usually do.”

Draco thought about it. He was tired, yes, but he didn’t want to be the type of man who said no to things because it was the middle of a work week. At least not all the time. When he was younger, he’d just say, fuck it, and take off for the other side of the world because he’d heard the coffee was sublime. Engaging in a little slap and tickle on a Wednesday wouldn’t exactly break the bank, as it were.

He sat up, swinging his legs over the side of the sofa. “Let me have a shower and eat some food, and then I’ll see what we can do. I still have to be in bed by ten.”

“You wild man, you.”

Harry said with some amusement, “We’ve had dinner, done the dishes, and even folded the laundry. Were there any other chores you want to take care of?”

“I think you’re just being cheeky in the hopes of being punished,” Draco replied, stepping closer. He put his hands to Harry’s neck and bent down to kiss him. In all honesty, he would have just gladly taken Harry to bed without all the bells and whistles.

Harry leaned into the kiss, and murmured, “Mm, what if I am?”

“Did you have something particular in mind?” Draco began to lay kisses along Harry’s cheekbone, letting his eyes close.

“I did.”

“What’s that?”

Harry set a hand to Draco’s chest and said, “I want you to hit me.”

Draco paused, then drew back a few centimeters. “Beg pardon?”

Harry looked up at him with determination. “It doesn’t have to be hard. I just want to try it. You tell me to do something, I don’t do it, you give me a little slap to tell me what’s what.”

“Oh—Harry, I don’t know—”

“It’s just something I want to try. I think it’s hot. When I’ve seen it happen. Could we try?”

Hesitating, Draco considered it. He didn’t like the idea. But he’d also thought Harry was mildly insane when he found out about the kink stuff in general. Giving it a go didn’t mean committing to anything in the future. Maybe he *would* like it. And if he didn’t, they wouldn’t have to do it again.

“We can try,” Draco agreed. “But if I don’t care for it, we don’t do it again.”

“Of course not.”

“All right then. Anything else, while you’re asking Father Christmas for presents?”

Harry raised a brow and said, “If this is you fishing for me to call you Daddy, you can get stuffed—”

Draco gave him a light shove and started to cackle.

It started out well enough.

Draco had Harry on his knees, a hand clamped in his hair. He had Harry bobbing forward and back to a fierce rhythm, feeling the tip of his cock touching Harry’s throat. Despite seven years of sex, Draco would never cease to be amazed at how Harry never

gagged. Draco had never managed the trick, as Harry would gleefully remind him on occasion.

The prick.

Harry's teeth dug in, and Draco hissed. "None of that," he growled between gritted teeth.

A minute passed by, and Draco felt the end approaching. He closed his eyes and gasped.

Harry's teeth nearly sliced him.

Startled, Draco yanked Harry's head back. "What the fuck was that?"

Harry looked up at him, defiant. "What was what?"

Right. He was *supposed* to misbehave this time. Nonetheless. Draco pulled Harry's head back by the hair, baring his throat, and bent down to glare into his eyes. "If you want to fuck around, you don't do it with me prick in your mouth, you little bitch."

He threw Harry off.

Disgruntled, Draco stepped away. He put his feet into his trousers and pulled them up. Twenty seconds away from orgasm and Harry pulls this.

"What are you doing, sir?"

Dropping his head back, Draco turned around. Harry sat on the floor, faking innocence. "What did I tell you about calling me that?"

"I don't know, sir. What did you tell me?"

All of a sudden, Draco was tired of this. It had been a long day, and he felt irritated. That was no mood to play in. Draco put a hand to his forehead, trying to collect himself. "Harry—"

Harry was abruptly on his feet, pulling at Draco's trousers. "We weren't done yet—"

"Harry, stop it."

"Stop what?"

He was deliberately being obnoxious, and Draco was over it. He was tempted to give Harry a smack half because he deserved it, half to just get him to stop. "Get your hands—off me—"

Harry pinched Draco's wrist, hard, to get him to stop fighting over the trousers, and Draco was over it. Because it was what Harry wanted, hoping it would make him stop, Draco gave him a light slap to the cheek.

Harry's arms shot out, and he snapped, "Is that the best you've got?"

Draco lost his temper. He pulled back his arm and slapped Harry as hard as he could.

The sound echoed through the kitchen. Harry's glasses went flying, his head jerking to the side. Harry went still, a shiver going through his body. Calmer, he said, "Now that wasn't so hard, was—"

"Umbridge," Draco said.

"What?"

Draco stared at Harry, horrified. There was a trickle of blood coming from Harry's nostril.

Shame ripped through Draco's body at lightning speed, and he fell away from Harry, shaking his head. "I can't do this. I can't do this."

Immediately becoming himself again, Harry stepped forward. "Hey—sweetheart—it's okay—"

Draco stumbled backwards, vehemently shaking his head. "No! No it's not okay, it's—Umbridge! Umbridge on the whole thing, Umbridge on—Merlin's beard, even saying that name—I can't, I just can't."

He turned and fled the room, bounding up the stairs.

Faintly, Draco heard Harry calling after him. He couldn't stop. He felt sick, as if he might actually vomit. Draco fell into the bathroom and slammed the door. Locking it, he turned on the cold water all the way and bent over the sink.

He couldn't catch his breath. He pulled in big, gasping breaths, his heart pounding in his ears.

He wasn't this person. He couldn't be this person. Not again. Not again.

There was a knocking at the door. "Draco—love, please let me in—"

"Stop talking!" Draco said, and discovered that he was on the edge of tears. He put shaky hands under the tap and splashed his face. It did nothing to help. Bracing his hands on the sink again, Draco lowered himself carefully to the ground.

He dropped with a thud. Turning around, he pulled his knees close to his chest, and wrapped his arms around them. Starting to weep, Draco lowered his head and shut out everything but the disgust he felt for himself.

It was some time later. Draco still sat on the floor of the bathroom. He felt exhausted and soggy. There was a pain, right in the middle of his forehead, from all the tears he'd shed.

Draco rubbed at it a moment, clumsily. He was getting irritated by the sound of water. He twisted a hand at the air, and the tap shut itself off.

Draco leaned back against the cupboard, breathing slowly. He knew Harry was right outside the door. He could hear the way the wood creaked.

What kind of man hit the person he loved most in the world?

A Malfoy, that's bloody who.

There was a gentle tap at the door. "Sweetheart?" Harry said hesitantly. "Can we talk now?"

Draco swallowed, and answered hoarsely, "Not much to talk about. Your husband is a fucking monster, is all."

"Oh—no. No, love, please don't—I'm sorry. I am so sorry, I pushed you. I know I pushed you too far, and I'm so sorry—"

"Please don't apologize to me," Draco said, sick. "I hurt you. I hit you, and I hurt you. How could I have done that?"

"Because I asked you to. Because I—my wiring is just all fucked up and I find some things sexy that no person in their right mind would find sexy and... Draco, can you please open the door? I want to see your face."

Draco gave it a few seconds, then reached up and unlocked the door.

The door knob turned, and Harry pushed it open. As soon as Draco saw his face, he moaned and looked down. "Hey," Harry said, and reached out.

"Don't touch me," Draco said quickly, squeezing his eyes shut. "Please don't—"

"Okay. Okay. I'm just going to sit right out here. I'm just going to sit here with you. Draco, I'm fine. Physically, emotionally, I'm completely fine. The only thing wrong with me is I'm worried about you."

"You're not fine. Your face."

"What about my face?"

Draco looked up. Harry's left nostril was crusted with blood. His eye was surrounded by a dusky purple. "Fuck," Draco said, feeling a wave of dizziness.

Harry reached up, touching his nose. "Shit. I didn't even look, I've just been sitting out here. Listen, it's not that bad—"

"I've given you a black eye."

"You have not—"

“I gave you a bloody nose and a black eye. Fuck, what’s wrong with me?”

Draco pulled his knees up again and buried his face in them. He felt about fifteen years old again, full with something dark he couldn’t understand, and completely out of control.

“Draco. Hey. I want you to listen to me. You’ve done nothing wrong—”

“Yes I—”

“No. You did what I asked—”

“Even though I didn’t want to!” Draco cried out. He shook his head at Harry. “I didn’t want to do this. I didn’t want to, and I did it anyways. That was a choice. That was a choice I made, and I fucked it all up. I did all of this for the wrong reason.”

“What reason is that?”

“Because you asked me to,” Draco answered. “I would do anything you asked me to. Even if it made me—uncomfortable. Even if it felt wrong. Stupid fucking Draco Malfoy, always doing the wrong thing instead of just saying no—”

“Hey,” Harry said firmly. “No. That’s not you.”

“Yes it is. For all the grief I give you—all I’ve ever done is say yes to the people I love. Even when I know it’s wrong. Even when I knew it could kill half the world. I want to act like I’ve changed, but I haven’t. I said yes even though it meant hurting you, and I *don’t want to hurt you*—”

Draco’s voice caught in his throat, and Harry leaned forward, holding his eyes. “You said no. You just said no. And I listened. I’m listening to you. We never have to do any of this ever again. Not ever. We went too far today. Not you, we. You’re the one who said no. And I’m listening.”

“I don’t want to be this.”

“You aren’t this,” Harry said. “This was a mutual fuck up. One we’re not going to make again. And I am so sorry. I never, ever meant to make you feel like this.”

Draco glanced at him, his lip trembling. “I didn’t mean to hit you so hard,” he said, in a voice that sounded far too young to be his.

Harry’s face went soft, and he leaned forward. “Love, please don’t cry—”

The unthinkable happened. There was a loud *puff* from downstairs, and there was suddenly someone calling, “Hello? Harry?”

Draco gasped, shaking his head. “No. No no no—”

“Harry? Are you here?”

It was Ron. Why hadn't they put out the fire? Why in the hell hadn't they put out the fire?

"I can't deal with this," Draco said, feeling frantic.

Harry was already on his feet, reaching for the door. "Ron! I'll be right down!" He put a hand down to Draco. "Calm down. Just stay there. I'll get rid of him."

He closed the door. Draco groaned, then fell onto his side. This day...was the worst.

They lay in bed, neither of them sleeping. After Harry got Ron to leave (how, Draco didn't know), Draco hadn't wanted to do anything else. He just wanted to be in his bed, where it was dark, and quiet, and hidden. Harry lay behind him, an arm protectively around Draco's waist.

Draco felt calmer, but not exactly better. He felt like an idiot, for any number of reasons.

Harry kissed the back of his shoulder and said, "Stay home tomorrow."

"No."

"We could have a day off together. Read together."

"No. I just want to...be a normal person tomorrow."

"Okay."

Harry's face was back to normal, but Draco didn't know if he'd ever get the image from his mind, or the sound of the slap. Harry was insistent that it hadn't hurt, but Draco didn't believe him.

Harry lightly scratched against Draco's belly. "Do you remember when we met for the second time?"

"I do."

"I was sitting at home one night, minding my own business, and you popped up on my doorstep. Drunk. Apologizing. You were so pitiful."

"Yes, how one would expect to begin an epic romance."

Harry pulled him closer and said, "But it was. It took a lot to do that. Even if you were hammered."

"Courage doesn't count if you need alcohol to achieve it."

"Were you drunk the next time I saw you?"

“You know I wasn’t.”

“You apologized. Sober. You were sincere, and thoughtful, and you were brave.”

“You didn’t believe a word out of my mouth.”

“Maybe not. But I couldn’t help but notice how attractive you’d gotten.” Harry laid another small kiss to Draco’s neck. “Especially after you cut off that ridiculous ponytail.”

“We’re agreed on that, at least.” Draco was silent a moment, then said, “I don’t want to be my father.”

“You are not your father.”

“He hit me. A lot. He said he loved me, but he hit me. He did a lot of things because he said he loved me. I don’t want to be that kind of man. I don’t want to be that kind of husband or, Merlin forbid, a father.”

“I know that you’re not,” Harry said. “Do you believe me?”

Draco inhaled, then nodded.

“We had a fuck up today. But it’s not the end of the world. It doesn’t mean you’re your father. It doesn’t mean you’re acting the way you used to. It means we were shit at communicating with one another. We’re new to this whole thing, and I broke the rules. I knew you didn’t want to do it. I got ahead of myself. I want you to accept my apology. I want you to accept that we were both at fault—the both of us. And I want you to accept my apology.”

Draco put his hand over Harry’s. It felt heavy on his tongue, but he said, “I forgive you.”

“Now—tell me you’re sorry for going ahead, even though you didn’t want to.”

“I am so very sorry.”

“I know you are, and I forgive you. I love you, Draco. I want you to be happy. Do you hear me?”

Draco nodded, and whispered, “Yeah.”

“Good.” Harry slipped an arm under Draco’s neck, pulling him closer. “Want to reminisce about our epic romance awhile?”

“No. I’d rather you just held onto me.”

“I can do that.”

Chapter 8

When the knock came at the door, Draco let his head fall onto the desk. He hit it against the surface a few times, then sat back up, collecting himself. "Come in."

He appeared to be sedately writing when Snikclaw opened the door. "Sir."

Just from the tone of his voice, Draco could only imagine what was coming next. Crossing his arms on the desk, Draco said, "So help me, if Molly Weasley comes back through that door, I will spell your feet backwards."

"It's a Weasley. Not that Weasley."

"Which one?"

Snikclaw's lip curled. "The Auror."

Draco's stomach dropped out. What in the holy hell could Ronald Weasley want with him? His mind jumped to yesterday, but Harry had said it was taken care of. It had to be something to do with the party. Hopefully.

Draco put away his quill and sat back. "Send him in," he said quietly.

Snikclaw withdrew, grumbling. He was obviously as thrilled about all the Weasleys as Draco was.

A moment later, Ron strode into the room, tall and dressed in Auror's robes. He looked positively grim. Perhaps his mother had roped him into carrying some message, performing some party-related task. Despite not being a particularly impressive teenager, Ron had become an Auror of some note, far too important to be dealing with his mother's whims.

"Ron," Draco said.

Shutting the door, Ron cast him a look. "Draco." He lowered himself into the seat before Draco's desk. His legs were too long, knees sticking up.

Wanting to get whatever this was out of the way, Draco said, "To what do I owe the pleasure?"

Ron ran his hands up and down the arms of his chair, then looked at Draco head on. "I'm not going to bother with small talk. I need to ask you something."

"All right."

"Did you hit Harry?"

Draco was a notoriously pale man. Once a moth had gotten into the house and insisted on throwing itself relentlessly against him. Harry had actually pissed himself a bit laughing, a

fact Draco could never use against him in public because of the horror that Harry would use the same story against him. In that moment, however, the remaining warmth in his face absolutely drained away.

Ron was shaking his head. “He said he got hurt at work. And it didn’t sound right, but he told me it wasn’t a good time because you were having a bad day, so I listened and I left. But it didn’t feel right, and it didn’t make sense. Why would he have gotten all the way from work to home without fixing a bloody nose? So I checked in. He wasn’t at work yesterday. They hadn’t called him in since last week. And the only thing in my head that makes any sense at all is if you hit him. Did you?”

It was none of his business. And of course it was his business. He was closer to Harry than his brothers. Draco knew this. A part of him, perversely, wanted to be punished. Wanted the world to know his shame. Draco couldn’t even think of a lie.

“I did,” Draco said.

The colour that had left Draco’s face appeared on Ron’s. Lips pressed so firmly together that they disappeared, Ron’s face flushed pink, then red.

Voice a touch strangled, Ron said, “We’re not going to wands over it. If we did, I’d kill you. And you’re not worth it. But I’m going to arrest you, and if you resist, it would be far too easy for my hand to slip and lay the killing curse.”

Sighing, Draco said, “Ron, it’s not what you think—”

“Not what I think?” Ron shoved himself to his feet. “Get up. Get up this second or this will hurt. Get up before I lose my temper—”

“If you arrest me, you’ll embarrass Harry even more than you think.”

“Embarrass him? You bloody—*abuser*, you hit my friend and you think that—”

“He asked me to do it.”

Ron stared at him, then screwed up his face. “Have you lost your mind? You think anyone is going to believe that, you—”

“It’s the truth. You can ask him.”

“Do not—be daft. Why in the hell would Harry ask you to hit him?”

Draco said, sounding calmer than he felt, “It’s an S&M thing.”

Why did I ever get married? Draco wondered. Ron seemed to be frozen, like some invisible source had cast *Petrificus Totalis*. Draco looked off into a corner, clearing his throat. His cheeks were starting to itch.

“It’s what?”

“It is—a sex thing. That we tried. It got out of hand. It will not be happening again.”

“I don’t understand.”

“I really don’t want to go into further detail—”

Ron yelled, “What the fuck did you talk him into? He’s—he’s Harry Potter! He’s Harry Potter, bad enough he married you, but now you’ve got him doing some perverted sex stuff—”

“I am *not* the one who suggested it.”

“Bullshit—”

“I am not,” Draco said, giving Ron a look.

It took a few seconds, but Ron’s eyes widened. He wavered there, then abruptly dropped back into his seat.

Draco tapped his foot nervously against the ground. It suddenly seemed important that he make himself clear, just to prevent any further misunderstandings. “We’ve been together seven years. When he brought it up, I said yes, because—well, you know what marriages are like, it doesn’t hurt to keep things interesting. But I did not care for this, and if you really must know, when you walked into our house, I was sitting on our bathroom floor weeping because I was so upset about what I’d done to him. I love Harry. I love him so much that I said yes when I should have said no. Regardless, what he and I do in the privacy of our home is our business, not yours. I’m glad you’re looking out for him, but—this situation will not be repeated. If you don’t believe me, ask Harry.”

There was a very long silence.

“Merlin’s scrotum,” Ron said. “I wish I didn’t know any of that.”

“Well, you walked in here and threatened to arrest me, so we were at an impasse. I’m not thrilled about you knowing either.”

“Well. This is...awkward.”

“That would be an understatement, Ronald.”

“Fuck,” Ron said suddenly. “Oh fuck.”

“What now?” Draco said, distressed.

Ron looked at Draco with horror. “I told Mum.”

Draco tried to think of any situation that could possibly be worse. He couldn’t come up with a single thing. Staring at Ron, Draco couldn’t even speak.

They both stood at the same moment. “I’ll go to the Burrow,” Ron said.

“I’ll go to the house,” Draco said, grabbing his cloak.

“I’m—blimey—”

“I don’t need your apologies, I need you to keep your mother from murdering me!”

“Yes—yes, priorities!” Ron said, throwing the door open, and they ran out of the office towards the fireplaces.

Draco nearly leapt from the fireplace. He glanced around the front room, searching for scorch marks. The house appeared to be in one piece—for now.

“Harry!” Draco yelled. “Are you here?”

There was a painful silence, but then an answering voice said, “Draco?”

Slumping with relief, Draco said, “Thank Salazar, you lazy bastard.”

Harry appeared in the kitchen doorway, holding a dish towel. “What’s wrong?”

Taking a step towards him, Draco said, “Don’t panic—but Molly—”

“Christ, is it something else about the party?” Harry tossed the dish towel over his shoulder, rolling his eyes.

“No, it’s a *touch* more pressing than that—”

Ashes suddenly plumed from the fireplace in a cloud. Draco turned, feeling his insides twist, stepping out of the way.

Molly came walking out of the fireplace, wand in hand, murder in her eyes. “Harry!” she said. Then she caught sight of Draco. “You!”

Draco scrambled backwards, hands up. “Molly—”

“I should *Crucio* you, you little shit—”

“Molly!” Harry yelped, darting across the room. “What on earth—”

Molly turned to Harry, taking him by the wrist. “Come on, Harry. We’re leaving.”

She actually managed to pull him a few steps before Harry dug in his heels. “What? Where are we—what’s going on?”

“I tried to tell you,” Draco said.

“Tell me what?”

“Oh, only that Ron told her I hit you, so she thinks I’m abusing you.”

Harry stared at Draco, then turned to Molly. “No. No, that’s not what happened—”

Molly pointed her wand at Draco. “I knew it! From the start! I knew this was just some cruel trick on poor Harry! Are you happy now? What sick kind of man would slap around Harry Potter? A Death Eater, that’s who! Same as you’ve always been!”

Harry grabbed Molly by both arms and turned her away from Draco. “Listen to me. Draco didn’t—you don’t understand what’s happening here.”

“Harry! Listen to yourself.” Molly put her hands to Harry’s face. “You poor thing, he has you convinced he’s done nothing wrong—”

“No, that’s—” Harry closed his eyes, shaking his head. “It’s not—it’s not like that!”

“Come on, Harry. We’re going home to the Burrow. I’ll send the boys to get your things later.” Molly glared at Draco. “And I’ll send the whole bloody Department of Magical Enforcement after you if you dare try to stop them!”

“Molly. Draco didn’t hurt me. This is all a mistake. It’s not how you think.”

“Enough, Harry. We’re leaving.” Molly began dragging Harry towards the fireplace again.

Harry looked at Draco helplessly. Draco threw up his hands, hissing, “Tell her!”

Stricken, Harry mouthed, ‘No.’

“Are you joking? I just had to tell Ron everything, and you can’t tell her the truth to keep her from dragging you out of this house?”

Harry yanked his wrist out of Molly’s grasp. “I can’t—I can’t leave, Molly.”

“Harry,” Molly said soothingly, “I know you thinks he loves you, but—”

“I beg your pardon!” Draco said. “Do not come in my house and—”

“I’ve had enough from you! Harry, he doesn’t love you, he’s tricked you—”

“Are you just going to let her talk like that about me?” Draco said in disbelief. “You’re just going to keep your mouth shut instead of telling her the truth?”

“What truth, Harry? What lies has he been telling you?”

Harry looked between them, green eyes huge. His mouth opened and closed a few times.

Looking at Molly, he deflated slightly. “Nothing.”

Flabbergasted, Draco could only stare a moment.

Then he said loudly, “Fuck *this*.”

“Draco,” Harry said.

“No! You know what? Molly, you don’t need to take him anywhere. *I’ll* leave.”

“No, Draco, please—”

“You’re right, Molly. I hit him. I hit him for no reason, because I’m a monster, just like everybody told him I was. You win, all right? You finally win. Have him. I’m leaving.”

Draco walked around them both, throwing off Harry’s hand when Harry tried to stop him. He took the stairs two at a time, Harry on his heels, Molly shouting at him to just let Draco go.

Striding into the bedroom, Draco took out his wand, and with one harsh flick had a suitcase flying from the closet. The drawers opened and essentials started flying into it.

“Draco—you’re not leaving—”

“Yes, I am leaving. I’m not going to stand here, in my own house, while that woman believes lies about me, and you don’t even have the bollocks to set her right. I can’t believe you, Harry! She’s literally dragging you out of our house and you can’t stand up to her!” Draco slammed the lid of the suitcase shut.

Harry tried to get between him and the suitcase. “I didn’t know what to say, all right? Can you just give me a minute to think?”

“No! You had a choice! You could either stick up for me, like a man, like a proper husband, or you could just be the same boy you always have been, following orders, because you can’t think for your bloody self! And don’t tell me you didn’t have a choice, because if it had been me, what would I have done? If someone came into this house, making accusations about you, what do you think I would have done?” Draco grabbed his suitcase and escaped Harry’s grasp, livid and heartbroken. “I am not doing this. I know my worth, even if you don’t.”

“No—Draco, please—”

Draco walked back out of the room, galloping down the stairs. Molly was still standing in front of the fireplace, arms crossed, glaring daggers at him. Draco grabbed his good cloak from the stand and reached for the front door.

“Draco, don’t go.”

“Harry, let him go,” Molly said. “You’ll be better off.”

Then, with a roar that filled the entire house, Harry shouted, “NO I WON’T!”

Draco was so startled that he fumbled his suitcase. It hit the ground with a clatter.

When he turned around, he found Harry standing between him and Molly, hands making fists. Harry was staring at him, desperate and determined. “Don’t you dare leave me,”

Harry threatened. “If you try to leave this house, I will bind you to the floorboards, Draco Malfoy, and I have the bloody materials to do it!”

He rounded on Molly.

“I asked—him—to hit me! I asked him! It is a sex thing! I asked my husband to do something that I thought would turn me on, and it did, and he hated it, and I love him to bloody death for it! I want to be tied up, and bossed around, and hit, and whipped, and what I do when I fuck my husband is none of your fucking concern!”

Draco was so taken aback that he couldn’t even take pleasure from the look on Molly’s face.

Walking up to Molly, Harry said, “And for another thing! This stupid bloody party! I’m not doing it! I am not doing it because it’s cruel! It’s putting Draco through hell and judgment and ridicule and I should have never agreed but I did because I am weak and any time I try to tell you no you make me feel ungrateful and I chose you over him on this and I hate myself for it! But I am never, ever choosing your side over his ever again because he is my husband, and I adore him, and do you know why I do? Because I can tell him no! Do you know why I want him to tell me what to do? Because he’s the only person in my entire life who’s ever listened to me when I tell him no! So fuck your party, and fuck you!”

“Harry,” Draco said. “Calm down.”

Harry pointed his index finger at Molly’s face. “How dare you walk into *my* house and speak to *my* husband that way? Who do you think you are? You are not my mother, Molly Weasley, and don’t you dare ever speak to Draco that way again or I’ll—”

Draco slipped an arm around Harry, pulling him back from Molly. “All right, love. All right. Let’s take a breath.” Harry’s chest was heaving, and his skin was hot. Draco said to Molly, “Maybe you should be going?”

White as mozzarella, Molly blinked and said, “Yes! That would be—a good idea.”

She turned and scampered back to the fireplace, hurling Floo Powder as she went. Within seconds, Harry and Draco were on their own.

Draco rubbed a hand over Harry’s back. “Deep breaths.”

“Fuck her,” Harry squeaked.

Draco held back a smile. “Okay, love. Okay.”

“Harry Potter,” Draco said from the doorway. “The man who yelled at Molly Weasley.”

Harry looked up from the bed, guilty. “Am I the worst person who ever lived?”

“Yes,” Draco replied. “First you, *then* the Dark Lord.” Harry groaned and flopped onto his back. Smirking, Draco walked around the bed, climbing onto his side. He pulled his legs up underneath himself, looking down at Harry. “No. You are not, in fact, the worst person who ever lived.”

Shaking his head, Harry gazed up at the ceiling. “I just...I couldn’t take it. I should have done it in a more constructive way, but I couldn’t stand her saying those things about you.”

“That’s one way to cancel a party.”

“She’ll never forgive me.” Harry sighed and said, “But fuck it. I could never forgive myself if I let you leave me over something like this.”

Draco paused. “Leave you?”

“You had a suitcase and everything.”

After a moment, Draco let out a laugh. “Harry, I wasn’t going to *leave* you. I was going to spend a night in a hotel, spend a superfluous amount of money on champagne, and come back after work tomorrow. You daft bastard, I’d never actually *leave* you.”

“Oh.”

Draco jabbed Harry in the side. “You ass. Is that why you stuck up for me? You thought I’d divorce you otherwise?”

“I mean—it was part of it. But also—you’re the bloody heart of me, Draco. I’m so ashamed it took me this long to act like it.”

Lowering his head, Draco scowled. “Oh, stop it.”

Harry stroked Draco’s knee and said, “Couldn’t stand it if you didn’t think well of me. If I wasn’t worthy of you—”

“Okay, you have to stop. You’re going to put me out in a rash.” Draco chewed on his lip, then said, “Can I tell you something that will sound Malfoyan?”

“Please do.”

“I can’t help but be pleased you chose my side over hers. And I know I shouldn’t have to make you pick sides—”

“You didn’t make me. I don’t want to take sides. I just want the people I love to not—be miserable to one another. Make no mistake, you’ve been terrible to Molly in the past. You’re an awful snob. You make snide little comments about the way she dresses, how her house looks, how she raised her children—”

“Well—”

“But that didn’t give her the right to say you’d spelled me to love you. I fell in love with you because I couldn’t help myself. Wait—*did* you spell me?”

Draco flicked at Harry’s hand. “Piss off.”

Laughing, Harry turned onto his side. “I should have...I should have said something sooner. And instead I just exploded at her. I’ll have to make that up to her. But I’m not going to apologize for sticking up for you. I should have done it an age ago. You were right. You’d never stood for someone saying those things about me.”

“Yes, but I’m a dark wizard, with a notoriously rotten temper.”

“You’re no such thing. You’re soft as a kitten.”

“Let’s not go too far.”

Harry reached out, tugging at Draco’s arm. “Hey. Lay down with me. I want to talk to you about something.”

Draco laid down, facing Harry. “What’s that?”

“Can we have a talk about playing?”

Raising a brow, Draco said, “You mean our sex life that the entire Weasley clan knows the details of now?”

“I doubt it. Can you see either Ron or Molly telling *anyone* about it?”

Draco thought about it. “You’re right. Our secret is safe.”

“What I wanted to know is—what we’ve been doing the past few weeks, did you hate all of it? Did you just go along because I wanted you to?”

Draco shook his head. “No,” he said quietly.

“It was just the hitting me part?”

“I don’t want... I made you bleed, Harry. I haven’t hit a person like that since I was a child. Let alone someone I love. It was...not what I wanted.”

“You were uncomfortable and you did it anyways.”

“I’m not always comfortable with things. Sometimes I don’t know if I’ll like it until I do it.”

“But if you have a feeling like that. If you know going in that it’s something you don’t want...”

“I know. I mean, I want to make you happy. I do. But I need to protect myself.”

“Equal partners. If we’re not both all in, it doesn’t happen. It’s no fun for me if I know you’re forcing yourself to do something. That’s not what I want. That won’t make me happy. If you did just want to forget all this, that would be all right. I love that you tried this. But if you want to stop, we’ll stop.”

And Draco believed him.

Rubbing his head against the pillow, Draco considered things a moment. “Could we take a break from it awhile?”

“Absolutely.”

“I just...would like you naked without having to worry about a code word to say stop.”

“We need to change the safeword. It was a shitty idea. We’ll choose something neutral when we decide if we want to try again.”

“Papaya,” Draco said. “That sounds innocuous. I don’t even know what a papaya looks like.”

“Papaya it is.” Harry watched Draco with affectionate eyes. “I want to make you a promise. Would have been part of my wedding vows if I’d had any. I promise to tell you when you’re being a prat, and to back you when the world is unfair. Which you’ll note, is most of the time.”

“I promise...to say no when I’m uncomfortable with your sexual escapades. And to hold you back when you look like you’re about to hex a family member.”

“Fuck.”

“I promise to never leave you.”

“Good.” Harry smiled crookedly. “Can we talk awhile longer?”

Draco smiled back. “I’d like that.”

Chapter 9

Draco nearly ran into Ron. They both stopped. Draco kept a tight hold on his wand, the tray of *hors d'oeuvres* floating before him.

Ron cleared his throat, stepping aside. "Harry asked me to get more wine."

"There's plenty on the counter."

They both hung there a moment, then continued on their way. Bloody awkward, that was, but at least Ron no longer glared at him whenever they met. Draco would take progress in whatever form it chose to present itself.

He walked back into the front room, saying, "All right, you greedy buggers, I've more of these cucumber things you all devoured."

The room was comfortably full with people. Their friends, some coworkers, some of Harry's family. Draco's friends mostly raised drinks and cheered, lunging for the tray.

"For heaven's sake, let me at least put it down, you ravenous beasts." Draco set the tray on the table, then stepped back. He perched on the sofa besides Maribel, saying, "You'd think my nearest and dearest would have better manners."

"So you want them to entirely change their personalities?"

"Yes. I would."

Draco glanced around. The party was most definitely a success. It was the most people they'd ever invited over, two dozen adults who they could drink with, celebrate with, laugh with. He'd had doubts when Harry suggested the venture, but it was admittedly going quite well. Everyone was getting along, sufficiently lubricated and mixing nicely.

Draco took a look over his shoulder. Arthur and Molly were sitting in a corner. Arthur was listening with some interest to Dulcine. Of course Arthur would find Dulcine, with her Muggle fetish. Molly, meanwhile, was just gazing at her drink, a small frown on her face.

Can't win them all, Draco thought, and found Harry.

He stood by the fireplace, chuckling at something Hermione said, gesticulating wildly with his hands. He was wearing an orange jumper. It made his skin look positively golden.

Harry caught Draco looking and smiled. Draco tugged lightly on the lapel of his emerald green suit. Harry mouthed a whistle, and Draco grinned, looking away.

Wasn't bad, this. He wasn't a big thrower of parties, and the ones he'd grown up with were sedate affairs that usually involved cello music in the background. This was nice. He was in his own home, not too many people. Draco could certainly see himself doing this again.

“Oi! Can I get your attention please!” They all looked up. Harry held a hand out to Draco. “You, come up here.”

Draco sighed through his nose. Of course, there were compromises one needed to make in any relationship. Smiling graciously, he got to his feet and walked over to Harry.

Harry slipped an arm behind his back. He had a drink in his other hand that he used to gesture with. Giving Draco a little bump with his hip, Harry said to the partygoers, “I just wanted to thank all of you for coming tonight. I know it’s a few months late, but—better late than never, eh? It was important that we had a night to celebrate with you lot. You’re our best friends. You’re our family. You’re part of our lives, and it means a lot to us that you’re here. Of course, I can hear what you’re not saying—if we’re so bloody important, why weren’t we at the wedding?”

There were some snorts, and some uncomfortable shuffling. Draco hooked an arm over Harry’s shoulder, and picked a full champagne flute off the mantelpiece.

“The thing is, Draco and I needed to do the wedding bit on our own. Or rather, I did. Draco was amenable to inviting some people, but the truth is that I was not.” Draco played with the hair at the nape of Harry’s neck and had a sip of champagne. He didn’t know where Harry was going with this, but he thought it best not to intervene. “And it wasn’t because I didn’t want people to know. It’s because I wanted something that was just ours. We’ve had to put up with a lot of judgment, particularly Draco. I didn’t need an outside opinion about this choice. I knew I wanted to marry this man, and I wanted to marry him proper. Most people don’t have to put up with the press chiming in on their choices. I wanted to marry him like a regular person. Because despite what it might look like to outside parties, our relationship doesn’t seem strange to me. To me, it’s the best thing I’ve ever done.”

Harry raised his glass slightly. “So I would like to propose a toast to Draco.” Draco turned his head away, wincing. Harry jostled him. “Oh, stop it.” Harry looked up into his eyes with a smile. “To Draco Malfoy. The kind of man who’ll read thirty books on a topic if he knows you’re interested. The kind of man who tells you when your shoes don’t match your jumper. The kind of man who buys you your dream flat for your birthday but pretends he bought you a malfunctioning broom instead. The kind of man who listens when you tell him no, who makes you think, who always has your back.” Harry grinned devilishly. “The kind of man who’ll tie you up on your birthday if you ask nicely.”

Draco nearly choked. There was some whistling and hooting.

Harry lifted his glass and said, “To Draco Malfoy. Love of my life.”

Draco shook his head as the partygoers echoed his name, some more vigorously than others. Putting a hand to Harry’s face, he bent down to give Harry a soft kiss on the mouth. He ignored everyone else and kissed his ridiculous man with all the love in his heart.

“I’ll tie your fucking mouth shut,” Draco murmured to him.

The side of Harry’s mouth lifted. “You promise.”

Draco looked at him. “Get through the rest of the party without embarrassing me like that again and we can negotiate.”

Harry grinned, but then something in his eyes faltered. Draco followed his gaze. Molly had gotten up and left the room. Harry set his drink on the mantle. “I’ll—”

“No,” Draco said, giving him a kiss on the temple. “I’ll talk to her. Have fun.”

He squeezed Harry’s hand, then walked across the room.

Draco closed the front door after himself. It was a warm evening, night going dark. Their street was empty, everyone inside. Draco let himself down next to Molly on the step, brushing off his knees.

They sat a moment in silence, gazing off into nothing.

When it was clear that Molly wasn’t going to speak, Draco took a deep breath. “We don’t have to like one another, Molly. I know you can’t stand me.” Molly opened her mouth to protest, but Draco said, “And I don’t like you. I loathe you, point of fact.”

She looked at him with shrewd eyes. Draco turned his gaze back to the street.

“You’re far too used to always getting your way. When it seems like you won’t, you threaten to withhold your approval, and for someone like Harry, that can be devastating. I’m not sure if you know that you’re doing it, but you are a clever, clever woman, Molly, so I don’t see how you can’t. You use kindness to mask cruelty, you’re presumptuous, you’re a bully. And you killed my aunt.”

Draco felt his jaw twitch.

“I know she was a monster. My whole family’s full of them. I once was a monster. I know she didn’t deserve to live, but I loved her. I’ll never not love her, even though it makes no sense. Like I know you’ll never forgive me for the death of your son. I didn’t kill him, but I was a Death Eater, and you will never, ever forgive me for that. We’ll never forgive one another.”

Draco looked at Molly. “But Harry adores you. He thinks the world of you, Molly, and as much as I hate the power that gives you over him, you make him feel safe. He hasn’t had many chances in his life to feel safe. I want him to be loved, to be happy. I know you want that for him too, and even though you don’t like it, I make him happy. I make him feel safe. We’re going to be stuck with one another for a long, long time. Til you die or I die. That’s a long time to battle for supremacy, and I could do it, save for what it would do to him. We don’t have to like one another. But we should both accept that when it comes to him, we’re on the same side. If nothing else, we have that in common. I don’t know what you want to do with that, but I thought it should be said.”

He waited to see if Molly would say anything.

She worried at her lip, a tic to her cheek. Several very long seconds passed, then she tilted her head slightly towards him.

“I’ll consider it,” Molly said.

Draco nodded. He couldn’t ask for more than that. “Okay.” He pushed himself to his feet. “Come back in soon. We’re opening a fifty-year-old firewhiskey, and you know what Arthur’s like with a few glasses in his belly.” He went back inside, not knowing if he’d changed anything at all. At least he could say he tried.

Draco followed Harry to the bedroom, turning lights off as they went. “We should do that again.”

“Oh! Oh, here he goes.”

“Stop it.”

“Parties aren’t really my thing,” Harry said, doing a more than passing imitation of Draco’s voice. “Too many people in too small a space, making inane conversation in an attempt to pretend as though they connect—”

Draco gave him a hard slap to the backside. Harry yelped, jumping forward. He slipped into the bedroom, grinning at Draco.

“The cheek on you,” Draco said. “Did you say that bit just to see Ron bite off his tongue?”

“I did it to see what you’d do. And you *blushed*.”

Harry grabbed Draco by the lapels, pulling him forward. Putting his hands to Harry’s hips, Draco said, “Yes, I blushed. You kinky bitch.”

They kissed, Draco dipping Harry back. They stumbled slightly, laughing. Kissing the side of Draco’s mouth, Harry asked, “Are you tired?”

“Not that tired.”

“Do—you want to do something?”

“Like what?”

Harry shrugged, and said, “Fuck me into oblivion, call me filthy names, maybe bite my nipples a bit. If you gave me a few more slaps on the back end, I wouldn’t argue.”

“It’s because I called you a kinky bitch, isn’t it.”

“Didn’t hurt.”

“I suppose. You’re quite attractive, and you have an eminently slappable bottom.” Draco slid his hands under Harry’s shirt, pushing the jumper up his arms. Harry tossed the shirt to the floor and tugged on Draco’s tie, pulling him towards the bed. “Careful. I’m the one who leads you around.”

“Yes sir.”

“Fuck you.”

“Only if you tell me to.” Harry shoved off Draco’s jacket, then started in on his buttons.

Draco let Harry undress him. The alcohol had worn off, but he felt good. Everyone had gone home, and it was just the two of them. Letting his head fall back, Draco took deep breaths.

Once they were both unclothed, Harry let Draco go. He walked backwards to the bed, laying down. He let his limbs splay out like a starfish. “Oh, that’s remarkably erotic,” Draco said, and Harry giggled.

Draco climbed onto the bed, and Harry pulled him down, wrapping arms around his neck. Draco pushed Harry’s head up, biting lightly at his throat. Harry exhaled, and Draco felt Harry’s pulse beating against his lips.

“Could we try something?”

Draco lifted his head. “What’s that?”

“Cut off my air a bit?”

Draco made a face. “I don’t think so.”

Harry shrugged. “That’s fine.”

“But I’ll call you mean names and mark you all over your body.”

“That sounds nice.”

Draco gave Harry’s lips a quick kiss. “Let’s start, shall we?”

He moved down Harry’s body, kissing as he went, letting his tongue flick out. Harry relaxed, letting his arms fall back. Draco had to admit, he loved leaving marks on Harry’s skin. He liked going back a day later and seeing the teeth marks there, the bruises. Knowing how easily Harry could vanish it all with his wand, but choosing to let it stay.

Draco bit into the flesh around Harry’s navel. His eyes fluttered closed at the sound Harry made. This man could always undo him so quickly.

Draco bit and sucked his way across Harry’s stomach, fingers kneading the back of Harry’s thigh. Harry writhed beneath him, coming perilously close to speaking, but not quite.

After all, the rules were that he could only speak when spoken to.

Moving further down, Draco pushed Harry's leg aside, meaning to run his teeth along Harry's cock. But it was an awkward angle, and it was like he was trying to push Harry's leg sideways.

Harry yelped, and tapped the top of Draco's head. "Ow—papaya. Love, I don't bend like that."

Draco lifted his head.

Harry had flopped back, catching his breath. When he realized that Draco wasn't moving, he cracked open an eye. "All right?"

"You used the safeword," Draco said, astonished.

Narrowing his eyes, Harry said, "Well—yeah. That's what it's there for."

Smiling, Draco said, "Yes. Yes it is." He raised a brow. "Shall we try again?"

"Let's."

End Notes

Thank you for reading! I wanted to explore a relationship where both parties were interested in kink, but not entirely on the same page. I'm interested in exploring the realities of navigating and negotiating kink, the good and the bad. Relationships don't exist entirely in a bubble, so I wanted to also show what it can be like when the outside world intrudes. I hope you all enjoy, and wishing you safe, sane, and consensual fun.

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