

Happily Ever After

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Summary: When Percy was little, his mother read the fairy tale of Snow White to him. Then his parents adopted a child that looked just like the fairy tale princess and Percy falls in love immediately. Slash. Harry/Percy.

Beta: Jen

Author's notes: This pairing of this story is not one I write or even read but it was very interesting to get into the head of a character I don't normally have in my stories. I'm very happy with the result and I hope you enjoy this as well.

Warning: Slash

Happily Ever After

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Happily Ever After

By Cosmic

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Happily Ever After

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## Chapter One

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“Would that I had a child as white as snow, as red as blood, and as black as the wood of the window-frame!” Soon after saying her wish, the queen had a little daughter, whose skin was as white as snow, with lips as red as blood and hair as black as ebony; she was called Snow White.”

Molly Weasley looked down at her son. Percy was leaning over the picture of the queen by the window, tracing the drawn black ebony frame.

Molly continued reading, her son looking deeply at the pictures, despite having looked upon them a thousand times before. Molly thought Percy should know every line of the pictures. Smiling softly at him, she continued. “And when the child was born, the queen died. After a year had passed the king took to himself another wife.”

“Now Snow White grew up, and became more and more beautiful; and when she was seven years old she was as beautiful as the day and more beautiful than the Queen herself. When the Queen asked her looking glass: *"Looking glass, looking glass, on the wall, who in this land is the fairest of all?"* it answered: *"Thou art fairer than all who are here, Lady Queen, but more beautiful by far is Snow White, I ween."*

“She’s so pretty, mummy,” said Percy, looking at the picture of the young Snow White. He smiled at Molly. “When I grow up, I’m going to have my own princess.”

Molly smiled at her young son. “I’m sure you will, sweetie.”

After finishing the story, Molly shut the book and kissed Percy’s forehead. “Now it’s time for you to sleep, sweetie. Good night.”

“Good night, mummy,” said Percy sleepily.

Molly pulled the covers up over Percy and blew out the candle next to the bed, then left the room quietly with the worn book about ‘Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs’ safely tucked under her arm.

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The Ministry official showed Mr. and Mrs. Weasley into the small room. They all took their seats, the official behind the desk, Arthur and Molly in the two other chairs. Arthur took his wife's hand, squeezing it lightly.

"You do understand that the boy has been abused," said the official, looking from one to the other. "As such, he does not react to touch well, nor is he very well-developed. Getting him to trust you could pose a challenge."

Molly nodded. "We understand and it only makes us more determined," she said softly.

"This is all made even harder by the fact that the boy is who he is," the Ministry official said, as though the Weasleys would have forgotten who the child was in the last five minutes.

"We don't care about his fame," said Arthur.

"We only want him to have a good home," Molly finished, looking from her husband to the man behind the desk. "Please, sir, we already know everything there is to know and we know we want this boy. Please, let's just sign the papers – I'm sure that the faster we get to him, the faster he will start trusting us."

The Ministry official nodded. "Very well."

He handed them a stack of parchments and told them where to sign. Molly's hand shook as she signed her name on the last paper and handed it back.

The official looked through the papers to see that it was all in order before nodding and with a small smile, he said, "Congratulations, you are now the parents of Harry James Potter."

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The playpen at the Ministry didn't offer much for a child to enjoy. Despite this, four-year-old Harry Potter looked as though he was in heaven. He touched the select few toys carefully, seeming afraid to break them.

Molly stood silently and watched him through the glass. Harry wasn't aware of her eyes upon him; he started playing ever so quietly with one of the teddy bears in the room.

"Molly, dear, we should probably go inside," said Arthur.

Molly turned to him, worried. "What if he doesn't like us? What if we're not good enough for him?"

Arthur kissed her forehead. "He'll love us – how could he not love you? And I'm sure he'll think we're better than those Dursley-people."

Molly's eyes darkened at the mention of the Dursleys. "If I ever get my hands on them—" she promised, but trailed off looking back at Harry.

Arthur opened the door to the playpen and let his wife walk inside first. Harry dropped the teddy bear he held immediately and backed away, his eyes wide. He acted as though he'd done something wrong, though he most certainly hadn't.

"Harry, it's all right," Molly said to him, getting down on one knee to be at his level.

Harry stood completely still a few feet away. His eyes darted from Molly to Arthur and back again.

"Come, Harry, I'm not going to hurt you, I promise," Molly said. "You haven't done anything wrong."

Her tone was soft and coaxing and something in it seemed to speak to Harry. The small child walked slowly towards Molly. He sent hesitant looks at Arthur, who stayed back.

Two feet away from Molly, Harry stopped, biting his lip.

"Hi Harry," Molly said to him. "I'm your new mum and I've come to take you home."

"Home?" Harry asked worriedly, taking a quick step back.

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Molly cursed the Dursleys inwardly for doing this to a child. No child should have to react to the word 'home' in a frightened manner. She didn't show it to Harry though; she just said, "A new home. I'm going to be your mum. Is that okay with you?"

Harry didn't answer. He looked confused and scared. Molly didn't blame him; first being abused by the Dursleys for three years and then suddenly some strange people came and took him away and now she stood before him, telling him she was his new mother.

"Will you come with us, Harry?" Molly asked.

Harry looked at Arthur again, then at Molly. Finally, he gave a tiny nod. Molly smiled at him and he smiled tentatively back.

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They Apparated to just outside the Burrow. Molly carried young Harry, who held onto the teddy bear he'd found in the play pen. His head was buried in Molly's shoulder and she felt him tremble.

"Here, Harry," she said softly, "this is your new home."

Harry lifted his head hesitantly. Tresses of ebony hair blew in the wind, revealing Harry's famous scar. Molly stroked the child's back, trying to appear calm. She was anything but; she was livid at You-Know-Who for taking Harry's parents in the first place and equally angry with the Dursleys for mistreating him. On top of that, she was nervous about what her children would say about another addition to the family and about how Harry would adapt to his new life.

"Not home," Harry said, shaking his head and frowning slightly.

Molly nodded. "Yes it is; it's your new home."

Just then, the front door opened and the twins rushed out. Fred and George immediately ran to their mother and looked at the child in her arms.

"Is that the new one?" Fred asked.

"He's not as small as Ginny was when she came home," George frowned.

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“He’s big,” Fred said, nodding with his twin.

Arthur took over, pushing the two in front of him back towards the house. “This one didn’t come from mum’s belly,” Arthur started explaining to the two redheaded boys.

Harry was looking wide-eyed at the twins. He seemed unable to decide whether to be scared or bewildered with their behaviour, so he just frowned slightly.

“Those two are your new brothers, Fred and George,” Molly explained to him. “They’re quite wild, I know.”

Harry nodded, slowly.

“Let’s go inside, shall we?” Molly asked and Harry nodded once more.

Arthur met her at the door. “Everyone is in the living room, save for Percy – he’s in the loo,” he explained with a smile.

Molly smiled at her husband.

They walked together into the living room. Harry clung to Molly tightly, hiding his face in her neck again.

“Harry,” Mrs. Weasley said, stroking his back to calm him, “this is your new family.”

Harry turned around hesitantly, his hands still fisted in Molly’s robes. He looked with wide eyes at the group of red-headed children sitting around the room.

“That’s Charlie,” Molly said, pointing to her eldest son, “with little Ginny on his lap. She’s even younger than you.”

Ginny was the only one in the room who didn’t seem particularly worried about the new boy that had been introduced to the family. The other children sat quietly and watched Harry. The twins were sitting but seemed to be bouncing in their seats.

Molly presented the rest of the children to Harry.

“And everyone, this is your new brother, Harry,” Molly said.

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“Harryyy,” the twins imitated, laughing between themselves. Arthur and Molly both shot them stern looks.

Molly placed Harry on the floor, letting him stand on his own. He stood completely still, watching the group of strange people carefully, almost without blinking.

Just then, another child walked into the room.

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Percy rounded the corner to the living room. His father had told him to come down; something was going on – his dad never called the whole family to the living room unless it was for something special, like Christmas.

Percy stopped dead in his tracks.

Before him stood a princess – she had ebony black hair falling softly around her face, skin as white as snow and lips as red as blood. She looked just like Snow White in the book – and she’d come to him, just as he knew she would.

“Mum,” Percy said, quite ecstatic, “that’s the girl I’m going to marry – it’s my princess!”

Molly covered her mouth with her hand while Fred and George roared with laughter. Charlie and Bill both laughed as well, while Arthur chuckled.

“He’s going to marry her!” Fred yelled between fits of laughter.

“He’s going to marry the princess!” George said, giggling madly.

“Fred, George, be quiet,” Molly said, sending stern looks at Arthur and the older boys as well. She turned to Percy. “Percy, darling, this is Harry – he’s a boy.”

Percy looked from the child before him to his mother. He blinked – it couldn’t be true. She was his princess – she couldn’t be a boy!

Harry looked helplessly around the room. There were tears in his eyes – what had he done this time? Nervous, he took a step back, then another and then he turned and ran out of the room.

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Percy also looked at his family, still laughing at him. His cheeks heating up and the anger building within him, he followed Harry's example and ran out of there.

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Nine years later

Percy hurried down the stairs of Hogwarts towards the Great Hall. He'd finished his homework for the next week and thus he would be able to relax some for the weekend. He might even have time for his friends; he knew he'd neglected them lately – but Head Boy business was important and took a lot of time.

He opened the doors to the Great Hall. As soon as he went inside, his eyes found the telltale ebony hair.

His princess.

He'd never lived it down, that single sentence he'd uttered on the day Harry had been brought to the Weasley family. The twins would remind him of it at every opportunity and even his parents and older siblings were more than happy to tell the story over and over again.

So the memory of calling Harry his princess, the girl he was going to marry, had stuck with him and every time Percy lay eyes on him, the thought came back to him, unbidden – *'That's the girl I'm going to marry.'*

It didn't matter that Harry wasn't a girl. Percy felt a stirring in his groin as he watched Harry laugh with his friends. His skin was tan now, no longer as white as snow as it once had been. Harry's lips were still as red as blood, though, and his hair as black as ebony.

"Percy, are you coming or not?" Penelope Clearwater looked expectantly at him.

Percy shook himself out of his reverie and sat down next to her. They were just friends now; they'd tried being together but he'd finally broken up with her – he loved someone else. She'd been surprisingly understanding; perhaps she too was in love with someone else, though she hadn't gotten together with anyone yet.

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Percy ate quietly, watching Harry out of the corner of his eye. He knew he had to make his move soon, before someone else got to Harry. The boy was only thirteen years old, but Percy had heard from his younger brother Ron about Harry's crush on Cho Chang. Percy couldn't see what was attractive about the girl – she seemed more occupied with herself than anyone else, but then he wasn't interested in girls much at all.

“You've got to eat something, Percy,” Penelope said. “You'll be a walking skeleton before the year is over otherwise.”

Percy shrugged. He wasn't particularly hungry.

*

Percy graduated from Hogwarts that spring. He had mixed feelings about it; he'd been offered a job at the Ministry which he'd already said yes to, so his income was secured. He'd be able to get an apartment in London, which meant that the luxury of having a place that was his own, something he'd gotten used to during his seventh year because of his status as Head Boy, would continue.

Still, thinking about living on his own and working in a new place made him nervous. On top of that, he would no longer be able to see Harry on a daily basis, which he'd also gotten used to in the last three years.

His parents picked him, the twins, Ron, Ginny and Harry up at the train station. Harry was unusually quiet. Percy had found out from Ron that Harry had found out about his crazy godfather, though it seemed something else had happened just before school ended.

Percy Apparated home while his parents used the Floo with his siblings. Apparition was an art Percy had mastered surprisingly easy. It was a freedom to be able to go anywhere he pleased.

He brought his trunk to his room and hesitated before he unpacked. This was likely to be his last time unpacking here; the next time, he would be unpacking in an apartment of his own.

He heard the family arrive downstairs and he thought for a second about going down. A moment later he heard Ron and Harry rush up the stairs towards their respective rooms. A short surge of familiar jealousy shot through him as he heard Ron and Harry talk loudly to

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each other. The two were of the same age, yet Percy still wondered what it was that had made Ron Harry's best friend. Why couldn't he, Percy, have been four years younger? It would have been so much easier.

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Harry sat at the window, watching the dark night sky. Stars seemed sprinkled across the black velvet and the half-moon shone. Harry wondered where Professor Lupin was now – and where Sirius had escaped to. He hoped they were both all right.

There was a hesitant knock on the door.

"Come in," Harry said, careful to keep his voice only just loud enough for the person outside to hear him. He didn't want to wake the rest of the house.

Percy stood in the doorway. He was dressed in pyjamas, just as Harry was.

"Hey Percy," Harry said, looking over at the older boy, slightly puzzled.

Percy looked fidgety and Harry wondered what he could possibly want at one in the morning.

"You can come in if you'd like," Harry said, motioning towards the old, cushioned chair that stood below the window. Harry used it when he read and studied during the summer.

Percy nodded briefly, crossed the room and sat down on the chair. He didn't look very comfortable; Harry wondered why. Then again, Percy had never been particularly comfortable around him. Of all the Weasleys, Percy had always seemed to be the one to dislike him. He kept his distance and rarely talked to Harry. So what was he doing in Harry's room now, on the day before he moved to his own apartment?

"Did you want something?" Harry asked, looking out the window again. The light from the stars and the moon illuminated the grounds around the Burrow in soft silver light.

"I just—" Percy hesitated. "I don't know. It's— no, I should go."

He stood up and walked towards the door. Before he reached it, however, Harry had caught up with him, grabbed his arm and turned Percy to face him.

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“Percy? Is something wrong?”

Percy’s lips quirked into an almost-smile. His eyes darted nervously from the window to Harry. “I just—” he repeated once more. “I’m just going to miss you. When I move, I mean.”

Harry smiled at him. “You came in here to tell me that at one in the morning?”

“I, uh—” Percy stammered, “I didn’t think I’d have the chance tomorrow.”

“Probably not, what with the general chaos that seems to ensue whenever something big is happening,” Harry said, smiling slightly.

A lock of black hair fell into Harry’s eyes and Percy lifted his hand to tuck it behind his ear. The gesture was oddly intimate and Harry gazed at Percy. He didn’t say anything; this midnight meeting seemed to fill all the requirements for being called strange already.

Percy’s hand dropped to his side. “I— I should go,” he said, taking a step back. When Harry didn’t protest, Percy turned around and headed for the door.

Just as he was about to walk out, Harry said softly, “I’ll miss you too.”

Percy looked back to see Harry standing there, the soft moon light dancing across his face and Percy’s breath caught. He knew Harry was only thirteen, soon to be fourteen years old, and it was quite sick to think of him the way Percy was thinking of him – yet in his mind, he heard the words yet again.

“That’s the girl I’m going to marry – it’s my princess?”

The words fell away, one by one. *“My princess.”*

“My prince.”

“My.”

“Mine.”

Frightened by the intensity of his own feelings, Percy fled the room.

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## Chapter Two

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Four years later

The graduation ceremony for the class of 1998 was more than a celebration of a class that had managed to get through Hogwarts' educational program. It was also a celebration of life and victory for those on the light side and a tribute to all those who'd given their lives to make the world a better place. At the same time, it was a time for mourning those who had died; there had not yet been enough time to heal the spaces that those who died had left – it might never be enough time.

Percy sat on the stands, separated from his parents and his surviving siblings. He'd been separate from them since 1996, when they'd first told him of Voldemort's rise. Percy hadn't believed them; he'd chosen to believe the Minister, Fudge, instead. It had been a safer belief – if he'd trusted his family, it would have meant that the Wizarding World was facing another war and that couldn't be possible, not so soon after the last one.

Thus, Percy had chosen Fudge's side.

It hadn't only been the impending war, Percy had to admit to himself, for if he was completely honest, he had known the truth in his parents' and siblings' stories. He would have trusted Harry as well.

Harry.

There was the other reason, perhaps the real reason, why Percy had not followed his parents. Hearing about Harry's escapades in school and his frequent near-death experiences sent Percy into a horrified frenzy each and every time. His breath caught as others retold Harry's adventures to him and he felt tears burning in his eyes as he read about the Triwizarding Tournament and its horrendous ending.

By Harry's fifth year, Percy realised that there was no other way for him to survive Harry's adventures than to completely cut himself off from him. To pretend that he didn't care,

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even to himself. To finally accept that a childhood exclamation about marrying him was not something that he could possibly live his adult life after.

Besides, he'd heard about Harry's flirtatious adventures as well. When he and Ron still wrote to each other, his younger brother had told him about Harry's continued crush on Cho Chang. After he'd stopped communicating with his family, he was still able to get the latest gossip through *The Daily Prophet*. There were pictures of the young man Harry turned into and Percy had to throw away the newspaper to keep from being overwhelmed with emotion.

Applause brought Percy back to the present; Hermione Granger had just finished a speech. Judging by the standing ovations she received, Percy almost felt sorry about not listening. With a certain amount of bitterness, Percy remembered his own graduation; there had been no standing ovations for his speech.

"Now, we have only one more speaker." McGonagall's voice echoed across the fields around Hogwarts, magically enhanced. She looked worn, tired, the lines on her face far more prominent now than they had been a few years ago. "I give you all Harry Potter."

This alone caused standing ovations as Harry shyly made his way onto the small stage. Percy couldn't keep his eyes off him.

The boy he'd known had grown into a young man. He'd filled out, gotten taller, though he was still shorter than most of his male classmates. It didn't seem to matter; he filled the stage with his presence and with a dazzling smile, he thanked the audience for the applause.

"I thank you all for coming here today," Harry said. His voice seemed to go right through Percy, straight into his heart. Percy remembered a midnight talk years ago – it was the only time he'd truly allowed himself to be close to Harry. The words Harry was saying faded slowly until Percy only heard Harry's gentle voice. It lulled him into calmness; a sense of wanting to curl up and sleep with Harry's voice softly speaking to him filled him.

Then the air was filled with another round of seemingly never-ending roars of applause. Harry gave a blinding, wide grin to the ecstatic audience and the flashes from the press cameras just kept on going off. Percy just watched Harry. He knew that no picture, Wizarding or Muggle, could ever capture Harry and show him as he really was. Harry was special. The energy he emitted, the power and yet the humbleness, as though he still believed that he was 'just another wizard'.

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Flowers were strewn over the graduating class and families started running down to congratulate their graduate. Percy stayed back, watching as his parents, Ginny, Charlie and George went down to hug Ron and Harry. There was a stab in his heart as he watched George. His younger brother was calm and quiet, pulled back – nothing like the child Percy had known. Since Fred had died, George had apparently lost his will to live. Percy had found out about Bill’s and Fred’s deaths through his mother. A black owl had delivered the letter.

Regret had filled Percy as he’d read the note – no matter the distance he’d taken from his family, he didn’t want them dead. And yet now his oldest brother had been killed in a confrontation between the Order of the Phoenix and the Death Eaters. Fred had lasted until the last battle; he’d died protecting Harry and George. They’d both died as heroes, but that didn’t matter much – they were still dead.

“Percy! You came!”

Percy looked up to see startling green eyes look at him. For a moment, Percy was speechless; Harry was even more beautiful close up.

“My princess.”

“Of course,” Percy said quietly, “I couldn’t miss your graduation, could I?”

Harry smiled gently at him. “Your parents want you to come over.”

Percy looked beyond Harry. A myriad of families with their graduates filled the field, yet Percy could still see the shock of red hair that was his family’s trademark. He couldn’t see their faces though; Charlie and Ron both stood with their backs to him and hid the others from view.

“Are you sure?” Percy asked.

“I wouldn’t have said it if I wasn’t sure,” Harry said. He pulled at Percy. “Come on.”

Percy found himself dragged along towards his family. Nervousness settled in his stomach; what was he going to say to the family he hadn’t spoken to in years?

“Look who I found,” Harry said as they reached the group.

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The words made Percy wonder if his family really wanted him to come over. His mother looked almost like she'd seen a ghost; her eyes widened and the colour drained from her face.

"Percy!" she gasped and threw her arms around Percy's thin body.

Shocked by his mother's show of affection, Percy stood dumbly. After a few moments, he relaxed into his mother's embrace; it felt so good to be held once more.

When Molly pulled back, she was crying. "I didn't think you'd come—"

"I wouldn't miss this," Percy said, his voice thick.

His siblings and father looked more apprehensive than his mother. Ron seemed downright angry and Percy could understand him – it was Ron's day to shine and Percy stole the attention. It had been one of the reasons Percy had stayed away from his family during the ceremony.

Suddenly, a young blond man threw his arms around Harry. "We've graduated!" he cried happily, smiling widely. The man had grey eyes and a pointed chin and on his chest, was sewn the Slytherin crest.

Harry leaned in and kissed the other man, smiling widely the whole time.

Percy felt his heart sink to his boots. His mouth fell slightly open and he stared, wide-eyed, at Harry's display of affection towards the man.

Continuing to smile, Harry turned to Percy. "Percy, I'd like you to meet my boyfriend, Draco Malfoy."

Draco reached out his hand to take Percy's hand. Percy had some vague recollection of the snotty brat that had been the topic of many discussions between Harry and Ron during the summers and during dinner at Hogwarts. This man seemed nothing like that young brat; neither did he look anything the elder Malfoy Percy had run into a few times in the beginning of his time at the Ministry. No, this young man was beautiful. And he was Harry's—

"Boyfriend?" Percy repeated dumbly, taking Draco's hand.

Harry nodded happily. "We've been together for six months," he said.

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Percy's eyebrows rose as his heart continued to sink down through the earth. Harry had a boyfriend, a beautiful, rich, perfect boyfriend.

"Don't tell me you have a problem with gays now," Ron sneered at him, coming to stand next to Harry.

"Ron—" Harry started.

"No, don't you see his face?" Ron asked, motioning at Percy. "He's acting all superior and disgusted."

"I'm not—" Percy protested but Ron cut him off.

"What are you doing here anyway?" he asked angrily. "You don't belong in this family anymore. You've made it quite clear that the Ministry is what you care the most about, so why don't you go and fuck with them instead of ruin mine and Harry's graduation?"

The anger and the hatred in Ron's voice made Percy take a step back. His eyes darted from his youngest brother to Harry, who was holding Draco's hand. There was a crease of worry between Harry's eyebrows. Draco didn't seem to care about the sudden tension.

"I— congratulations to graduating, Harry," Percy said. "And to you, Ron."

He turned and disappeared into the crowd, humiliating tears burning in his eyes. He refused to let them fall.

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Harry slapped Ron upside the head. "Did you have to do that, moron?"

"What? He was being an arse!" Ron said, throwing his hands into the air.

"He just wanted to congratulate us on graduating!" Harry said, speaking louder than before.

"He was being a homophobic idiot!" Ron said, also raising his voice.

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“Yeah, I can see how his behaviour was far worse than when I told *you* about my being gay,” Harry said sarcastically.

Ron opened his mouth to retort, but discovered he didn't have anything to say to that. He looked rather like a stranded fish, his mouth opening and closing again. After all, the memory of Ron's horrified, disgusted reaction to the revelation of Harry's sexuality was fresh in both their minds.

“All I wish is that you'd think before you speak,” Harry said, shaking his head.

“Yeah, well, Hermione has been trying to teach me that for years,” Ron said, looking rather sheepish. Then he added, sounding agitated once more, “But he shouldn't have come here. This is our day and he's not part of the family anymore.”

“Ron,” Harry said, “whether you want it or not, Percy is still family. We all had our reactions to the war – though you, me and Hermione didn't have much time to reflect on it. Percy was hardly the only one who didn't want to believe that Voldemort was back and honestly, I can very much understand it now.”

Ron nodded. Harry knew he didn't exactly agreed with what he'd said but he would try to understand it, at least. Now wasn't the time to discuss it any further; Draco came back from speaking to Mrs. Weasley and started kissing Harry again, while Ron went to find Hermione on the people-filled field. The incident with Percy was forgotten, for the moment at least.

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At home, far from able to forget the meeting with Harry and Ron, Percy sat on his bed. The room was dark, his drapes drawn so that the sun outside the window couldn't light the room. An old teddy bear, which Percy had had since long before he could remember, was his only company. He held it close as he fought tears and sorrow.

Finally, he lost the battle and the tears fell down his cheeks, accompanied by pained hulking.

It wasn't just tears over Harry; it was tears for his family, the one he'd lost. He hadn't protected himself against feeling pain just because he'd distanced himself from his family;

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instead, he'd made himself even more vulnerable – because now, there was no one there to hold him and love him.

His mother's arms had felt so good, so loving, so familiar. It was as though she had never stopped loving him, despite his behaviour – but she couldn't possibly still love him after how he'd acted. He hadn't even replied to the owls bearing the news of the deaths of his brothers. At the time, he'd told himself he didn't care and that they only had themselves to blame for being killed. They could have done like him – worked for the Ministry, a safe distance from the war. They were stupid to risk their lives.

The tears burned their way down his cheeks and he tasted their salt when they reached his mouth. He had no right to mourn now; he'd been too selfish once and now he didn't have anything left.

He'd never felt so alone.

He didn't have any friends. He didn't hang out with anyone after work – instead, he usually buried himself in work. He'd made it quite far within the Ministry, but no one knew how things would be now that the war was over. He might no longer be needed. Percy knew Harry had been offered a job somewhere at the top of the Ministry; from there, he could likely decide to have Percy fired with a moment's notice.

Yet that wasn't Harry. No, Harry was sweet and good all the way through – he had even seemed happy to see Percy at the ceremony. This made Percy cry even harder, because with the memory of Harry's shining face came the face of Draco as well, unbidden, into his mind. The two of them holding each other and kissing.

How long had Harry known he was gay? While Percy still had any contact with them, all he ever heard about was Harry crushing on girls.

Regret filled him. He'd missed so much – and again, it wasn't just with Harry, but with his whole family. He'd caught a glimpse of Ginny, who'd turned out as beautiful as Percy had always known she would. Ron had turned into a young man, taller than most and freckled like few – and obviously a temper that was not to be messed with.

He had to smile despite the tears as he thought of the family he no longer had. Then, in the end, he fell into an uneasy sleep, his cheeks still wet with tears.

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Harry stared at his two best friends. They hadn't been out of school for more than two months and yet there they were, telling him they were—

“Engaged?” he repeated dumbly, staring at the two.

“Oh come on, Harry,” said Hermione, rolling his eyes at him. “Don't act so shocked.”

“But— when?” Harry stammered, choosing the first words to come to mind.

Ron shrugged. “Before the final battle,” he said, looking down at his shoes and then smiling at Hermione. “I wanted something to look forward to after it was all over, so I asked her to marry me. She didn't really believe me, but said yes in the end.”

“I thought he was joking at first,” Hermione said, smiling.

“There I was – I'd never been more serious in my life – and she reacts as though I'm saying something funny,” Ron said.

Harry shook his head, still shell-shocked by the news. It wasn't that it was really surprising – after all, the whole student body of Hogwarts had waited for the two to get together – but it was so *soon*. They weren't even twenty yet and they were planning to get married?

Harry ran a hand through his hair. “Well, I suppose congratulations are in order?”

He hugged Hermione, who seemed rather ecstatic for someone who usually wasn't very girly, and shook hands with Ron. The latter beamed like a sun.

“So— when are you going to get married?” Harry asked, knowing that if he asked, they would start talking and he wouldn't have to engage much. As Hermione started replying that they hadn't really thought about a date yet, Harry let his mind wander.

It wandered to Draco, who was currently travelling around the world. He'd wanted Harry to join, but feeling a need to let himself settle down for a while after the war, Harry had declined the invitation. He wasn't sure their relationship would survive being away from each other for the six months Draco had decided to be out travelling – but Harry had a feeling that his life wasn't so much up to him these days. It had been decided for so long by a destiny chosen for him by someone else, that it seemed strange to him that he himself would choose how he would walk through life.

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He looked up at his friends and wondered if he would ever be as happy as they seemed to be together. They shone together, with light and love and everything else sappy in their eyes as they looked at each other. Harry had a hard time seeing himself and Draco look at each other that way. They had fun together and they had great sex, but it wasn't that One True Love.

He thought of Ginny. He'd never been quite sure of how to look at her – he'd grown up with her, yet when they grew older, there had been a mild attraction. They'd tried dating, but had both decided that in the end, it felt wrong. They'd kissed, but it had never felt like Harry thought it was supposed to feel like.

His relationship with Draco had started by mistake. Harry had found Draco crying in the girl's bathroom, which had led the hatred between them to become even worse. Harry wasn't sure when or why it had happened, but at some point, when they'd been facing off together, alone in a hallway, they had ended up kissing instead. Their relationship had been purely physical to begin with, but slowly, bits and pieces of the walls around Draco's heart had broken.

So many things had happened since they started seeing each other that Harry wasn't sure he could keep it all straight.

So many people had died.

Harry felt his heart break, as he always did, when he thought of Bill and Fred's deaths. They'd been far too young, as many others had been; they shouldn't have died. And they were far from the only ones – more than half of Hogwarts' students had been killed or injured in the battles and riots around the war. Death Eater attacks had become an everyday occurrence.

Harry nodded to what Hermione and Ron was telling him. He'd become quite adapt at pretending to listen in the last few years. Finally, Hermione decided they should leave him alone and they left. The apartment became quiet and Harry lay on the couch, watching the flames lick the wood in the fireplace. Images of people who'd died in the war played in the fire, allowing Harry little rest.

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Happily Ever After

Harry started working at the Ministry. He had been offered a job as a high ranking official, but decided that he wanted to learn the work for real, so he got a job in the Wizengamot administration. He didn't start quite as far down as most probably did and the people around him were more than helpful when it came to showing him around and taking care of everything from bringing him breakfast and tea, to keeping him updated on what was going on. He didn't work full-time either, figuring that he could live off the money his parents had left him as well.

His apartment in the outskirts of London didn't cost him so much as a penny – the Ministry had given it to him as a thank you for defeating the Dark Lord. Harry hadn't wanted to accept it at first, because he felt that he was far from the only one who'd helped in the defeat, but in the end, his mum and dad had convinced him that he should accept it. Molly had loved it from the beginning and helped him decorate. It made him feel at home.

“Harry, do you mind running these down to the International office?” Harry's boss, Andromeda, stuck her head into Harry's office. “There aren't any owls free.”

“Of course I don't mind,” Harry said. He took the stack of papers and trotted down the steps towards the International Cooperations level, all the while looking through the stack of paper to see who it was for.

He stopped for a moment when he saw the name.

Percy Weasley.

Harry hadn't known Percy still worked there. He'd have thought Percy would have climbed the ladder towards success and work in the Minister's office by now – but no, obviously not.

As all other parts of the Ministry, the International office was rather messy, with owls flying back and forth and witches and wizards coming and going. Some said hi to Harry while a few stopped and stared at him, not used to the war hero working amongst them, obviously. Harry hurried away from those who stared, feeling embarrassed.

Percy's office wasn't hard to find; it was the third office in the long row, with a small tag on the door with his name on it.

Harry knocked on the door.

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Feeling more tired and worn than he'd ever felt in his life, Percy still dragged himself to work every single day. Yet unlike before the graduation, Percy now didn't feel any joy in coming there. It wasn't fun, there was no challenge that could keep him from thinking of his family and Harry.

He supposed that had he not been an avid avoidant of all sorts of alcohol, he would have been a drunk by now. He had thought about drowning his sorrows in liquor, but he hadn't seen the point – and his sensible side had told him just how much worse he would feel afterwards.

Thus he sat through day after day at work, wondering if this was how his life was supposed to be, what it was supposed to look like. He hoped not, because he certainly wouldn't make it through much longer if it was. He wondered what happiness was like, because he wasn't sure he'd ever felt it. He'd never been like everyone else, never felt joy at the same things. When everyone had laughed at the twins' jokes, he'd only felt they were stupid and meaningless and when they'd eaten dinners and everyone had told stories, he'd never shared anything because he hadn't felt his tales were good enough. His parents only ever saw the his siblings anyway; he wasn't noticed, save for when he did something exceptional.

So he'd tried his best at being exceptional. He'd been the best student he ever could be, he'd become both a Prefect and Head Boy. His parents had noticed him – but at the cost of him being ridiculed by his siblings and classmates.

Now there was no point. There was no one to see his promotion to second to the Head of the International office, no one to tell him that he'd done well. There was no one and nothing to spend the money he earned on, no one to hug and kiss at the end of a long day at work.

He was woken from his thoughts by a knock on the door.

"Come in," he said, righting his glasses and hoping that he didn't look too awful from the lack of sleeping.

The door opened and Percy's mouth fell open.

"Hi Percy," said Harry and stepped inside.

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Percy's room was rather dimly lit, Harry thought, and far messier than Harry had expected it to be considering what an organized student Percy had always been. Percy himself looked incredibly tired, dark circles beneath his eyes and he seemed too thin.

"Harry," said Percy, sounding completely shocked.

Harry walked further into the room. "Yeah, hi. I have some papers for you."

Percy stared at him as though he didn't quite understand what he was saying. Immediately concerned, Harry took another step forward.

"You— you can put them over here," Percy said, motioning at the desk.

"Are you all right?" Harry asked, putting the papers down.

Dazed, Percy managed a shrug. "I just didn't sleep well last night."

Harry lifted an eyebrow. "Last night? You look like you haven't slept for a month, Percy. Did something happen?"

Looking away, Percy shook his head. "I— it's nothing. Don't worry about me. I just—"

He trailed off and Harry watched as Percy tried to find other things to look at than Harry. Finally, Harry spoke.

"They miss you, you know."

Percy looked up, his eyes strangely empty. Harry had never seen Percy look quite like it, though he had seen the same look in others eyes, when the war was raging.

"Mum and dad. They want you to start talking to them again," Harry continued as he sat down in the chair in front of Percy's desk, when Percy didn't seem able to speak. "Mum thought you'd come back when you came to graduation."

"I just— wanted to congratulate you," Percy said, his words stilted and his eyes on the ground.

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“You broke her heart again,” Harry said, watching Percy carefully for any and all reactions. “You broke it the first time when you stopped talking to us.”

He saw the flinch that passed quickly over Percy’s face. He wondered how he was able to read Percy so easily – he’d never spent much time with Percy at all. He’d always kept to himself, while Harry played with Ron and Ginny most of the time.

The person sitting before Harry wasn’t the same Percy Harry had known, though. This was a broken version, a rag doll someone had played with one to many times. Worn and old, tired of the world and longing for a rest; Harry could see much of himself in Percy’s slumped body.

“You should come home,” Harry said.

“They don’t want me there. You heard Ron,” Percy said, the self-hatred in his voice obvious to Harry’s ears. He repeated, “They don’t want me there.”

“Ron was just being Ron,” Harry said. “He has a bad temper and has yet to learn how to control it.”

Percy looked up, his eyes suddenly wide. “I wasn’t being a homophobe about your— relationship with Draco, I swear,” he said, speaking quickly.

Surprised at the outburst, Harry said, “I didn’t really think you were.”

“I was just shocked that it was him. I’d only heard you speak badly of him before,” Percy said, his speech still quick.

Harry shrugged. “Don’t worry about it. Ron got his knickers in a twist, not me.”

Percy nodded and looked away again. He didn’t seem to know what to say. An uneasy silence spread; Harry watched Percy twitch, his eyes flitting between Harry’s shoes and anywhere else in the room. He never looked Harry in the eye.

“They’re having dinner on Friday night as usual,” Harry said. “Why don’t you join us?”

“I don’t— They don’t—”

“They want you there,” Harry said. “I promise you, they want you there.”

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He stood up and walked to the door. Then he turned and looked at Percy again. “Our family has already lost two members. We really don’t need to lose another one.”

Happily Ever After

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## Chapter Three

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Harry didn't mention inviting Percy to anyone in the family. He figured there was no reason to get everyone worked up – whether in getting his mother's hopes up or in making Ron angry for inviting him – since he was far from sure that Percy would actually show.

Instead, he sent an owl from his office with a short invitation for Percy to join him at his apartment before Apparating to the Burrow, so that Percy wouldn't have to come alone. Just before he sent the note, he scribbled, 'And get some sleep before Friday!'

He was trying to figure out how he felt about Percy. As he'd told Ron, Harry didn't dislike Percy the way Ron did because he'd chosen to believe the Ministry's tale that Voldemort wasn't back. In retrospect, Harry wasn't certain that, given the choice, he wouldn't have done the same. It had been an easier truth to believe.

Still, he wasn't sure he liked Percy. Despite growing up with him, Harry couldn't see him as a brother, unlike all the other Weasley children. He'd barely talked to Percy at all; Percy had never joined when they played and hardly ever said anything, even when the whole family was sitting around the dinner table. He had never been an easy person to get close to, always keeping everyone, including his family, at an arm's length. Harry didn't know what kind of food Percy liked, or what made his blood boil with anger. He didn't know if Percy had ever had a crush and he didn't know what Percy's favourite book was. He didn't really know anything about him.

Friday came and Harry was at home, just getting dressed when the doorbell rang. Still buttoning his robes, he opened the door to find Percy.

"Uh," said Percy, looking at Harry's half-dressed state. "Am I early?"

He looked as impeccable as Harry remembered him in school; his dark robes buttoned all the way up, his hair neat and tidy unlike Harry's own. There were still circles beneath his eyes, but Percy had obviously made an effort to look nice for his family.

"No, no, I'm just running late as usual. Come in," Harry said, opening the door wider to let Percy inside.

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Percy's eyes flitted from Harry's body to take in the apartment. Harry wasn't a tidy person and his apartment looked accordingly. He'd tried to clean up the worst, but it still looked like organized chaos.

"Want something to drink?" Harry asked, buttoning the last of his robes and closing the door behind Percy.

"N-no, I'm fine, thanks," Percy said. "It's a nice place you've got here."

Harry shrugged. "It works."

He wondered when Percy had started stammering. Was he nervous? It was likely, considering he was about to come unannounced to dinner with a family he hadn't spoken to in years.

"Sit down," Harry suggested. "I'll be done in a minute."

Percy did as he was told; he sat on the couch, his back straight and shoulders tense. His eyes flitted nervously around the room and he swallowed every now and then. Anxiety was clearly written on his forehead.

When Harry had run a brush through his hair and chosen a pair of shoes from his wardrobe, he returned to the living room and sat down on the couch. He looked at Percy, who wouldn't look at Harry but stared at the fireplace.

"They'll be glad to see you," Harry said after a few moments of silence.

Finally, Percy looked at him. "How can you be so sure? I haven't spoken to them in years."

"It doesn't matter," Harry said. "Mum never stopped loving you."

He tried his best to look earnest; the words he told Percy were true. Percy's eyes were still filled with doubt and yet again, Harry wondered how he was able to read Percy so easily.

Silence spread.

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Percy felt his heart beat wildly in his chest. The honest look in Harry's eyes, combined with the earlier glimpse of Harry's well-muscled body and the fact that he was soon to meet the family he'd distanced himself from for years, made pearls of sweat run down Percy's back. He was overwhelmed by feelings, feelings of inadequacy standing next to Harry, yet passion for the man he'd become and nervous anxiousness about the coming meeting.

His mouth was dry and he was unable to form words. He wanted to tell Harry everything, all that he'd felt in the last few years and every reason behind every stupid decision he'd made. He wanted to tell Harry that he loved him – loved him in a way that was not how brothers loved one another.

Yet he stayed silent, almost afraid to breathe, while the feelings inside warred.

Harry stood up. He wasn't quite as tall as Percy, but more well-muscled, obviously – Percy had gotten a glimpse of that.

"We should go," Harry said. "Are you ready?"

Licking his lips, Percy nodded and stood shakily. He stood quite close to Harry; he could feel Harry's aftershave.

Harry placed a hand on Percy's shoulder. "Relax," he said. "It'll be fine."

Wondering if he looked as distraught as he felt, Percy only managed a nod.

"Maybe we should go by Floo instead," Harry pondered. "It doesn't seem safe for you to Apparate if you're that nervous."

"I— I'm all right," Percy said, "I'll manage."

Harry looked doubtful. "If you say so. I don't want you splinched – mum wouldn't like that."

"I'll be fine," Percy said, taking a deep breath in an attempt to calm his frayed nerves.

A moment later, the pair Apparated from Harry's apartment. They landed in the garden, outside the Burrow. Percy swallowed, looking at the crooked house where warm light spilled from the windows. It looked every bit as he remembered it, though perhaps a bit older. He wondered what he'd thought when he'd Apparated out of the House for the last

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time, mere weeks after moving out. He wondered what he would have felt, had he known that he wouldn't return for years.

He felt Harry's hand on his shoulder. "You all right?"

Percy closed his eyes briefly, then he nodded. "Just a— a tad bit nervous, I suppose," he said.

The hand on his shoulder didn't leave. "I understand."

The hand dropped and they stood in silence. Harry's eyes were on the house, Percy noted, but he didn't seem to be actually looking at it. He seemed far away, lost in his own thoughts.

It could have been hours, but was likely mere minutes, when Harry shook himself out of his reverie and pulled Percy along down the small path to the kitchen door.

Percy's heart beat wildly in his chest.

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"—and then McBey turns around and asks, 'what hat?'"

The occupants around the table roared with laughter and Ron, who'd been telling the story, took another swig of his drink. Mrs. Weasley smiled fondly at her children. Ron, sitting close to Hermione, their fingers interlaced. Ginny on her boyfriend's lap, looking happier than Mrs. Weasley had seen her in months. Even George was smiling a bit; it warmed his mother's heart to see, though her heart ached as it always did when she thought of the two sons she'd lost.

Feeling she was about to tear up, she carried a set of trays out into the kitchen. She didn't want to spoil the good mood of her children; they deserved smiles and laughs. She wished her husband would come home so that she could share her feelings as she always did.

She heard the door opened and turned around.

"Harry!" she said, smiling. "You made it."

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Harry smiled back. “Hi mum.” Then he paused. “I— uh, I brought— someone.”

He moved into the kitchen and Mrs. Weasley’s eyes opened wide. “Percy!”

The trays long forgotten, she ran to him. He was taller than her, still, but it didn’t matter; he was still her little boy. She was barely aware of crying, only holding onto him tightly, asking questions of how he was and statements about how happy she was to have him there.

Others piled into the room; they’d heard their mother’s happy cry. The group of younger Weasleys stood staring in the doorway to the kitchen.

Finally Charlie, who’d made it to his parents’ weekly dinner for once, walked over to give his younger brother a hug. Mrs. Weasley stood back watching the two, tears still falling down her cheeks.

Her son – he’d come home at last.

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Harry allowed himself to smile when Charlie came to Percy and hugged him, whilst telling him that he needed a good beating for leaving the family for so long. Ginny followed her oldest brother’s lead and came to Percy next, leaving Dean behind.

One by one they all welcomed Percy into the family. Ron and George were the last ones; Ron seemed conflicted on whether he was angry or happy while George just looked sad. Harry knew what George was thinking; he’d talked to George about it. He knew how much George wished that it were his twin that walked through the door instead.

In the middle of it all Mr. Weasley arrived home. His mouth fell open at the sight of Percy and he took him in his arms, appearing to be in shock.

Harry watched Percy who seemed overwhelmed by the welcome his family was giving him. Tears were shining in his eyes, though Harry doubted Percy would allow them to fall.

In the end they sat down for dinner.

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It was a quiet affair; no one was quite certain of how to act. Mrs. Weasley fussed over Percy and told him to eat more, that he was too skinny. Harry saw Ron eyeing Percy warily as though Percy would suddenly pull his wand out and curse the family or some such. There had been no hugs when Ron said hello to his brother again. Harry wasn't surprised; Ron was no less stubborn now than when Harry first made friends with him.

When dinner ended, Harry and Percy both helped Mrs. Weasley with the dishes. Percy seemed thankful for having something to do; an excuse not to have to interact with the family. When the two were left alone in the kitchen for a moment, Harry told Percy he was doing fine.

"I feel— I feel like an outsider. Like I don't belong here," Percy said, looking away from Harry.

"It's to be expected," Harry said. "But you're doing fine."

Then Mrs. Weasley was back, continuing to fuss over Percy as though he was five again. In the end Harry and Percy said their good byes.

"Tell the others it was— nice seeing them," Percy said hesitantly.

Mrs. Weasley smiled tearfully and hugged Percy. "It's so wonderful to have you back."

Percy patted his mother awkwardly on the back, though he looked like he was still enjoying the hug. "It was lovely to see you to, mum."

A few minutes later, Harry and Percy were walking away from the Burrow. They stopped and turned to look at the home where they had both grown up.

"Thank you for taking me back here," Percy said, his voice heavy with held back emotions.

Harry shrugged lightly, a small smile on his lips. "I'm glad you came. It was nice to see mum smile again. She doesn't do that much these days."

They stood in silence. Harry noted that Percy still seemed rather fidgety but he didn't comment. In the end they Apparated away, each to their own apartment.

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Happily Ever After

One year later

Percy's desk was neat and tidy. Each parchment had been sorted and marked so that he would know exactly where he was supposed to start when he came back after the weekend. He put his quill away in the top drawer – it had already been sharpened, ready for use. Finally he stood, picked up his bag and walked out the room, locking the door with a spell.

If one were to compare the man who'd just left his office with the same man a year ago, one would likely come to the conclusion that it *couldn't* possibly be the same man. The one a year ago had had badly kept and rather long hair, dark circles beneath his eyes, bad posture and badly fitting clothes. This man was the complete opposite; his red hair was well-kept, only a few inches long, his eyes were clear and alert, his back was straight, and his robes were impeccable.

On top of that, this man tended to smile far more often.

Percy arrived home, smiling at the thought of how much better his life had become in just a single year.

The apartment was already filled with the delicious smell of dinner; his partner was a great cook. It fitted Percy very well considering how he didn't like cooking at all.

"I thought I heard you come in."

Ames O'Keefe stuck his head out of the kitchen. His dark hair fell softly into his eyes and he flashed a row of white teeth at the sight of Percy.

"Something smells fabulous," Percy said, walking up to Ames. Ames wrapped his arms around Percy and kissed him soundly.

"Yes," Ames said, "you."

Percy chuckled. "Nah, don't think so. I actually think I need a shower."

Ames shrugged. "There'll be a few minutes until dinner is finished so you can take a quick one."

"I think I just might do that," Percy said. Ames smiled and gave Percy another kiss before returning to the kitchen.

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Percy went to the bedroom and chose another set of more comfortable clothes to wear for dinner. In the bathroom he undressed and turned on the water, allowing it to soak him and warm him.

Ames O'Keefe.

A wizard originally from Ireland, who worked at the Ministry in one of the International Office's subdivisions. They'd met by accident – literally. Percy, deep in thought, had walked straight into Ames who'd been carrying a stack of parchment so tall that he couldn't see at all. Percy hadn't noticed Ames anymore than he noticed anyone else in the office at the time but Ames had noticed him and the next day, Ames had 'had an errand' that just happened to take him to Percy.

Percy had been completely bewildered by the attention Ames was giving him and had said no to the dinners Ames kept asking him to go on just out of habit.

In the end Ames had won – they'd gone on their date and one had turned into more. Obviously.

Lathering his hair up with shampoo, Percy sighed softly.

Ames was head over heels in love with Percy. Percy could see it in his eyes, in the way Ames worshipped everything he did. Percy doubted there was anything Ames wouldn't do for him. He'd guided Percy through his first hesitant tries at sex; he'd taught Percy how to please both himself and Ames. And outside the bedroom Ames did things like today – made dinner for the two of them, cleaned the apartment while Percy was working late nights or left little notes here and there for Percy to find and smile at.

Yet the fire was missing. The passion Percy had always felt for Harry, even when Harry was far too young to be told of it – the passion Percy imagined was supposed to exist in relationships between lovers.

'My princess.'

'That's the girl I'm going to marry.'

The words echoed in his mind, distant memories of years ago. He could still hear Fred and George's laughter following his statement, and he could still remember all the ridicule he'd had to live through. Yet no matter how young he'd been or how silly the words had been

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and no matter how funny they'd been to his siblings' ears, they had still been true. In his heart, Harry was still the only one.

He'd never told Harry. Over the year since he'd started speaking to his family again, Percy had started seeing more of Harry again – sometimes he would come to Percy's office and chat and every now and then Harry would even visit Percy at his apartment. They were becoming friends again. It felt bittersweet, Percy thought, because in a way it was dangling what he could never have right in front of his eyes. Harry would never see him as anything but a step brother, a friend. Harry was with Draco and Percy couldn't very well tell Harry that he had chosen the wrong man.

Instead, Percy had settled for Ames. They had a nice, loving and safe relationship, which assured Percy that he wouldn't have to be alone for all time just because he could never tell Harry. Ames loved him and they had fun together. They could talk for hours and the sex was pleasurable.

“Ready soon?” Ames' voice came through the door to the bathroom.

“Yes,” Percy answered, banishing the thoughts of his relationship with Ames being anything but perfect. “I'll be out in a moment.”

Yet as he looked in the steam fogged mirror, he wondered: is this my life?

*

The clock standing on the bedside table read two thirty in the morning when Percy was awoken by rapid knocks on the front door. Blinking and attempting to clear his head, he slipped on his slippers and walked out of the bedroom quietly, trying not to wake Ames.

Peering through the hole in the door, Percy was surprised to see Harry on the other side. He opened the door and stared at Harry. Harry's hair was on end and he looked distraught.

“Harry? What are you doing here? What's wrong?” he asked immediately, letting Harry inside.

Harry looked uncertain and sad. “I just— I just needed a friend.”

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He slumped down on the couch and wrung his hands. Percy sat down in the armchair, worried about Harry – why would he show up at Percy’s in the middle of the night?

He got his answer immediately. “Draco and I broke up.”

The world seemed to come to a halt. Harry and Draco, who’d seemed so close and so perfect together – they had broken up? Percy’s mind instantly filled with questions such as how and why but he didn’t voice them. Harry didn’t seem to need being bombarded by questions; he needed a friend just to talk to. Perhaps to tell what had happened but not necessarily.

“I’m sorry, Harry,” Percy said finally when he’d gathered his wits.

“Don’t be,” Harry said, suddenly sounding rueful. “We’ve just been fighting for months. It’s a miracle it worked this long.”

“Fighting? Why haven’t you said anything?” Percy asked, though he knew the answer.

“I didn’t want you to know. None of you. I didn’t tell Hermione or Ron either. Everyone kept telling me that Draco was such a good match for me and I— I suppose I didn’t want to disappoint you guys,” Harry said. “I wanted it to work – I love Draco.”

“As a lover or as a friend?” Percy asked before he could stop himself.

Harry looked up, really meeting Percy’s eye for the first time since he’d arrived. “I— I don’t know.” He hesitated. “I don’t think our relationship was based on love to begin with; it was just the fire from all the fighting we’d done for six years and then— well, it’s a thin line between love and hate, I suppose.”

When Harry fell silent, they heard Ames shuffling around in the bed. Harry’s eyes widened. He stood up and said, “Oh, is Ames here? Of course he is – I shouldn’t have come here, disturbing you like this. I should go – you don’t need to listen to my problems.”

Percy stood just as quickly as Harry. He placed his hands on Harry’s shoulders before he had time to think; it felt natural. “Sit down, Harry. You’re not disturbing at all.”

Hesitantly, Harry sat down again. Percy quickly placed a silencing charm around the bedroom so that Ames wouldn’t be bothered by Percy’s conversation with Harry. In the back of his mind, a little voice said to him, ‘and so that Ames won’t bother your conversation with Harry’ – but Percy ignored the voice poignantly.

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Percy conjured some tea from the kitchen and when Harry had a cup in his hands, Percy sat back down again. He sat on the couch this time, just a few feet away from Harry.

“Now, tell me what happened tonight with Draco.”

Harry shrugged. “We were just fighting, like we’ve been doing the last few months. I don’t even remember how it started – just that we were suddenly shouting at each other. In the end, he yelled, ‘If all we do is fight, maybe we shouldn’t be together’ – and I said, ‘No, you’re right.’” He sighed softly. “And that was all. I just ended it right there. Two years together, ended just like that.

“I didn’t want to go home,” Harry continued. “It would just remind me of everything we’ve had together and it might make me go back and say that we should be together again. I don’t want to do that – we’d just be fighting within a week again – probably within a day. I didn’t know where to go, though; I didn’t want to go to Hermione and Ron, and mum and dad wouldn’t get it anyway.”

He trailed off and looked at Percy, his eyes sad. Percy didn’t think he’d ever seen anything more beautiful.

“My door is always open for you, Harry,” he said sincerely.

“Even at two thirty in the morning?” Harry asked, a small and sad smile on his lips.

“Yes, even at two thirty in the morning,” Percy said.

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“You were up late last night.” Ames poured Percy a cup of tea.

“Thanks,” Percy said, taking the cup. “Yes, Harry came by. He was upset – he and Draco broke up. He needed someone to talk to.”

Ames smiled. “Of course. Why did they break up? They seemed good together.”

Percy shrugged. “Apparently, they’d been fighting quite a bit, though they’ve kept it from everyone else.”

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Ames nodded slowly and sipped his own tea. “But Harry’s all right?”

Percy looked at Ames, who seemed honest in his question. There was no jealousy; Ames had never shown any signs of being jealous of Harry or anyone else. Instead, Ames seemed to believe anything Percy did was right.

“Yes, I think so. He just needed a friend,” Percy said. He looked down, pretending to read the paper so that Ames wouldn’t be able to see how pleased Percy was with the fact that Harry had come to him instead of to Ron. It showed a level of trust that Percy hadn’t dared to hope for between the two – and it was something that would hurt Ames to see so he hid it. He was talented at hiding his thoughts and feelings; he’d done it since he was seven years old.

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The days passed and turned into weeks. Autumn came to London and wrapped the city in a grey, wet glove but Percy found that he didn’t mind so much. Ever since Harry and Draco had broken up, Harry had started coming to visit Percy more often. Harry and Ames got along just fine and every now and then, Harry stayed for dinner. Percy tried to keep the visits where Ames was present to a minimum, though; he found himself giving far too much attention to Harry and forgetting all about Ames.

The small hope he’d once had that he’d be able to fall out of love with Harry had long since been extinguished. The more time Percy spent with Harry, the more he could feel the love and adoration taking over his heart. He wasn’t blinded by it; he saw Harry’s faults and weaknesses, but it didn’t matter. He loved all of Harry.

“How on Earth do you ever get anything done? Every time I come by, you’re daydreaming.”

Percy looked up into sparkling green eyes and his heart skipped a beat as it always did when Harry came by.

“I’m not daydreaming,” Percy said. “I’m thinking.”

Harry chuckled. “Yeah, right. About non-work-related things.”

Happily Ever After

Percy smiled slightly. “Maybe. What brings you here?”

“I thought I’d see if you’re free for lunch,” Harry said, shrugging lightly. “There’s this new Chinese restaurant just a block away that I thought needed checking out.”

Percy looked at the clock on the wall and was surprised to find it was already on ‘time to eat’. Contrary to Harry’s belief, he had been working hard for hours – he’d even arrived to work early. He didn’t have the same need to eat as Harry did but he would never say no to spending time with him.

“Sure,” Percy said. “Let me just get my umbrella – I hear it’s raining?”

Harry nodded. “Someone forgot to turn off the water up there again,” he muttered.

Percy chuckled and his heart constricted as it tended to do whenever Harry made faces or just simply existed.

They made their way out of the Ministry and walked to the Chinese restaurant Harry had spoken about. For a moment, Percy allowed himself to imagine that he and Harry were together and that at any moment, Harry would take Percy’s hand in his. He imagined that Harry was the one who waited in bed when Percy came home late from the Ministry; imagined that Percy was the one who was allowed to taste those lips, no one else.

It was a dream that would never happen. It was impossible; Harry was not for him and had never been. He was supposed to look upon Harry with brotherly love, nothing else. He was supposed to love Ames the way Ames loved Percy. Ames deserved a devoted boyfriend and lover – and Percy deserved to be able to focus on Ames. Perhaps, if he didn’t see Harry so much, he’d be able to find the love for Ames.

Perhaps, if Harry no longer existed in Percy’s life, Percy would have the peace he needed to love another.

The lunch suddenly felt bittersweet. He and Harry laughed and talked, their lunch much longer than it should have been but neither caring. In his heart, Percy knew what it was; a long awaited good bye.

So in the end, when they’d paid their bill and were going in separate directions – Harry to a meeting and Percy back to the Ministry – Percy allowed himself a final show of affection towards Harry.

Happily Ever After

“Good bye, Harry,” he said, “and thanks for lunch.”

Harry smiled. “We’ll have to do this again, soon.”

Percy nodded. Then he leaned forward and hugged Harry. He felt Harry freeze for a moment and knew he was doing the right thing; Harry didn’t want to be touched by him. Still, he lingered; he breathed in, smelling Harry’s unique scent and storing it away in his mind along with all the other things he knew about Harry.

“That’s the girl I’m going to marry.”

“My princess.”

Then he pulled back, gave Harry a half-smile and turned away.

Though his heart was breaking, he knew it was the right thing to do. It was the only way he’d ever be free.

Happily Ever After

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## Chapter Four

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Two years later

“I’m feeling a bit left behind,” Harry admitted. “There you are, with good jobs, married and with a kid on the way – and I’m still trying to figure out what I want with my life.”

He took a sip of tea from the cup Hermione had placed on the table for him. There were cookies as well; Harry had already eaten a few. Outside, the late summer sun shone warm and beautiful.

Hermione smiled sympathetically at him. “I’m sure you’ll figure it out, Harry.”

Harry ran a hand through his hair. “I just— I can’t figure out what I did wrong. I mean, I saved the world. Couldn’t the world have been a bit nice about it and given me a bit of a break with the rest of my life?”

Hermione chuckled. “One would think so, but obviously not.”

“I mean,” Harry continued, “first I figure out I’m gay. That’s fine, but it kind of makes the traditional two point three kids and white picket fence impossible.”

“You can still have the picket fence,” Hermione said. “Besides, there’s adoption.”

Harry gave her a look. “You know that’s not the point. Anyway, then I fall in love with Draco and figure that it won’t ever be returned feelings – but surprise! He’s in love with me too. Unfortunately, we’re both too hot headed and the only thing we do is fight.”

“You’re better as friends,” Hermione pointed out, picking up her own cup of tea.

“Yeah,” Harry said sarcastically, “‘cause then *you* don’t have to see him as much.”

Hermione shook her head. “No, but you’re just— I don’t know. I always pictured you with someone else.”

Happily Ever After

“Who?” Harry asked, cocking his head to the side.

“I don’t know, but I’ll let you know as soon as I’ve figured it out,” Hermione said, smiling slightly. Then a look of pain passed over her face and she mumbled, “Oh bloody— Harry, I’ll be back in a moment, I just need to go to the bathroom.”

Harry watched her stand up and waddle away. The baby was due in two weeks and Hermione looked ready to pop, but Harry’s thoughts didn’t linger long on her.

They lingered on someone else. An impossible someone, yet a someone none the less.

Percy Weasley.

For the longest of times, Harry had told himself that what he felt for Percy was just regular brotherly love, nothing else. After all, he wasn’t supposed to fall in love with his step brother – it was wrong on so many levels.

But when he’d started dreaming of Percy, imagining things that he most certainly wouldn’t do with a brother, he’d started to realise that it was something more. He’d written it off as lust, teenage hormones. He’d told himself that he dreamed of everyone – and it wasn’t really a lie, though no one was as frequent in the dreams as Percy.

Then Percy had disappeared; he’d completely stopped speaking to Harry and the rest of the family. Harry’s life had filled with Voldemort and his followers and the deaths they caused. The war had raged at the same time as he was supposed to learn everything he could in school – he’d barely had time to breathe. Somewhere in all of that, Draco Malfoy had kissed him for the first time and the two had become a couple; secret at first, then out in the open when Draco decided to side with the Light.

Years had passed since. Harry had forgotten about the dreams, about Percy; he hadn’t been part of his life at all. At graduation, he saw Percy again and became curious – what had happened with his step brother over the years?

He’d been able to read Percy like no one else, he found. He’d taken Percy back to his family and he’d been able to label every emotion that passed over Percy’s face.

“Harry?” Hermione was coming back to the living room and she sounded a bit concerned.

Harry shook his head to clear it. “I’m fine. Just thinking,” he said automatically.

Happily Ever After

“What about?” Hermione asked, sitting down on the couch again. “It looked like rather good thoughts.”

“I don’t know,” Harry admitted.

“A person? Someone special?”

Harry shrugged. “It’s just— someone I knew. I had feelings for him once, I think, but then the war happened and we— we didn’t talk. But then we met again after the war and I thought there might be something and that he might feel something for me.”

He trailed off, memories playing before him again. He recalled the night when he and Draco had broken up and Harry had ended up outside of Percy’s apartment. He’d hesitated for fifteen minutes before he actually knocked on the door. Yet despite it being two thirty in the morning, Percy hadn’t seemed to mind his presence at all – and after that, their relationship had deepened.

“So what happened?” Hermione asked.

“He had a boyfriend,” Harry said. “We still talked and all and I even thought he might reciprocate my feelings – but then he disappeared again. I still see him sometimes, but whenever I look for him he seems to vanish. I don’t know what happened.”

“He just disappeared?” Hermione asked. “When was this?”

Harry looked down. “Two years ago.”

“Two years? And you still haven’t moved on?” Hermione asked, sounding surprised.

Harry shook his head. “I know, it’s insane. I just— I can’t seem to stop thinking about him. Trust me, I’ve tried.”

“Is he still with his boyfriend?” Hermione asked after a moment of silence.

Harry nodded. “I think so. They seem to be terribly in love – I’ve heard they’re even planning a bonding ceremony.”

“That sounds like a serious relationship,” Hermione said.

Happily Ever After

“Yeah,” Harry said, shaking his head in frustration. “But there was something wrong. Something off. I don’t know what, it just— it just was.”

Something about how Percy had always given him far more attention than he gave Ames when they were both in his company. The way Percy always listened to him, his eyes and whole body attentive. Harry could feel the world disappear and all there was, was them.

Then it had been that lunch. It was one of those times when everything had just clicked – or at least Harry had thought so. They’d talked for hours, far longer than they should have, until Harry had to run to a meeting. He’d been reluctant to go but knew that he had to; they were expecting him. He’d imagined he’d seen the same reluctance in Percy’s eyes.

Then Percy had hugged him. Harry had frozen in shock; Percy never gave such public shows of affection. Harry had willed himself to relax and enjoy the feeling of the other man’s closeness. Perhaps Percy did feel the things Harry imagined after all.

Percy had pulled back and given him a small smile that made Harry melt. It felt like they’d gotten over something, like their relationship had suddenly changed. Harry hadn’t been able to stop smiling for the rest of the day.

And then Percy had just ceased existing.

“Why didn’t you tell him?” Hermione asked.

A sad laugh escaped Harry. “This is me you’re talking to, Hermione.”

Hermione shook her head fondly. “Would you have told him if he didn’t have a boyfriend?”

Harry shrugged. “I don’t know. I— I don’t think he ever felt anything for me. I mean, couldn’t he see it? I visited him far more often than I visited anyone else – and I came to him at two thirty in the morning after breaking up with my boyfriend!”

Hermione raised an eyebrow. “Nothing a friend wouldn’t do,” she said. “Maybe he was just as scared as you are and he’s hiding because it’s the only way he could stop thinking of you.”

“That’s stupid,” Harry muttered. It was, of course, true – most things Hermione said were. It didn’t mean Harry wanted to hear about it.

Happily Ever After

Hermione stood up and took the tray that had been on the table to the kitchen to clean the empty tea cups. Harry stood up and followed her, helping her dry off the cups and putting them away.

“I suppose I should go,” Harry said. “Thanks for the tea.”

“You’re welcome,” Hermione said. “You’re always welcome, you know. Don’t make yourself a stranger just because we don’t live in London anymore.”

Harry grinned at her. “Yeah. I’ll try not to.”

“Oh, Harry, I almost forgot,” Hermione said. “Mrs. Weasley told me when she was here yesterday – Percy is getting bonded with Ames on Saturday and we’re all invited.”

Harry could have sworn that she winked at him just before he Apparated away.

*

Harry was pacing; back and forth, back and forth over the living room floor. His robes, which had once been neat and tidy, were now rumpled and his hair was messy even for him because he’d run his hand through it so many times.

It was one hour until the bonding ceremony was to start. Harry’s heart beat quicker in his chest as soon as he thought about it.

He wasn’t really invited, he’d found out. For some reason or other Percy didn’t want him there. Still, Mrs. Weasley and Hermione had both insisted on Harry going, saying Percy had probably just forgotten. Harry didn’t believe that theory; Percy didn’t want him to be present – and Harry wanted to know why. Why had Percy been hiding from him ever since that lovely lunch? It had been two years.

The doorbell rang and Harry opened to let Hermione and Ron inside. In the last stages of pregnancy, Hermione had taken to going by train and other Muggle transportations as much as possible instead of using magical means. Magical transportation made her far too sick and wasn’t healthy for the baby.

“You look stressed out,” Ron noted, with a raised eyebrow. “Why? It’s just Percy getting bonded – nothing special.”

Happily Ever After

Harry chuckled nervously. “No, nothing special.”

Ron gave him an odd look while Hermione shot him a look that Harry couldn’t read. Ever since her random announcement about Percy’s bonding, Harry had had the feeling that Hermione wasn’t exactly clueless about Harry’s feelings. Still, she hadn’t said anything and he wasn’t about to ask until she made a move.

“So how are we supposed to get there?” Harry asked, choosing to focus on the practical instead of starting another internal monologue about Percy.

“By foot,” Hermione answered. “It’s not far from here.”

It really wasn’t. It took less than ten minutes to walk to the small park that Percy and Ames had chosen for their ceremony. It was a lovely little clearing; there were trees all around, quite a few people and a table set with a variety of food. It didn’t take long for Harry to find Percy and Ames either – they were both dressed in long, white robes. Ames looked good, Harry noted absently but his attention was solely on Percy. Percy’s red hair and freckles stood out against the soft materials of his robes; it came together perfectly making him look just— beautiful.

“Come on,” Hermione said, pulling Harry with her towards the happy couple. Ron had gone over to the food table already; it seemed more important to him than his brother.

Ames noted Hermione and Harry coming closer. “Hey guys!”

“Hi Ames,” Hermione said and hugged him lightly, her belly in the way.

Ames turned to Harry. “And Harry! I haven’t seen you in a long time.”

If Harry hadn’t been watching him, he wouldn’t have noticed the way Percy froze. Yet Harry hadn’t been able to take his eyes off Percy, even when he was saying hi to Ames so he did see it. He watched as Percy turned around slowly, his eyes immediately catching Harry’s.

“Hi Percy,” Harry said. “Long time no see.”

*

Happily Ever After

It was supposed to be the happiest day of his life. The sun was shining, the food was great and he was about to be bonded with the man he loved.

Or told himself he loved, anyway.

Percy didn't know when it had gotten to the point that he almost believed the lies he'd been telling himself for years. He wasn't sure why he'd asked Ames to bond with him but he had always thought that a bonding ceremony was the ultimate way to show one's love – so why not ask Ames, considering he was supposedly terribly in love with him?

Now they were here, in the park where Percy had spent many of his afternoons just sitting about reading. He'd taken Ames there once and Ames had thought it so pretty that once they decided to get bonded, this was the only place they'd had in mind.

The park was filled with friends and family. Percy's parents had arrived a bit earlier – his mother had kissed him on the cheeks and hugged him and he was reminded, yet again, how glad he was to have them in his life. It was all thanks to Har—

No, that was forbidden territory. He'd avoided thinking of Harry for two years – he would be able to keep him out on the day of the ceremony as well.

Ames took his hand and squeezed it.

“You're looking a bit out of it,” Ames whispered in Percy's ear. “Are you nervous?”

He wasn't at all nervous. “Yes. I just don't want anything to go wrong.”

Ames smiled at him and kissed him softly. “It'll be just fine. Perfect, in fact. Because it's you and me.”

Percy attempted to smile back. It felt false; it wasn't him. But he couldn't stop this now – he wouldn't humiliate Ames so completely by leaving him today. In fact, Percy was never going to leave him. Percy would live with Ames and love Ames the same way he had for the past three years – and they would be fine. They would live happily ever after together, because that was how it was supposed to be.

Ames turned around to say hi to some guests. Percy didn't listen until—

“—Harry! I haven't seen you in a long time.”

Happily Ever After

Percy froze. His whole body went rigid, his mind becoming completely blank all at once. He couldn't be here. Percy hadn't sent him an invitation; he wasn't supposed to be here!

Slowly, he turned around. The blood pounded in his ears, his heart beat quick and loud enough for him to suspect others could hear it as well.

He found Harry's eyes immediately. Green, beautiful, intense. Harry's hair was still black as the blackest of woods and his lips were red as blood. There was nothing that wasn't perfect about him and in his company, everyone else seemed grey.

'My princess.'

"Hi Percy," Harry said. "Long time no see."

His voice was soft but Percy still heard every word he said. Only the two of them existed, no one else.

"I—" Percy's voice didn't hold. His brain was completely blank; he had no idea what to say.

"You look good," Harry said, filling in where Percy's words should have been.

"Thank you," Percy managed. His voice sounded weak and pathetic to his own ears and he wondered how it was possible for another person to make him this way. "You too."

Harry smiled slightly, looking at the ground. Then he raised his head and his intense eyes looked straight at Percy. "So why wasn't I invited to this special day of yours?"

Percy swallowed. How was he supposed to explain why he hadn't wanted Harry there – especially when Ames was standing right next to them?

Then Hermione suddenly pulled Ames away and Harry and Percy were left alone together.

"I—" Percy said, feeling like an idiot. What was he supposed to say?

Harry's face was demanding an answer. His lips were set, his eyes intent and he'd crossed his arms over his chest.

"That's the girl I'm going to marry."

Happily Ever After

Suddenly he realised that everything was completely wrong. He wasn't supposed to be here with Ames, he wasn't supposed to bond with Ames. He was supposed to share this day with Harry – only Harry and no one else. *They* were the ones who were supposed to bond and live happily ever after.

And in the end it came down to that: Harry had to know.

Because if Percy didn't take this chance, this, his last chance to actually tell Harry what he felt, then he didn't deserve to live happily ever after at all. Then settling for a mediocre love with Ames was what he deserved. If he didn't dare to be honest for just once in his life then he could never win the big price.

Let it fly or fail; he had to do this.

“I didn't invite you because I love you.”

*

The world stood still. It was possible that time was still ticking forward second by second and that other people still lived their lives, but for two young men standing in a beautiful green park, time had just stopped.

Green eyes met pale blue; those were the only colours of their world.

“W-what?”

Harry's stammered words broke the spell.

Harry's heart beat so hard he thought it would break his chest. Percy couldn't possibly just have said what Harry thought he'd said. It was impossible— wasn't it?

“I love you,” Percy repeated. His words were soft but his voice clear with more intensity than Harry had ever heard behind any sentence Percy had uttered. “I couldn't invite you here because I could never go through with the ceremony with you watching.”

“But—”

Happily Ever After

It was exactly what he'd wanted to hear, wasn't it? Harry was in love with Percy and apparently, obviously, Percy was also in love with Harry. It was what Harry had wanted to hear for years – but now that he heard it he only felt the panic rising within. This was Percy's bonding ceremony; a bonding ceremony for him and another man. He couldn't possibly ruin that!

In the end, Harry looked away from Percy, grabbed his wand and Apparated away.

*

There was a knock on the door. Clad in a simple dressing gown, Harry opened the door.

"Good lord you look awful," Hermione said, walking inside without waiting for his invitation.

"Hi to you too," Harry mumbled sarcastically.

He closed the door behind her and followed her to the couch. Hermione didn't sit down however; she stayed standing, her hands on her hips and her face stern.

"What on Earth happened today? First you and Percy stare at each other like you've both seen a ghost, then you Apparate away and then Percy blows off the ceremony!" Hermione said, sounding exasperated.

"He did what?" Harry asked, his head snapping up to look at her.

"He blew off the ceremony!" Hermione said, throwing her hands in the air. "He broke up with Ames just minutes before they were supposed to start the bonding."

"He broke up with Ames?" Harry repeated dumbly. That wasn't what Percy was supposed to do – Harry had left so that Percy could go through with the ceremony as he was supposed to. Yet something within him leaped with happiness at the thought of Percy without Ames.

Hermione came closer to Harry and looked up at him. "So I was right."

"What?" Harry asked, taking a step back and looking like a deer caught in headlights. When Hermione got that look in her eyes, it was never good.

Happily Ever After

“Percy is the someone you’ve been in love with,” she said matter-of-factly. “The one you were talking about earlier this week.”

“That’s— it’s— no!” Harry protested.

“Oh give it up,” Hermione said. “My suspicions were strong and now, after Percy’s display today, it’s obvious.”

“How— how is Ames?” Harry asked. He felt he should at least ask, whether he cared or not. He’d been Percy’s boyfriend for years after all and he’d just been dumped.

“I don’t know,” Hermione said with a shrug. “Heartbroken, I suppose. I don’t really care. I’m far more interested in you and Percy.”

“There’s no me and Percy!” Harry said.

Hermione looked as though she wanted to strangle him. “He’s in love with you, that’s what he told you today, wasn’t it?” At Harry’s blank look she continued. “And you’re in love with him. What is the bleeding problem?”

Hermione was annoyed, obviously; she never swore otherwise.

“I didn’t want him to break up with Ames – they were supposed to bond and I didn’t want to hurt anyone,” Harry said quietly, looking at his feet.

Hermione rolled her eyes. “It’s too late for that. Besides, you and Percy are in love with each other – I’m guessing this story will have a happy ending for at least some of its players.”

Harry looked up at her. “But what am I supposed to say to him?”

“That you love him back? Because I doubt you said that to him,” Hermione noted dryly.

Harry realised that he hadn’t even mentioned his own feelings before fleeing the scene. He felt his cheeks heating a bit; Percy had spilled his heart to Harry and Harry hadn’t so much as mentioned where he stood in the whole thing.

“No, obviously not,” Hermione said, reading his face. “Go talk to him. The two of you need to talk.”

Happily Ever After

Harry was still hesitant about it – he'd never been all that good at being honest about his feelings. Still, there wasn't much risk for him now; he already knew Percy's feelings.

Finally he nodded to Hermione. "Where is he?"

*

The clearing in the park was calm now. There was a light breeze going through the leaves in the trees and the sun was about to set. The large crowd that had been there earlier had left long ago and the chairs, table and food had long since been cleared away.

Percy sat still in the middle of the clearing. His head, his heart, his entire body felt empty. Like all feelings he could possibly feel had been felt during the course of the day and now he was left an empty shell.

It would take a while to forget Ames' crushed face as Percy told him he couldn't bond with him. Yet at the same time, Percy had a strange feeling that Ames wasn't completely surprised by the news after all.

Percy looked down at the book in his lap.

'Snow White and the Seven Dwarves'

He'd thumbed through it so many times in his life that the only thing holding the book together was a keeping spell. The pictures were fading but Percy, who knew them by heart, could still see their beauty. The faded words had been read so many times over that Percy would be able to recite them in his sleep.

He flipped forward to the page where the king's son came to the forest.

"Let me have it as a gift, for I cannot live without seeing Snow-White. I will honour and prize her as my dearest possession'," Percy read quietly out loud to the still park around him. "As he spoke in this way the good dwarfs took pity upon him and gave him the coffin'."

"You always did love that story."

Happily Ever After

Percy froze for the second time that day. Harry's soft voice came from above and out of the corner of his eye, he could see Harry's shape. Percy didn't look up.

"The first time I met you, I told my family that you were my princess and that I was going to marry you," Percy said. "You looked just like Snow White."

He heard Harry give a low chuckle. "I looked like a girl?"

"You looked beautiful, even then," Percy said. Then he looked up, straight at Harry. "And it hasn't changed."

He saw Harry swallow. Obviously Harry wasn't as un-affected by this as he was pretending to be. Percy wondered why he was back – what was he going to say? It didn't matter; Percy finally knew himself and where he stood – and he had finally been honest with himself about his feelings. Whatever happened, that was something good come out of this mess.

Still, his heart couldn't help but beat a bit quicker as Harry slumped down and sat next to Percy.

"And before long she opened her eyes, lifted up the lid of the coffin, sat up, and was once more alive," Harry read softly. "Oh, heavens, where am I?"

Percy looked into Harry's eyes. "You are with me. I love you more than everything in the world."

He was reciting the words of the story but the words he was saying were true and honest. He hoped Harry understood and wasn't frightened by it.

Harry didn't look frightened. He ducked his head for a moment before gazing back at Percy again.

"And I love you," he said. "I have for years."

At that, Percy finally broke into a huge smile. Without another word, he pulled Harry towards him and kissed him, letting every feeling that he had for Harry pour into the kiss. Harry felt warm and wonderful, his lips even softer than Percy had imagined them. Everything was better than he could ever have dreamed.

Happily Ever After

There was nothing that wasn't perfect about that moment. The sun was setting, casting a red glow over the world and the park. Birds chirped and flew over the clear sky and in the park's clearing two men forgot everything about the rest of the world.

And then they lived happily ever after.

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*The End*

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