

Infinite Shades of Grey

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Pairings: Harry/Draco, Ron/Hermione

Written: 22 November 2003

Edited: 16 July 2010

Spoilers: post!Voldemort

Warnings: slash

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Summary: Harry disappears from the wizarding world and starts a new life known only to a chosen few.

Notes: This was originally broken up into a prologue and fifteen chapters. It's all one piece now.

Prologue: Bloodied, exhausted, but finally free, the wizarding world celebrated with unbridled intensity. As before, they were not quite as careful as they should have been, but as before, no one was truly called to task for it. As before, things eventually settled down as people began to once again dream of a peaceful world, where they could live, and love, without the oppressive fear they'd been living under for so long.

Most people never knew what happened to the Boy Who Lived. Only the closest of his friends, those who had earned his undying trust, were ever told where he'd gone. Most people just assumed he died in the titanic battle against Lord Voldemort, succumbing to the wounds he'd received in defeating the Dark Lord. But that was exactly the way he wanted it, and no one who cared for him for saw fit to disagree with his choices.

Respective Viewpoints: Sitting silently as always, nursing a drink with casual indifference, he watched the dancer amidst a crowd of others on the floor with no expression to betray his thoughts to anyone watching. His eyes drank in the sight of the man's fingers sliding through his long, dark hair with unconscious grace, of those same fingers splayed, sliding down his chest to the waistband of the black leather trousers that hugged his form like a lover's embrace.

Shaking his head he glanced at his drink and took another sip. He couldn't think now how many nights he'd come here since the first, when he'd unexpectedly seen him in the crowd. After he'd watched him dance though, he continued to return on the off-chance of seeing him, and finally worked out the pattern of his appearances. It was a drug, an addiction, one he didn't want to break.

Glancing up as the music finished, he watched as the man ran his fingers through his hair again then left the floor for a dark corner not far away, signaling a nearby waitress. He'd chosen this spot purposely, he always did, knowing he could watch every move in comfort, without straining. Silently he watched, dreaming of a very particular future.

The beat was hard and strong, perfectly matching that of his heart as he danced in solitude, in his own little world. Nothing mattered here but the song and the movement. He never noticed the people who watched him, never noticed the lustful stares, the envy, and in some cases the awe. It'd happened so many times before that it had ceased to have meaning for him. This was his release from it all, his escape, a place where nobody knew him and nobody cared what he'd done, only what he might do. He didn't mind the hands that brushed against him and he didn't acknowledge them, causing no end of suffering in those who kept trying to draw him from his dream-like state. The beat ground on, and him with it, to an explosive finale that left him gasping. One more time he ran his fingers through his hair, then retreated to a dark corner and signaled a waitress for his usual.

He shook a cigarette from a pack on the table and lit it from the nearby candle, leaning back as he exhaled slowly at the ceiling. A soft clink signaled the arrival of his order and he grabbed it without looking, the weight of the cool, heavy glass comforting in his grip. He knew he was being watched now. He recognized the burning intensity of the gaze from years past, the gaze of his former enemy.

Lazy streams of blue-grey smoke coiled up into the dark above, floating effortlessly. It reminded him of how it felt when he danced, free and unfettered. By and large, people here knew to leave him alone, knew that he would not respond to anything but the music. He wondered, idly, why his former rival never spoke to him on these nights, after all these months of simply watching. Perhaps soon he would trouble himself to find out. He inhaled deeply, feeling the smoke draw into his lungs like mist to be cooled in his apparent indifference, then watched again as the curls wafted ever upward into the darkness.

Friend or Foe: “Grey, wake up would you?” asked Malcolm patiently. It was usually like this, but Malcolm was a patient man.

“Sorry, mate. Is it time already?” I ran my fingers through my hair and glanced at my friend and co-worker. I could feel a lopsided grin flash across my mouth, but only because I’d never really gotten used to using a different name. I wasn’t the same person anymore, but I couldn’t entirely escape it either.

“Go on, get going then,” Malcolm drawled with a good-humored smile. “I know you’re dying to be off to the club again, though I can’t see how you can stand how they eye you like a particularly delicious dessert.”

I could only grin at that and roll my eyes, slapping Malcolm lightly on the back before slinging a satchel over my shoulder and apparating home. The bag I dropped carelessly by the couch on my way to the bedroom so that I could change into comfortable, loose clothing.

I made no sound as I walked to the room I’d set aside for exercises of any and all kinds, having learned long ago the ways of stealth. By now it was so ingrained that it affected me by reflex. I couldn’t begin to count the number of times I’d scared the blazes out of someone by gliding up behind them. It’s not like I meant to, after all.

For a half hour I worked through the ancient forms, slow at first but moving steadily faster, striving to keep my movements precise despite the increasing speed, striving to make the full extensions required of me. As I reached the peak of this peculiar kind of dance I reversed myself, slowing down at the same steady rate until at last I was still, centered both in mind and physical position, and facing the mirrors that lined one wall.

This was one way I achieved peace with myself, one way I’d learned to help me make sense of my life in the aftermath of the war and to slowly wash away the grief and pain that had threatened to completely break me there at the end. I couldn’t help but smile a little at my

reflection, noticing that I'd once again dropped the essential part of my disguise in the privacy of my home, and reached up one finger to trace the scar that graced my forehead, the one that had branded me both idol and villain to a multitude.

"Well," I said to my reflection, "I think you need a shower. Not that Ministry work is any kind of a challenge, though this is. Then again, I can choose my own challenges these days, can't I." Chuckling, I wandered off toward the bathroom.

The throb of the music was intoxicating and as usual I was able to completely lose myself within the notes that moved through me rather like pleasurable jolts of pain. As it came to a close I drifted to a stop, shaking my damp hair out behind me. I casually skimmed my eyes over the interior of the club, noting with satisfaction that my shadow was once again spying from his customary vantage. Yes, perhaps now I should trouble myself.

So I wandered over to the table reserved only for me as the owner of the club and shook a cigarette out of the pack waiting for me, inhaling deeply as I touched the end to candle flame. Sweet curls of smoke drifted from my parted lips as I observed my nearby shadow. Inwardly I rejoiced that he continued to appear, even though he never did more than sit and watch. It took no more than moments until I was standing next to his table, seeing what looked like growing awareness and a slight hint of panic. Maybe he hadn't realized what I was doing until I was already there?

"May I sit with you?" I inquired lazily, letting the corner of my mouth rise slightly.

"If you'd like," he replied smoothly, waving one hand toward the padded bench upon which he sat.

I slid into the circular booth with a smile and draped one arm along the back, bringing the cigarette to my mouth again. After exhaling toward the ceiling I murmured, "So Draco, to what do I owe this pleasure?"

My companion started violently, nearly knocking his drink over, which of course was most unlike him. He barely started to speak, "Har—" when I cut him off with a quick gesture of the cigarette, shattering the sinuous stream of smoke that drifted from it.

"No. That is not my name. I am no longer that person." I paused for a moment, casting my eyes toward the ceiling. "That man is dead. My name is Grey, if you please. Frankly, I'm not quite sure how you recognized me in the first place. I don't look the same, I don't act the same, and I surely do not sound the same."

Another lazy curl of smoke drifted toward the ceiling as I exhaled slowly, staring directly into his silvery eyes. I shook back my hair in a calculated movement and waited for him to respond.

“Grey, then. I-I’m not quite sure. I knew something the first time I laid eyes on you. I just didn’t understand what it was.” Confusion twisted the angelic features for a moment before the habitual mask shuttered his expression.

Despite everything, he is a Malfoy, and a Malfoy never lets the public see anything other than what they should if they can help it, I thought with amusement. I stubbed out my cigarette and leaned forward, closer to him. “I’m sorry if I startled you. Would you prefer it if I left you to your thoughts?” I cocked my head to one side. “Or would you prefer to dance with me instead?” Inwardly I was laughing, thinking that this plan had gone so much better than I’d ever imagined. Hermione would be pleased, very pleased.

I’d watched him for so long, never realizing until now that my target had indeed noticed me. Who would have thought that an innocent suggestion of Hermione’s would reap such unexpected results. I snapped back from my thoughts as the meaning of the question made itself clear. “Dance with you?”

“Of course. Would you rather I left?” came the lazy response.

Rather than trusting myself to speak I slipped from the booth and gestured toward the dancers. Grey pushed away from the seat and grabbed my outstretched hand, leading me to the floor with its crowd of writhing bodies, immediately beginning to move against me to the throbbing beat of the music.

I reacted more from reflex than conscious choice, letting myself move with and against Grey’s body, letting him set the tone of this dance. My mind was a maelstrom of thoughts, each barely breaking the surface before broached by another rising up. The blood rushed to my face, worsening as I realized it was happening, and I felt dizzy and weak like some larky schoolboy who’d been caught peeking where I shouldn’t have been. I wasn’t in the least amused by the traitorous reactions of my body.

And then, a whisper in my ear. “I know you watch me, my shadow. You always watch me.” And then, nothing but darkness.

I chuckled, but quietly, as I braced Draco’s sagging weight against mine. *Well, I certainly didn’t expect this from him, not from a Malfoy.* Whispering under my breath the tiniest of spells to assist me, I walked Draco over to my private exit and through, half carrying him now up the stairs as we were away from prying eyes. I settled him on one of the couches and arranged a light blanket over him before heading toward my room.

I felt much better after I’d stripped and showered, glad to be free, for once, from the heat and sweat of the club. I tossed on what came to hand and padded out to the kitchen to make tea,

settling on the couch with the tray on the table before me when I was done. A cup of tea in hand, I settled back to await the sleeper's awakening.

Hermione really is brilliant, I mused. You couldn't hear the club from here, despite being located directly on top of it. There were definitely benefits to being a wizard. Perfect privacy, with the perfect escape just a level away. Judging from the way Draco was shifting restlessly, I knew it was only a matter of minutes before those silver eyes would be on me again.

I almost squirmed in my seat at the thought, and I could feel the effects of my desire strengthen as I recalled our all too brief moments on the dance floor. I tilted my head back against the couch and closed my eyes briefly to better feel the familiar ache lance through my groin. *Well, time enough for that if he feels the way I always hoped he would*, came the voice of reason always lurking around in my mind. A sound made me sit up in time to see Draco's eyes flutter open.

"All right, Draco?" I asked, and was rewarded by those eyes shifting toward me, clouded with confusion.

I knew I was laying down, I just didn't have any idea why. Then the memory flooded back and that whisper rang in my ears.

I know you watch me, my shadow. You always watch me.'

Carefully I opened my eyes, immediately shifting my view to the man sitting across from me at the sound of his voice. I started to say the name that came to my lips without thinking and stopped, remembering that things had changed.

"Where am I?" I whispered hoarsely.

"You're in my flat, of course. Above the club. I assumed you didn't particularly want me to leave you there in that condition. Would you like a cup of tea?" was Grey's friendly, even warm, response.

"Ah . . . yes," I replied, pushing myself up to a sitting position and removing the blanket.

I watched as Grey's capable hands poured out the tawny liquid and added milk and sugar, then reached out to take the cup from him. The warmth was like solidified sunlight as I considered the change of clothing. "So why that name?" I asked, then took a sip, enjoying the way it slid down my throat and warmed the chill that had always seemed to threaten me, especially now.

This was no longer the Harry I'd known and I really wasn't sure what to do, or say, so I settled on the obvious question. I'd spent so many years acting as though I'd been cast from the mold

of my forefathers even though I had, in the end, gone my own way. How to deal with this man before me who used to exude a sense of innocence, coupled with sometimes fatalistic determination, who now seemed to be the epitome of effortless charm and confidence? Rather like me, actually, when I wasn't being a complete twit.

“That’s simple enough. After everything I’ve gone through, all that our world has endured, I finally realized that there’s precious little black and white out there, and infinite shades of grey. And that is, in the end, what I am. Infinite shades of grey.” Brilliant green eyes gazed at me, Grey’s expression unreadable.

It’s funny, I thought to myself, when you feel like you’re staring into a reversed image of yourself. At least he isn’t sneering or smirking like I would have back then. I let my eyes wander again over Grey’s hair, his face, and body, sitting there with one arm slung casually over the back of the couch he was seated on. It was only when I noticed the upturned quirk of Grey’s mouth that I mentally shook myself awake, cursing the fact that I’d been caught woolgathering.

So I set down my cup and said, “I’m not quite sure what happened down there but, er . . . thanks. I should probably get going.” I didn’t really want to go, but without knowing how to handle myself I figured it was better to retreat from the situation for now. I stood up and looked around for a moment, wondering whether I should apparate or use a normal exit. I wasn’t sure I *could* apparate from here, since it was only common sense for wizards to key in protections only open to a select few.

Inwardly I smiled, keeping my outward expression a great deal more vague than what I was feeling. “Draco,” I said lazily, in a way I knew would probably confuse the man, “you’re welcome back to my club anytime you want. Drinks are on me. And in case you were wondering, you can exit from here any way you’d like. This place is shielded and silenced to a fare-thee-well. No one will notice or care but myself.”

Standing up with fluid grace, I flashed my former rival a quirky little grin, then slowly walked down the corridor to the bedroom, hearing the sound of a door closing behind me in the distance. It was short work to shuck my clothing and plait my hair to keep it from tangling before slipping into bed. The last thing I remember is sighing as the soft silk wrapped around me and claimed me for its own, even as sleep did.

Some ten hours later found me in my bathroom, a towel draped around my waist as I stood before a mirror. *Saturday, thank Merlin,* I thought as I combed out the dark mass of my hair. Who would have thought it would be so simple to just let it grow, and how easily it could be tamed from its former state with a simple spell? I tossed the towel into the hamper and paced off to the bedroom, picking out clothing at random and throwing them on.

My wand I tucked carefully into my trench coat, though I hardly needed it these days. It was, however, better to keep up appearances while wandering the wizarding world. While it could

not be said that a mere handful could do wandless magic, it would mark me as being special in some way, and I avoided that like the plague. I'd had enough of that, thank you very much.

With a last glance around and a quick check to make sure my scar was invisible I apparated to a normally quiet corner of Diagon Alley and with my hands in the pockets of my jeans strolled into the stream of people wandering the street. Flourish and Blotts was wasn't too far away, and when I gained entrance I began to scan the shelves patiently, waiting for Hermione to arrive.

And Then: She walked quickly toward Flourish and Blotts, taking care to stride purposefully, but without seeming to be unduly urgent. Swinging through the door she swiftly scanned the room and allowed herself the tiniest of tender smiles as she spotted him perusing the shelves. Several steps brought her to his side and she gave him a breezy wave.

"Hullo, Grey. It's great to see you again." She rested one hand on his shoulder and gave it a quick squeeze. "Are you ready?"

"Yeah, just let me pay for this first," he said, waving a book under her nose, then heading off toward the counter. After a brief exchange of speech and coin, he was back, tucking her hand into the crook of his elbow. "Shall we go then?" And with that, he led her out to a quiet corner of the street and nodded. Hermione nodded back and apparated out, reappearing in her kitchen.

She immediately began making tea, smiling as she heard Grey arrive behind her. Without turning from her task she asked lightly, "So . . . dare I hope our plan is working?"

Rich laughter erupted behind her, followed by a kiss to the back of her head. "Better than I expected, dearheart. Better than I expected. Honestly, I wasn't sure what to think at first, but then he kept coming back, kept watching."

After a slight pause he continued, "He never approached me though, so I finally approached him." In a lightning quick change of topic he asked, "Where's Ron, anyway? I thought he'd be here."

She gathered up her tray and turned, nodding toward the living room, then walked out, placing the tray on the table before sitting down to pour out cups of tea for them both. "He's off with the children. I think he figured it would be better to have them out of my hair for a while," she said with a laugh. "And anyway, we can be sure the children won't overhear anything they wouldn't understand. So you approached him. Then what?"

"Honestly, Hermione, I think I startled the hell out of him." He paused for a moment, thinking back through the years and all the things that had happened. When was it exactly that he'd started to wonder, to notice the changes in Draco that had crept in on feet silent like those of a

cat. When was it exactly that he'd realized he wanted his rival and enemy with a passion that equaled or surpassed the one shared by his two best friends?

She watched him gaze off into the distance, his eyes shuttered, then shake his head. She prompted again, "And then?"

"Oh. I asked him if he'd prefer I left him alone, or if he'd prefer to dance with me," he replied with a sheepish smile. "He didn't bother to say which, he just stood up and gestured to the floor. What really got me was while we were dancing and I whispered in his ear that I knew he'd been watching me and he passed out."

She hid her own smile in her cup and took a sip, savoring the slightly smoky flavor. "Based on what you're saying about his actions, and reactions, I think he's well on his way toward admitting what we both always assumed he felt." She grinned openly this time, inviting Grey to laugh with her, but not in an unkindly way. "Do you think he'll come back then?"

"I hope so. I think so. But who knows? Just because I want him to doesn't mean he will. Just because we seem to think he's not the person we once knew and disliked, that he may actually care for me, doesn't mean he'll walk right into my life. On the other hand, he didn't exactly *act* like the old Malfoy, and I can't imagine why he'd be hanging around the club for months without doing a thing if all he wanted was some twisted sort of schoolboy revenge."

She looked down for a moment and took another sip of tea, pondering the situation. Looking up she asked, "Would you like some suggestions to be going on with?"

Grey swirled his tea around, a faint look of distaste on his face as he remembered all those times in divination so long ago, then shrugged and sipped. Glancing back up he gave her an achingly sweet smile and nodded.

"Right then, okay. Honestly, Grey, I think the best approach may be for you to simply act toward him as you do me and Ron. You know? Affectionate, like he's a close friend, so you can suss him out a bit more. I don't necessarily mean right off the start, but work into it. Then again, you're so different from what you used to be like that I'm not sure that matters, if you follow my meaning. We know what you mean by it toward us, but I think it will throw him off balance and maybe he'll let loose some of what he's thinking, even if he doesn't mean to."

As she watched Grey digest this whilst sipping his tea, clattering and high-pitched shrieks heralded the arrival of her husband and children. Ron's head appeared around the corner followed by two small blurs that launched themselves at her and their *Uncle* Grey, who barely had time to put down his cup before catching a wriggling, giggling child in his lap. Apparently, it was time for their family picnic.

Distress: He fanned himself with the papers in his hand, ignoring them in favor of staring out the window. The green of the flora outside was surprisingly calming considering he'd just

spent the last half hour listening to various people in his employ argue with each other around the table, getting his blood on the boil until he finally ordered them all out.

He knew as he stood and paced in front of the window he should be dealing with them, but he kept thinking that sometimes nature had a way with colour. He glanced down at the papers in his hand, paying more attention to the black lines of ink than the words they formed, uncharacteristically wondering just how they made it look so velvety and soft, yet crisp and defined.

Shaking his head, he tossed the paperwork onto the table and continued on into the hallway, never noticing those in his employ scattering in every direction as he stalked along in silence. Had he been paying attention, he may well have allowed himself a trademark smirk at their reactions, but for once his mind was somewhere else entirely.

I'm not getting anything done today, he thought in disgust. My mind is wandering all over the place after listening to them fight like children, trying to pass the blame around. Sod the bastards. Maybe I'll just go home instead, relax in the pool. . . . Thoughts turned to action as he stepped through a doorway, appearing not on the other side, but in his own home, having apparated without much conscious thought on the matter.

He stalked into his bedroom and flung off his robes and stripped down, knowing his house elf would take care of things, and grabbed a towel instead. Striding back out, he threw open a pair of French doors and entered the garden, barely glancing up at the shimmering barrier which domed overhead, making the sky slightly fuzzy to the eyes. Again his silvery eyes were drawn to the green of the grass and the leaves of the roses planted all around the barrier's edge, and he became calmer.

Setting the towel down, he slid into the pool at the center of the garden and leaned back, shifting until he was comfortable in the formed sides and his head was resting on the soft edge. Soft, warm water bubbled against his skin and nibbled away at his temper as he stared up at the hazy sky, his mind empty for once of feeling or thought.

It wasn't until the sun was low on the horizon that he came to himself with a slight start and rose from the pool, rivulets of water running down his slim, though toned, body. Wrapping the towel around his waist, he circled the garden, gazing at the flowers without really seeing them. He knelt for a moment, idly fingering the velvety petals of a gold-edged crimson rose before snapping it off to bring to his nose. Back inside the flower was left on his bedside table, forgotten as he let himself be drawn down into sleep.

Trying Again: The music, the beat, it was all so insanely beautiful. Long dark hair whipped around in a frenzy as the music screamed and I danced like a demented dark angel. All alone in my self-contained world, I didn't really pay attention to the people watching me as my hands slid over my body, through my hair, and up into the air. I had in the beginning, but I just didn't give a damn now. Here I didn't have to think or try and make sense of anything,

didn't have to worry about what people said or meant, if they were lying or being sincere. I could simply exist.

It's why I'd created this place to begin with after all. My own 'Haven' from the world. Droplets of sweat trickled down my face and dampened my clothing as I moved to an abrupt stop as the music cut off, panting slightly with my eyes still closed. I finger-combed my hair back and opened my eyes to stare directly in a set of silvery-grey, and smiled.

Back at my table I sat down and tilted my head at Draco for a moment before snagging a cigarette and lighting it at the candle. Draco stood and made his way over, sliding into the booth with an enviable economy of motion. A waitress appeared out of seemingly nowhere and placed two drinks on the table, then disappeared just as quickly. I blew out a stream of smoke before taking a glass and drinking, letting the cool liquid slide down my throat.

"It's not like I'll bite," I said conversationally, flicking the ashes from my cigarette into the ashtray. "Drinks are on me, like I said. Are you having a good evening?" I continued, raising one brow questioningly.

"Why do you smoke?" asked Draco.

"Perhaps it's not so strange to think I got a little rebellious after all was said and done, and from there I realized I didn't want to stop this particular experiment, or a few others for that matter." I tilted my head again, letting my dark hair fall across my shoulder in an almost coquettish manner. "You sound like Hermione when you ask that, all direct and to the point. Tell me something, if you will. Why do you watch? Not that I mind, of course, I'm simply curious. And, I might point out, I'm glad to see you either way."

I was rewarded by a blink from Draco and watched as a pale hand snaked out for the other glass.

"You don't exactly beat around the bush either, do you?" replied Draco, after sampling his drink. "You've changed a lot, haven't you."

"Only in the things that don't hold much meaning, if you care for the distinction," I said casually.

"Mmm. Why do I watch? I don't think I can answer that just now. Not fully anyway. You do put on quite a show though, Grey. Surely you must be aware of that." Draco ran his finger around the rim of his glass, though no sound arose from the action. "I think I can safely assume that there are a trusted few well aware of the truth then, judging by what you said a moment ago. Somehow, that doesn't surprise me."

I flicked my hair back behind my shoulders and took another drag, closing my eyes as I exhaled toward the ceiling. *Merlin, this was hard. I can barely sit still around him and I don't think he has any idea what he's doing to me.* I leaned forward and returned the glass to

the table asking, "Care to dance with me again?" and batted my lashes flirtatiously. "Well, that is if you'll finish what you start this time."

I sat there, outwardly composed now, utterly casual. I couldn't help but wonder about the mention of Hermione, and whether or not she'd had anything to do with any of this. Granted, it *had* been a chance remark when the conversation had turned to harmless amusements. I could hardly be surprised that someone who was obviously still alive had kept the faith with a trusted few associates, but still, I had to wonder if people were trying to maneuver me around like a chess piece.

Did it matter? I wasn't sure. I was sure about that question though. I wouldn't dream of saying no, not now, not after all this time. I knew a challenge when I heard one, regardless of the manner in which it was being given.

And so I heard myself saying, "Finish what I start? You can bet I can. Let's go." In the back of my mind an uncertain voice whispered, *Did he just make a serious pass at me, or is this just part of the new man's normal behavior?* I moved to the side and stood, not bothering to glance back over my shoulder as I walked to the dance floor to see if Grey had followed.

Once there I turned around to see Grey exactly where I expected him to be, and without unnecessary words, we both started moving to the music. What I hadn't expected was for Grey to treat me the way he'd been treating his own body. Just as I'd often watched Grey's hands roam his own body and hair, they now roamed over my own with the same wanton abandon. I wasn't sure whether I should pass out from pleasure or give back as good as I got, but since I wasn't about to black out again like some prat, I decided on the latter as a matter of course.

I started my own dance with my hands, finally getting to touch the ever elusive figure before me, and so intent on what I was doing and feeling that I almost missed the cocky little quirk that flashed across the corner of Grey's mouth. I didn't care that Grey was damp with perspiration or that I was getting whipped with thousands of dark strands as he tossed his head. All I cared about in these moments were being able to touch what had so far been a mere dream that had haunted me through years of lonely nights. It was like being whipped with the softest silk imaginable in a self-devised torture of dreaming, except this time, it was real.

Interlude: Sally leaned against the bar with a wistful sigh, waiting for her drinks order to be readied. Her pale blue eyes rested on the owner of the bar, Grey, dancing with his new friend. That in itself surprised her. She hadn't been surprised when this man had been added to the list of people to always be let into the club, Haven, and always be served for free, but this. . . . Grey never danced with any of his few friends like he was doing now. She tuned out the myriad sounds of people talking, the clink of glasses and the music itself as she watched them dance, unable to prevent an image come to mind of what these two would be like together in

bed. Two tigers mauling each other, fighting for dominance in a game where nobody really lost, and everyone wins. A soft touch at her shoulder brought her back to the world around her and she turned, picking up the drink-laden tray. As she moved off to deliver her cargo, a gentle smile touched her lips.

Hermione swished her drink around idly, a mysterious smile hovering around the corners of her mouth. She'd watched Grey dance with people before, but this . . . this looked incredibly right, not to mention highly arousing. She took a sip from her glass and, turning her gaze to her husband Ron, watched the play of emotion in his eyes and the thoughts that flickered across his expressive face. Her smile broadened as she watched the struggle resolve itself and Ron too began to smile, slowly at first, but with increasing surety. If anyone could see the answers there, she could, and it looked like Ron had finally decided that if it made Grey happy, he would not be the one to raise objections in the face of his best friend's happiness and would do what he could to facilitate the outcome.

A Party of Four: We kept on through successive songs as one melded into another, my own hair now almost as wild as that of my companion. Slowly though, slowly, I was becoming aware that the continued melding of our bodies was causing an ache that was almost more than I could bear, and my arousal was becoming painfully obvious. So I began to back off slightly from Grey, no longer letting my hands roam at will, and stifling the exuberance of my body's motions.

I could tell that Grey had noticed the change, that he also backed off in response to my own retreat. I, a Malfoy, in retreat? Merlin's beard! But it must be done, mustn't it? As the music drew to a close Grey threw an arm around my shoulder companionably and laughed softly in my ear. I turned my head, gazing into those sparkling green eyes, fighting to keep my expression clear.

"All right, Draco? You look a bit tired." Grey lifted his free hand toward me. I couldn't help but close my eyes for a brief moment as I felt strong fingers comb my disheveled hair back into a hasty semblance of order. "Let's go sit down, talk a bit, eh? Have a rest."

I nodded, once again not trusting myself to speak, and let myself be guided away, though not to either of our usual tables. I looked into the amused eyes of Grey's two best friends as we drew closer and wondered what this was all about. As we stepped next to the booth, Grey reached out and shook Ron's hand heartily, then leaned over and bussed Hermione on the cheek with a laugh, sliding in next to her and patting the seat beside him.

I paused, again wondering what exactly was going on. Suspicion had been so long a part of my life that it would be unexpected indeed if I had blindly accepted this turn of events. Granted, I had long since turned to the side of Light, but that hardly meant I had to do more than tolerate people I'd never liked in the first place. Still, having done so, the Order had in turn

tolerated me, and included me in their trust. They expected I would not betray them, and I had not, despite the personal cost.

Thought followed thought in my mind, like a wheel slowly turning, or the mighty ouroboros. It had been a chance meeting with Hermione at Diagon Alley that had started this particular turning of the wheel, determinedly lighthearted conversation about nothing in particular, and brought mention of this particular club that she frequented as a method of relaxation. Having had nothing better to do one evening, I had followed up on the idea, only to see *him* on the floor, dancing with utter abandon. I hadn't known at first who I was looking at, only that I was drawn back again and again, until it dawned on me just exactly *who* I'd been watching all this time.

How it was possible I could not say and I wasn't sure I wanted to understand—when was it that I'd decided that this was Harry? I did know that now that I had found the place, and him, I couldn't prevent this unspoken addiction. The clink of glass brought me back into focus, and I slid into the seat next to Grey, immediately feeling an arm draped around my shoulders. I would just have to set aside my inner confusion for another time, and rejoin my current companions in more than just the physical.

I watched as Draco simply stood there lost in thought, sparing a moment to flash a lopsided grin at Hermione and Ron. Though I wasn't sure, I suspected that Draco had no idea he'd been standing there for minutes, staring with unfocused eyes at nothing in particular. I was glad, however, when Draco slid into the seat next to me, and allowed myself to once again casually rest my arm around the man's shoulders.

Flashing a quick smile at Draco, I turned to the others, leaning to the side to give Hermione another kiss on the cheek, letting my fingertips slide over to Draco's neck as I shifted position. I and Hermione both laughed as Ron growled and threatened, "Watch it there, Grey. I'll hex you into next week if you keep snogging my wife!" It was a scene that had been played out many times before, one that all three of us were comfortable playing at.

I thought I felt Draco shiver in a whisper of movement, and this pleased me to no end. Leaning back, I returned my arm to its original position, then flicked my fingers in a faint signal. In the next heartbeat a waitress was there with a tray, placing new glasses on the table for the four of us, then gone after giving the table a slight nod.

As we conversed about inconsequential things, nothing deeply serious, I let my mind wander back to the dance floor. I knew why Draco had started to pull back, had felt the effects of our mutual actions. I would try to play this her way, and try to see if Draco was willing to become more than just an acquaintance to us all. Desperate though I might feel, now that I was more than reasonably sure that Draco had no ill intent, I must not push or force things.

Regardless of the changes I had forced upon myself, there were some things I simply could not do, despite the intensity of the urgency my body and heart might demand. So I laughed and

smiled easily, chatting with the others, presenting the quintessential picture of the man known as Grey. I flirted with all the innocence of a child with all three of them, treating Draco no differently from my long-standing friends and as though he'd always been part of the group.

Finally, Hermione and Ron made noises about getting home, back to their twins, and we exited the booth. Hugs were passed around indiscriminately and then the couple left with waves of farewell. I turned to Draco and watched something flitting through his silvery eyes, then clapped him on the back. "Did you want to come upstairs, or are you done in for the night?" I asked, smiling lazily.

Draco flicked his eyes to me, silent for a moment, then replied, "Ah . . . I believe I have some things to think about for now. I should be going, though I will say I have enjoyed myself this evening more than I'd expected. I will see you . . . soon" Turning, he made his way into the crowd and disappeared.

Things to Think About: As I turned to go I noticed a flash of something in Grey's eyes and a barely perceptible change in his posture. Perhaps it was only because of our so many years of exposure to each other that I noticed these things at all, but I couldn't help but think that what I saw was disappointment or pain. Certainly Grey had lost some of his sparkle, become slightly leaden in his expression.

Making my way through the crowd, I cast one glance back over my shoulder to see Grey simply standing there gazing after me. A second later, Grey headed for the floor and insinuated himself into the music. I left Haven behind and apparated home from within a pool of deepest shadow, heading straight for the bedroom. As I shed my clothing my gaze fell upon the gold-edged crimson rose on the bedside table. Slipping between the silk sheets, I brought the rose to my nose and inhaled deeply before setting it back down gently. Rolling over, I let sleep drag me down into the darkness.

I stood next to Grey and said, "Yes, let's go." His hand met with mine and we left the club through Grey's private exit. It only took a few minutes to ascend these stairs, and yet another set that led to a rooftop lush with tropical plants nestled around a bubbling pool. I barely had time to take in my surroundings when the door closed behind us and he lunged, slamming me against the wall and savaging my neck with his teeth and lips. I heard a hoarse moan escape my throat as I sagged against the wall, felt my legs being kicked apart and a hard thigh pressed between them, and his hand tangled in the hair at the nape of my neck.

Thought obviously had no place here, not with waves of pleasure coursing through my body, and I let myself be led unresisting toward the pool, where our clothes were shed with a speed I'd not thought possible. The water was fiercely warm, but it was nothing to match the heat

that radiated from Grey's skin as he pushed me down onto the bench that circled the interior of the pool and straddled me, continuing his assault on my neck. I could barely hear above the roaring of blood in my ears, but as I strained to listen beyond the turmoil that rocked me I caught him whispering huskily, "I thought forever would never come."

Hunting Truth: Morning found me trapped in my bed, the victim of damp silk sheets twisted around my body like Devil's Snare. I pushed myself up into a seated position and brushed back my hair, then set about the patient work of untangling myself from the sheets. The dream was still vivid in my mind as I stepped into the shower, and I closed my eyes as the water sluiced away the external sweat and disorder.

I did want him, that went without saying. But was I seeing what I wanted and hoped to see, fooling myself by the current behavior of my former rival, or was there some spark of truth beckoning me along a path I wanted to take anyway? Perhaps I should—though the very thought made me feel strange to the extreme—arrange to meet with Hermione. After all, she was one of the gateways to Grey's being. Maybe she could give me some small clue that would help me navigate this tangle that had become my life.

So fine, I would owl Hermione and see if she'll come and talk to me. The worst that can happen is that she won't tell me anything, right? And then I put my thought into action, dashing off a short note and sending it on, kicking around the garden for a good part of the day as my thoughts ran in circles on whether or not Grey was simply being friendly or if there really was something behind the casual, good-natured behavior.

As I stared at the pool, thinking yet again that I simply wasn't interested in getting in, my owl returned with a note from her. She was pleased enough to visit and would come later this afternoon if that would be convenient. Back went the note with an acceptance and I let my feet carry me inside to make sure I had something suitable to serve. After asking my house elf—pleasantly I might add—to have a little something ready, I continued on to my bedroom to change into something more appropriate than ragged cut-offs I was currently wearing.

I paced around for what seemed like ages until I heard a knock at the front door, and hastened to open it. She was all smiles, saying she was happy to see me again and that my home looked quite lovely indeed. Her eyes danced in much the same way Dumbledore's had, which unnerved me a little, I must admit. That kind of twinkle usually meant something was being hidden, or several somethings. Very unnerving indeed.

I escorted her out to the garden for refreshments and to talk. The urge to fidget was getting very hard to ignore, so I sipped more tea and crumbled a biscuit on my plate before getting around to the actual point.

"I, er, trust the children are well?" I asked politely, figuring that was a safe place to begin, and endured a long ten minutes all about them, and how much they loved it when Uncle Grey came to visit. Which, in fact, made for a good opening.

“About Grey,” I asked, “is he always like that?”

“Like what?” she countered maddeningly, then reached for a bakewell tart.

“He’s not the same person. This is . . . him . . . now?”

“Mmm,” she agreed. “No, he’s not the same person, and frankly I’m glad he isn’t. Once everything was said and done, it all just got so much worse! You can’t bear a burden for that long and stay sane. You either crack up, or you change.”

“Yes, I guess I can see that. But is he all right.”

Hermione shrugged. “He’s happy most of the time. No one bothers him. After all, he isn’t anyone special, right? Just a man. He gets lonely sometimes, but we do what we can.”

“So tell me, if you will. Why *did* you mention the club?”

“It’s a place Ron and I like to go to just be people. We have fun there. I thought you might like it. I think *he* named it aptly.” Her eyes were twinkling again, so I was immediately suspicious. I just don’t trust that twinkling stuff.

“And it never once crossed your mind I might possibly recognize him?” I arched a brow at her and lifted my chin slightly.

“Why would anyone? He’s Grey,” she said to me, her brown eyes wide. Then she reached for a lemon tart and made a happy fuss over how flaky the crust was. She wasn’t fooling me for a second.

“I see,” I drawled. “Well then, how do *you* feel about the fact that I did?” I could feel my eyes do that thing they do when I want to stare compellingly at someone. I know, I’ve practiced. The mirror tells me I’m a right terror.

“Me? It’s not like you’ve tried to harm him, Draco. He seems to be friendly toward you, you seem to be behaving yourself, so what’s to get upset over?” Still those innocent eyes.

Hmm. “Why does he dance like that?”

She shook her head. “I think that’s a question better asked of him.”

Damned loyal Gryffindors! “So noted.” So I skillfully steered the conversation away into lazy social talk until an hour had passed, the tea was quite cold and all the biscuits had run out. She gave me a quick hug before she left, and a breezy wave. Maybe she wasn’t so bad after all, but she was still hiding things.

I called for a house elf and asked it to tidy up, then stripped down and slid into the pool to brood.

And Then: A loud **crack** made me turn, though not with fear, as the house wards would only allow a select few through. She was back, and with a bright smile.

“Well?” I dropped to my knees and made as if to plead, widening my eyes like a beggar on the street. She laughed at me, then ran forward to pull me back up.

“Don’t be such a prat. Like I wouldn’t report everything to you!” I got a cuff upside the head for my acting abilities.

I waved my butterbeer at her but she refused, so we both flopped down into comfortable overstuffed chairs.

“Well. . . .”

“Come on. Don’t make me agonize for every word.”

“Okay,” she said, sitting up straight and folding her hands in her lap, looking like she was in the middle of a prefect’s meeting. “I was only there for about an hour, maybe a little more, but it was hmm, only five or ten minutes of that time that counted.”

I nodded and took another swig.

“Let’s see, what did he ask me? He wanted to know why you’d changed, if you were okay, why I mentioned the club, if I’d ever thought once if he’d recognize you, how I felt about the fact that he had, and lastly why you dance like that. But . . . I told him he’d have to ask you the last one.”

I grinned and searched out a cigarette, lit it, and started smoking it normally instead of making it look like a sensuous encounter. She made a face at me, but continued.

“Obviously, he suspects I set him up, but I don’t think he has a clue that *you* had anything to do with it at all. He looked worried, but you know how hard it can be to tell what he’s thinking. That mask of his can be like stone. All in all, I think I managed the right mixture of suspicion and interest.”

“Aren’t you the clever girl,” I drawled, unable to keep the smirk on my face from turning into a smile.

“So, you think he’ll keep coming back then.”

She nodded.

“The question is, is he *interested* or just curious.”

“I can’t be sure, but I think he is. Well, think back to that last dance. It looked pretty, er, interested to me.” She smirked and blushed lightly. “But, now that I’ve spilled my guts, I have to go. Ron will be going crazy alone with the twins.”

She jumped up, ran over to give me a kiss on the cheek, then disappeared.

Well. This called for a workout, a bath, and an evening in the club.

Dinner and a Dance: I was sitting there, enjoying a light meal and watching the floor writhe with bodies, when he sat down next to me. He then had the balls to reach over and pluck a baby carrot from my plate and eat it, licking the butter from his fingers with a pale pink tongue. I was immediately hard.

He looked at me with those silvery-grey eyes and smiled pleasantly. “I never knew one could get meals here.”

“One can’t normally. The owner gets perks.”

One elegant brow rose up in a stately gesture. “What about the owner’s friends?”

I shook back my hair and laid one arm across the back of the booth, gazing at him steadily and letting the corner of my mouth curve slightly. Then I reached out and took a carrot for myself and asked, “Were you hungry, Draco?” before mimicking his actions.

“Yes, I do believe I am,” came the drawn-out reply.

“What are you hungry for, Draco?”

“Oh, whatever you’re having is fine.” He brushed a nonexistent speck of dust from his shoulder.

He was definitely on his game tonight. Cool, collected, not to mention dead sexy. I could swear I was getting harder by the second. I couldn’t help it, I let loose with a full-blown smirk as I signaled almost imperceptibly.

As usual, the server was there before I could so much as blink with a round of drinks.

“He’ll have what I’m having, Sally, if you would be so kind.”

She nodded and moved away. I wondered if he'd mention he'd talked to Hermione. Probably not. Either he wouldn't want to, or he expected she'd already told me. So I smiled lazily at him and ate another morsel from my plate.

"You dance very well," he commented as though mentioning the weather.

Hmm. That wasn't quite the starting point I was hoping for. "I'm pleased you think so. I happen to think you're quite good yourself, if the other night was anything to judge by." I reached for my glass and drank. Nobody but me had to know it wasn't even alcoholic; it was bad enough I smoked.

"We'll have to do that again . . . soon" And then his eyes flicked up from where my fingers were sorting through my plate and gazed into mine, sparkling with . . . something.

At which point Sally returned and gently set a plate before him, nodded, and moved off. She really was a dear, and probably due a raise. He began to eat, slowly and with care, so I fished around on my plate, my mind far more on how uncomfortable I was and trying *not* to shift around noticeably.

"Why did you—buy?—make?—this place?" he asked.

"Make would probably be a better term. I'm comfortable enough in both worlds, but this is my haven. It's here to be that." I replied casually and licked butter from my fingers.

"From?" Again he arched that brow at me.

"What else? The world."

He paused in the act of forking a broccoli floret and stared at me. "You're surrounded by what I presume are mostly muggles and that's a haven?" he asked in surprise.

"Of course. I'm just the owner, who happens to like to dance on his own floor. I can do what I want, when I want, and no one can gainsay me."

The floret had made it halfway to his lips when he paused again. "So you built all this," he said, waving his fork around, "so you could become a face in a crowd . . . and dance."

"That's one way to look at it, yes."

He looked thoughtful as he ate, but finally spoke again. "I wonder why they all come here. Grey, why do they come here?" He speared a carrot and raised it, using it to point at me. He was a tricky little devil.

I swiftly reached out and circled his wrist with my hand and drew it closer until I could steal the carrot from his fork and crush it in my mouth. Then I released him and sat back, shaking

my long hair behind me, and said, "Isn't that obvious? They come here to have fun, to relax, to forget about things, to get lost in the music, whatever."

"So that's *you*," he said, eyes narrowed.

"Me?" I asked, letting my own eyes widen to falsely innocent proportions.

"Yes, you. You dance off into your own little world, don't you," he accused in a velvety drawl.

"I didn't dance like that with you did I?" I countered, flashing Draco a casual smile.

"Grey, what is your surname?" he asked after finishing his meal.

"What an odd question. It's Senir. Why?"

"I've seen your club. I've seen your home, briefly. Those are a start, but how am I to learn more about this . . . you . . . without a few little details to start with?"

"Planning on investigating me further, are you?"

"Perhaps. I like to know things. Many things."

"I see." What in blazes was he up to? He'd been playing things so close to his chest that I wasn't sure what his interest was now, and I felt a little bit worried. Nervous. Jittery even.

"Care to dance?" I asked, sliding free of the booth. With or without him, I planned on getting onto the floor. I needed to dance, but I wanted him to follow. "Or, would you prefer to watch?"

Then I walked away without looking back, gained the floor, and slipped into the music. I'm not sure how much time passed before I felt hands slide over me from behind.

It had only been a little flirting, to see how Grey would react, but something I'd done had obviously bothered the hell out of him. I heard his parting offer and watched him take long strides toward the floor and insert himself seamlessly into the throng of gyrating bodies. So I sipped from my glass and watched him move fluidly until I had nothing left to swallow except the sight of him out there alone. And lonely? It was hard to tell really, but she'd said he does get lonely.

I stood and deftly slipped between and around bodies until I was there behind him, letting my hands begin a dance of their own against sleek muscles concealed from my wandering eyes. I snaked my arms around him and pulled, then ground my hips against his leather-clad ass as my hands came up under his arms and around to grip his shoulders to hold him back against me. He smelled of patchouli.

I think I heard him moan, but the music and the people were so loud that it might have just been wishful thinking on my part. It wasn't long before he turned the tables on me. I was left wondering if he was upset or not because his hands were everywhere, his hair was whipping me blind and he drove every coherent thought from my head.

A timeless span later, he was the one to back off, to retreat, as the music ground to a close. He finger-combed his hair like always then looked at me with glittering emerald eyes. He reached out to brush wayward strands of hair away from my perspiring face and said, "I hope you enjoy your evening, Draco. I'm glad you dropped by."

And then he left me standing there. I could feel my nostrils flare in response. He'd left me—how *dare* he! I wanted to hex anyone foolish enough to breathe. I stormed back to my customary table and slammed into the seat to fume and mutter curses.

Well, he *had* said he was glad I'd come by. A smile almost surfaced but my features pulled into a scowl as I thought of him walking away like that after practically shagging me on the dance floor. How *dare* he! Then again, maybe he was just being cautious? After all, I had to admit I knew next to nothing about him. Maybe he thought I just wanted to ease my curiosity on a number of points and then I'd be on my way.

Did I? Would I? No, I don't think that was at all it. Not what I wanted, anyway. I cast my eyes upward and imagined him upstairs, preparing for sleep, standing under a stream of warm water . . . that was a problem. I'd had my hands on him, but I had no real idea of how he looked underneath those surprisingly attractive, but very annoying, muggle clothes. Hmpfh.

Maybe he hadn't stayed because I'd already rejected his company several times already? He walked off before I could tell him I had something else to do, someplace else to be? He was gracious about it, certainly, but I was becoming more convinced that I *had* hurt him, or caused him disappointment the last time I'd been here. I furrowed my brow and bit my lip. This would take some time apparently, and thought.

Muggle Shopping: I watched him, he just didn't realize it. I saw the anger, the brooding and sulking, and finally the thoughtfulness and worry. Good. I'd pissed him off and maybe gotten him to really think about things. I still didn't know what was going on in that angelic head of his though, which was frustrating in the extreme. So, do I ghost past him and see if he'd follow, or just slip away upstairs and wait for another encounter on another day? I left him alone. I'd put out feelers of my own to catch if he started checking up on me. Preferably I wouldn't and he'd end up asking the source: me.

It was several days before I saw him again. I was browsing the upper levels of Flourish & Blotts, looking for history on the Founders, when I sensed someone coming closer. No sound though. But the scent, that I recognized. So I turned my head toward the presence I'd felt, paused for a fraction of a second and then let what I knew was a dazzling smile spread slowly across my lips in greeting.

“Heyla,” I said before glancing back at the shelves, finally tipping a book out for purchase. I turned fully then to face Draco, pleasantly surprised to see a gentle smile lighting his features.

“It’s good to see you,” I said, inclining my head toward the stairs and wiggling the book I was holding. He gave me a nod so I slung one arm around his shoulders casually and descended to the ground floor with him at my side. The book was paid for with a minimum of fuss and we stepped outside into the warm sunshine. I tossed the book into my rucksack and gave Draco a sidelong glance.

“I was on my way to shop for a gift for the twins when I got distracted in there.” I smiled sheepishly and looked up and down the street. “I don’t suppose you have any suggestions?”

“For children?” he asked, sounding appalled. “Er. . . .”

I dropped my head for a moment to think. “Suppose they might like muggle toys?”

That earned me an odd look.

“Maybe I could, you know, enchant some normal toys—make them more personal. Something.”

Draco’s face changed, part musing with a touch of roguishness. He looked at me and grinned. “You could . . . enchant them to scream bloody murder if they were getting into trouble. Alert the parents? Hex the erring twin? Something.”

His eyes were positively sparkling as he spoke and I found myself matching that grin.

“Shall we? There’s loads of toy shops in London. Well, that is . . . if you aren’t busy.” Had to give him an out. Wouldn’t be right otherwise. For all I knew, he was just as confused as I was, or nervous.

He pursed his lips then and flicked a glance at his watch, then at me. “I think it would be a lovely way to spend the day. Lead on?”

So off we went to muggle London and suffered the delights of a dozen shops, some large, some small, and in the end—with much wrangling—we returned to my flat with two fluffy stuffed animals. Surprisingly, one was a white ferret. Draco picked it himself, making sure the fur was soft as silk. The other was a weasel.

I had an extensive library tucked away in a room that was much larger than should have been possible according to muggle physics . . . or whatever. I actually had fun, browsing through books to find what we needed and then enchanting the plushies with Draco. I think he did too; he certainly smiled a lot, and he wasn’t wearing his mask that I could tell. That’s always been a part of the problem though. He’d worn it for so many years that I suspected it was difficult to let it go.

All in all we had a grand time.

I think it was even more fun when we visited Ron, Hermione and the twins. I simply told them they were *special* toys and they squealed loudly, smothering both of us—I almost laughed at the look on Draco’s face—with hugs and kisses, then ran off with their new acquisitions. Hermione and Ron were still laughing hysterically over the ferret. After I was sure the twins were out of hearing range and that the Weasleys had recovered, we explained.

“Guys, they’ll find out soon enough what those toys will do. But you should know now.” I glanced at Draco and grinned when he took up the thread.

“Mmm. They’re special all right. They’re muggle toys enchanted to be watchdogs. If either of those two get into any trouble, those animals will sound the alarm and you’ll know it immediately.”

“And,” I added, “they can talk to the twins. Not exactly like a person but . . . nightmares shouldn’t be a problem, at least.”

They all gave me funny looks. I knew what they were thinking. I didn’t mind though. We stayed for a while longer, then said our good-byes. Outside I gazed up at the setting sun, enjoying the play of color across the sky with a slight smile. I didn’t look at Draco. I wanted him to come home with me, but frankly, I wasn’t sure I could stand to hear the answer if I asked. And then he spoke.

“You owe me a decent meal for helping you.”

It was all I could do to prevent my head from snapping in his direction, and instead I glanced over in a lazy motion and smiled. What an adorably Slytherin thing to say.

I’d been cooking since I was a child, so this was child’s play. We quibbled a bit over *what* to eat, but in the end I tossed him a cookbook and told him to pick. He enjoyed it, of course. I’m not sure he needed to be quite that seductive with his utensils, though. Maybe next time I’d make him eat something messy, if there was a next time.

I thought about asking him up to the roof. I thought about how this evening was going to end. If I didn’t want him to be the one to initiate things, I’d have to right? Either ask him to stay, or tell him to go. If I asked him to stay though. . . .

“You look troubled, Grey. Confused. Are you . . . ill?” Somehow I didn’t think he realized everything that was flitting across his face as he toyed with his food more than he ate it.

“Huh?” He looked up at me and said, “Oh. Just thinking.”

“About?” I was nothing if not persistent.

“Er . . . tomorrow, the next day, the club, next week . . . whatever. Stuff.”

The club, which meant dancing, which meant escape. Something was upsetting him. Obviously. And then I thought, it was probably about me. He’d been awfully coy this morning when he asked if I wanted to help him. I sighed inside. This would be much easier if I could just tip the table aside with one sweeping movement and lunge at him, taking him down to the floor where I could straddle his hips and feast on his pale skin. But. . .

“Was it something I said the other day?” I asked, dropping my chin a little and inclining my head slightly to the side.

He smiled at me, a beautiful smile, but it didn’t quite reach his eyes. I didn’t spend all that time at Hogwarts taunting him and his friends to learn nothing about reading him.

“Grey, I know something is bothering you. Please just tell me.”

His eyes went a little blank and he straightened up in his chair. He worried his lower lip between white teeth then and narrowed his eyes slightly. I felt for a moment like I *was* back in school and was about to get blasted, either with words or a wand.

It all passed in a second, and an easy smile broke out again along with a low chuckle. He said, “Bothering me? All right. Your acknowledgment that you might be planning on digging around, investigating. I don’t like it. I think, if you consider things, you will understand why.”

I blinked. That was the problem? And then I said something I never thought I’d ever hear myself say. “I’m sorry. That was truly insensitive of me.” And I *meant* it.

“Just . . . ask . . . if you want to know something.” That cost him, I could tell by the way his eyes darkened and the faint lines of stress and worry revealed themselves. No one should look like that this young.

So I nodded, and gave to him a rare thing, a genuine smile, and got one back in return. Being the engaging fellow that I am, I then entertained him with anecdotes about my enterprise, which carried us through the remainder of dinner. I was getting tired though and while I might want to stay, I also didn’t want to push him, so I was honest. I yawned and stretched.

“I’m getting pretty tired, Grey. I think I’ll head out.” I glanced over to see what I thought I’d seen the other night in his eyes, his posture. “Maybe we could do something tomorrow though,” I said as I roughly folded my napkin and dropped it next to my plate, then stood.

Grey also stood, pulling his hair away from his face by sliding the fingers of both hands into the dark strands and pushing back slowly. “Yes,” he said. “We could.” Then he angled his

head. “You *can* apparate here, you know. The wards are keyed for you.” The ghost of a smile curved his lips as he started gathering the plates and utensils.

“I’ll drop by tomorrow,” I said, then sketched a bow and apparated home.

Midwinter Land: Snow was falling in soft, fat flakes, coating the landscape in a frosting of crystallized water. Ice encased the trees outside the barrier, lending the barren branches a translucent beauty. In the pool it was warm though, with gentle jets of water bubbling all around us. The first time I had come up here I was struck by how similar yet different it was from my own little garden. There was something precious about relaxing here in comfort as the world outside was cocooned in the grip of winter.

Draco sat across from me, laying in the embrace of the sloping sides of the pool, his head back against the rim and his lips slightly parted, his silvery blonde hair spread around him like an angel’s halo. Sometimes I couldn’t breathe properly when I looked at him. I think over the past months we’ve become closer, much closer, though we’ve never touched more than like what had happened at the start of all this. Casual, like my somewhat impersonal affection laid upon him as though he was the same as Ron and Hermione.

We’d been circling each other, warily, neither of us quite willing or able to make the first move. Even so, this was satisfying in its own way. It’s hard being so close and yet not. I think Hermione is impatient with me, but although I’m the first person to step forward into danger I perceive is mine for the handling, I’m probably far too cautious when it comes to things more personal. Still, I think she understands my confliction.

The sun is setting, making the trees come aglow with heaven’s fire as the sky slowly turns through a kaleidoscope of pinks and reds shading out into deepest blues and dusky purples. I can’t come up with better names for these colours. It’s almost like dying, in a way, only to be reborn in the gentler hues of sunrise the next day. It’s painful, masochistic, the agony of being so close, the indecision and uncertainty, but right now I wouldn’t have it any other way. I don’t dance quite the same anymore. I can lose myself, but I’m much more aware now of what happens around me. I can feel it now when he’s watching and I find myself getting a little wilder when he is sitting there. He’s been drawing me out, inexorably, almost against my will. I can use it to escape, but only if he’s somewhere else.

The sun has set, and his eyes opened at the change in the quality of light, lifting his head to grace me with a slow smile and half-lidded eyes. I felt like I was being seduced by that look and I fought hard not to tremble in response. I watched as he stood and left the pool, watched as the water streamed down his perfect body then slowed to trickles and he brushed them away with a towel. Then he spoke, shaking me from my silent immobility.

“It’s time. We should get going before we arrive so late as to hear a lecture, don’t you think?” His expression was of affectionate amusement tinged with annoyance, so I smiled and stood.

I was a bit pissed and so was he. Perhaps more than a little. But we were able to successfully apparate to Grey's flat from the Christmas Eve party at the Weasley's. I'd never heard him giggle before, but he was now, like a child on holiday. I led him to his room, gripping his arm tightly when he stumbled. I needed to get him to his bed at least. It wouldn't do to have him waking up on the floor because we were both a little too far gone.

But we got there and I watched as he stripped down to a pair of silk boxers, unsteady on his feet. So I guided him again, pushing gently as I steered him to his bed and onto to it, watching as he flopped down gracelessly, still giggling madly. I brushed the hair that fought to obscure my vision away from my face and started to turn. I must have tripped, or gotten dizzy, because then it was just velvety blackness.

Waking in the Arms of Heaven: Mmmmm. Warm, soft, like being in the arms of heaven. I kept my eyes closed, enjoying the awakening process, coming up from the depths of darkness slowly. I turned slightly and realized there really were arms around me, so I cracked one eye open cautiously to see a familiar face, peaceful in sleep. A face quiet with the innocence of a child who had never had a chance to be one. I couldn't help myself. I cradled his face with my hand, and moving with a languorous lack of speed touched my lips to his, shivering at the feel of his plush, soft mouth.

His brow furrowed slightly and his arms tightened around me, murmuring sleepily against my mouth and pulling me closer. It's hard to preserve falsehoods when you're asleep, and I was finally sure. So I was daring. I kissed him again gently, the merest brushing of lips against lips, and ran my thumb along his jaw line. I carefully took his lower lip between my teeth in a gentle nip, letting things slide into pulling him in, suckling his lip tenderly.

He moaned deep in his throat, eyes still closed, though his arms loosened their hold only to begin a slow friction along my back, his hands finding their way underneath the shirt I still wore. I flicked my tongue against his lip and then angled my head dreamily and entered him, tasting and teasing, feeling the silken warmth of his tongue begin to move against mine as he slipped further from sleep and into waking. I slid my hand along the side of his face and around to tangle my fingers in his hair, pressing my body against his.

Grey responded by scratching his nails lightly down my back, making me shiver and moan into his mouth. I arched against him as his hands reached the small of my back and his fingertips slipped beneath the waistband of my trousers, but he went no further. Slowly his mouth pulled away from mine and his head pushed back, and I opened my eyes to see his opening to meet mine.

I stilled immediately, worried, though a smile curved his lips and lit his face before his expression turned to one of pain. I remembered now, and the pleasure of being in his arms

was overset by the pain of a definite hangover as it all came rushing back. He groaned loudly and released me, rolling onto his back.

“Sorry, Draco,” Grey said. “I didn’t mean to take advantage of you like that.”

I frowned. He was ever the bearer of responsibility, whether he was to blame or not. I decided not to exactly comment for now on that. Not feeling like this, anyway.

“I feel awful. I think we imbibed a little too much, Grey.”

He groaned again, wholeheartedly, and replied with predictable sarcasm, “You think?”

It hurt too much to respond, so I eased myself onto my back beside him and bit my lip against the pain in my head and the typhoon in my stomach. It felt like something was trying to bore a hole through my left eye from the inside. I’d kill the drill-man if I could just find him.

We must have drifted back into sleep again despite the pain for I found myself struggling up from dreams into wakefulness. I felt marginally better, enough so that I could pull myself up and bear to find my wand to cast a sobering charm on both of us. I slipped out of the bed and cast another charm, this one to straighten out my sleep-rumpled clothing.

Grey was still sleeping, his face at peace and relaxed, so I dashed off a quick note telling him I’d be back later in the day and to owl me if that wasn’t all right. After one more look I turned and left the bedroom, moving far enough away that the sound of my apparation wouldn’t disturb him.

Dream Shock: My head didn’t hurt, which was curious indeed. I rolled over and realized I was alone, then remembered waking up earlier and what had happened. He must have done something, I assumed. Sitting up was easy enough and allowed me to see a piece of parchment on the bedside table. Hmm. Well, I certainly wasn’t going to tell him to stay away, so I stood and discarded what little remained of my clothing and headed to the bathroom.

Refreshed a little later, I’d kicked around the apartment listlessly, wondering what on earth had possessed me earlier to act the way I had. A long soak in the pool was soothing, but it also had the effect of replaying the early hours of morning in my head in a loop.

What in Merlin’s name had possessed me to come on to Draco like that? Well, it didn’t matter, I hoped. Maybe he’d do the gentlemanly thing and let it slide. Honestly, where had my self-control gotten to? I groaned and lifted myself from the pool and wrapped a towel around my waist, then carefully maneuvered down the stairs to the flat just in time to see Draco apparate in.

Draco took one look at me and blinked.

I smiled sheepishly and said, “Er, hello. I didn’t expect you to pop in just yet. I was upstairs and must have lost track of the time.”

He flicked his eyes over me quickly. “Upstairs?”

“Yes, the garden. You’ve not been up there before.” I rolled my head around to snap some of the tendons and release the pressure. “I came down here to grab some snacks. Did you want to come up, or would you prefer to stay down here, or go elsewhere?”

“Up is fine. I’ll just go grab some towels while you get food.”

He padded off down the hall so I moved into the kitchen to rummage up finger foods and a variety of beverages. When I walked back to the living area Draco was waiting, so I adjusted the wards on the staircase so he could see it and led him up.

I was surprised to realize, after I’d put everything I was carrying in places which would be easy to reach from the pool, that Draco was still standing near the door with an utterly blank look on his face. In point of fact, he looked rather like he’d seen a ghost, to use a muggle turn of phrase.

“Draco?” I asked softly. “Is something wrong?”

When he didn’t respond I moved closer and grabbed his wrist gently, pulling him to a bench near the pool and guiding him into a seated position.

“Draco?” I asked again. “Come on,” I cajoled, “please talk to me. What’s wrong?”

He finally looked at me and his eyes narrowed. I confess I didn’t know what to think at that point.

“Draco?”

“I’ve been here before,” he said accusingly.

“I’m sorry? I only just changed the wards when you said you’d come up. There’s no way you could have been in my garden before. You wouldn’t have even noticed the staircase existed,” I protested.

“Then how the hell do I know this place? I’ve dreamed about it, Grey.”

My brow arched reflexively in surprise. “I don’t—but. . . .”

“We came up here and y—never mind.”

“Draco?”

His eyes glittered dangerously at me and a smirk twisted his mouth. "I'll show you." Then he stood and walked back to the door, then opened it. "I'll show you *exactly* what happened in that dream." He crooked his finger at me. "Now come here," he commanded.

He was incredibly sexy when he was like this. I felt like pouncing on him. Instead I stood up and walked over to him and waited.

"You, Grey, will be me, and I will be you. Turn around and face the garden. Pretend you're seeing this place for the first time."

After I turned around, he took action. I heard the door close a split second before I was slammed into the wall and felt his mouth on my neck, felt stinging bites and wet flicks of his tongue. I was barely processing what he was doing when he kicked my legs apart and pressed one of his thighs between mine, then shoved his hand into the hair at the nape of my neck.

I know my eyes fluttered shut and I moaned. I was aware enough to comprehend that much, but I felt like I was falling, spinning, and I sagged against the wall under his onslaught. It was only a minute, or maybe forever, when I felt myself being led away from the wall. I didn't care, I was willing to be led anywhere by him at that moment.

I was pushed down into the pool, onto the seating within, and straddled a heartbeat later. His lips and teeth were back on my neck teasing and taunting me, driving me insane at the feel of his body shifting against mine. He lifted his head and whispered huskily in my ear, "I thought forever would never come."

And then it was over and Draco was sitting across from me in the warmth of the pool, his face perfectly composed. I gaped at him as I tried to stem the tremors running through me. How could he be so calm? As I watched a smirk start to form on his lips it hit me. I knew what to do.

"So that was the dream you had? I thought you liked to finish what you started, Draco," I said challengingly.

That was all it took, and I barely had time enough to smirk myself before he straddled me again and I felt like this dream forever had indeed come.

— **The End** —