Survival of the fittest

Posted originally on the Archive of Our Own at http://archiveofourown.org/works/1005656.

Rating: Explicit
Archive Warning: Choose Not To Use Archive Warnings
Category: M/M
Fandom: Harry Potter - J. K. Rowling
Relationship: Draco Malfoy/Harry Potter, Sirius Black/Remus Lupin, Lucius Malfoy/Severus Snape, Mentioned Ron Weasley/Hermione Granger, Mentioned Hermione Granger/Luna Lovegood
Additional Tags: Slash, Limes, Lemons, Drama, Angst, Lots of Angst, Who doesn't love angst right, Mpreg, Bottom!Harry, some violence, Dumbledore Bashing, Ron Bashing, Slight Molly bashing, Helpful Luna, Bad Dumbledore, some disturbing content
Series: Part 3 of Struggle for life and love
Stats: Published: 2013-10-15 Completed: 2015-05-01 Chapters: 34/34 Words: 263599

Survival of the fittest

by SasuNarufan13

Summary

Sequel to AIFITGCL. Voldemort is finally gone, but now Harry has made a new enemy, who is possibly even more dangerous than Voldemort. Combine that danger with new revelations about the past, new additions to the family and ex friends out for revenge and Harry will have anything but a calm year. Will he manage to survive another threat?

Notes

So yes, this is the sequel to All is fair in the game called love. This story is still ongoing, so once I've posted all the chapters I've currently posted on another site, you'll have to wait the same amount of time as the readers on the other site to read the new chapters.

Please pay attention to the warnings in the tags.
Warnings for this chapter: Lemon, a bit of suspense, some foul language

Disclaimer: I don't own Harry Potter - J.K. Rowling owns it
Chapter 1: Holiday

16th of July

The sun was burning on their skin and the small gust of wind did nothing to cool them off. Only the slippers they wore, prevented their feet from getting burned on the hot sand.

"What do you think of this spot?" Sirius asked and shifted the basket with refreshments and food from one arm to the other. His eyes were already trained on the sea, his face displaying his eagerness to take a good dive in the refreshing water. His blue T-shirt was already sticking to his back and he couldn't wait to get rid of the sweaty shirt.

"What does it matter? This entire beach side belongs to you now," a dark voice replied snidely.

"Aw, is little Snivellus jealous?" Sirius taunted smirking.

"Padfoot, behave. They are our guests," Remus ordered with a stern gaze. "Now put that basket down, place the sunscreen and lay down the towels on the sand."

"Looks like the dog is collared," Snape smirked when Sirius did what he was told to.

Sirius rose up with narrowed eyes and opened his mouth to deliver a sharp retort, but was interrupted by Lucius.

"Severus, we are here as their guests," he reminded his scowling lover. "Do try to keep your comments to a minimum."

"Yes, this is a holiday after all," Narcissa chimed in, adjusting her hat to protect her eyes against the sun.

Even though she and Lucius were no longer together, she didn't seem to mind living together with her ex and his lover. As a matter of fact, she seemed to take delight in teasing them whenever the opportunity arose.

"What do you think, cub? Is this place good?" Remus asked smiling.

The dark haired boy, who had been staring at the sea with a contemplative face, startled and shrugged. "Yeah, sure, this is good," Harry replied, his green eyes shifting to look at the sea again.

Remus and Sirius shared a concerned look.

Ever since the school year ended, Harry had a closed off look on his face. It wasn't hard to find the cause of his stress: Dumbledore and the Weasley clan.

Getting rid of the biggest threat to wizard kind had gained Harry an, if possible, bigger enemy. Even knowing he couldn't trust Dumbledore hadn't prepared the young man for the shock of almost getting killed by the same man his parents had trusted.

Aurors over the whole world were informed to search for the ex Headmaster, but so far they had nothing. Wherever Dumbledore was hiding now, it was somewhere inconspicuous.

At first, the Minister had appointed four Aurors to stay by Harry's side twenty-four/seven, but Harry
had quickly made clear that the Minister wouldn't like the outcome of what would happen if the 
Aurors stayed. They had compromised: the Aurors would only be called in when Harry visited busy 
places to avoid him getting kidnapped and the rest of the time his family, friends and pets had to 
watch over him. It made Harry feel as if he was a small child, incapable of defending himself, but he 
had no other option.

For the time being, Harry tried to ignore the threat of Dumbledore and enjoy his Voldemort free life 
– which proved to be far more difficult than expected.

Molly and Ron Weasley had never forgiven him for Percy's death. Deaf to the truth of Percy aiding 
the Death Eaters, they made it their job to slander Harry's name in the press, together with the rest of 
his family and the Malfoys. Weeks ago, they had tried to put Harry on trial for murder (ignoring the 
fact that it had been Sirius who had killed Percy to defend his godson) but the Minister had quickly 
turned more vicious in their attacks to 
indiscriminate Harry in the press.

They had tried to get him in Azkaban for using Dark magic, but because almost everybody had to 
use Dark magic to survive the war, their protest was filed and afterwards disappeared in the large 
basement of the building.

If Ron's behaviour during the school year hadn't been enough of a clue to let Harry know their 
friendship was dead, these attacks finally convinced him. It was depressing and heart breaking to 
realize that their friendship of five years wasn't enough for the ginger haired boy to stay by his side.

Thankfully not all Weasleys had joined the attack. Arthur had divorced his wife after her first public 
attack and the twins and the two eldest sons had sent a letter and paid a visit to Harry, giving their 
support.

Ginny had sent a letter too, but unfortunately for her, Draco had intercepted the letter and had 
destroyed it before Harry had had the chance to read it. This action had annoyed Harry greatly, but 
Draco had managed to distract him quite effectively.

Hermione had apologized after the funerals and had quickly scurried away before Harry was able to 
utter a word. That had probably been a good idea, because he still had no clue as to what to do with 
her. He wondered if there would ever come a time where he would be able to talk to her, without 
remembering how she had abandoned him.

After the first two weeks of owls bombarding Grimmauld Place asking for more interviews with 
Harry and people on the street eyeing him warily, some even fearfully, Sirius had shipped his family, 
the Malfoys and a very reluctant Snape off to the vacation home James had left him to make sure 
they would have a calm summer without any interruptions.

Well, as calm as it could get with Sirius and Snape in constant near vicinity.

"Why again did you drag me to this god forsaken hellhole?" Snape glared when Lucius beckoned 
him to sit down on the blanket beneath the sunscreen.

"Because you need to relax once in a while. Oh, and I so do enjoy seeing you suffer by sharing a 
house with Gryffindors," Lucius deadpanned.

Snape's glare intensified tenfold when Narcissa chuckled softly and if Lucius hadn't been used to
receiving that glare on a daily basis, he would have cowered in fear. As it was, he merely handed a
cold Butterbeer to his lover and Narcissa before leaning back in his beach chair.

"What do you think of swimming?" Draco suggested to Harry and folded his T-shirt, leaving him in
dark green swimming trunks.

A blond eyebrow rose up when he received no reply from his boyfriend and he looked questionably
at Sirius and Remus, who shrugged helplessly.

Draco huffed and quickly grabbed his wand and spelled Harry's blue T-shirt away.

"What the …?!" Harry exclaimed when he was suddenly lifted and put over a shoulder. "Let me
down, you git!" he protested and smacked Draco's back, reddening the skin in the progress.

"Not before we're in the water," Draco told him calmly and proceeded to the water with a heavily
protesting Harry over his shoulder. His yelling was abruptly cut off when Draco threw him in the
cool water, making him splutter instead.

Ruby and Garin briefly looked up when they heard the splash, but laid back down on the sand that
was especially cooled for them. Sapphire blinked sleepily, before curling up in a furry ball and falling
asleep again.

Sirius cocked his head to the right and watched amused how his godson had taken to dunk the young
Malfoy, making the blond splutter this time.

"If I had known that only a good dunking was needed to break through Harry's shell, I would have
done it weeks ago," he commented dryly.

Remus snorted. "You can't blame him for feeling down after everything that happened to him," he
replied, frowning.

"Is he still pining for that idiotic redhead and that know-it-all?" Snape sneered, his disgust for those
particular Gryffindors clearly visible on his face.

"I suspect he's just mourning the definite ending of their friendship," Remus muttered and pushed
back a piece of his grey brown hair behind his ear. "You can't blame him for doing that."

"I thought he had given up on them during the school year?" Lucius questioned.

"He probably was subconsciously wishing for those two to come around and accept him as a
Slytherin and as friend of Draco," Remus sighed.

Sirius snorted and took a swig of his Butterbeer. "That would only happen when it snows in hell."

"About that," Narcissa suddenly spoke up. "Was the ritual successful?"

Snape shook his head. "No, if anything, it seems the ritual only made matters worse. The animosity
between the Houses escalated when Potter was dropped in Slytherin. I doubt things will change for
the better when the school year starts again."

"Do you think the students will try to attack Harry?" she asked worriedly.

Only two minutes after Draco had officially introduced Harry to his mother, she had hugged the
young man and had enclosed him in her heart. It didn't take long for her to consider Harry as her
own son. That had made Draco glowing with pride of course. He was very happy to have his
boyfriend interacting with his mother as if she was his own. Narcissa was just happy that her son had found someone he was happy with and that she had someone else to dote on.

"If Weasley succeeds in her attacks, then you can count on the students trying to attack Potter. It isn't as if they are smart enough to think on their own," Snape answered curtly.

"Not all students are idiots, Severus," Remus frowned.

Surprisingly enough, it was Sirius who came to Snape's defence. "Sadly enough I have to agree with Snivellus," he muttered, grimacing. "They already tried to attack Harry last year and the Weasleys hadn't started their attacks then. Harry will have anything but a calm year."

"What about Dumbledore?" Narcissa asked, wrinkling her nose delicately. "Will Harry be safe in Hogwarts?"

"Minerva and Flitwick created a new mass of spells that enclose both the school and the surrounding areas up to fifty miles," Remus explained. "If Dumbledore is in range of the net, Minerva will be notified immediately."

"Will that be enough?" she asked sceptically. "I'm loathe to admit it but that man isn't weak. The Dark Lord had a reason to fear him and he wasn't weak either. Who is to say he won't be able to destroy the net?"

"I doubt he'll be able to destroy it completely," Snape replied. "That cat received help from Slytherin and the castle. They used ancient magic. Even if the old man manages to create a gap in the shield, we would know it immediately."

When Narcissa still looked unconvinced, Lucius said, "I spoke with the Headmistress at the end of June and she and I agreed that the dorms won't be a safe place for Harry. We do not know how many people will be influenced by that Weasley woman, so young Harry will get a room of his own, close to Severus' quarters. Only the ones he trusts will be able to find the room."

"Well, that does sound like a good solution," she admitted. "Does Harry know of his new living arrangements?"

"No, I haven't had the opportunity to talk to him yet," Lucius replied and casted a Cooling charm around them when the air grew too hot.

Sirius stopped caressing Ruby's back which caused the full grown lion to look up and growl in protest. He grimaced and resumed the stroking. "I take it Blondie hasn't been informed yet either then?" he asked lightly.

Lucius raised an eyebrow. "If you're talking about my son, then no, he doesn't know it yet."

"Oh, Blondie is going to be pissed off," Sirius grinned widely, already imagining Draco in a fit of rage. It would serve him right; that obnoxious possessive brat.

"Dog, did you know Draco has unpacked his suitcases in Potter's bedroom this morning?" Snape smirked. "I believe he's planning to stay with Potter during the night," he continued, enjoying the rapidly increasing red face of Sirius.

"WHAT!"

Both boys looked at the beach when they heard the shriek.
"I think Sirius discovered you sneaked into my room," Harry winced.

Draco cursed. "How angry do you think he is?"

"Considering the fact that he already glares at you when you just hold my hand, I think it's safe to say you're screwed," Harry replied drily.

"Well, it's not like he can keep us apart. You're almost seventeen," Draco answered petulantly.

"You think that will stop Sirius?" Harry shook his head. "I thought you knew better than that."

"I really don't understand what he has against me. It's not like I ever hurt you," Draco pursed his lips.

"It's more the fact that you're my boyfriend. Remus said Sirius regrets the fact he couldn't raise me for the first fourteen years so now he wants to catch up and make up for the lost time," Harry shrugged. "Apparently he feels threatened by you because he thinks you're going to take me away from him."

Draco stared at him incredulously. "Your godfather is crazy," he stated flatly.

"At least he has an excuse," the dark haired boy snorted. "Can't say the same for your godfather."

"Merlin, let it go already," Draco groaned. "How many times do I have to say he likes you?"

"He tolerates me; there's a difference," Harry retorted, swimming a bit to the shore so that he could stand in the water.

The high rock he leant into curved up above him, so that it provided a sort of roof and it shielded him from the sight of his family on the beach.

"That's more than I get from your godfather," Draco complained and slid his arms around Harry's slim waist.

Green eyes rolled in annoyance. "Sirius accepts you. He just likes to screw people over."

Draco huffed and let his head drop on Harry's shoulder. "Either way, I'm sleeping with you during the nights," he muttered stubbornly.

"Yeah, I figured you would," Harry smiled and brought his hands up to play with the wet strands of blond hair.

Draco hummed at the touch and raised his head, smirking in a way that made the other boy wary.

"What?" Harry asked, sounding almost defensively.

"How far do you reckon we are from the beach?" Draco asked nonchalantly.

Harry cocked his head to the left. "Not sure. At least thirty feet or so. Why?"

"That's enough for me," Draco murmured and before Harry could question what he meant, Draco dipped his head and caught his lips with his own. Surprised, Harry almost automatically opened his mouth when an insistent tongue licked and prodded against his lips.

Not fully aware of the blond's scheme, Harry turned his head a bit so he could kiss back more easily and on instinct opened his legs when a strong leg forced them to part. He felt arms cradling his bottom and hoisting him higher against the smooth, cold rock, making him clasp his legs around
Draco's waist in return.

Harry moaned encouragingly when a hot mouth focused on a particular sensitive spot right above his collarbone while a hand was pinching and rubbing one of his nipples.

It was only when two hands had disappeared beneath the water surface and were slipping off his trunks that Harry finally realized what Draco was planning to do. And he was not happy about it.

Grey eyes looked at him surprised when he grabbed the sneaky hands.

"Are you insane? We're not doing it here!" Harry hissed. "We'll get caught and then Sirius will maim you for life!"

Draco rolled his eyes and dropped a soft kiss on Harry's red lips. "We won't be caught as long as we stay quiet," he assured his growling lover. "Come on, it'll be fun," he grinned and managed to free one of his hands which was enough to yank Harry's trunks down. He unhooked one of Harry's tanned legs from around his waist and slid the trunks off it, leaving Harry with one leg still in the trunks.

"Draco, I'm serious! Sirius will go ballistic if he finds out what we're doing," Harry protested.

"Then you have to keep quiet. Besides," Draco smirked when his right hand closed around Harry’s hard member, "you can't tell me this isn't turning you on. Just admit that you like the idea of me screwing you against this rock," he breathed hot air in Harry's ear, making the young man shiver in response. "I've always wanted to do it in the water. Don't worry, I'll make sure you'll enjoy it."

Logic and reasoning left Harry’s mind when a slim finger slid into his entrance and started moving softly, stretching him slowly. He forced himself to relax his inner muscles, letting out a hiss as he did so.

After his first time, they had done it three times during those weeks following Draco's birthday. A second time in the Room of Requirement, one time in Malfoy Manor when the adults had been discussing Dumbledore and even one time in Grimmauld Place when Sirius and Remus had gone out shopping. Still, Harry hadn't gotten used to the stretching part which every time made him tense up, making it hurt a bit.

"Relax, it will feel good soon," Draco murmured against his cheek.

Harry sought out Draco's mouth when he felt a second finger entering him next. He wriggled a bit on the two intruding fingers and felt water sloshing gently against his skin.

Draco grinned when Harry moaned his name, realizing he had found his prostrate. After a few more tries, Harry moaned again, burying his face in Draco's neck while his body jerked in response and his legs tightened around Draco’s waist.

"Hmm, more…” Harry breathed and Draco shivered violently when a small tongue touched his collarbone and licked a path up to his ear where his earlobe was grabbed between two plump lips and sucked on.

One hand grabbing Harry's chin, he pressed his mouth hungrily against Harry's, thrusting his tongue in immediately and curling his own tongue around the other one, while his other hand impatiently pushed down his own swimming trunks, freeing his hard prick.

Harry whimpered when the fingers were yanked out of him, only to be replaced with something hot, big and blunt.
"Ready?" Draco whispered and after receiving a nod, he pushed in, slowly stretching Harry more. Panting, Harry threw his head back, his eyes screwed shut. This was always the most difficult part: getting Draco to fit in him. He felt Draco pushing further and further, feeling him sliding against his inner walls until he came to a stop.

"Ah, ah, ah," Harry bit his lip and tried to concentrate on relaxing his muscles fully. He wiggled again and felt hands grabbing his hips, angling him so that Draco was pushing against his sweet spot, eliciting a mewl out of him.

A groan escaped Harry's throat and he stared at Draco with half lidded eyes, watching how the young man was forcing himself to keep still for his sake. Harry slid his arms around Draco's neck and bent his head to whisper, "You can move."

Grey eyes flashed ferally and that was that only warning Harry got before Draco pulled out so that only the tip remained inside and then slammed back inside, water splashing up high with the force of his thrust. Draco set a fast hard pace, making Harry struggle not to scream every time his sweet spot received the force of the thrusts.

"You're so fucking tight," Draco groaned and one of his hands released his bruising grip on Harry's hips and began stroking Harry's cock that was begging for attention.

"Oh god," Harry whimpered when he felt the added stimulation and he grabbed Draco's head and kissed him harshly, demanding entrance which was granted immediately. Their tongues met in a furious battle and they only stopped to breathe before diving into a kiss again.

"I-I'm cl-close," Harry panted and bucked his hips.

Draco buried his face in the sweaty neck of his lover and softly bit down, making the other boy keen in response. He was so close … Just a bit …

"Harry, Blondie, where are you?" Sirius suddenly yelled and he sounded awfully close. Too close. Emerald green eyes flew open in shock and he stared horrified at Draco who was startled and had stopped moving, though he was still buried deeply inside the dark haired boy.

"Shit! What now?" Harry whispered panicking. If Sirius saw them now, there was no saying what he would do.

"This is problematic," Draco murmured and pressed his body a bit harder to Harry's.

"You think?" Harry hissed sarcastically. "Get out of me before he sees us!"

Draco shook his head with an impish grin on his face. "Just tell him we'll be right there," he murmured and circled his hips, making sure he was stimulating Harry thoroughly, ignoring the harsh glare that was losing his intensity with each thrust he delivered.

"Harry?" Sirius sounded worried now-and closer.

"We're, ah, just swimming. We'll be, oh…, right back," Harry forced himself to say, trying to hold
back any sound that could betray them.

"You feel so good…" Draco groaned throatily and it took everything in Harry to keep his attention to Sirius and not to the stream of soft curses and filthy words Draco was producing and which made him blush harshly and had him bucking his hips in response.

"Are you all right? Are you hurt?" Sirius asked and the sound of splashing water sounded much too close for Harry's comfort.

Draco just grinned and doubled his thrusts, the water splashing violently now.

Ye-yeah, I'm o-okay," Harry squeaked and without any warning, he let out a loud moan when Draco pressed hard against his prostate. Horrified, Harry slapped a hand on his mouth, but the damage had already been done.

"What the fuck are you two doing?" Sirius demanded to know and right at the moment Sirius' arm appeared around the rock and Harry's heart was on the verge of collapsing, another voice made his godfather stop.

"Padfoot, you idiot, you forgot to put on sun block! Do you want to get burnt?" Remus scolded and Sirius disappeared behind the rock again. "Harry, Draco, lunch is ready."

"O-okay," Harry called out weakly, still shocked that Sirius hadn't found them in this awkward position.

"Well, this was interesting," Draco smirked and before Harry could protest, Draco pressed harshly against his prostate and at the same time, he softly squeezed Harry's dripping member.

Stars erupted behind his closed eyes and Harry was only vaguely aware of him yelling in the mouth covering his own while he finally came, his whole body trembling and his legs tightening around Draco's waist, toes curled up in pleasure.

Seeing Harry flushed red and trembling in his arms and his inner muscles clenching down around his own cock was too much for Draco and he came too with a low moan, spilling his seed inside his lover.

Harry leant against him bonelessly when they came down from their high. Only the sound of their panting and the distant murmur of their family could be heard now.

Harry's heartbeat, that had been working overtime, finally calmed down and he felt his feet hitting the sandy ground when Draco set him down again. Thankfully for him, his swimming trunks hadn't drifted away and he pulled them up, wincing when they slid over his sore arse.

Draco kissed his softly on his lips. "Are you okay?"

At that, Harry smacked his shoulder, making the blond wince in pain. "Okay? You asshole! Sirius almost caught us and you ask me if I'm okay?" Harry hissed and smacked him again. "What the hell is wrong with you?"

Draco rolled his eyes and embraced the dark haired boy tightly to his chest, trapping his arms to prevent more smacking. "We didn't get caught, so relax. We both know you enjoyed yourself, so stop pretending you didn't." He dropped a quick kiss on Harry's nose. "Now why don't we go eat our lunch, hm?"

Harry grumbled, but turned around and left the shelter of the rock, trying not to wince when the pain
in his back flared up. Damn it, how was he supposed to sit down when his arse felt like it was on fire?

"Hm, maybe I should have been a bit more gently," Draco mused when he saw Harry wincing with every move he made.

Harry whipped his head around to face the blond boy, ignoring the droplets of water dripping from his bangs plastered against his forehead. "You think? Why couldn't you have waited until tonight?" he snapped, narrowing his eyes.

Draco grinned cheekily. "How was I supposed to control myself when you looked like one of my fantasies became reality?" he purred, brushing his hand over Harry's back.

A blush burned on Harry's cheeks and he looked away. "Pervert," he muttered and hurried to the shore, feeling a bit relieved that the water had made all evidence of their tryst disappear.

Draco smirked and followed Harry, knowing that he was already forgiving.

*But*, he thought amused, *the least I can do, is cast a Soothing Charm.*

It wouldn't do if Black got alarmed when he saw his godson wince. He liked his balls where they were, after all.

"Draco, come on! If we don't hurry, Sirius will eat all the good sandwiches!" Harry protested and grabbed Draco's hand, dragging him with him.

"Coming," Draco chuckled and managed to cast the Soothing Charm on Harry without anyone being the wiser.

Just when he had taken the first bite of his sandwich (turkey with tomato and a delicious sauce), he wondered how long a Soothing Charm worked.

Maybe he should try it out tonight. After all, the best way to learn something is through practice, right?

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*At Privet Drive 4*

A quick Alohomora spell made sure the front door opened without any problems. Dust particles danced in the air when they were disturbed and the silence was deafening.

Robes swished softly over the carpeted floor and shoes made a soft thudding sound on the floor.

A look around the house showed that nobody had been living here for quite a while. Closets were emptied from clothes and the bathroom missed some toiletries. The refrigerator was full with rotten food, creating a very strong sickening smell. The walls, once decorated with photos, showed white, empty spots. The garden, once the pride of the house and the envy of others, was now unrecognizable. The grass was almost fifteen feet tall and the beautiful flowers had been swallowed up by weed.

Entering the house again, the dust-collected on every surface rose up and clung to the man, making him sneeze.

A spell, designed to call up the most prominent emotions trapped in a house, showed nothing but pain, loneliness, despair and fear. The walls were breathing with all kinds of negative emotions, not
allowing space for any positive ones. It was as if the house acted like some sort of Dementor, sucking out all the positive feelings once someone stepped into the house.

A second spell detected a small string of magic, strongest in the living room on certain spots, but the string had wrapped itself around the house, trapping the former inhabitants in it and sinking into their skin, soaking them with its poisonous energy.

_They had probably thought they could lift the curses if they moved away_, he mused and stood up. He shook his head and snorted. Those Muggles were fools. Nobody could escape from those curses.

He sighed and left the building. Tracking down those Muggles would be time consuming; time he could spend on better things.

A crack signalled his departure and after that the neighbourhood turned quiet again.
Chapter 2: Town trip and jealousy

"What do you think of visiting the town tomorrow?" Sirius suggested later that evening. "We can take a look around the shops, see if they have anything interesting."

They were sitting around the large dining table, enjoying their dinner that consisted of baked potatoes, a juicy well-roasted steak and a fresh salad, mixed together with sliced tomatoes and shredded cucumber.

Sirius was sitting at the head of the table with Remus on his right and Harry on his left. Next to Harry was Draco and across from him, Narcissa was seated. Lucius sat next to Narcissa and Snape next to Draco.

Both Lucius and Snape were dressed in button up shirts and black slacks; Remus wore a blue T-shirt with dark blue jeans. Narcissa wore a simple light green dress with a low cut back, showing off her slender curves. Harry had been forced by Draco to wear a light grey shirt with a V-neck, showing his collarbone and dark jeans that hung low on his hips. His necklace, Draco's Valentine gift to him, glittered in the light every time he moved. Draco himself wore a blue button up shirt that softened his sharp features and dark slacks. Sirius was wearing a black T-shirt and worn out jeans.

Currently Draco's hand was laying calmly on Harry's knee, but every so often, his hand would creep up between Harry's legs until Harry clenched his legs shut, preventing the hand from reaching higher.

"I'm not going," Snape answered scowling. "I have no desire nor the patience to deal with those Muggles."

"I pass too. I'm not very fond of shopping," Lucius replied and took a sip of his white wine.

Remus sighed and shook his head. "I'll go with you, but only to make sure you don't go overboard with your shopping."

"I'm not that bad," Sirius pouted.

"If you don't mind, I'll like to join as well," Narcissa smiled. "I never had the opportunity to shop in North America before, so I am going to make good use of our stay."

"We're going as well," Draco piped up, ignoring Sirius' disgruntled face.

"'We'?" Harry repeated suspiciously and stared at Draco with narrowed eyes, ignoring - for the time
"Yes, you and I," Draco smirked. "You need new clothes."

"What for?" Harry asked exasperatedly. "I have enough clothes!"

"Harry, those clothes were bought last year," Draco explained patiently. "You need to have new ones every year, so you can keep up with the fashion trends."

"But I don't care for fashion," Harry protested and stood up to bring his pets' food to them. After a brief hiss, Garin slithered out of the room, going outside to catch his dinner.

Sapphire got a plate with neatly cut chicken and a bit of steak, together with a saucer of milk. She showed her appreciation by purring and licking Harry's hand.

Ruby received a large lump of red meat (Harry had no desire to know which innocent animal had been killed for his pet) and everyone grimaced when the lion pounced on it and proceeded to drag it outside where a few minutes later the sound of ripping flesh could be heard.

"That was disgusting," Draco commented drily. He shook his head. "Anyway, too bad for you, but I do care for fashion. You're getting new clothes and that's it. No whining."

"God, you're annoying," Harry groaned and plopped back down on his chair. "Is there even a wizard community here? Otherwise we have to exchange our money in dollars, but I don't know if they have a wizard's bank here."

"There is a wizard community here, but it's small and there are no shops," Remus answered and nodded his thanks to Sirius who had refilled his glass. "We already exchanged money to dollars so there is no problem."

"I don't mean to be rude, but do you even know how to handle that money?" Harry asked warily, thinking back to the time he had taken the underground with Mister Weasley.

Sirius laughed. "Don't worry about that, pup. Lilyflower made sure we knew how to shop in dollars and pounds," he winked.

"Those shopping days were torture," Remus grimaced. "Even when she was pregnant, she managed to shop a whole day - before they had to go in hiding of course." A flash of pain entered his eyes, before it disappeared and Harry wondered which memory Remus had been thinking of.

"She sounded like an amazing woman," Narcissa smiled and ignored the incredulous look Remus gave her. "Don't worry, my dear, Dragon and I have shopped in the Muggle world before."

"Seriously?" Harry widened his eyes. He had never expected to hear a Malfoy admit they went shopping in the Muggle world. That just didn't fit with their hostility against Muggles.

"Why that face? Their fashion is good," Draco sniffed and looked insulted.

"But you … Never mind," Harry shook his head, not wanting to create an awkward discussion. "Anyway, when will we leave tomorrow?"

"Around ten so don't stay up too late," Sirius warned them.

At that moment, both Ruby and Garin entered the room, going straight to Harry.

"Did you have a nice meal?" Harry hissed and carefully stroked Garin's smooth head.
"I did, thank you, Master," Garin hissed back and wrapped himself around Ruby's neck.

Ruby let out a loud grumbling sound and his head dropped on Harry's knee.

While the two house elves cleaned the table, they chatted for another hour before the two boys excused themselves and announced they were going to sleep.

"Good night. Oh, and Blondie, of course you're sleeping in a separate room," Sirius smiled, but his eyes were narrowed warningly. "I'm sure you unpacked accidentally in the same room as Harry, so I was friendly enough to have your stuff moved to your room."

Draco clenched his jaw, but smiled back. "Of course. I must have been distracted while unpacking," he replied stiffly.

"I'm sure you were." Sirius raised an eyebrow.

He and Draco stared at each other in some kind of challenge until Remus asked something. They both looked away and Draco bowed slightly to his parents and Snape. "Good night, mother, father, uncle."

Lucius and Snape nodded and Narcissa smiled. "Sweet dreams, boys."

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"Well, that was awkward," Harry mumbled underneath his breath when he entered his room.

He and Draco had parted at the beginning of the hallway, seeing as Draco's new room was now around the corner. Draco had been cursing vehemently all the way to their rooms and his glare had never lessened.

Harry sighed and waited until Ruby, Sapphire and Garin were in his room before he shut the door.

Sapphire immediately jumped on the bed and kneaded his pillow - her purring filling the room - and laid down, curled up like a big ball of fur.

Ruby climbed on the large pillow that was especially made for him and closed his eyes with a sigh. Because he was the size of a grown up lion, he couldn't sleep on the bed and was therefore placed on his pillow in the corner of the room.

Garin slithered up the bed and watched how Harry changed into blue shorts and a white T-shirt.

"Why is Master's mate angry?" he asked and never relented his gaze.

Harry sighed. "Because he isn't allowed to sleep in the same room as me."

Room sounded like nest in Parseltongue and Harry hoped Garin would understand that.

"Why not? He is your mate," Garin spoke confused. He didn't understand the issue. Mates were supposed to stay together and protect each other and their children. Why would Master's family try to separate them?

"That is because ..." Harry felt himself redden, but he forced himself to continue. "Because my family doesn't like that. They think we will...mate."

Merlin, this was embarrassing. Could it get any worse?
Harry climbed in bed and hoped Garin wouldn't ask further. No such luck apparently.

"Why would they be against mating? They do it too, no?"

Harry grimaced, not wanting to even image what Sirius and Remus did in bed.

"Because they find me too young for it," he hissed finally, hoping his face wasn't as red as he thought it was.

Discussing his sex life with a snake … How awkward could it get?

"But don't they want to create a big family?" Garin asked incredulously.

When Harry realized what Garin's words meant, he promptly choked on his breath. Garin was talking about children. Children between him and Draco. He felt a hysterical laughter bubbling up.

"Children are not something they fear will happen to us," he replied, stifling his shocked laughter. Honestly, the thought alone was hysterical. "We're both male after all."

"Of course you are male," If Garin could frown, he probably would have done that now, judging by his tone. "But you are wizards too, no?"

Harry was left speechless, wondering what the hell Garin was talking about.

The snake seemed tired from the conversation and laid down, closing his eyes as well.

Frowning, Harry closed his eyes too, deciding to ignore the weird conversation.

Three hours later, a shadow slipped out of the room, sneaking past three others. Moonlight shone through the drawn curtains and illuminated the hallway.

The figure stopped in front of a closed door and slowly pulled the doorknob down, pausing every time he heard movement in the other rooms. Finally he opened the door a bit and slid through the crack.

Three pairs of eyes immediately shot open and stared at the person; a low grumbling and hissing warning the person to not try anything funny with their master.

"Ssssh, it's me," Draco whispered and the grumbling and hissing ceased immediately.

"Will you sleep with Master?" Ruby asked through their mental link.

Draco nodded and softly padded over to the bed where Harry was deeply asleep, unaware of the on-going conversation.

"Yes, if he doesn't mind," Draco murmured and placed his wand on the nightstand. The Wake Me Up spell would warn him in a few hours before he was caught.

"Do you want us to leave?" Ruby inquired, cocking his head to his left.

Draco halted his process of lifting the light blanket up so that he could slide underneath it and looked at the lion confused. "Why would I want you to leave?"

Ruby looked confused back. "I thought humans didn't like anyone else near them when they mated."
"I'm not going to mate with Harry!" Draco hissed after a short moment of shock.

"Hm? Who?" Harry sat up, his eyes half lidded with sleep and his hair sticking up at the back. He narrowed his eyes when he noticed a dark figure about to climb in his bed. His hand had already grabbed his wand, hidden underneath his pillow, when the person shifted a bit. A small sliver of moonlight caught blond hair and glittering grey eyes.

"Draco? What the hell are you doing here?" he exclaimed, but kept his voice low. No need to wake up the others.

"What do you think?" Draco rolled his eyes and stepped in the bed, bringing his arms around Harry and pulling him back down on the bed.

Garin slid to their feet, giving the blond boy the space to lie his head down on the pillow. Sapphire however glared at the intruder and promptly snuggled into Harry's chest, preventing the boys from embracing each other further.

"Stubborn cat," Draco murmured disgruntled and was rewarded with an insolent flick of her tail against his nose.

"Are you really getting a kick out of challenging Sirius?" Harry asked exasperatedly. "I'm not going to save your arse if he catches you here."

"Ouch; I thought you had a Hero complex? You're supposed to save my arse - well, more my balls and cock - whenever it's in danger," Draco joked.

Harry snorted. "That Hero complex left me the moment I hooked up with a Slytherin."

"Oh double ouch. Someone's a bit grouchy," Draco commented drily.

"What the hell do you expect? It's," Harry craned his neck so that he could look at the clock, "two o'clock! The hell?"

"I had to wait until everyone was asleep," Draco defended himself. "Your godfather took a long time to fall asleep."

"Whatever," Harry sighed and closed his eyes. "Go to sleep. Make sure you're back in your room on time."

Draco chuckled and pressed a soft kiss on Harry's forehead. "Sweet dreams."

Harry grunted, but fell asleep with a smile tugging at his lips.

17th of July

"Have a safe trip, Master," Ruby said through their mental link the following morning.

Harry bent down slightly and scratched the lion behind his left ear, making his body vibrate with the heavy purrs. "I'll be fine. Garin is with me and my family is there too," he murmured and pressed a kiss to Sapphire's nose when she bumped her head against his chin. "Be a good girl, okay?" he chuckled.

She looked at him with wide eyes and mewedl innocently. Harry rolled his eyes and rose up, shaking his head. It was a good thing he knew Sapphire and Hedwig got along; otherwise he wouldn't have
trusted them to stay alone in the house.

"Harry, we're leaving now!" Sirius shouted downstairs and the dark haired boy jumped up in fright.

"I'm coming!" Harry yelled back.

Five minutes later, they were making their way to the town; all dressed in T-shirts, light jeans or cargo pants. Narcissa was dressed in a dark blue loose shirt and white pants.

Remus and Sirius were walking hand in hand, chattering with Narcissa and keeping an eye on Harry, who was walking in front of them, holding hands with Draco. Garin was curled around his waist, hidden underneath his shirt.

"So, any idea what you want for your birthday?" Draco asked nonchalantly, absentmindedly caressing Harry's palm with smooth, warm fingertips.

Harry shrugged; narrowing his eyes a bit to protect them against the sun. "I don't know. You don't have to buy anything."

Draco snorted. "Don't start that crap again. Are you going to be this bloody difficult every year?" he sighed.

His dark haired boyfriend pursed his lips. "I'm not being difficult. I'm not," he insisted when grey eyes glanced at him incredulously. "I just don't know. I don't want anything."

"Why, oh why, did I chose someone non materialistic?" Draco bemoaned his fate and Harry rolled his eyes in response. "Fine, I just have to pick something myself."

"Do whatever you want," Harry sighed. "Just don't get something ridiculously expensive."

"I buy you whatever I want. That's what you get for being so damn difficult," he told him smugly.

Harry just sighed exasperatedly, knowing he wouldn't be able to stop Draco once he got something stuck in his head.

When they reached the top of the small hilt they were climbing up, they were met with the sight of the town.

Five streets filled with shops were situated in the centre of the town, connected with each other through the main road and back alleys. Despite the early hour, the streets were bustling with many people shopping or just walking around. Big and small houses were littered around the centre, their roofs shining in the sun. Even on the top of the hilt, they were able to see children playing in their gardens and some of their voices reached them on the hilt.

They made their way down the hardened pathway, feeling eager to take a look at the shops.

After reassuring their guardians they would be careful and would stay together, Draco and Harry were allowed to room around freely, provided they would be at the pub located at the beginning of the street, at one o'clock.

"Where do you want to look first?" Harry asked and his eyes slid idly from one shop to another.

At least here he wouldn't have to worry about getting recognized and having to answer questions. The perks of having a holiday in a Muggle area.

"Let's just take a look around and see what catches our eye," Draco suggested and together they set
off, occasionally stopping in front of a store that looked promising.

After half an hour of looking around, Draco forcefully dragged Harry into a clothing store, despite the latter's protest.

"Draco, really, you're just wasting money," Harry sighed exasperatedly and winced when he caught some of the price tags. Of course this was an expensive shop. Merlin forbid Draco chose something cheap.

"It's my money, Harry. I do what I want with it." Grey eyes rolled and Harry huffed.

"You're an idiot," he muttered and was ignored.

"Hm, let's see … What would look good on you?" Draco pondered and began shifting through the clothing ranks.

Harry crossed his arms and pursed his lips. Why again had he not protested more? Instead of doing this dreaded shopping trip, he could have been relaxing in their vacation house, reading a book or even sleeping in. He sighed and watched how Draco busied himself with searching for perfect outfits.

When after half an hour it became clear that the blond wouldn't be quick to leave the shop, Harry resigned himself to his fate and began out of pure boredom, looking through the clothes, picking up T-shirts and sweaters and folding them back up after looking at them. He had half a mind to just leave the shop and search for a more interesting shop, but he had promised to stay with Draco.

He sighed and leant against the wall. "God, I'm bored," he grumbled and rubbed his forehead.

"I take it you don't like shopping?" suddenly a mischievous voice with a heavy American accent sounded next to him and Harry turned his head surprised. A pair of crystal blue eyes met his emerald green ones.

The boy who had addressed him couldn't be more than a year older. He had curly brown hair with a lock that almost covered his right eye. A few freckles adorned his small straight nose and his grin revealed pearly white teeth. The black shirt he wore revealed a part with tanned skin and a very nice six-pack - at least the part that was shown. His long slim legs were hidden in a blue ripped jeans. All in all, he was quite handsome.

"You can say that," Harry responded drily.

"Ah, a Brit! I knew you weren't living here," the boy grinned and offered his hand. "I'm Jake."

"Harry." He shook the offered hand.

"So, if you don't like shopping, why are you here?" Jake asked amused.

"I was dragged here." Harry rolled his eyes.

"Ah yes, I know the feeling. I was forced to come here by my cousin." Jake nodded to his left and Harry glanced, seeing a boy with spiky black hair standing with his back to them.

"I would say that gays are insufferable, but that means I would insult myself," Jake laughed.

Harry looked at him surprised; he hadn't expected such a light comment. Not many people were keen on being honest about their sexuality. Wizards were slightly more forthcoming with their sexuality,
but there were people who still had problems with it. But Muggles were even worse to everything that was different.

"So what are you: straight, bisexual or gay?" Jake asked, his voice light.

"I'm gay," Harry smiled weakly.

"What a coincidence," Jake chuckled. "So you're here with your boyfriend? Or are you still single?"

Harry raised an eyebrow. For someone he had just met, Jake was very curious. But what was the harm in answering him? He wasn't a wizard, so he wouldn't open his mouth to the press (not that his sexuality was a secret after that news article last year) and he lived here, so he wouldn't see him again after this holiday.

"My boyfriend's the one who dragged me here," Harry replied with a small sigh.

"Ah, that kind. I once had a boyfriend like yours," Jake smiled.

"What happened?"

"He cheated on me with someone he met during a photo shoot," Jake serenely answered and crossed his hands behind his head.

Harry winced. "Oh, I'm sorry," he offered awkwardly.

"Don't be; it was good riddance." Jake shrugged. Then his eyes lightened up again and his grin returned. "Are you free this afternoon? There's a new candy shop opening at two, but my cousin hates sweets, so he refused to join me."

"Why do you think I like sweets?" Harry asked amused and shifted a bit, feeling Garin curling up tighter around his waist. Thank Merlin he had thought of pulling on a loose shirt, because he had no idea how to explain the presence of his snake otherwise.

"You're from Britain, famous for their tea hours and snacks." Jake winked. "There's no way you can say no to a trip to a candy shop."

"Well, I don't know," Harry hesitated. "I don't know if my boyfriend is willing to …" he broke off his sentence when his eyes caught sight of Draco and his blood almost froze in his veins.

Draco was smirking and talking enthusiastically with Jake's cousin and Harry realised with a sick feeling that the boy had black hair and no doubt light coloured eyes too. The type Draco had gone after and slept with before he got together with Harry.

Harry tried to calm down. There's no reason to think he'll go after that boy, he told himself. He said so himself: those boys were just replacements until he got me. He won't cheat on me; he's got no reason to.

But as he watched, he saw how Jake's cousin laid a hand on Draco's arm and Draco only bent closer, not even removing the hand.

A red haze slipped over his eyes and he balled his hands to fists. Why the hell was he laughing and touching that guy? Was he really flirting with him? What, was he suddenly not good enough anymore, now that he was sleeping with him? Had Parkinson been right when she told him he was just a fling like all those other nameless boys?
Just when he wanted to storm over to the pair and give Draco a good piece of his mind, Jake touched his hand and immediately pulled back when a spark stung him.

"Wow, static electricity sucks," he grimaced and rubbed his hand.

Static electricity? But he wasn’t … Only then did Harry realize that his magic had started to react to his anger and he felt it crackling underneath his skin, ready to lash out the second he lost control.

Realizing this, he took a deep breath and forced himself to calm down before he blew up the store.

"Harry, are you feeling okay? You look a little pale." Jake frowned and looked concerned.

"Yeah, I'm okay; don't worry," Harry reassured him and clenched his jaw when he heard Draco's soft laughter.

Staring at Jake, who didn't look convinced after his reassurance, he made a split decision which he would have never made if the hurt and another strange, vicious feeling wasn't coursing through his body. "You know what? I'd like to visit that candy shop with you. I have a severe sweet tooth after all," he grinned.

Jake chuckled. "All right. Will your boyfriend join us?"

Harry smiled a tight smile. "No, he doesn't like sweets that much."

"Well, his loss then."

"Indeed; his loss," Harry muttered.

Draco raised an eyebrow when Harry refused to look at him. They had left the shop five minutes ago after Draco had bought two sweaters and a ripped jeans for Harry. For some unknown reason, Harry had given him a glare before refusing to look at him.

Remembering the boy he had seen with his boyfriend, he wondered if something had happened. "Who was that guy in the shop?" he asked curiously.

"Jake," Harry replied curtly. "He lives here and invited me to the opening of a new candy shop this afternoon."

Draco frowned, not liking the sound of that. But it wasn't as if Harry would go with that guy – he wasn't allowed to go anywhere alone (even with them being in the USA now, they didn't want to take any risks) and Draco had a meeting with Severus, so he couldn't join him. He doubted that Black and Lupin were willing to join a trip to some candy shop with a Muggle.

"I bet he was disappointed when you refused his invitation," Draco said lightly.

"I accepted. He's going to pick me up at two," Harry answered to his astonishment.

Draco stopped abruptly in the middle of the street and started at the black haired boy who just kept walking. Immediately he followed him. "What do you mean: you accepted? You can't go alone."

"Oh, and why not?"

"Because I have a meeting with Sev and I doubt your godparents are willing to give up their free time for a Muggle," Draco pointed out.
"Well, then it's a good thing I'm a wizard and have pets willing to protect me, isn't it," Harry replied coolly.

"Even so, I won't let you go alone. It's too dangerous." Draco frowned. What was wrong with Harry?

"What can he possibly do? Poke me to death?" Harry snorted. "If I can survive the most powerful dark wizard, I'm sure I can handle going to a candy shop with a Muggle. If there's trouble, I have my wand and Garin with me."

"I don't like you going alone," Draco insisted and almost jumped when Harry turned to look at him with a sharp wolf like grin on his face.

"You're not the boss of me, Draco. I don't care if you like it or not, I'm going," he answered with a scowl marring his face.

"Harry …" Draco reached out to take Harry's hand, but was to his shock harshly slapped away. He stared dumbfounded at his boyfriend whose eyes were burning with rage.

"Do not touch me," he finally hissed, almost slipping into Parseltongue.

"What the … What's wrong with you?" Draco scowled, getting irritated.

"The fact that you even dare to ask that, amazes me," Harry snarled and then stormed off to the pub, leaving a shocked Draco behind.

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"Ah pup, you're right on time," Sirius greeted when his godson appeared next to him. He looked around and frowned when he didn't see Draco. "Where is Blondie?"

"Somewhere behind," Harry replied dismissively. "Can we go into the pub? I'm thirsty."

"Don't you think we should wait for Blondie?" Sirius frowned. "Besides didn't you promise to stay together?"

His godson glared at him with narrowed eyes. "He's a big boy, he can handle himself," he replied coolly and jerked his head to the pub. "I'm going inside." With big strides he entered the pub and they followed him cautiously.

"Something happened between them," Narcissa said in a low voice and looked at the boy concerned.

"That's obvious, but what?" Remus furrowed his eyebrows. "It must have been something serious for him to arrive alone."

"All right, you two try to find out what's wrong and I'll buy the drinks." Sirius made a hasty retreat. He remembered from last year that Harry had inherited Lily's temper and he'd rather his lover and cousin handled that than taking the burn himself. Not very Gryffindor of him, but he supposed he still inherited a tiny bit of Slytherin from his parents.

"Padfoot, you bloody coward," Remus muttered underneath his breath and glared daggers at his fleeing lover.

"Shall we?" Narcissa asked lightly and together they approached a silently seething Harry, who was seated in the back of the pub, partially hidden by a flowerpot on the back of the seat in front of him.
Remus chose the seat on Harry's left while Narcissa went to sit on the other side.

"Did you have a good time shopping, Harry?" Narcissa started idly.

Remus grimaced inwardly; he understood the necessity of subtleness, but he was afraid that subtleness was the worst she could use now. You had to be an enormous idiot to not see how bad the shopping trip had been for Harry.

Harry grunted. "I'm not a fan of shopping." He shrugged.

Not a real answer.

"So I take it you're ready to return to the vacation house?" Remus smiled weakly.

Harry shook his head. "No, I'm going to a new candy shop with Jake at two, but you can go home if you want."

"Jake? Who's that?" Sirius jumped in the conversation and placed a bottle with water and four with orange lemonade on the table and sat down next to Remus.

Before Harry could reply, a cold voice answered, "Apparently he's a Muggle he met in a clothing shop."

As soon as Draco sat down, an icy atmosphere filled the space between the two young men.

"A Muggle?" Sirius blinked, then frowned. "You're going with someone you just met?"

"Yes, we're only going to that candy shop." Harry tensed and his hands clenched tighter around his green bottle.

"Who's going with you?" Remus asked. "Sirius and I have to prepare our class schedules before the idiot forgets it again."

Sirius threw him a foul glare.

"Garin," Harry replied drily.

"Harry, dear, I don't think …" Narcissa began, but he interrupted her.

"He's a Muggle. It's not like he's dangerous," he huffed and shot a glare at Draco, when the latter scoffed.

"Muggles can be dangerous too, cub," Remus pointed out calmly.

Green eyes rolled up to the ceiling in annoyance before looking back at the group. "I know, but Garin is there to help me if I need it and Dudley made sure I learnt to run fast."

"Well, fine," Remus relented and ignored the faces of incredulity from Sirius and Draco. "As long as Garin stays with you and you're back at the latest at seven, then you can go."

"You're just letting him go with someone he just met?" Draco asked angrily.

"Garin will stay with him, darling," Narcissa replied soothingly. "He'll be fine."

"Yes, listen to your mother," Harry smirked, but his eyes darkened. "You heard her: I'll be fine."
Draco sneered. "Yes, because you always manage to stay out of trouble."

"Shut up, Malfoy," Harry hissed, his eyes burning with rage. "I can take care of myself just fine."

"Oh, of course, how could I forget that? Last year really proved how well you can take care of yourself," Draco snapped.

They both jumped when Sirius slammed his fist on the table and Remus quickly muttered a Privacy spell. They didn't need eavesdroppers.

"Both of you shut up!" Sirius snapped. "Start acting your age and tell us what the fuck happened when you were alone, because there's obviously something wrong."

"Nothing's wrong," Draco growled and crossed his arms. "Harry's the one behaving oddly. I didn't do anything."

"You didn't do…" Harry spluttered and shot up, shoving his chair back violently; everyone winced when the chair scraped loudly against the brown tiles. "Screw you!" he hissed and stalked out of the pub, ignoring the confused faces of the Muggles.

Draco's arms lowered in shock and his mouth dropped open. What had just happened?

"Sirius, why don't you go after Harry?" Remus suggested calmly. "See if you can calm him down."

"Ah … yes, right," Sirius muttered and after casting a glance at a dumbfounded Draco, he quickly left the pub as well, going after his godson.

"What happened?" Draco asked confused.

Remus and Narcissa shared a look. They would like to know as well.

Sirius managed to grab Harry's arm when the boy was about to turn a corner.

"What?" Harry spat, whipping his head around.

"First of all: calm down," Sirius snapped and raised a Privacy spell, followed by a Notice-Me-Not-spell. "Now tell me what Blondie did to make you so angry."

"That's none of your business," Harry growled and crossed his arms, mindful of Garin wrapped around his stomach.

"You're my godson so it damn well is my business," Sirius replied irritated. "Let's go back to the pub so that you can talk it out with Draco."

"No," Harry glared. "If that bastard doesn't realize what he has done wrong, I see no reason to talk to him."

"How can he know what he did wrong if you don't tell him?" Sirius sighed exasperatedly. He tugged on Harry's arm. "Come on now. They'll be wondering where we are."

Harry shook him off roughly and took a step back. "No." He wasn't going back. Draco was in the wrong now and he knew damn well what he had done wrong. Harry didn't buy his innocent act.

Sirius narrowed his eyes. Harry's little tantrum was starting to work on his nerves. The boy had always been reasonable and had never behaved like an unruly child. Which was good because Sirius
couldn't deal well with tantrums. He always got angry in response which often worsened things. He knew he should stay calm and reason with his godson, trying to figure out what was wrong, but Harry wasn't about to budge. One look at the boy's face let him know he wouldn't confess what was wrong and Sirius' patience snapped.

"Fine, if you won't tell me what's wrong, then you aren't allowed to go out this afternoon," Sirius said tersely. "I don't want to do it, but you are grounded."

Harry's mouth dropped open in shock and his arms fell loosely to his sides. "What? You can't ground me!" he exclaimed outraged. Grounded, him? What was Sirius thinking? Why was he the one getting punished while he didn't do anything wrong?

"If you're going to behave like a child with a tantrum, I'm going to treat you like one," Sirius growled and grabbed Harry's arms.

Before he could twist free, Sirius pulled him against him and Apparated to their vacation house, startling Snape and Lucius who just entered the hallway.

"What …" Lucius started to question, but closed his mouth when Sirius dragged Harry upstairs, ignoring Harry's curses and protests and his futile struggles.

"Let go of me!" Harry snapped, but his godfather just continued to ignore him, only picking him up when Harry's feet dragged over the floor (once again Harry cursed his relative small stature, even after all the potions Snape forced in his body). Sirius opened the door to Harry's room and placed the boy on his bed, keeping a hand on his shoulder to prevent an escape.

"Order Garin to leave the room," Sirius commanded and after a long foul glare responded to by another glare, Harry finally hissed something and Garin slowly slithered out of the room, reluctance and hesitation almost radiating from his body. Harry's wand was also confiscated.

"You're going to stay here and cool down," Sirius said and walked over to the door. "I'll come back later and then we'll talk again." He closed the door behind him and cast a Lock spell on it. His response was something thrown at the door with a thump. Sirius sighed and shook his head. He felt slightly guilty for treating his godson like a misbehaving toddler, but he hoped this would give Harry time to cool down. He disliked seeing him upset and hoped that whatever it was, Harry would talk it out with Draco.

Too bad he has Lily's temper, he thought glowering and made his way downstairs.

"What happened?" Lucius asked and raised an eyebrow.

Ruby and Sapphire cocked their heads when Garin slid to them. What had happened with their master?

"Harry had a fight with your son; he refuses to say what's wrong and because he behaved like a child, I grounded him," Sirius answered exhausted and rubbed his forehead. "I'm going to warn the rest," he added and Apparated again.

"So much for having a quiet day," Snape muttered with a scowl and stalked back to the kitchen, his lover following him with a headshake. He wondered what his son had done now.

Frowning, Remus made his way up to Harry's bedroom. Maybe he shouldn't have sent Sirius after Harry when his cub was in that state. He should have remembered how bad Sirius had handled situations like this one before.
He hoped he could convince Harry to talk to Draco. The blond was feeling miserable because he still didn't know what he had done wrong. Remus' instinctive reaction was to get angry at Draco for hurting his cub, but he realistically knew he couldn't do that. Every couple had fights and more often than not, they both shared the blame. Talking was the only thing that could help in those situations.

He knocked on the closed door and removed the Lock spell. "Harry, it's me," he called out and was greeted with silence.

Rolling his eyes – stubborn Potters – he opened the door and froze in the doorway.

"Well, shit," he sighed and pinched the bridge of his nose. How was he going to explain this?

Harry had used the oldest trick for escaping house arrest: going through the window and climbing down the tree that had been planted next to his room.

The window was still open, the curtains swaying softly in the light breeze.

"Fantastic. Just what we needed," Remus shook his head and turned around.

It looked like they had two options now: waiting for Harry's return or going after him.

He could only hope Harry had gone to that Jake guy and wasn't wandering around somewhere without his pets' protection or his wand.

"Oh cub, what were you thinking?"
Chapter 3: Fight and make up

Harry leant against the brick wall, half hidden in a small alley and pursed his lips. He couldn't believe he had really escaped his room by climbing out of the window. He groaned and closed his eyes; how cliché could he get? He was actually surprised it had worked. The tree had looked slippery and weak, but luckily enough, it had hold his weight.

Biting his lip, he stared at the street, ignoring the strange gazes he received. Maybe he shouldn't have left. How angry would Sirius be when he found out he had disobeyed him?

Guilt started to settle in his stomach. He hated disappointing the only family he had left, but he didn't think it was fair that he was punished while Draco got no trouble. It was that bastard's fault to begin with! Harry could be oblivious at times, but even he recognized flirting when he saw it!

Clenching his jaw, he forced the anger, guilt and hurt inside a dark compartment in his mind, relaxing as he did so. He would deal with those problems later; now he just wanted to have some fun with a guy who didn't know him and therefore didn't have any high unreachable expectations of him.

Plastering a smile on his face, Harry left the seclusion of the alley and made his way to the meeting place.

"What do you mean 'he left'?!" Sirius exclaimed increduously after Remus had informed them of the situation.

Severus sneered. "Can your brain – tiny as it is – not comprehend the facts, dog? The boy escaped; probably to meet that Muggle boy Draco talked about."

Sirius ignored him. "What the hell is he thinking? I specifically said he was grounded. What part of that did he not understand?" He growled and the knuckles of his balled fists turned white with the force he clenched his hands.

"Sirius, calm down," Remus interjected, but it was futile.

"Calm down? My godson just upped and left and you expect me to calm down?" the Animagus growled and glared at his lover.

Amber coloured eyes narrowed and a hand shot out, grabbing Sirius' arm with a deceptively harsh grip, making the man yelp.

"We'll talk somewhere else," Remus said, eerily calm and almost dragged the unfortunate man to their bedroom.
Draco, who had been silent the whole time, stood up and with a pale, calm face walked over to the door, intending on continuing to the front door, until he was stopped by his mother's voice.

"Darling, what do you plan to do?" She raised a thin elegant eyebrow.

"Getting Harry back of course, before that idiot lands himself in trouble," Draco replied coolly, his hand resting on the doorknob.

"Do you know where he is?" Lucius asked dryly.

"Well no, but …" Draco frowned.

"Then you can do nothing more than wait until Harry returns," Lucius replied resolutely. "Searching would be futile in this case."

Draco glared and opened his mouth to protest, but his parents looked at him warningly and Draco hissed furiously underneath his breath. His parents sighed when he stormed off to his room.

"Let us hope that young Harry doesn't land himself in trouble." Lucius rubbed his temples in an effort to stave off a headache.

Severus just sat in contemplative silence, brooding about something.

"You should have expected something like that to happen," Remus admonished Sirius, who had taken a stance next to the window with his arms crossed.

"Oh yeah, why?" Sirius scowled and looked at the trees surrounding the property. Absentmindedly he wondered if he should destroy the tree near Harry's bedroom.

"You and James did exactly the same thing that time you were grounded during Christmas in our last year," Remus reminded him and the other flushed.

"That was different," he muttered petulantly and scratched his cheek.

"Oh and why is that?" Remus raised an eyebrow sceptically.

"Well, Prongs and I didn't leave in a fit because we were angry at our lovers," Sirius huffed and resisted the urge to stick out his tongue.

Remus rolled his eyes and leant back against the door. He paused for a moment when a nearby door slammed shut, but then shook his head. "That's because Prongs was too smitten with Lily to ever be really angry with her and you only had flings that lasted no longer than a week, two weeks if she was lucky." He snorted.

Sirius pouted and waved his hand dismissively. "Still, it's different. Harry should have stayed and told us what was wrong instead of disappearing."

"I don't say it was smart of him to leave like that, but honestly, Padfoot, which teenager is comfortable talking about his love life to his guardians?" Remus asked rhetorically and Sirius grimaced at the combination of Harry and love life in one sentence. That combination shouldn't appear together unless they had "didn't have" put between them.

"What do you propose we do then?" he asked annoyed.

"We wait until Harry returns and talk to him then," Remus answered and gestured towards the desk.
"Until then let's work on our class schedules. Minerva wants them in the first week of August."

Sirius grumbled and grimaced but dragged himself towards the desk, feeling like a student again who was forced to study his least favourite subject.

"Tough choice, isn't it? Choosing between hundreds of different candies," Jake chuckled and came to stand next to the dark haired boy.

Harry glanced at him and smiled. "Yeah, I'm surprised they have so many. I expected a small shop, not this." He gestured towards the big shop.

The candy store was every child's dream come true. Every available spot against the wall was occupied by large shelves filled with huge jars of colourful candy pieces. Three rows of cabinets formed small hallways inside the store. The cabinets were opened by a small handle that one needed to pull down. Underneath every handle hung a string with small plastic bags in which one could stash the candy.

Traditional for the candy theme, the walls on the right side were painted a pastel green, the walls on the left a pastel blue and the wall behind the cashier a pastel pink. The ceiling was painted white and the floor consisted of white tiles where the heels of the women's shoes created a soft 'tick tack' sound.

The store was a success already; grandparents were following their excited grandchildren, holding the bags for them so they could browse through the candy; parents watched their children with eyes of a hawk to make sure the sweets landed in the bags and not in the mouth and teenagers were laughing and joking while filling their own bags.

Everything considered the store was the Muggle equivalent of Honeydukes, Harry concluded.

"Did you find something?" Harry asked and Jake nodded, showing his bag that was filled with two sorts of candy: square milk chocolate cubes and sweet, sour, brightly coloured candy drops.

"What did you find?" Jake questioned, tying a knot in his bag.

"I filled the bag half with sour sweets and the other half with those chocolates filled with cream," Harry replied.

"Time to pay?"

He nodded affirmatively and followed Jake to the counter. A long queue had formed, reaching as far as the section where the candy was placed (which was fairly long, considering how big the store was), but there were four pay counters open, which made sure the waiting wasn't long. It only took about ten minutes before it was their turn to pay. They received an extra bag to store their candy and a coupon, giving them ten per cent reduction of the price if they came back before the fifth of August.

Harry didn't think he would be here much longer, but it was silly to refuse.

After four long minutes of slipping past people in the store, they finally broke free from the crowd and exited the candy shop. Both boys took a relieved breath, glad the air outside was cool.

Noticing how low the sun had suddenly set, Harry asked curiously, "How late is it now?"

Jake glanced quickly at his wrist watch. "Nearly five." He whistled surprised. "Damn, we took longer than I had expected."
Harry stiffened and he paled a bit. It hadn't been his intention to stay out this long. By now the others had probably noticed he had sneaked out. Shit, he was in it for now. Sirius had never gotten angry before, but now he had deliberately disobeyed him by sneaking out even though he had been grounded.

He swallowed and bit his lip.

"You need to go home?" Jake interrupted his thoughts of panic and he nodded wordlessly. The other one stared at him concerned. "Do you think you're in trouble somehow? You look a bit pale."

"Something like that," Harry answered after wetting his lips.

"Well, come on; I'll walk you home," Jake said soothingly and grabbed his wrist. "If your parents get angry, I'll take the blame."

Not bothering to correct the notion about his supposed parents, Harry looked at the other one perplexed. "You don't have to do that," he protested. "I'll be fine, promise."

"It's no problem. It's the least I can do for keeping you here so long," Jake smiled.

Feeling a bit flushed, Harry closed his mouth, realizing further protests would fall on deaf ears. Instead he just silently followed Jake, after giving him the address.

Crickets were softly chirping in the half long grass adorning the side walk of the street.

They left the noise of the village behind and silently but quickly strolled through the streets.

It was maybe twenty minutes later when they arrived at the holiday house.

Harry sighed in relief when no one of his family was waiting for him angrily, demanding an explanation. Maybe he would even be as lucky as to be able to sneak back in.

He turned to Jake and smiled. "Thanks for accompanying me to here."

Jake shrugged and grinned back. "No need to thank me. You'll be okay?"

Harry nodded, absentmindedly pushing back a strand of hair. "Yeah, I'll be good. I'm just going to …"

"And so the lost son returns." Suddenly a cold, sharp voice interrupted them and Harry froze in shock.

Shit.

"I'll go look what Draco is up to now. It's been suspiciously quiet since he stormed out," Lucius announced and left the room.

Severus snorted and placed a book marker between his research papers and put them next to him on the small table, originally intended to hold drinks and snacks.

He didn't need to check up on his godson to know that the teenager was sulking.

Draco had refused to show up for tea, apparently having decided he benefitted from sulking. He had wanted to point out that sulking wasn't becoming of a Malfoy, but decided he would leave that up to Draco's parents. The mutt had been grumbling during tea and the wolf had stayed silent. Potter's
animals were somewhere hidden in the house. Narcissa had retreated to her room.

They were all waiting for Potter's return, though they had agreed they would give the boy until six before they would start to search for him.

Idly, Severus wondered how long the brat was planning on staying away.

He stood up, intent on going to his room, when he faintly heard two voices outside. Raising an eyebrow, he soundlessly opened the front door and saw Potter standing near a boy, a few years older it seemed; both carrying white, plastic bags, filled with a smaller package.

Well, at least they wouldn't lose their time searching for that impertinent brat. The boys hadn't seemed to notice him yet.

"And so the lost son returns." He announced his presence in a cold voice and noticed satisfied how Potter seemed to stiffen from shock.

Slowly the Potter heir turned to face him. "Sir, I didn't know you were there."

"Apparently." Severus crossed his arms. "Do tell me how you would try to enter the house undetected."

"Harry," the unknown boy, probably the Muggle Draco had mentioned earlier, spoke uncertainly.

"You can go home, Jake," Potter murmured to him and gave him a small smile.

"Are you sure?" Jake glanced at him and Severus noticed slightly amused how the boy seemed unwilling to leave Potter behind with him.

"Yes, it's fine. Really," Potter reassured him and reluctantly the Muggle boy went back, but not before squeezing Potter's wrist.

"Come inside." Severus ordered sternly. "I have no desire to talk louder because you keep standing there."

Potter bit his lip, but trudged up the path, his head bowed. As soon as the boy was inside, he locked the door. No need to give the brat a way to escape again if he wanted to.

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Harry tensed when he heard the door close. He had been realistic enough to realize that his chance of slipping in the house was incredibly small, but to be caught by Snape was not something he had envisioned.

"Sit down." Snape brushed past him and entered the living room. "And don't even think about slipping away. I can ensure you, you will regret that action."

Even though he felt annoyed at being bossed around, he still complied, knowing that pissing off Snape was not a smart idea. Rigidly he sat down on an armchair and glared at the innocent coffee table.

"So, care to tell me why you thought it prudent to leave this house unprotected?" Snape asked icily and Harry felt his dark eyes drilling in his head.

"None of your business," Harry replied petulantly and crossed his arms.
"It is when your absence causes my godson to sulk like a child and can potentially bring danger to us and you." Snape's voice chilled further. "Did you ever stop to think that it could be dangerous for you to disappear unprotected? You didn't even have your wand or pets with you! What would you have done if you had gotten into trouble?"

"As if I could get into trouble here." Harry looked up and glared. "I just went to a candy shop with Jake. That's all."

"Correct me if I'm wrong, but in my definition of being grounded, that means you are not allowed to leave the space into which you have been confined." Snape narrowed his eyes and glared back. "And you seem to have forgotten that there is still someone out there, waiting for an opportune moment to strike."

"I may have bad luck, but I seriously doubt that Dumbledore would appear the moment I'm on my own," Harry snapped. "And I was grounded for a stupid reason."

"For not telling why you were angry at Draco, yes." The Potions Master nodded. "If you would have told what bothered you, you wouldn't be in this mess. So what did Draco do that bothers you?"

Harry bristled and shot up. "None of your business!" he hissed and balled his fists. "Draco knows damn well what he did wrong!"

"Mister Potter, we may not be in school, but you will show me respect. I'm still your teacher and Head of the House," the older man replied in a low voice. "Draco does not have a clue as to what he did to anger you. Instead of behaving like a child, can you act like an adult for once and talk about your problems?"

"He was flirting with another guy in the store!" the Saviour suddenly exploded. "I stood there while that bastard was flirting in front of my eyes!" His heart started beating wildly, anger coursing through his veins again at the memory.

"Why are you so certain Draco was flirting with someone?" Snape raised an eyebrow, his voice a bit sceptically.

"Because that guy was dark haired and probably had light eyes as well," Harry snapped, crossing his arms. The anger started bubbling up more fiercely.

"You lost me, Potter." Dark eyes narrowed. "Why would that specific appearance mean he was flirting?"

"Because he used to date those guys before we got together," Harry answered through clenched teeth.

Snape sighed and pinched the bridge of his nose. "So you automatically assumed he was flirting instead of just being friendly," he deadpanned. "Don't you think you went overboard with your reaction? You could at least have asked him what he was doing, instead of lashing out like that."

"But he …"

"Don't you think your reaction showed very little trust?" Snape remarked, cutting off any response the other had wanted to give. "I'd had thought Draco had earned your trust after everything he did for you during the school year. What a poor way to repay him."

It was silent for a long time in the room. Harry felt his face burn in shame and he bit his lip, averting his eyes to the floor.
Snape's rebuttal stung, but that had been his intended goal probably.

He knew he should have just asked Draco about the conversation with Jake's brother, but he had been afraid of the answer. He realized he should have just trusted the blond boy, but …

In Hogwarts he had trusted Draco not to cheat on him, but it seemed that this holiday had brought up his jealous side and he didn't like that. He didn't want to distrust his lover, didn't want to turn into someone petty and jealous.

But seeing Draco laughing so freely and talking so animatedly with someone who wasn't him, stung him and angered him.

He didn't want someone else to hear Draco's laugh, to feel his touch …

But he didn't want to be jealous either. He didn't want to be so possessive and petty. He didn't like the way jealousy changed him.

"Now, do you suppose you can hold a civilized conversation with Draco and talk about your fight?" Snape broke through his dark thoughts.

Harry nodded wordlessly.

"You can go then."

The dark haired boy scurried out of the living room and ran on the stairs, his shoes making a soft thudding sound on the carpet clad floor.

He stopped abruptly in front of the closed door, leading to Draco's room. Taking a deep breath, he wiped his clammy hands on his trousers, trying to calm down his racing heart.

To be honest, he wanted to skip the whole talking part and go straight to the forgiving part, but he knew that wouldn't happen. He closed his eyes for a moment and then opened them again, steeling himself and raised his hand to knock.

"Go away, father. I don't want to talk," Draco snapped through the closed door.

Glancing around to assure himself he was still alone, he softly pushed down the cold door knob and opened the door.

"How many times do I …" Draco had stood with his back to the door, but during the beginning of his rant, he had turned around, presumably to glare. Abruptly he stood still and closed his mouth when he caught sight of his boyfriend standing uncomfortably in the door opening.

"Hey," Harry mumbled warily and took another step inside so that he could close the door behind him.

Grey eyes narrowed and his glare was cold. "Decided to come back?" he murmured and sat down stiffly on the chair next to the window.

Harry winced at the hidden sneer and shuffled with his feet, his hands fiddling with a loose thread of his shirt.

"I want to apologize," he began and bit the inside of his cheek.

"Oh."
Harry marvelled at Draco's feat to sound so sarcastically while uttering just one word. How did he do that?

"I shouldn't have lashed out like that. It was uncalled for," Harry murmured, feeling his ears turn red. Was this how children felt when they had to apologize to their parents after getting a scolding?

"No, you shouldn't have," Draco replied sharply and one of his hands clenched down on the fabric of the arm of the chair. "Mind telling me what that crap was about?"

"It was something stupid; it won't happen again," the other hurried to answer, not wanting to confess his petty thoughts, fearing he would be ridiculed for them.

"Of course it was stupid," the blond readily agreed with that part, making the other one glower at him in response. "But I still want to know why you acted like such a git."

"It was just …" Harry pursed his lips and stared at Draco, who stared annoyed back. "What were you talking about with Jake's cousin?" he blurted out.

Draco blinked surprised and seemed to be confused, not understanding where the sudden question had come from. "Jake's cousin?" he repeated questioningly.

"The guy you were talking to in the shop." Harry tried to temper the bite in his tone.

"Oh, that guy." Draco suddenly chuckled, seemingly amused. "We were talking about how our companions hate shopping and then he showed me some of his favourite shops on a map."

"That was it?" Now Harry felt foolish and quite idiotic. They had been talking about shops? They hadn't been flirting?

Harry had worried about nothing. Merlin, he felt like an idiot now.

"Yeah, that was it." Draco narrowed his eyes suspiciously. "Why, what did you think we talked about?"

"Eh, nothing. Like I said, it was something stupid," Harry mumbled, his blush spreading from his cheeks to his neck.

Draco rose and crossed the room, coming to a hold in front of him. He frowned. "For Merlin's sake, we already established the fact that you were stupid," he snapped. "Just tell me why you were being a git."

Harry looked away and clenched his fists. "I thought you were … flirting with that guy," he finally muttered embarrassed, bracing himself for Draco's comments about it.

Draco stared at him bemused. "You thought I was flirting?" His incredulous tone couldn't hide the small sliver of hurt tinting his voice, making Harry wince. "I thought you trusted me?" His body tensed in anger.

"Of course I trust you," the dark haired boy replied almost inaudibly.

"Oh? Apparently not, if you thought I would flirt with someone when I have you." Draco's jaw clenched and he scowled. "Why would I flirt with a guy, when I have you? My record of past relationships is not something I'm proud of, but I never cheated nor flirted if I was with someone. Believe me, if I was interested in someone else – which I'm not – I would dump you first before flirting with someone else," he sneered.
Strangely enough that calmed Harry down and he chanced looking at the Malfoy heir.

Draco's grey eyes sparked with anger; his lean body was tilting slightly forwards as if ready to jump and his magic was humming around him, a soft zoom sound, like a swarm of bees would make on a warm summer's day. He looked very alive, very beautiful and Harry's breath hitched a bit. He averted his eyes quickly, afraid he would give something away that he'd rather keep silent about.

"Now, if one of us should be pissed off, it's me," Draco continued and he looked haughtily.

Harry narrowed his eyes. "I already apologized," he remarked.

"It's not about that, though it will take more than just an apology to make me forgive you," Draco huffed and fixed him with a hard stare.

Harry squirmed uncomfortably. "If not that, what are you mad about then?" he asked, deciding to ignore the implication he needed to do something to be forgiven.

"I was the only one who had the right to be jealous," Draco replied, completely serious.

"What, jealous?" Harry spluttered in protest. "I wasn't jealous! And why would you be?"

"Oh, please, your display of being such a git just shows you were jealous." Draco rolled his eyes and then looked thoughtfully. "Though thinking of you being jealous is a boost for my ego."

"As if your ego needs a boost," Harry snapped irritated.

Draco just smirked, making Harry itch to wipe that smirk off. "You were the one who went on a date with a guy you just met. You even sneaked out to meet him. How do you think that made me feel?"

"It wasn't a date!" Harry exclaimed and threw his hands up. "We just went to a candy shop! There's nothing wrong with that. And I sneaked out because it wasn't fair of Sirius to ground me, just because I didn't want to tell him what was wrong."

"So, you can go out with some unknown guy, but I can't talk with another guy. Nice double standard you have there, Potter," Draco growled and his eyes sparkled in fury.

"Those are two different things!" Harry snarled, getting furious himself.

How could Draco compare those things? They weren't alike at all.

"No, they are not! They are exactly the same; yours was even worse! I only talked – you went on a fucking date!"

"You're the one who screwed one guy after another!" Harry hissed.

Somewhere in the back of his mind something warned him to back off so both could calm down. He hadn't meant for his apology to turn into another fight.

"For Merlin's sake, are you going to hold that over my head forever? I thought we had put that past us," Draco replied frustrated, his cheeks a dark red from anger.

"You're the one claiming I was on a date – which I wasn't," Harry snapped, his body strung tightly with fury.

Subconsciously he noticed how several small objects were trembling on their surface, reacting to his magic going out of control.
"Merlin, you're such an annoying git!" Draco snarled furiously and grabbed Harry's arms roughly, pushing him harshly against the door. Harry opened his mouth to protest against the rough treatment, but was silenced by harsh, punishing lips, intend on plundering his mouth.

Draco stepped forwards, until his body was pressed flush against Harry's. Harry turned his head to break the painful kiss, but Draco took his wrists in one hand, slammed them against the door – pulling a yelp from the younger boy – and kept his head in place by grabbing his chin. The grip bordered on painful, but the blond didn't lessen his grip.

Instead, he thrust his tongue in Harry's mouth and curled it around the tongue he found, forcing Harry to react.

Harry resisted a bit longer, fighting against the fire threatening to overtake his body, but gave up with a small whimper, when a foot pushed his legs apart and a knee nudged higher.

When Draco was certain Harry wouldn't resist him anymore, he released his wrists and gripped his hips instead, pushing him higher up against the door. Harry understood the silent hint and swung his legs up and clamped his legs around Draco's slim hips.

They both moaned when their hips pressed against each other.

Harry's arms snaked around Draco's neck and he pushed his body even tighter to the other one holding him up. He turned his head a bit and their kiss changed from nearly painful to heated.

He felt hands slip from his hips, trailing over his thighs, until they slid underneath his bottom. The hands seemed searing hot even through his jeans and he groaned, unconsciously pushing his arse back.

Lips against his curled up in a devious smirk and a soft, startled squeak escaped his throat when he was suddenly pulled away from the door. Their lips released each other and wide green eyes stared into smug grey ones. Instinctively, the dark haired boy tightened his grip on his blond lover.

"Draco?" Harry questioned breathlessly.

Draco chuckled and hurried to his bed where he fell down; Harry landing first on his back with a silent 'oomph' with Draco landing between his spread legs, catching his weight on his hands.

"I know a good way to solve this argument," he murmured; his eyes half lidded with excitement.

"Our family is near," Harry replied, biting his lip. He wanted to do it, but he wasn't eager on getting caught by the rest of the inhabitants. That one time in the sea had given him a good scare and he wasn't so keen on testing fate again so soon.

"Good thing I'm already an adult then, no?" Draco muttered with a triumphant smirk and grabbed his wand to cast a Locking and Muffle charm.

The door was audibly locked and a soft green bubble surrounded the door before it seemingly was absorbed in the thick wood.

"That's indeed handy," Harry smirked and his eyes gained an excited glitter.

Draco bent his head down with a smile and the next hour was filled by apologizing to each other through their loving touches.
"Why didn't you call us the moment Harry came back?" Sirius asked annoyed and crossed his arms.

Remus shot him a warning glance and squeezed his arm. He had no desire to be in the middle of a fight this evening.

Snape narrowed his eyes, but his voice was calm. "It seemed more prudent to try and extract the truth from Potter when you weren't around. Considering he refused to talk to you, I thought I could try and get him to tell the truth. And it worked, didn't it?" He crossed his legs and his eyes seemed cutting. "After he finally opened up, I sent him upstairs to talk to Draco."

Sirius frowned. "How long has he been talking to Blondie then?"

Black eyes glanced at the clock. "An hour and a half by now," he replied idly.

The Animagus stilled and his eyes narrowed in suspicion. "Does talking really take so long?"

"I have sharp hearing, but I can't hear through thick walls and closed doors. Frankly, I don't care how long they talk, as long as their differences are solved," the Potions Master answered bored.

Narcissa, who had been seated silently next to Lucius, stood up when it became clear to her that her cousin was on the verge of jumping up and marching over to her son's bedroom.

"I'll go and see what's taking them so long," she announced calmly. Her cousin gaped in surprise, but she ignored him, just like she ignored the smirk on her ex-husband's face.

Her gown made a soft rustling sound on the stairs and her shoes tapped on the floor.

Raising an eyebrow when she was met with a locked door, she knocked on the wood, immediately stilling the muffled chuckles in the bedroom.

"Yes?" After a small, suspicious silence, her son called out.

"We would like to speak to you both. My cousin has been anxious to see his godson again," she informed calmly.

There was a moment of urgent whispering, before Harry replied, "We'll be downstairs in a moment."

"All right," she smiled and turned around to go back. She had an inkling as to what they had done, but decided to ignore it.

Hiding a smirk, she informed the men downstairs that the couple would be joining them soon.

In the end, Harry wasn't allowed to go further than the garden for a week, as punishment for leaving the house. He also got a lecture from Sirius and Remus, which – though expected – was still embarrassing.
Chapter Notes

Warnings: a few new additions to the family - and my idea of presents probably sucks; I'm not good at finding presents

Disclaimer: I don't own Harry Potter - J.K. Rowling owns it

Chapter 4: Harry's birthday

30th of July - 31st of July

A few weeks later, it was Harry's birthday. The only ones who would attend were Sirius, Remus, Draco and his pets. Narcissa had left a week ago to visit some friends in France and Germany. Lucius and Snape had returned to England two weeks ago; Lucius was needed in the Ministry and had to answer to his colleagues in other countries. Snape had to return to his job as Potions Brewer, because the orders didn't stop simply because he was in another country.

They had however delivered their presents a few days before Harry's birthday.

There were also presents waiting to be opened from Luna, Neville and to Harry's immense surprise even from Dean and Seamus. The Weasley twins had put their presents in one package together with those of Charlie and Bill. The presents were waiting in a pile to be opened.

Like he did every year – it was almost a tradition – Harry stayed up to count down the hours and minutes until midnight.

Everyone had already retired to their room; well, except for Draco, who had, like almost every night, sneakied into his boyfriend's room.

Except for Sapphire, Harry's other pets Ruby, Garin and Hedwig were prowling outside. Both Ruby and Garin had assured their master that they would be careful, but they wanted to be outside tonight.

"I wonder how much stronger you'll get," Draco mused.

They were lounging on Harry's bed, lying next to each other. A soft breeze came through the window, cooling the warm room.

Like every wizard and witch, Harry would receive his magical heritage when he turned seventeen. He didn't expect more than a simple power boost at the most.

"I don't really care." Harry shrugged. "I'm just happy I'll finally be able to do magic outside of school."

"Still … Considering how strong you already are, I'm curious how much more power you'll receive."

The dark haired boy shrugged again and they fell silent. The peaceful quiet was only disturbed by their breathing and the soft ticking of the clock.
Slowly the hands of the clock moved until finally both reached the number twelve, announcing Harry's birthday officially.

Harry, who had been silently counting down, smiled widely.

"Happy birthday, Harry," Draco smiled and turned on his side, leaning up on his elbow and bent his head to give the birthday boy a slow, burning kiss.

"Hm," Harry moaned appreciatively and kissed back.

"What do you say of receiving an unofficial gift already?" the blond suggested with teasing eyes and his right hand slipped underneath the dark blue shirt, skimming over the warm skin and received a shiver in response.

"I like gifts," Harry smiled, a flush adorning his cheeks.

Draco chuckled and bent down to capture reddened lips.

The two boys shifted around on the bed until Harry was on his back, his legs spread open to give the Malfoy heir space to lie in. A low whine escaped Harry's throat when their hips rubbed against each other. His hips bucked up when fingers teased his nipple and he broke free from the kiss to gasp for air.

Wet lips continued to press small kisses all over his face and neck. The neckline of his shirt was pulled down in favour of the skin underneath it being marked.

He groaned encouragingly and twisted his hand in the fine, soft, blond hair; pushing down to indicate he wanted more attention to that particular spot in his neck. Draco didn't seem to mind the push if his harsh sucking was any indication.

Soft, quick gasps changed into excited, harsh breathing and Harry squirmed, his hands sliding impatiently over Draco's body, tugging on the shirt.

"This needs to get …" Harry's demand was cut off abruptly when white, hot pain – worse than the Cruciatius curse – flared up in his body. His hands, that had been pulling Draco to him just a few seconds ago, were now pushing the blond away harshly, before he curled up in a ball; his arms clutching his waist as if he could push the pain away.

"Harry, what's wrong?" Draco asked worriedly and then flinched when a scream tore through Harry's throat. Eyes were clenched shut tightly and his hands dug in the matrass, clawing at it.

His body went through a spasm when the pain worsened, until it felt as if liquid fire was streaming through his body, swallowing his organs in the burning fire. He thought his organs were being pulled out and expected to see his blood streaming from a deep gut wound. His heart went into overdrive and something sharp, something vicious seemed to carve something in his back. The pain was overwhelming him and he only vaguely registered Draco gripping his arms, frantically asking him what was wrong.

Two hot, wet trails of liquid streamed from his eyes and he didn't know whether they were tears or his blood seeking another way out.

His throat burned and he wondered if the fire had reached his neck already.

Sharp, loud screams pierced through his ears and he could only beg and plead to let it stop, for someone to take the pain away.
Panicked shouting joined the screaming and he was only vaguely aware that someone was trying to push a bottle against his mouth.

Suddenly it was as if he was in the ocean and a huge, pale blue tidal wave swept over him and a blast was heard. He had hoped to get some relief from the pain, but instead of diminishing, it seemed as if the pain was concentrating on wrecking his waist, destroying every organ he possessed.

He wasn’t aware of anything except the pain, didn’t even realize he was destroying his throat with the screams he produced.

Was this the day he would join his parents?

Just a bit past the garden, two animals were seated in the grass. A lion whose tail was flickering with bright flames sat next to a huge snake, who was curled up on a log.

Both raised their heads and glanced at the house when the pain filled screams from their master resounded through the otherwise silent night. Normally this would be the sign that their master was in need of their assistance, but this time they stayed seated, though their eyes glowed unnaturally bright in the dark.

*It was time.*

The moment was there to call for help. They alone weren’t enough anymore to protect their master and his mate. It was time to call the two others to finally join them after being separated for so long.

Garin slid off the log and slowly slithered across the sand, curling in strange patterns and making loops, twists and turns until finally a large, wide circle was made in the sand; the inside was filled with intricate patterns, mysterious symbols and various runes of which two were the same as those on their master’s body.

Before he laid back down in the grass, Garin opened his mouth – large enough to swallow a pig whole – and his fangs sprung forwards, a milky white substance dripping off it, falling down on two runes and five symbols.

Instead of absorbing the liquid poison, the substance laid on top of the symbols, acting as a waxen seal almost.

Ruby took a deep breath and when he opened his jaw, his sharp teeth glinted dangerously for a second before a big flame escaped his throat and shot over the circle, the fire following the patterns Garin had created.

The poison hissed and spit when the fire enveloped it, but was ultimately absorbed by the roaring flames. After seven minutes the fire suddenly died out, leaving Ruby and Garin again in the dark. Their eyes gleamed in anticipation and Garin’s body swayed back and forth to a melody only he seemed to hear.

Three minutes after the fire had died out, it suddenly flared up again, brighter than before. It crackled loudly; almost loud enough to drown out their master’s screams.

Slowly, it calmed down again until finally only a red glow was left.

Ruby and Garin, however, weren’t interested anymore in the fire. Their attention was solely focused on the centre of the circle.
Two large forms had appeared in the circle and slowly they uncurled themselves from their centuries long sleep.

The first one was a large, majestic eagle who regarded the lion and the snake with sharp, brown eyes. His dark beak gleamed dangerously in the faint red glow.

The other one regarded them with ice blue eyes; its snow white fur seemingly glowing in the dark night. The snow leopard was the first one to break the silence. "I presume our master and its mate are found?"

"Yes, Mara, we found them and they are in danger," Ruby replied and his tail swished back and forth uneasily.

"Did you form a bond with the master?" the eagle, named Rowen, asked and ruffled his large wings.

"Yes, we didn't have a choice," Garin hissed. "But we can't bond with his mate as you can understand."

"Is master's mate trustworthy?" Mara asked suspiciously.

She wasn't planning on bonding with someone who wasn't fit to be the master's mate.

Ruby let out a grumbling sound. "Yes, he is. He has proven himself. We'll share our memories with you."

For several minutes, the four animals stayed connected with each other through a silver white thread that drifted between them.

Slowly the thread drifted apart until it disappeared in thin air.

"It indeed seems the case that we're needed," Rowen murmured. "Especially over a year."

Mara sighed. "Guess it's time to meet them in the morning."

The others mumbled their agreement.

When Harry woke up on the morning of his birthday, he was amazed he was still alive. After the excruciating pain he had experienced, he had honestly expected to join his parents in the afterlife.

Bewildered, he raised his head a bit and looked around.

It looked like a hurricane had passed through. Pillows were strewn across the room, some ripped apart, the stuffing decorating the furniture. The wardrobe was wide open, a pile of clothing dropped in front of it; other clothing items were on the verge of being spilled on the floor. His travel bags, at first neatly put against the wall next to the wardrobe, had ended up near the window. The curtains had large rips in them. Bottles, some still dripping potion, were spread out over the whole room.

Harry himself was lying wrapped up in Draco's arms, whose face looked troubled in his sleep.

He was surprised to see even Remus and Sirius curled up on the floor and a stab of guilt surged through him. He had probably scared the hell out of them during the night. He couldn't remember much aside from the excruciating pain and the screaming. Especially his throat remembered the latter;
he winced when he tried to swallow and his throat protested.

What the hell had happened? Was it normal to feel so much pain during the receiving of the heritage?

He was startled by a hand touching his cheek softly and he turned his head, looking straight into worried grey eyes.

"How are you feeling?" Draco whispered concerned.

"Like I fell off a broom and swallowed fire," Harry replied grimacing and gingerly sat up. As soon as he was leaning against the only remaining pillow, a warm weight settled against his hip and he looked down to find Sapphire curled up, her head lying on his hip. He smiled weakly and caressed her soft fur, making her purr.

Draco groaned and stretched, feeling his back pop.

"Is it normal to be in pain when receiving the heritage?" Harry asked uncertainly and shifted to give the blond some space.

"No, it's not," Remus spoke calmly.

He and Sirius rose from the floor and felt their bodies protesting as a reminder of the bad night.

"Normally, you shouldn't have noticed receiving it until you performed magic," Sirius' forehead was marked with a deep frown. "Your father received his heritage at school, but he never was in pain nor tried his magic to attack everyone trying to help him."

"My magic attacked you?" Harry repeated shocked and his guilt surged again. He had lost control over his magic?

Remus, who had straightened a chair so he could take a seat, nodded. "It started to attack us once I tried to slip you a Calming Draught."

"I'm sorry," Harry whispered and looked down ashamed.

His godfather patted his leg. "No need to apologize. It's not your fault. Your magic probably assumed you were in danger and reacted."

"But it isn't normal how he received his heritage," Draco frowned. "Are you sure James Potter didn't experience any pain?"

"He didn't have any problems." Sirius shook his head. "If he had, Lily would have told us about it. She was staying in the dorms on Prongs' birthday," he added when he noticed Harry's confused face and cracked a smile when Harry's face flushed.

"The only way to find out what happened is to look in the books left in the Potters' vaults," Remus sighed and sounded tired.

"There are books in those vaults?" Sirius asked surprised.

Amber coloured eyes rolled in exasperation. "Yes, there are."

"And you think we'll find an answer in those books?" Draco raised an eyebrow and his arm slipped around Harry's shoulders.

"There has to be an explanation in them. It's obviously tied to Harry's heritage, even though we can't
see any new physical changes. Our best guess is to do research in those books," Remus answered calmly, though he glanced at the dark haired, exhausted boy in worry. "We need your permission to enter the vault and borrow those books, Harry."

"Sure, no problem," Harry sighed and rubbed his neck.

"How are you feeling now?" Sirius asked with a weary sigh.

"Not all that great, but better than last night," Harry answered drily.

"Well, no use in staying here brooding," Sirius said in a forced cheery tone and clapped his hands. "It's your birthday, so we are going to celebrate!"

Twenty minutes later, they were all sitting on large, comfortable chairs, outside on the patio.

The birthday presents were all put on the table, hiding the table from sight.

Harry, who felt marginally better after having taken a shower, grabbed the first present, which turned out to be from Luna.

"Eh." He frowned and stared perplexed at the gift he had unwrapped. It was a large, light green blanket, cool and soft to the touch; it had small lilies and small, cute dragons stitched on it, enchanted to move. The included card didn't offer any explanation, only the cryptic message 'For later. Happy birthday, Harry.'

"Am I now allowed to say she's weird?" Draco asked with a pointed look at the blanket.

Even though he inwardly agreed – it was a weird present – Harry still defended the dreamy girl. "She's not weird! She just has her own way of looking at things."

Draco snorted, but refrained from commenting further.

After casting a dubious look at it, Remus folded the blanket carefully and put it on a smaller table.

Harry shook his head and reached out to grab the next present. He had to laugh when Dean's present turned out to be a shirt from the soccer club Manchester United. Even after six years, he refused to give up his love for soccer. Draco had sneered at it disdainfully, but didn't comment. Seamus had given him a small pouch, filled with clovers; apparently his mother had insisted Harry would need luck to deal with everything the public would throw at him. Neville had gotten him a plant that released a calming scent.

The Weasley twins had given him a big box full of newly invented jokes; Bill had gotten him a book about breaking curses and Charlie had given him a small, painted statue of a dragon which Harry couldn't immediately identify.

From Lucius and Narcissa he received a small silver wrist watch, which apparently was given to the partner of their child, which resulted in Harry blushing, feeling pleased.

Snape's present was a simple broche in the form of a dark blue butterfly that had once belonged to Lily.

From Sirius and Remus he received two packages; one had the form of a book and the other was smaller and square.

First he removed the paper from the book. It was self-made, he noticed to his surprise and when he
opened it, he saw that it was filled with pranks the Marauders had pulled during their school time. Each prank had received a title and were catalogued in various sections, depending on what kind of prank it was. By each prank was the explanation written, together with the spell (often invented by the Marauders themselves), the counter spell and the result.

The book even had an index at the back. Most of the pages were already filled, but it still contained blank pages.

"We thought it was time you received it," Sirius grinned and winked.

"Uncle Severus is going to kill you," Draco chuckled amused and shook his head.

Sirius waved his hand, unconcerned. "He can never prove it's us who gave Harry that book. Besides, it's not our fault if Harry uses a prank."

Harry smiled and placed the book on the table before switching his attention to the smaller present. One of his eyebrows rose up when he saw the unknown, beautiful, cursive handwriting. His breath hitched when he read the message.

'To our beloved son, Harry James Potter.

We will never leave you completely. Remember that we'll always be there for you.

With all our love,

James and Lily Potter'

This time the paper wasn't ripped off hastily, but instead peeled back carefully and was folded and put for safekeeping between the pages of the prank book.

The square box was covered with soft, blue velvet and after opening it, it revealed a silver pocket watch. The small clock still worked and Harry discovered he could open the locket. After a bit of fumbling and hearing his blood soar through his veins, he managed to open it. His mouth fell open and he felt a few hot tears sliding down his cheeks, a lump settling in his throat. Inside the locket was a single small photo. The photo showed a baby Harry being held by a tenderly smiling Lily, who was embraced by a proud looking James.

"Every wizard and witch receives a watch with something special in it when he or she turns seventeen," Remus said softly.

"James gave it to me for safekeeping a week before you turned one years old," Sirius continued, his voice gravely. "He said he wanted to make sure you knew they loved you in case something happened to them."

Harry only nodded, not trusting his voice to stay steady if he opened his mouth now.

His head shot up and he stared wide eyed at Draco who had stood up and moved in front of him. Two cool hands stroke his tears away and lips brushed over his forehead and cheeks.

"I'm pretty sure your parents intended for you to smile and not to cry," Draco smiled, though his eyes looked at the watch sadly.

"I know," Harry replied and he took a shuddering breath. His hands clenched around the watch, the cool metal quickly warming up and he tried to calm himself down. He was pulled against a strong chest and hands rubbed his back.
Vaguely he was aware of Sirius and Remus standing up to collect the presents and bringing them inside, giving the two boys a chance to be alone.

After a while, Harry took a deep breath and felt well enough to raise his head without fearing he would cry.

"Okay again?" Draco asked softly and pulled back to give the other one space.

Harry nodded, feeling a bit embarrassed.

"Ready for my present?" Draco asked lightly, though his eyes flickered up in uncertainty.

"Yeah, I'm ready," he replied and was surprised when Draco placed a rolled up parchment in his hands. "Draco?" he asked confused.

"Read it." Draco sounded brusque, and he seemed to realize that for he followed his order with an apologetic smile.

Confused, Harry removed the royal blue, waxen seal and his eyes slowly scanned the letter.

When he was done reading, he stared at the blond speechlessly. "Draco …" he trailed off, not certain how to react to this particular present.

"Listen, hear me out before you say anything, all right?" Draco began, an uncomfortable look crossing over his face.

Harry nodded bemused and waited until the other one started his explanation.

"I know we have not been together for long, but it's tradition in the Malfoy family that once we reach our seventeenth birthday, we receive one of the Malfoy properties, spread out over the world, and we share that property with our partner if we have one." Draco cleared his throat and his cheeks were a bit flushed. "Of course I can't predict the future and anything can happen, but I have faith in us so I … put your name with mine on the documents for one of the smaller manors in Ireland. When we graduate, you and I can go live there."

Draco shifted uncomfortably underneath Harry's shocked gaze. "You're not obligated to live there of course, but I just wanted you to know that you'll always have a place in my family, even if we go our own way one day."

"But Draco, this is too much," Harry protested when he finally found his voice again.

"It's not that much. This house has been in the family for centuries – it's not like I purchased it with money," Draco remarked, correctly guessing Harry's concern.

"Well no, but you're giving me a house!" Harry exclaimed shocked.

"No, I'm proposing we share it after graduation," the other corrected him.

"Wait, you're asking me to live together when we graduate?" Harry said slowly, his brain finally catching up to the situation.

"Honestly, Potter, are you really that slow?" Draco huffed and scowled. "What the hell do you think I've been telling you just now?"

A warm glow of happiness spread out through his body and a wide smile made its way on his face.
"So what do you think of it? Want to share this manor with me?" Draco asked lightly, but his voice wavered with uncertainty. Maybe he should have waited with this particular gift – maybe it was too heavy for now. Should he suggest they forgot about it for now?

He was answered in the form of Harry babbling something nonsensical which was drowned in a hard, enthusiastic kiss. He smiled relieved and responded to the kiss, not caring whether his cousin or Lupin were watching them or not.

It was almost four p.m. when Garin and Ruby finally returned home, Hedwig having returned somewhere during the morning.

Draco and Harry, who were lounging outside on the grass, were alerted by the new arrivals by Sapphire meowing sharply.

They turned their heads and saw Ruby and Garin gazing at them calmly.

"Where have you been?" Harry frowned.

"We called our friends," Ruby spoke to them both and they stepped closer.

"Friends?" Draco questioned warily.

"Master's family has to be safe," Ruby explained. "Mate needs protectors too. Garin and I can't be bonded to mate because we have bond with master."

"What are you saying exactly?" Harry asked confused.

"Mate needs to follow," the lion simply answered. "Garin stays here with master."

Furrowing his eyebrows, Draco stood up slowly while Harry remained seated in perplexed silence.

"I'll be right back," the blond murmured and followed Ruby, whose head now easily reached Draco's shoulders.

The garden had no physical boundaries. When the Potters had built the holiday house, they had erected strong wards that kept everything and everyone not keyed into the wards outside. Muggles were led to believe that the house was surrounded by a large brick wall.

Draco, who was keyed into the wards, felt the magical wards ripple around him when he breached them and for a minute it felt as if the magic was pressing into his body; sounds being muted as if he was under water; his skin prickling until the magic released him and let him through.

There was a small, sandy path leading from the edge of the garden to a small patch filled with trees and Ruby led him to it, the flames on his tail shining brightly. His ears twitched when he caught a particular sound from a nearby tree. He turned towards it and then huffed and suddenly sat down, his tail curled neatly around his body.

"Ruby?" Draco came to a stop as well and looked around him. Nothing but a couple of trees, grass and past the trees the beach. The sound of waves reached them and broke the eerie silence.

Irrationally he suddenly wondered whether he had somehow pissed off Harry's pets and Ruby was planning on extracting punishment. Remembering the state of Ruby's victims, he shivereded and grimaced, not acknowledging the small coil of fear in his stomach.
"Here they are." Ruby's rumbling thought crashed through his worried thoughts.

He blinked and stared at the two animals who had suddenly appeared from behind a tree.

One was a large eagle, who was seated on the back of a full grown snow leopard. Both were regarding him with solemn eyes and he resisted the urge to squirm.

What the hell was going on here? Where did those animals come from?

The snow leopard opened his mouth and a shock ran through his body when instead of a normal cat tongue, he saw a forked tongue coming out, the same he saw whenever Garin opened his jaw. The unnatural bright blue eyes looked at him suspiciously and the animal came closer. It raised its tail and a bright blue flame suddenly surrounded the tip of the tail. Contrarily to Ruby's flame, that flame exuded cold air, which shouldn't be possible.

The snow leopard bared its teeth and two sharp canine teeth flashed in the sunlight that broke through the roof of leaves.

Draco froze and fear strengthened its grip around him. He wasn't sure whether he should keep as still as possible or run away as fast as he could. The snow leopard practically screamed danger.

Reluctantly his gaze slid from the leopard to the majestic eagle. He swallowed nervously when he noticed that the sharp beak was the colour of blood. His feathers gleamed in the light and on his chest, right in the middle of the dark feathers, three light brown lines formed a triangle with a single white line separating the triangle in two halves.

"So this is the mate?" suddenly the snow leopard spoke up and Draco stared at it shocked.

It had been obvious that they weren't common animals considering their appearances, but to hear the snow leopard mentally speaking, he wondered if the animal was related to Ruby somehow.

"Yes, this is the mate," Ruby confirmed.

The eagle opened his beak and clicked with it. "Let's see his memories first." The mental voice of the eagle sounded a bit shrill as if he could start screeching any moment. "I'm not bonding with a weakling."

"Wait, what?" Draco stammered nervously and before he could utter a spell to defend himself, the snow leopard had shot forwards and his breath left him for a moment when he landed harshly on the bumpy ground. He gasped for air and stared right into blue eyes. As if paralyzed, he laid there on the ground, trapped underneath the large body of the snow leopard, while the animal seemed to stare right into his soul.

It was an unnerving feeling and Draco tried to look away, but something compelled him to return the stare.

After what seemed an hour later, the snow leopard huffed, a sound of amusement and ice cold breath hit his face.

The snow leopard stepped back, allowing Draco to sit up again.

"A Potter and a Malfoy, huh? You didn't call us a moment too soon." The eagle sounded wary and amused at the same time. "I can understand now why they'll need our help."
"As if we would have called you if we had been able to defend them on our own." Ruby sounded annoyed; his tail swishing back and forth.

"It doesn't seem an easy task to keep the family safe," the snow leopard remarked idly and Draco got the mental image of a woman checking her nails in boredom.

"Us four will be enough as protection," Ruby remarked confidently.

"What the hell is going on here?" Draco blurted out, finally having found his voice back.

Ruby's eyes slid from the two animals to him. "The snow leopard is named Mara and the eagle Rowen. They will be your bonding animals," he explained calmly.

"Bonding animals?" Draco repeated dumbfounded. "Wait, like you and Garin are bonded to Harry?"

"You seem smarter than the last person we bonded with," Mara remarked amused. "Maybe it won't be so bad to bond with you."

"Hold on! Why would I need to bond with you?" Grey eyes narrowed. "Who said I want to bond with you?"

Rowen stared at him in a rather threatening way. "Because your family will need protection when the old man attacks. While your magical strength is admirable, it won't be enough. That's why Ruby called us."

"You don't have a choice, so I suggest you get used to us," Mara added idly.

"Wait, so you'll be coming with me to school as well?" Draco asked surprised.

So he now had two magical creatures bonded to him as well. This was not how he had envisioned his holiday in the States ending. How was he going to explain this to his parents?

"Of course. There would be no point in entering a bond if we stayed here while you return back home." Mara managed to sniff disdainfully even in thought. "Now let us go back to your mate; we want to meet him."

"Of course I get arrogant animals as bonding partners," Draco muttered darkly. "You better be able to turn invisible as well, because I don't want to explain your presence to an entire school."

He ignored the warning growl of Mara and led the three animals back to the house.

He would have one hell of a time trying to explain the presence of the two animals. Why couldn't he have a snake like Harry? At least that would be more fitting for him than a larger than normal eagle and a large snow leopard, who was as big as Ruby.

In the end, the explanation of the new presence of two magical creatures was accepted without too much fuss of the adults.

Remus had called Lucius and Narcissa back because it concerned their son. While they were wary of the two animals, they accepted their presence after the explanation, thinking that extra protection was always welcome, especially with the threat of Dumbledore looming over them.

Harry was mainly fascinated with how Draco's bonding animals looked like, especially with the cold
flame on Mara's tail.

Both boys agreed that it would be a very interesting year with the four magical pets.
Chapter 5: Ministry ball and departure

Three weeks later, they all were back in England.

Being the main hero of the war, Harry had been asked to attend a celebration ball in honour of Voldemort's defeat a few months earlier. Harry had refused at first, not eager to mingle and talk to unknown people whose sole attention would be on his scar. But he had to eventually give in when the Minister threatened to undo his restrictions on the press.

After the first couple of weeks following Voldemort's defeat, the press had gone wild with speculations about Harry's last moments confronting Voldemort and after they were tired of that, they turned their attention to his private life. Speculation about his relationship with Draco and his family quickly turned to outward slander articles until there were even articles suggesting that his relationship with Sirius was more than just godfather and godson – rumours which were eagerly fuelled by Molly Weasley, who claimed she had always been suspicious of their bond.

It was then that Harry had decided it was enough and had gone to the Minister, where he requested that the Minister put a leash on the press.

Having read the articles, the Minister had readily agreed to restrict the press. The next day, the press had been notified there would be consequences if they wrote any article without Harry's permission.

Thus it was now, a week and a half before school started again, that Harry was scowling at the mirror, disliking the formal robes he had to wear. Draco, who had also been invited to the ball – courtesy of the Malfoy family's influence -, would pick him up soon. After a brief discussion, it was decided their pets would stay home. Hiding four large animals, even with their ability to turn invisible, would be impossible in a crowded room, considering the chances were big other people would bump into them.

"I look stupid," he muttered in disdain and studied himself critically. While Draco looked well in formal robes, Harry looked awkward in them and it was clear he wasn't used to being dressed like this.

Hedwig, perched on top of his wardrobe, hooted softly and he sighed.

"Let's hope this evening is over soon," he mumbled and dropped some owl treats on the windowsill.

"Are you certain one of us doesn't need to accompany you?" Garin hissed, his long body curled up in a pile on the bed. Sapphire was sleeping in the small gap Garin had left open when he curled up. Ruby was taking a nap on the carpet, enjoying the last rays of the low setting sun.

"It would raise too many questions if someone bumped into you," Harry answered and his fingers
absently traced over the necklace adorning his neck, which had been Draco's Valentine gift. He was also wearing the wrist watch Lucius and Narcissa had given him. His parents' locket was displayed on his desk, put under various protection charms.

Garin made a sound as if he clucked his tongue, but laid back down again.

"Harry, are you ready?" Remus appeared in the doorway.

With a last grimace thrown at the mirror, Harry turned around and nodded. "Yeah, I'm ready." He regarded Remus with troubled eyes. "I wish you and Sirius could join us though. I'm not looking forward to this ball."

The older man smiled sadly. "You know why that's impossible."

While the Ministry hadn't explicitly forbidden Remus from attending the ball, they had sent a letter in which they cautioned him against attending. Even though the Hogwarts professor was one of the war heroes, various people had expressed their disdain to letting a werewolf attend the festivities. The Ministry had written in a clear text that they couldn't guarantee Remus' safety if someone dared to attack him.

Remus had decided he didn't want to risk it and therefore Sirius refused to attend as well, not wanting to leave his lover alone and because he was disgusted by the people's reaction towards Remus.

"I know, but it's still unfair." Harry frowned, cursing those prejudiced people to hell.

"It is, but we can't do anything about it." Remus shrugged, used to the people's opinion by now, though it still stung him. "Besides, Minerva is coming over to talk to us, so it's not that bad that we're missing the ball."

"McGonagall? Why is she coming over?" Harry asked bewildered.

"Something to do with some teachers' posts, but I don't know more than that."

"She is not going to fire you, right?" the Saviour asked alarmed.

"No, no, she's just going to talk about a few open positions," Remus assured him.

"Harry, Draco has arrived," Sirius called from the foot of the staircase.

"I'll be right there!" Harry called back.

"Alright, try to have fun," Remus said lightly and Harry pocketed his wand in his sleeve.

He rolled his eyes. "Not likely," he muttered darkly to which Remus chuckled.

"Ready?" Draco smiled and his eyes looked at his boyfriend with admiration. Contrarily to what Harry thought, Draco was of the opinion that the dark haired wizard looked incredible in his formal, midnight blue robes.

Harry grunted annoyed, but nodded reluctantly.

Sirius smiled and patted his shoulder. "Just a few hours and then you can come back here."

Harry snorted and nodded to Draco. "Is your father waiting outside?"
"Yes, the Portkey will activate in two minutes so we better go join him," Draco answered and after saying their goodbyes, they walked outside, seeing Lucius waiting for them under the cover of a big tree, a few feet past the border of the wards.

Lucius nodded to Harry. "Good evening, Harry."

"Good evening," Harry greeted back and noted with slight envy that both Malfoys looked well in their formal robes.

Narcissa and Snape wouldn't be attending. Snape loathed the mere thought on its own of attending a festivity and Narcissa wasn't feeling up to it.

"Grab the Portkey; it will activate in six seconds," Lucius instructed and their hands joined the small copper goblet that clearly hadn't seen any water or another cleaning product for a long time.

Six seconds later, Harry felt the familiar and annoying tug behind his bellybutton and for a few seconds his body was squeezed through a very narrow tube and he was gasping when his feet landed on solid ground.

"Are you okay?" Draco asked concerned when he noticed Harry's pale face.

Harry smiled weakly. "Yeah, I just don't like Portkeys."

Lucius tapped his cane on the ground. "Let's go. The sooner we are there, the sooner we can leave." His disdain for the party was clearly audible in his voice.

They followed the arrows marking the route to the right room. Sometimes Harry thought he caught a glimpse of an Auror, hiding in shadows and charms.

Ministry functions were always supervised by the Aurors, but this time the best Aurors were assembled in case Dumbledore was near for some unfathomable reason.

Harry doubted the ex-Headmaster would show up now, but he figured he shouldn't go too much against the Minister's decisions.

The room, where the ball was held, was incredibly large. Even with the large crowd and the long tables loaded with food, taking up the space against the walls, the room seemed only half filled. Lit candles were floating in mid-air.

Right across from the door, against the wall, a raised platform stood, clad with a midnight blue carpet where the Minister would hold his speech.

Soft, classical music filled the space, together with the chatter of women clad in beautiful gowns and men dressed in classic robes. The mass was split in several smaller groups, spread out over the whole room: some were standing in the middle of the room, some near the tables and others underneath a window.

Harry had already seen some of his schoolmates: Neville, who had become a hero when he saved a group of six Hufflepuffs from three Death Eaters and who still wasn't used to the sudden attention, judging by the ever present blush on his face; Luna, who had kept the Death Eaters out of the Ravenclaw Tower (and who was now dressed in what seemed to be a blouse and a skirt made from tree leaves, together with matching green shoes and earrings with big leaves); Parvati and Padma, together with their parents; Daphne, who was talking with Blaise near a window …

While there were clearly more families present with ties to the houses of Gryffindor, Ravenclaw and
Hufflepuff, there were also families tied to Slytherin attending, making up the majority of the Purebloods present. Those families were regarded warily by the others, but they didn't attempt or dare to do anything, scared for the rebuttal of the Ministry.

"How long do we have to stay here?" Harry questioned, not caring whether he sounded like a whiney child or not. He was already bored and uncomfortable and he had only just arrived.

Draco glanced at him exasperatedly while Lucius smiled indulgently.

"Two hours should suffice," the older Malfoy muttered and his sharp gaze flitted coolly from one side to the other.

"Thank Merlin," Harry mumbled darkly.

"Harry! Never thought I would see you here."

A grin appeared on Harry's face and he turned around to meet his friend. "Neville, glad to see you again!"

"Who managed to convince you to attend?" Neville asked amused, his cerulean blue robes bringing out his eyes. While he seemed more confident than a few months ago, he still glanced nervously at Draco, whose gaze was slightly narrowed.

Harry grimaced. "The Minister."

"Ah." Neville heard enough of Harry's tone to realize he didn't want to talk about it.

"How have you been this summer?" Harry asked, switching the attention to the other boy, who for once didn't mind the attention.

While Harry was talking with Neville and Luna, who had joined them a few minutes later; Draco was accosted by Blaise, who took him to a table to taste some of the dishes while talking about his vacation in Italy and Lucius – to his great annoyance – was engaged in a conversation with Marcus Parkinson and his wife Patricia.

"Lucius, how has your family been this summer?" Marcus asked with a thin smile.

The man was probably under the assumption his mask was well enough to hide his disdain, but Lucius saw right through it and he wanted to scoff.

"My family is well. We have enjoyed a holiday with Lord Black and his family," Lucius replied calmly and accepted the glass of sweet, white wine offered by a house elf.

"Ah yes, Lord Black." Patricia's upper lip curled up slightly, making her look like she had swallowed something sour like lemon juice. "Where is Lord Black if I may ask? One would think he would be present on an occasion like this one." Her muddy brown eyes glinted rather viciously.

"Lord Black had other matters to attend to, but he is represented by Lord Potter," Lucius answered and idly waved his hand at Harry, who had an intense look on his face while he listened to his friends.

"Ah yes, Mister Potter is of age now," Marcus murmured, his gaze calculating when he looked at Harry. "They grow up so quickly, don't they?"

Lucius merely inclined his head, wary of where the conversation was heading to.
"I can't believe my daughter is a young woman already," Marcus continued with a wistful voice. "She has inherited her beauty from her mother obviously."

Lucius raised an eyebrow slightly, but didn't comment; certain he wouldn't be able to hold back his retort what he really thought about their 'precious' daughter – the word 'beautiful' wasn't included in his response.

Marcus continued, seemingly under the assumption that Lucius' silence expressed his agreement. "I was thinking the other day that young Draco and our Pansy have quite a long history together. Why, they met for the first time when they were just six years old."

"It has indeed been a long time," Lucius smiled thinly. He was beginning to suspect what the Parkinsons were aiming for and he wondered whether they really were that stupid or just too stubborn to acknowledge the truth – a bit of both, he suspected.

"Pansy has always found your son charming. This summer, the oldest son of the Rougefleur family was set on wooing her, but she declined his advances."

Amusement and annoyance were battling each other. Did Marcus really think he wasn't acquainted with the Rougefleur family? They were the most influential Pureblood family in France and the Malfoy family had been smart enough to make an alliance with them, not eager to have that family as possible enemies.

Lucius knew for a fact that the oldest son of the Rougefleurs had his eyes set on one of the Delacours' daughters and therefore wasn't the least bit interested in the only daughter of an unimportant Pureblood family.

"My, she must be popular then," Lucius replied bored.

Again Marcus didn't seem to pick up Lucius' disinterest, though Patricia narrowed her eyes a bit.

"Indeed she is, but she only finds one man worthy enough to become her husband and I can only approve of her choice," Marcus smiled and took a sip of his wine.

"She has high standards then," Lucius answered idly.

"That she has, but that's only to be expected when it comes to matters like this, no?"

A non-committal sound was his response.

"I am certain your son has high standards as well. After all, the Malfoy family is one of the purest bloodlines that still exist, thanks to your high standards."

*Flattery will get you nowhere.*

"Considering the intelligence, looks and charm owned by young Draco, I can safely assume he attracts a lot of attention."

*Subtlety is not your strongest suit. How did you survive Slytherin with your abysmal acting skills?*

"Like I mentioned before, our sweet Pansy is only interested in one man and that man happens to be your son."

Both Parkinsons looked expectantly now and Lucius decided he had enough of this inane talk.

"Unfortunately your daughter will have to lower her standards, because my son is unavailable,"
Lucius stated calmly.

"Who is he wooing then? None of the other Pureblood families have mentioned your son is a suitor for one of their daughters," Patricia remarked, her gaze sharp.

"You must have missed the various articles about my son and Mister Potter then," Lucius murmured with a silky voice.

Sharp, midnight blue painted nails dug into her husband's arm while she smiled sharply. "Of course we haven't missed that news. We all know however that their relationship is merely a fling; an experiment so they can settle down with a proper wife later," she responded stubbornly.

Lucius paused and studied the pair in front of him. Inwardly he sighed. It wasn't so much that they were stupid – though that certainly played a role – it was the fact that they refused to face the truth that made them pathetic.

He wasn't planning on forcing his son in a loveless marriage, like his own father had done to him. He had been lucky to get an understanding and open minded wife, whose only demand had been to wait with the divorce until their son was old enough. He had respected that one wish and while he never had been in love with Narcissa, he had come to love her in the course of their marriage as a dear friend and he was grateful for the son she had given him.

That didn't mean he would put his own son through the experience. Especially not if the possible choice for a wife was Pansy Parkinson – he suspected the girl wouldn't be as understanding as his ex-wife.

"Apparently you have lost your ability of comprehension with the defeat of the Dark Lord." Lucius stared at them coldly. "I'll make it clear for you: even if my son wasn't together with Harry Potter, your daughter would not even make the last place on the list with possible suitable partners for Draco. Miss Parkinson is a spoiled, selfish, immature, ill-mannered girl who doesn't even deserve the title of 'Lady' and whose intelligence level is the same as that of a second year Muggleborn Hufflepuff," he spoke smoothly and tapped his cane softly on the tiled floor, enjoying the dumbstruck faces of the couple. "Now that we have cleared up this little issue, is there something else you needed to speak about?"

Marcus opened his mouth, but closed it again when it was clear his voice had left him in his shock.

Lucius nodded satisfied. "I thought so. If you'll excuse me." Without waiting for a reply, he turned around and calmly made his way across the room, intent on talking to the Greengrass family.

A smirk lingered around his lips. Three, two, one …

"You pompous bastard!" A shriek suddenly tore through the excited chatter and the crowd fell silent in shock.

He could hear the crackling of the fired spell and was slightly surprised to know Patricia had immediately chosen for the Dancing Spine curse instead of something less offensive. He had pissed her off more than he had assumed. Well, it didn't matter.

He was ready to cast a shield for protection, when a familiar voice nearby snapped, "Protego!" and a light blue shield enveloped him, bouncing the curse off harmlessly to the ceiling.

When he turned around, he saw Harry standing a few feet away to his right, glaring at Patricia who had a small scuffle with two broad shouldered Aurors before they disarmed and cuffed her, leading her out of the room with Marcus trailing after them, after he casted a hateful glare at Lucius.
"Please accept our excuses for this brief disturbance," the Head Auror spoke through a Sonorus spell. "Enjoy the rest of the evening."

"Are you all right, father?" Draco asked concerned, his arm clasped around Harry's waist. They had approached him after Patricia had been escorted out the room.

Lucius nodded. "Of course." He glanced at Harry, whose eyes were still flashing with anger. "Your shield was appreciated, but unnecessary. I would have been able to call a shield on time."

Harry shrugged. "I didn't want to take a risk." He frowned. "Who was that woman?"

"Pansy's mother," Draco answered and studied the elder blond. "What happened?"

"Just a small issue I cleared up which dismayed them," Lucius answered in a neutral voice, though he threw his son a look which conveyed the message they would discuss it later.

Draco nodded slightly.

"Let's attempt to enjoy the rest of the evening," Lucius murmured.

Harry should have expected there would be trouble for him this night. Draco had left his side momentarily to speak with Daphne and he was lingering near a high window, alone for the moment. The Minister had held his speech and he had received thanks of many people again.

Bored out of his mind, he was counting down the minutes until he could finally leave.

His dream of his soft bed was rudely interrupted by a too familiar voice of the owner he had hoped to avoid.

"Look who we have here." His voice wasn't loud – yet – but the anger was clearly audible in his voice.

Harry stared apprehensively at his former best friend whose main goal now seemed to be harassing Harry. "What do you want?"

Ron's ears turned red – a sign he was close to exploding in rage. "For one thing, your excuses for Percy's death, how pathetic they may be."

"Why? He attacked me first, not the other way around," Harry snapped impatiently; tired of hearing the same accusations being thrown at him. It hadn't even been him who had killed Percy – it had been Sirius in self-defence.

"You had it coming, obviously – he would never have attacked you without a reason," Ron argued hotly. "You can't say you were innocent with that plethora of Dark spells! They should lock you up in Azkaban!"

Harry couldn't hold back his scoff. "No reason? Your brother was working under order of Voldemort. He was nothing but an opportunistic bastard who had lost his mind in his desire to get higher up in the Ministry."

That made Ron snap and he quickly pointed his wand at Harry, the first syllables of an unknown spell (Harry suspected it wasn't a nice one) escaping his mouth.
However, just when Harry had erected a shield, a female voice called "Expelliarmus!" and Ron's wand was taken from his before he could finish the spell.

Both boys turned around and faced Hermione Granger, whose cheeks were tinted red. Her forehead was creased in a disapproving frown, the same one she always had worn when either Ron or Harry had neglected their homework until the last moment.

"What did you think you were doing?" Hermione asked and her tamed curly hair swished around her face when she stepped closer. Her blue, strapless dress glittered faintly.

Ron puffed up his cheeks like an angry chipmunk. "I was just giving that bastard what he deserves! He …" His rant was interrupted brusquely by his girlfriend.

"We're on a party, hosted by the Ministry and you thought attacking another guest would go unnoticed?" Her tone was incredulous, as if she couldn't believe someone could be that stupid.

"But he …"

"Ron, let it go," she spoke firmly.

He glared at her and after throwing Harry a hate filled gaze, he snatched his wand from Hermione's hand and stormed off.

Harry blinked bemused and stared at the girl, who went red and looked down, seemingly finding the floor more interesting.

"I want to apologize for Ron's behaviour," she muttered. "He's been acting stupid the whole summer – I had thought he would behave himself at this party. He didn't manage to curse you, did he?"

He shook his head. "No, you stopped him on time. Thanks for that," he added, feeling awkward.

She gave him a one shouldered shrug. "It seemed you got your shield up on time, so my interference was probably not necessary." She glanced away, her hands fiddling with a small bow on her dress.

Harry felt uncomfortable; what should he do now? Continue the conversation somehow? Or make an excuse to leave?

While she didn't act as hostile as Ron and he had saved her life during the final battle (like the fight was called now), he didn't feel comfortable around her. She had been one of the people who had dropped him like trash, when it became clear he wouldn't give up Draco or protest his removal from Gryffindor – not that he could have protested, considering the terms of the ritual were very clear, but a lot of people had let him known he should have fought to stay in Gryffindor. Sure, she had never attacked him like Ron did, but she hadn't stayed at his side either.

Maybe she had been hurt by the fact he had given Draco a chance, but that didn't excuse her entirely. He supposed he was partly to blame as well. He shouldn't have given up on his friends so soon, but he had been tired of the arguments and he had allowed the rift to drive them further apart. Later in the year, Ron had completely destroyed any chance of reconciliation with his attacks. Maybe he could reconcile with Hermione, but it would never be the same as it used to be.

He was saved from making a decision, when a familiar voice called his name and footsteps came near.

"I should go," Hermione whispered and before he could say anything, she quickly walked away.
Right after her quick departure, he felt two warm arms coming around his waist, pulling him back until his back leant against a strong chest.

"What happened?" Draco murmured in his ear and he sounded wary.

"Ron wanted to start a fight, but Hermione stopped him," Harry sighed and frowned, still not entirely sure about what had transpired just now.

Draco tensed for a moment, before he relaxed again. "I would have thought that Weasley at least had the brains to not attack you here." Harry could imagine the sneer on his boyfriend's face with the next sentence he uttered. "Shouldn't have expected it of course. I am still amazed he got so far in Hogwarts."

"Apparently he had been pissed off all summer," Harry murmured.

"Not a surprise." Draco shrugged. He paused. "Want to leave?"

Harry nodded relieved and turned around.

Draco released him, stepped back and grabbed his hand. "Let's go find father."

They found Lucius talking with the Minister. He casted one look at Harry's troubled face and excused them, announcing it was time for them to leave.

They took a Portkey to Grimmauld Place where Lucius gave them a moment of privacy to say goodbye before he and Draco Apparated home.

Still feeling a bit troubled by what had happened at the ball, Harry entered the house and locked the door behind him.

The sound of low voices let him know Sirius and Remus were in the living room.

"Is McGonagall gone?" he asked when he entered the room.

The two men broke apart and looked at him surprised.

"You're home early," Sirius remarked after glancing at the clock.

Harry grunted and shrugged, picking a seat across from the men. "What did she want?"

"She wanted to talk about a position that opened recently," Sirius replied slowly.

"What position?" Harry asked and brought up a leg, resting his chin on his knee.

"With the disappearance of Dumbledore, she took over the Headmistress position," Remus began calmly. "But that leaves the position of Transfiguration teacher open."

"So she came to ask one of you to take over?" Harry furrowed his eyebrows, perplexed.

The older man nodded. "The other courses all have one teacher, so she couldn't ask one of them to take another course."

"So who's going to take over Transfiguration?"

"I will, because I was the best in Transfiguration when we were in school," Sirius grinned proudly.
"All the years?"

He nodded, still grinning.

"Well, Parvati will be happy at least," Harry muttered, remembering the girl's disappointment last school year when she heard Sirius would only be teaching the first through fourth years.

Remus grimaced and Sirius looked confused.

"What are you talking about?"

"Nothing," Remus spoke quickly.

Sirius glanced suspiciously at his partner, but for once didn't pursue the subject.

"Minerva told us the owls with the letters will arrive tomorrow, so what do you think of going to Diagon Alley afterwards?" Remus suggested.

Harry perked up. "Without Aurors?" he asked hopefully. Maybe the Ministry wouldn't be able to assemble a group of guards on such short notice.

Sirius shook his head, looking at him sympathetically. "Sorry, pup, but the Minister has already appointed three Aurors to join us on our trip."

A big sigh left his body. "Of course," he muttered broodily. It had been stupid to hope for that.

"It's just for two hours – you won't even notice they are there," Remus spoke soothingly.

Green eyes scowled at him. "They thought they had hidden themselves today too, yet I still noticed them at times."

"Well, it's only for two hours and then you won't see them except for the first school day when they accompany us to the station," Sirius replied, his fingers absently plucking at a loose thread of the couch.

"I guess," Harry muttered petulantly and stood up. "I'm going to bed."

"Party tired you out?" Sirius chuckled, stroking Remus' hand now.


"Goodnight."

"Everything all right?" Garin hissed after Harry had finished showering.

After slipping into his boxers and an old shirt, he opened the window and Hedwig hooted her gratitude before flying into the night to go hunting.

"Yes, everything went okay," Harry murmured, heaving a sigh when he climbed into his bed.

Sapphire purred sleepily in acknowledgement and Harry scratched behind her ear.

Not too long after, he fell asleep, mindless of the glance Ruby and Garin exchanged.

The following morning a sleepy Harry was eating his breakfast, leaving the reading of his school
letter over to Remus.

"Is it okay if we search some books about your heritage in your vault?" Remus asked after passing the letter to Sirius.

Harry looked up from his toast with strawberry jam. "Sure." He shrugged.

Since his birthday, Remus hadn't let go of his idea of research. He was strengthened in his resolve when nothing else strange happened to Harry. His magical strength seemed to have grown stronger, but so far he hadn't performed a difficult spell to really check his level. The fact that nothing outwardly had changed, made the older man suspicious. After experiencing such pain, something very abnormal when receiving the magical heritage, something should have changed and Remus was determined to find out what exactly had happened.

"Ready to go?" Sirius asked twenty minutes later.

Harry nodded, feeling Garin sliding around his stomach.

The three Aurors were waiting outside; two men and a woman. The woman, with dark brown curly hair and light brown eyes, smiled friendly when Remus, Sirius and Harry joined the group, but the two men, one with grey hair and narrowed blue eyes and the other with strawberry blond hair tied together in a ponytail and small muddy brown eyes, just grunted, looking as enthusiastic as students during a history lesson.

They Apparated in a small alley, right next to the Leaky Cauldron and briskly made their way through the pub, ignoring the heavy stares of the other customers.

First they visited Gringotts and Remus spent half an hour in the large vault, handing over books to Sirius that looked promising for their research.

In the end they left with a bag full of gold and six heavy, old tomes, though Remus mused that maybe the Malfoy library would have some information about the Potters as well, considering they had a lot of texts about the various bloodlines in possession.

Sirius had looked resigned, remembering from their school time that his love wouldn't give up until he had found his answers.

From the bank, they made their way to the various shops; buying new school books; stocking in more quills, ink, parchment and potion vials. Hedwig got more owl treats as well.

As last stop, they visited the shop of the Weasley twins, though the Aurors – who had been following them the whole time (not even bothering to hide themselves) – frowned; clearly this shop was not enclosed in their plan.

George and Fred were happy to see them and introduced the small group to their newly invented products, ignoring the Aurors.

They left the joke shop with heavier pockets and three annoyed Aurors, who seemed very happy to leave the trio behind at their house.

The days leading up to the departure to Hogwarts were busy.

Harry finished his homework and checked the essay for mistakes, feeling a vague pang of sorrow when he remembered the times Hermione had looked over his essays while lecturing him and Ron about the perks of paying attention to the lessons. Thankfully, Draco agreed to checking his essays,
the one time he had been able to visit his boyfriend during the last school free week.

Meanwhile Sirius and Remus were busy with planning and finishing their lessons.

Eventually the morning arrived when they would be going back to Hogwarts. Sapphire had been put in her cage, Hedwig following the same fate. Garin was curled around Ruby's neck, turning invisible when Ruby did.

They had agreed to meet the Malfoys at Platform Nine and Three Quarters. The Ministry had lent them a car, so they were driven to the station, arriving early enough to avoid a meeting with the Weasley family.

"I missed you," Draco muttered and embraced the smaller boy, kissing him softly on his lips.

"I missed you too," Harry murmured and slipped his arms around Draco's waist.

"Blaise is keeping a compartment for us," Draco let him know and after getting a hug from Narcissa and a handshake from Lucius, they got on the train.

A dark toned hand waving from the last compartment let them know where their friend was seated.

They managed to get their bags and all their pets (all invisible except for Sapphire, Hedwig and Cornelius – Draco's owl) inside the compartment – which wasn't an easy feat considering there were four large animals pressed between them.

Blaise, feeling the invisible, abnormal large presence against his legs, raised a dark eyebrow. "So, anyone going to tell me why it's so cramped here all of the sudden?"

Harry chuckled amused and Draco rolled his eyes exasperatedly.

While they launched into the explanation of how exactly Draco had acquired two new pets, the train took off, leading them to their last school year.
Chapter 6: Welcome to Hogwarts

5th of September

"First years, welcome to Hogwarts. The rest of you: welcome back," McGonagall greeted them once the Sorting Hat was done sorting the new students. She was seated right in the middle of the Head table, signifying her new position as Headmistress. "I'd like to remind all of you that the Forbidden Forest remains forbidden for students. Our caretaker also made a new list of prohibited products; the list can be found on the announcement board in your dormitories," she continued. "I have an announcement to make. Starting this year Professor Black will take over the Transfiguration position and Professor Lupin will remain in charge for the position of Defence against the Dark Arts."

Almost everybody started to clap, though some of them – including Ron – settled on glaring only. Remus just smiled gently and Sirius stood up to bow with a big grin on his face.

Once everybody had settled down again, McGonagall smiled and closed off her little speech. "I wish you all good luck in this new school year. Enjoy your meal!"

As soon as those words had left her mouth, the plates on the large tables were filled with various steaming dishes that made the students mouth water.

Immediately the Great Hall was filled with chatter and the sound of cutlery hitting plates.

"So I take it that the ritual didn't succeed?" Daphne asked lightly.

Harry shook his head with a slight grimace. "No, it didn't. Thanks to Ron and Parkinson."

They briefly glanced at the Gryffindor table where Ron was talking animatedly to Seamus and a couple of sixth years; Parkinson was sulking, glaring at her food.

"Well, those two have never been the brightest," Blaise remarked drily.

"Well, you're better off here, anyway, Potter." Daphne winked and then got roped into a discussion about the right fabric for dress robes by her friends.

"Let's hope we don't have too many classes with Gryffindor," Millicent murmured. "I have a feeling some of them won't understand the war is over."

Harry agreed silently. Right when he wanted to pick up his goblet with pumpkin juice, a small scrap of folded up parchment appeared in front of his plate.
"Harry?" Draco asked curiously and eyed the scrap of paper warily.

Apprehensively, Harry opened the paper and was greeted by the familiar spidery handwriting of Snape.

'Potter

Before you follow your fellow schoolmates to the dormitory, wait at the entrance of the common room. Some changes have been made which concern you in particular.

S. Snape'

"Changes?" Harry muttered bewildered.

"I wonder what those changes entail," Draco mused softly.

"Me too." Harry frowned and crumpled up the paper, stuffing it in his pocket. He would throw it out later.

After dinner had ended, all the students made their way to their common rooms, their stomachs filled with a delicious dinner.

Harry and Draco were joined by their pets while they were waiting for Snape to arrive.

Ten minutes later, the soft rustle of a robe gliding over stone let them know the Potions Master was on his way.

"Potter, Draco," Snape greeted them curtly. "You and your pets need to follow me."

Harry and Draco shared a confused look, but obediently followed the man. Ruby and Garin were walking next to Harry, Sapphire held in his arms while Mara and Rowen walked next to Draco.

The boys grew more confused when they realized Snape was leading them to his own office. Well, not exactly. They walked past his office and halted two doors further.

A painting of a grey scaled dragon was watching them warily with his cold black eyes. His tail, with spikes embedded on it, scraped along the large rock that served as part of the background. The rest of the painting was filled with a patch of grass and a small river.

"Dragon scale," Snape murmured and the dragon snorted, smoke escaping his nostrils, but the painting swung open, revealing the round entrance.

Snape ushered them inside and the painting fell shut behind them.

They were standing in what appeared to be a living room. The fireplace was built right across from the entrance and a painting of a grass field with flowers softly swaying in the breeze hung above it.

A midnight blue couch with two matching arm chairs were placed a few feet away from the fireplace; a small wooden table stood in front of the couch. The stone floor was covered for the most part with a black carpet that looked soft to the touch and had a unicorn, sewed with golden thread, walking on it.

There were two other doors, save for the entrance; one on each side of the room and both were open, showing the inside of the two other rooms. One was a bathroom with the classic black-white tiles. It contained the toilet, sink and a deep bath tub. Towels were already hanging on the towel rack next to the sink.
The other room was the bedroom, containing an oak desk with a padded chair; a poster bed the same size as the ones in the dormitories; a nightstand with one drawer and a candlestick on it and a wardrobe.

Harry's trunk was placed right next to his desk.

"Sir?" Harry questioned confused.

The rooms were very nice and comfortable, but he didn't understand why his trunk was here instead of the dormitory and why he had been led here.

"This will be your new quarters," Snape replied. "With the new threat, it was decided that you should have quarters near a professor, in case something happened."

"My own quarters?" Harry repeated baffled.

"Yes, for your safety." Snape nodded towards the painting. "Salazar will check up on you and he'll arrive if you call for his help."

"Are private quarters really needed?" Harry questioned doubtfully. "When Voldemort was after me, I slept in the dormitory without problems."

Draco gripped his hand and squeezed it.

The Potions professor grimaced at the mention of the name, but didn't respond to it otherwise. "Unlike the Dark Lord, Dumbledore had a connection with Hogwarts and knows everything about it, including weak spots. Hogwarts has its defence shield strengthened against him, but we don't want to take risks."

"Will everybody know about Harry's new quarters?" Draco asked and he seemed tense.

"Of course not." Snape's dry tone clearly implied how stupid he considered that question to be. "Only the ones that Potter will confide the password in, will be able to locate this room. So be careful to whom you confide in."

Harry nodded, resisting the urge to scowl at the implication that he wouldn't be careful with his words when talking to others.

Snape glanced at the clock hanging next to the door of the bedroom. The arms on the clock showed nine thirty.

"I suggest you go to sleep now, because tomorrow you'll have an early morning." He turned around and walked back to the entrance. "Draco, I'll lead you back to the common room; I need to welcome the first years."

Draco rolled his eyes, but complied. "All right. I'll see you tomorrow." He bent his head and he and Harry shared a brief, but sweet kiss.

After wishing a good night, the portrait fell shut behind Snape and Draco.

"Guess I'll go to sleep then," Harry muttered.

Ruby curled up in front of the fireplace; the flames extinguished because it was night.

When Harry entered the bedroom after brushing his teeth, Sapphire was already curled up in a fuzzy ball in the middle of the bed while Garin had wound his long body around one of the bed posts.
Quickly, Harry changed into his pyjamas and climbed in the bed; his body sinking down into the soft matrass. A flick of his wand and the lights were extinguished, leaving the quarters dark, except for the faint glow of the dying embers in the fireplace.

The silence, broken only by his and his pets' breathing, was a bit unnerving. He hadn't realized until now how accustomed he had been to hearing other people sleep near him.

To hear nobody else except for his pets was a bit unsettling, but he would get used to it.

Carefully, as to not accidentally kick his cat, he turned on his right side and closed his eyes.

He still found it ridiculous that he had been given his own private quarters, but complaining wouldn't do anything. Best to just deal with it then.

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6th of September

When Harry woke up the next morning, it took him a moment to remember where exactly he was and why. For the first time in all his school years, he woke up to a quiet room; no grumbling of others about the early hour, no sound of the shower running or his roommates talking.

A wave of his wand and a muttered "Tempus" spell told him it was almost half past seven and with a sigh, he pushed back the sheets – eliciting a sleepy meow from Sapphire, who awoke and yawned – and stepped out of bed. Shivering from the chill that clung to the dungeons, he shuffled to the bathroom, grabbing his school clothes on his way.

After having cast a water protection spell on his necklace to protect it, he took a quick shower which woke him up almost completely.

After dressing, he grabbed his bag and called Dobby.

"Was can Dobby do for Master Harry Potter?" Dobby asked eagerly; the stack of knitted hats on top of his head seemed to have grown again, making the stack sway from one side to the other when the house elf just twitched his large, floppy ears.

"Can you make sure my cat receives her food and can go to her litter box?"

"Like last year, Master Harry Potter?"

Harry smiled. "Exactly."

"Dobby will makes sure Master Harry Potter's cat be given food and cans go to litter box," Dobby smiled and tapped his heels against each other.

"Thank you, Dobby."

The house elf disappeared after one last bow and Ruby came to stand next to him, Garin already curled around his neck.

"We are ready to go, Master," Ruby told him calmly.

"Okay, let's go." After checking to make sure Ruby – and in extension Garin – had turned invisible (he didn't want to attract even more attention of the students), he made his way out of the dungeon to the Great Hall.

When he arrived, most of the students were already eating their breakfast, while chatting quietly with
their friends and checking their timetables.

He spotted white blond hair in the middle of the Slytherin table and he approached his boyfriend, who looked up and smiled when he heard the footsteps.

"Good morning," Draco murmured and accepted the kiss Harry gave him when he sat down.

"Morning," he mumbled and reached for the coffee. "Did your pets follow?"

Draco rolled his eyes. "Mara is sitting behind me. Rowen decided that his wings would make too much noise and stayed behind." He snorted. "Which is good, because I don't fancy being followed around by two large animals."

"Here is your timetable, Harry." Daphne handed him a folded parchment.

Harry accepted the timetable, noticing how pale the girl looked. He hadn't noticed her pale pallor last night, but she had probably put up a mask then. She had lost her sister in the fight, but aside from her newly acquired paleness, one would never guess she was mourning. He wanted to offer his condolences, but her drawn mouth and harsh eyes made it clear she wouldn't appreciate the sentiment.

"Thanks." He studied his schedule, while taking a bite of his buttered toast.

Aside from starting with Potions first thing in the morning, it wasn't too bad he supposed. He had dropped History which gave him two empty hours after lunch on Thursday. From Wednesday till Friday, he had two hours each afternoon of Advanced Defence against the Dark Arts which luckily was still taught by Remus. On Monday and Tuesday he had two hours of Advanced Transfiguration in the afternoon (he briefly wondered how the lesson would differ with Sirius teaching them now).

The three hours of Care of Magical Creatures was split into two hours in the morning on Wednesday and the last hour on Friday. Herbology was put in the morning on Friday. Astronomy was scheduled on Thursday night.

This year he would also follow two hours of a class called simply Curses, which was an introduction to dark curses and their counter spells. That class was split in one hour before lunch on Monday and Tuesday.

The few free hours were placed towards the end of each day, except for Thursday when he had no morning classes.

All in all, he had a fairly good schedule.

When he compared his timetable with Draco's, the only difference was that like last year, Care of Magical Creatures was replaced by Healing.

"You dropped History too?"

Draco nodded. "Why prolong my suffering?" he shrugged and Harry laughed.

"So, how was the first night on your own?"

"It was weird," Harry admitted and reached out to take another toast. "I'm used to sleeping with other guys around me and now it was only my pets sleeping near me. It was quieter as well," he chuckled.

"I guess it's better than hearing Blaise snoring," Draco smirked and sipped from his camomile tea.
"I do not snore!" Blaise said indignantly, having heard Draco's comment when he arrived at the table. The glare he threw the blond had lost its effect thanks to the huge yawn he barely managed to cover.

"Classy," Draco commented drily.

"Fuck off," Blaise groaned tiredly. He turned his attention to an amused Harry. "Where on earth were you last night? I thought you and Draco had sneaked off, but Draco returned alone."

"I was in Hogwarts," Harry retorted and filled his empty cup with coffee; the two sugar cubes were dissolved by the hot liquid.

Blaise rolled his eyes. "Obviously," he said exasperatedly. "But where?"

"So concerned about my well-being?" Harry murmured and sighed. "I'll tell you later."

Blaise furrowed his eyebrows, but didn't push for more information and focused his attention on his breakfast.

"You're not confined to your room?" Draco mumbled, glancing at him. "I mean, you still can visit the common room, right?"

"I suppose so. Snape didn't say anything about me not being allowed in the common room," Harry replied.

"Good." The blond nodded and then his grey eyes gained a mischievous glint.

"What?" Harry asked warily, already having been taught that that look didn't bode well.

Draco leant towards him, one hand firmly gripping his thigh, and whispered in his ear, "Of course having your own private room has its benefits as well. For example, we don't have to rely on the Room of Requirements anymore if we want some … alone time." The hand squeezed his thigh.

"Of course that's what you think of," Harry replied with a snort, but he felt flustered and he knew he was blushing.

A kiss was placed on his ear and he didn't need to look to know his boyfriend was smirking.

"As if you hadn't thought of it," Draco whispered amused and retreated before Harry could retort.

Harry just rolled his eyes, but he could feel himself grow warmer at the thought that he and Draco wouldn't need to hold back and hide anymore. At least there was a benefit to having a private room forced on him.

As it turned out, it would be a while before the two boys could reap the benefits of a private room.

Their first lesson of Advanced Potions greeted them not with a review of the past years, but with a new, complex potion that would take a month and a half to brew – provided they wouldn't make a mistake.

The seventh year's Advanced Potions class was small. There were only three Gryffindors: Hermione, Dean and Parvati (to Harry's relief, Ron hadn't passed the exam); two Hufflepuff guys; six Ravenclaws: four boys and two girls and Slytherin counted four boys: Harry, Draco, Blaise and a quiet, light brown haired guy named Lysander, and three girls: Millicent, a dark blonde haired one named Kelly and a shy, pale, brown haired girl with a nose full with freckles named Marylyne.
"You all have managed to reach Advanced Potions." Snape's dark gaze slid from one student to another and some flinched, making him curl his lip. "Therefore I assume you know how to read recipes and brew potions without any problems, no matter how complex the brewing process is. If you suspect you may not be able to handle brewing the delicate potions of this year, then remove yourself immediately from this class. I have no intention of coddling you if you screw up," he sneered.

When nobody left, he continued, "The potion you will brew first will take a month and a half. You will work on it in pairs. That means if one of the two messes up, both of you will be deducted points."

One of the Hufflepuff guys groaned softly in dismay and Snape shot him a withering glare that made the boy pale in fear.

"The potion you will brew first is called the Wiggenweld Potion. Can someone tell me what the potion does?"

Three hands rose up in the air; they belonged to Hermione, Draco and a Ravenclaw girl named Selina.

"Yes, Mister Malfoy?" Snape raised an eyebrow.

"The Wiggenweld Potion is a healing potion created to wake someone up from a magically induced sleep, sir," Draco replied calmly.

"Has it another function?"

"Yes, it can also cure minor damage caused by mind controlling spells."

Snape's attention suddenly switched to Harry. "Give me a potion or a spell that induces sleep."

Harry hadn't expected to be called on to answer and he rapidly ran through the mental list of potions he had studied up until now. It had to be a potion they had already discussed because Snape knew him well enough to realize Harry wouldn't have done extra work for Potions when it wasn't necessary.

A potion that induced sleep … He could come up with two spells, but he knew Snape was expecting the name of a potion. He was testing Harry and the seventeen year old found himself not wanting to disappoint the older man.

Come on, he had to know at least one potion …

*Ah, but of course!*

"The Draught of Living Death is a potion that induces sleep when a person drinks it, sir," Harry replied and bit his lip when the dark eyes drilled into his own. Had he given the wrong answer?

Then Snape nodded. "Excellent, thirty points to Slytherin."

Harry breathed out in relief.

Snape pointed his wand at the blackboard and the ingredients started to appear on it.

"These are the ingredients that are needed. Pay attention to the amount next to each ingredient." A smirk crossed his face. "A botched up potion will not only be bad for your marks."
With that sinister threat hanging in the air, Snape sat down behind his desk and grabbed one of the
file stacked on the desk. "You may begin," he murmured.

The first five minutes after Snape's permission were spent in silence, save for the scratching sound
that the quills made on the parchment.

"Which ingredients do we need first?" Harry asked softly.

They had fallen into their roles as potion partners of last year: while Draco set up the cauldron and
did the necessary preparations (he was picky about the set up), Harry would get the ingredients and
help with dicing, crushing, slicing or chopping them.

Draco glanced at the instructions. "Get the Salamander blood, Flobberworm mucus, Lionfish spines,
Honeywater, Moondew drops and the Horklumpjuice first," he murmured. "The rest is only needed
in two weeks."

Harry nodded and made his way to the inventory. Dean smiled fleetingly at him in passing and he
nodded back.

Looking around the inventory room, which was filled with cabinets and various jars containing
samples of plants and parts of animals, he tried to figure out where he could find everything.

The Flobberworm mucus was located to his left and two shelves above it, he found a small vial
labelled 'Horklumpjuice'. The Honeywater and Moondew drops were put next to each other two
cabinets further.

"Can't find the rest?" Blaise murmured.

"No, I still need the Lionfish spines and the Salamander blood," Harry replied and pressed his arm
tighter against his chest to avoid having the vials slip and crash on the floor. Snape wouldn't
appreciate the loss of ingredients.

"They are over there." Blaise jerked his head to his right. "On the top shelf, right in the middle."

"Thanks," Harry smiled and crossed the room, standing on his tiptoes to reach the top shelf. Right
when he had grabbed the vial made of thick glass and a handful of the Lionfish spines, a body
knocked into him hard, making him stumble and the vial containing the Salamander blood slipped
out of his hands and fell on the ground, a loud "tink!" announcing its meeting with the floor.
Thankfully the glass was thick enough to not break when it made contact with the floor and Harry
bent down quickly to grab it.

"Oops, sorry," the Hufflepuff guy, who had groaned in dismay earlier, muttered carelessly and Harry
narrowed his eyes at the retreating back. He was pretty certain he had seen that guy smirk and he
wondered whether he was paranoid to think that the guy had knocked into him on purpose.

"Potter, what are you still doing here?" Snape appeared in the doorway and raised an eyebrow.

A quick glance around showed Harry that everybody had already returned to their tables and he
cursed inwardly. "Sorry, sir, had trouble finding an ingredient," he replied absently and slipped past
the Potions Master, ignoring the eyes he could feel burning into his back.

Snape probably didn't believe him, but he wasn't about to call him out on it during class.

"What took you so long?" Draco asked softly with a frown when he arrived back next to him.
"Sorry, it took some time to find all the ingredients," he whispered and put the ingredients down on the table.

"Hm," was all the response he got and they set about slicing the Lionfish spines and measuring the amount of Salamander blood that had to be poured in first in the cauldron.

"Welcome to the first lesson in Advanced Transfiguration," Sirius greeted them in the afternoon after they had finished their lunch. "Like always this year will be more difficult than the previous year. However if you study hard and concentrate on the spells, you shouldn't have too much difficulty. If you do encounter some problems, you can always ask me for help."

Advanced Transfiguration was with the Hufflepuffs, though the amount of students had significantly lowered in comparison with the previous year. Advanced Transfiguration was one of the most difficult subjects, aside from Advanced Potions, so it made sense that the amount of students was lowered after the exams were over.

"Now, last year you have been transfiguring small creatures into other small ones, correct?"

Some of the students nodded affirmatively and Sirius continued, "This year you'll be handling bigger creatures. You will also learn the theory of turning into an Animagus, but if anyone has an interest in actually becoming one, you'll have to wait until you're graduated and go to the Ministry to ask for help in becoming one. If you do it without the Ministry's approval, you'll have to pay a heavy fine if they discover it."

Harry barely contained his snort at hearing Sirius say that. It was ironic how his godfather was lecturing the class on how to become an Animagus legally, while he and his friends had become one during their school years illegally.

Sirius shot him a quick look, as if he had heard the concealed snort and raised an eyebrow. Harry looked back with innocent eyes. Sirius' mouth twitched as if he wanted to smile, but he looked away and continued with his explanation about the spells they would cover this year.

Curses turned out to be a very interesting class. It was taught by a tough looking man called Larten Moondagger; he was somewhere in the fifties and had long silver grey hair that reached the middle of his back, and which was tied together in a low ponytail. He had apparently been a Head Auror until five years ago when he had decided to quit his job at the Ministry and had become a duel instructor, specializing in curses. His bare arms revealed various scars, some still a shining deep red, others faded to a silver line. He seemed to have a small limp, courtesy of receiving a Shatter bone curse in his right leg years ago.

All Houses were put together for this class. There were eight Hufflepuffs, ten Ravenclaws, nine Gryffindors and seven Slytherins attending the course.

The Ravenclaws were seated to the complete left of the classroom and were as always ignoring the other students, though occasionally some of them glanced to the other side of the room. The Hufflepuffs were sitting in the row next to the Ravenclaws, imitating their seating arrangements of the Great Hall. Next to them were the Gryffindors and the Slytherins sat closest to the door.

The seating arrangements weren't really strategically chosen – if strategy had been in mind when choosing the seats, Gryffindor and Slytherin would have been the furthest apart from each other.

Unfortunately for Harry, Ron had chosen this subject as well and he was seated next to Hermione.
Ron had thrown him a very foul glare when they had entered the classroom and Harry had done his best to ignore the glare, pretending he hadn't seen it and had chosen the seat furthest away from Ron, Draco following him after throwing his own glare at the red haired boy.

But it wasn't only Ron who threw the occasional glare at the Slytherins. Dean and Seamus had smiled reassuringly at him, but Pansy had sneered at him – which he had expected – and some of the other Gryffindors had looked at him suspiciously, which admittedly had hurt him. Even some Hufflepuffs and a few Ravenclaws had glanced at him uneasily and he figured that was a result of Molly Weasley spreading her gossip in the papers and these students being too naïve to realize the truth.

Inwardly he sighed and focused on the lesson, which was now a basic introduction to the theory. They would be taught the curses in the next lessons.

And so the days flew by; if the seventh years had thought they could use their free hours to relax a bit, they were very wrong. The amount of homework they were given made sure they were busy with it during the evenings and the free hours, leaving them barely any time left to relax in the evening. Quidditch practice had started again as well, and so another two evenings were filled for a few hours.

Some of the students had approached Harry about the defence club of last year, asking if he was planning on opening the club again, but he wasn't certain about it. The club had started as a way to make sure the Slytherin students were able to defend themselves against the other Houses and during the actual fight with the Death Eaters. Now that the war was over, Harry didn't think it was necessary to keep the club alive. When some people had protested, pointing out that the other Houses were still out to get them, even with the war being over, Harry had told them they knew enough to defend themselves against any attacks and that the teachers wouldn't go easy on the students attacking each other.

Some of the other students had indeed attacked some Slytherins since the school year had started again. They seemed to believe that the Slytherins had no right to attend school after the war, thinking that every Slytherin had been a Death Eater. None of those attackers seemed to realize that the Slytherins they had attacked, were as much a victim of the war as they had been. Slytherin had lost as much as the other Houses had, but other people didn't care about that. In their minds, all Slytherins were evil, regardless of whether they had fought in the war or not.

Even the first years – who hadn't even been there during the final fight – didn't escape the attacks and after the first two weeks, it was decided that all first years would travel in group and with an older student with them if possible.

The teachers were ruthless in punishing the ones who dared to attack the other students – especially Snape and McGonagall. Snape was pissed off – understandably – that his students were targeted by the other Houses and McGonagall was angry that students would behave that way while they had seen what hate could do to someone.

The amount of detentions had never been that high in the beginning of a school year as this year.

18th of September

It was a Tuesday, the third week since the start of the new school year, when Harry discovered just how much Molly's gossip in the newspaper had influenced some students.
He and Draco were working on their potion, adding new ingredients to it, stirring them and recording the progress of their potion on paper.

Snape was walking around, offering assistance to students who were in trouble, when one of the Ravenclaw boys, whose brother had been murdered by a Death Eater, walked past Harry's and Draco's cauldron.

Both the boys weren't paying attention to the Ravenclaw student – they were used to students walking around the classroom to grab an ingredient from the storage room they had forgotten and this particular student was seated behind them, so when he walked past them, they merely assumed he went to the storage room.

However when their potion suddenly created a thin line of dark grey smog, Harry grew alarmed.

"Draco, is the potion supposed to be doing this?" he asked apprehensively.

Draco looked up and when he noticed the sudden change of their potion, his eyes grew wide. "No, it doesn't. I think we need to …"

But before he could finish his sentence, the potion exploded and both boys felt two large, furry bodies throwing them against the floor and covering them in the progress.

Harry made the mistake of accidentally inhaling the smoke that was circling around their table and he began to cough harshly, his throat burning and his eyes watering.

"Harry, are you okay?" Draco asked him and he could hear students panicking and Snape snapping at them to shut up.

A spell took care of the dangerous smoke and the air cleared up immediately. Mara and Ruby raised their heads and sniffed around. When they were certain there was no smoke left, they let their masters stand up.

Harry immediately doubled over and his coughing fit grew worse. He felt familiar hands settling on his shoulder and the worried voice of Draco sounded in his ear, "Harry? Harry! Did you inhale some of the smoke?"

He nodded weakly and tried to gasp for air. The burning in his throat had intensified and he whimpered in response, blindly grabbing Draco's arm and squeezing it.

"Potter, raise your head and open your mouth; I need to see how bad the damage to your throat is," Snape murmured and managed to take a quick look at Harry's throat, before the latter bent his head again when another coughing fit attacked him.

"The smoke did some damage to your throat, but you should be fine once Pomfrey heals you," Snape nodded to Draco. "Take him to the Infirmary. We'll discuss later what we'll do about your potion."

"Yes, sir," Draco muttered and brought an arm around Harry's waist and led him out of the dungeon, while Harry's body rattled with his coughing. Mara and Ruby were following behind them, their low rumbling signifying their anger that their masters were attacked.

They entered the Infirmary and Pomfrey came immediately, raising an eyebrow when she saw Harry standing doubled over, coughing harshly.

"Oh dear, sit down, please." She patted on the closest bed and Harry sat down on it, taking a big
gulp of air when his coughing fit released him for a moment.

"What happened?"

"We were working on a potion and it suddenly exploded and it released some kind of poisonous smoke. Harry inhaled some of it and he started coughing," Draco explained, hovering near his boyfriend.

Pomfrey tsk’d and took out her wand. "What kind of potion are you working on?"

"The Wiggenweld Potion."

"Ah yes, that potion can release dangerous smoke if a leaf of the oak is thrown in it," she murmured and peered in Harry's eyes. "Did you throw a leaf in it accidentally?"

"What? No, of course not. We were following the instructions." Draco frowned.

"Hm, well, I'll let Professor Snape figure out what went wrong with your potion. You can go back to class; Mister Potter needs to stay here for a few hours, while the potion will fix his throat." Pomfrey walked over to a cabinet and rummaged through it, before she came back with a vial filled with a gooey, rose coloured potion.

"All right, you need to drink this up – no objections, young man – and then lay down while the potion does its work," she instructed and handed over the vial.

"I'll come back later to check on you, okay?" Draco whispered and gave him a kiss on his cheek after Harry nodded.

Pomfrey kept standing there, staring at him with hawk eyes until he had swallowed the last drop of the potion, which vaguely tasted like a mix of cherries and raspberries.

She nodded satisfied and left when he lied down on the bed, waiting for the potion to kick in.

He stared at the ceiling and wondered how a leaf of the oak tree could have landed in their potion. Neither he or Draco had taken oak leaves from the storage room – there was no need to, because it wasn't in their ingredients lists.

That only left the option of someone having thrown it in their cauldron while they weren't looking.

"Is Master feeling well again?" Ruby revealed himself, sitting next to him. His tail with the fire on it burning brightly, was curled around his paws.

"The potion is starting to work, yeah, so I'll be fine soon," Harry whispered reassuringly.

Ruby nodded and laid his head down on Harry's bed, closing his eyes in contentment when Harry started to rub behind his ears. "Thanks for helping me in the classroom."

"Master has to be protected," Ruby murmured through their mental bond and Harry smiled.

Half an hour later, the burning in his throat had been soothed by the potion and he could swallow again without feeling like there were burning shards of glass stuck in his throat. The coughing fit had eased up as well and Harry was relieved that he could breathe in again without feeling like his lungs would come out of his throat.

"How are you feeling, Mister Potter?"
Harry was startled by the sudden appearance of the nurse in front of him and he stopped petting Ruby. "Ah, I'm feeling okay; the potion worked well," he replied and furrowed his eyebrows when he noticed Pomfrey's eyes.

There was something wrong with them; he had seen that particular look before, but where?

"That is good to hear," she murmured absentmindedly and stared at him with blank eyes.

"So, can I go now?" he asked warily. "I'm feeling well again."

"No, not yet; I need to examine you again."

"Why? I assure you I'm feeling fine."

"No, no, you're not feeling fine," she stated matter-of-factly.

Looking at her slightly glazed over eyes, he finally made the connection in his mind and he grew alarmed. Glancing around quickly, he saw his wand lying on the nightstand and he bent sideways to grab it.

At least that was the plan but a thick rope bound his arms tightly against his sides and he fell back, cursing underneath his breath.

Shit, how the hell did he always land in this kind of situations?

Ruby started to growl and he sprung forwards with his teeth bared, intent on throwing the nurse on the floor to prevent her from doing anything worse to his master.

The one using Pomfrey as his puppet however was quicker and Pomfrey turned around to face the furious lion and a hissed curse threw Ruby back and he landed with a loud 'crack' against the wall, sliding down until he was sprawled out on the ground, his eyes half closed.

"Ruby!" Harry yelled shocked and he was afraid his pet had gotten seriously hurt. Was he unconscious? Or was he worse off?

"No need to worry about your precious pet, Potter," Pomfrey told him calmly and before he could retort or try to scream loudly in the hopes of being heard by someone in the hallway, she uttered one spell very clearly, "Constricto."

The spell wrapped itself around his neck and tightened, constricting his breathing. Then it seemed to slither down his throat and it started to crush his lungs together, making him gasp for air.

He started to trash around, hoping to break free from the ropes so that he could grab his wand and break the spell, but the ropes didn't even give him an inch of freedom, and the lack of air was making him very lightheaded. He knew he should try to call his magic to the surface, do something to break the spell, but his energy was leaking away with every second that passed without him being able to breathe.

He tried to gasp for air, but his airway was sealed off and he started to panic. He didn't want to die here! He had survived Voldemort for Merlin's sake! He couldn't die now because the nurse was being controlled by someone else through the Imperius curse.

But his struggling weakened and black spots started to appear in front of his eyes.

Did he survive all those years, just to die here in the Infirmary?
"I'll make sure the student responsible for ruining your potion gets punished," Snape murmured with a glare thrown at the Ravenclaw student, who was waiting at his desk.

The boy flinched and looked down.

"Let Potter know you can recreate the potion during the weekends," the professor continued. "You can start this Saturday at two o'clock."

Draco opened his mouth, but was struck by a sudden tingling feeling in the back of his neck. He frowned and brought his hand to his back to rub at the spot, but the tingling feeling intensified and an ice cold shiver ran over his spine.

"What the hell?" he muttered bemused.

"Is everything all right?" Snape demanded to know and frowned.

"I don't …"

He got cut off by Mara, who began pulling at his trousers.

"Get your arse to the Infirmary! Your mate is in danger! Don't you feel that?" she snapped at him through their mental bond and without thinking twice about how she had known he felt weird, he took off, ignoring Snape's demand to explain what was happening.

He tore through the hallways, paying no heed to the yelling of other students who got shoved aside by him and Mara.

"Draco, what's wrong?" Daphne asked startled when he ran past her.

He turned his head around and snapped, "No time to explain; send a professor to the Infirmary now!"

She nodded grimly and ran away, searching for a professor who was closest.

The doors of the Infirmary banged open and he came to an abrupt halt when he took in the scene in front of him. Pomfrey was standing in front of Harry's bed with a blank face, her wand pointed straight at the boy lying in the bed. When his gaze shot to Harry, he grew horrified; Harry was lying bound with ropes on the bed, his lips turning blue while his open mouth tried to desperately gasp for air; his eyes having rolled back in their sockets so that he could only see the white of his eyeballs.

He became furious and without thinking his hand shot out and the air in front of him grew into a solid, silver coloured ball. He drew his hand back and punched the air ball towards Pomfrey. The nurse was too late to turn around and the ball hit her square in her side, throwing her hard against the floor. Her wand clattered on the ground and rolled underneath the nearest bed.

"Incarcerous!"

Thick ropes winded around her body and made sure she couldn't move anymore.

With Pomfrey's concentration broken, the spell released its deathly grip around Harry's throat and lungs and the boy immediately began to cough and gasp noisily for air.

"Harry," Draco murmured and with trembling arms he removed the ropes, and Harry fell into his arms as soon as his arms were free again.

"Dr-Draco," Harry hiccupped and his lips slowly regained their colour with every breath he took.
"What happened here?"

"How's Ruby?" Harry ignored Draco's question for the time being and he turned his head around to catch sight of his lion.

Ruby was standing on trembling paws and he shook his massive head.

"I'm sorry, Master, that I couldn't protect you." Ruby sounded frustrated and angry at himself.

"It's not your fault, Ruby, I'm already glad that you're okay," Harry replied relieved.

"Would someone mind telling me why Greengrass seemed in such a hurry to get me here?" Sirius appeared in the doorway, his face gaining a perplexed look once his eyes caught sight of the bound, unconscious Pomfrey on the floor. Then his gaze slowly slid to Harry being embraced by Draco on the bed and Mara and Ruby standing next to each other. "Something tells me that this wasn't something as simple as Harry refusing to take his medicine. For that matter, what on earth did you do to end up here? School has only been going on for three weeks," he continued perplexed.

Harry took a deep breath and started to explain everything that had happened.

"How did someone manage to put the Imperius curse on the head nurse?" Kingsley asked, rubbing his forehead, which was creased with worry lines. "Was it someone in the school?"

"No, that isn't possible. An alarm would have gone off if someone used an Unforgivable in Hogwarts," McGonagall answered coolly, not taking too kindly to Kingsley's suggestion that someone in the school was responsible for cursing her head nurse.

After Harry was done talking, Sirius had ushered them to McGonagall, while taking the unconscious nurse with him. The students they had passed on their way to the Headmistress' office had started whispering once they saw the unconscious Pomfrey floating next to Professor Black and rumours were surely flying around the school now.

Harry and Draco were ordered to take a seat, while Sirius remained standing behind them. Their pets had turned invisible again and were seated in front of their legs.

Head Auror Kingsley had been called once Sirius had made it clear that an Unforgivable had been used on the head nurse.

With the arrival of Kingsley and a younger Auror (a honey blonde haired woman who had introduced herself as Kelly Halfeger), Harry had been asked to explain again what had transpired in the Infirmary, Draco joining the conversation at the end.

"Severus, do you have an idea as to how this is possible?" McGonagall asked and her mouth tightened in wariness.

Startled, everybody turned around to see Snape standing near the bookcase, closest to the door. When had he arrived?

"I have a suspicion, yes," Snape inclined his head and studied the dazed looking Pomfrey. She had been revived with a spell as soon as Harry had told them what had happened and her symptoms were linked to the Imperius curse after Kingsley had used a spell to determine whether or not she had been under the influence of an Unforgivable.

"It is possible that someone brought her under the Imperius curse by first using Legimency on her,"
he explained thoughtfully.

Kingsley frowned. "There are not many accomplished in the art of Legilimency; don't you need to be in close contact to use it?"

"Usually contact is required, yes," Snape agreed. "But there have been a few cases before where someone was very skilled at Legilimency and didn't need to be in close contact to make it work. Usually though, that required that they were already familiar with the person they were using Legilimency on."

"So we are searching for someone very skilled at Legilimency, who has been in close contact with the nurse," Kingsley muttered and scowled. "That doesn't make it exactly easy, Snape."

"I was asked how it was possible for Pomfrey to be under the Imperius curse while no one in the school used it – I was under the impression you would realize it wouldn't be easy, Kingsley," Snape sneered and crossed his arms in front of his chest.

"If I may interrupt," Kelly said softly when it looked like Kingsley and Snape were ready to verbally assault each other. "I think I can think of one person who would be capable of doing this."

"Oh?" Kingsley raised an eyebrow and shifted his attention from Snape to his subordinate.

"We're looking for someone powerful, very capable in Legilimency and who has been in close contact with the head nurse," she summed up. "I can only think of one person who fits all three criteria and that's Albus Dumbledore."

Shocked silence reigned in the office before Snape cleared his throat. "Well, he does fit the criteria and now we know why the Imperio'd Pomfrey tried to kill Potter. Dumbledore tried to kill him last year already – it could be that he decided to try again through someone else this time."

"And here I thought Voldemort was horrible," Harry muttered and Draco threw him a weak smile.

"So what you're saying is that basically everyone can be used to kill Harry once Dumbledore manages to use Legilimency on them?" Sirius said slowly and a troubled look appeared in his eyes, while one of his hands clenched into a fist.

At first Harry didn't understand this weird reaction to Snape's explanation, until realization hit him and his breath hitched. Sirius was scared he would be used as a tool to kill Harry.

He opened his mouth to reassure his godfather, but Snape beat him to it.

"Don't worry, mutt, to use Legilimency, the other one has to possess a decent brain," he sneered. "So you don't have to worry about hurting your precious godson."

Sirius glared at him, but deep inside his eyes, Harry could read the relief at hearing Snape's reassurance.

"I don't think Albus will try to use Legilimency again on someone else," McGonagall said thoughtfully. "He knows we'll be more alert to that method now, so he won't waste his time on using the same technique again." She glanced at Pomfrey. "Considering we don't know how damaged her mind is, I'll send her to Saint Mungos; they'll know how to heal her." She grabbed a blank parchment and started to scribble something on it. "I'll have to hire a new nurse for the Infirmary and I'll install new wards that will let us know immediately if a patient is in danger."

"You don't have such wards yet?" Kelly asked astonished and flushed when McGonagall stared at
"No, until now, the nurse hadn't tried to kill a patient," she responded drily. She focused her attention on the two schoolboys in front of her desk. "Potter, I'll notify the teachers that you won't be attending class today; Malfoy, you can go back to your classes."

Draco opened his mouth, presumably to protest, but McGonagall's sharp glance made him close his mouth again and he looked down, scowling at the floor.

"Come on," Harry murmured and together with their pets, they left the office, where the tension hadn't dissolved yet.

Draco insisted on escorting Harry back to his room and Harry allowed his fussing, having learnt by now when to pick battles with the blond.

"Are you sure you're okay?" Draco asked worriedly and his hands grabbed Harry's face and he stared into his eyes, as if those would show him Harry's health.

"Yes, I'm fine," Harry insisted and covered Draco's hands with his own, bringing them back down. "I'm fine, Draco," he repeated softly and releasing one hand, he brought his free hand up to caress Draco's neck, pushing him softly down to press a kiss on his lips. They broke apart with a soft gasp and stood staring in each other's eyes until Harry cleared his throat and stepped back.

"You better go back to your classes – McGonagall doesn't deal well with students playing hooky," he smiled and winked.

Draco snorted. "No, I have noticed that already." He turned around and walked back to the entrance. Before he stepped through it, he turned his head to look at Harry. "I'll come back later, okay?"

Harry nodded and waved before bending down to grab his schoolbag. Might as well start on his homework now.

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23rd of September

By Friday, during dinner, students were still trying to figure out just what had happened to make Pomfrey leave her position for an undefined period of time. She had been replaced a day later by a small, frail, brown haired woman, who looked as if she would faint if someone looked at her a bit too long. Regardless, she was good at Healing, so she had taken over the position as head nurse of Hogwarts now.

McGonagall had told the students that Pomfrey had requested some time off to deal with 'personal issues'. Of course the students weren't ready to accept that tale, but none of the teachers were willing to come forth with more details, so all they could do, was speculate and conjure up every possible event that could have occurred; ranging from the more plausible ("Maybe she got hurt somehow and they had to take her to the hospital?") to the more outrageous speculations ("I heard that she got caught messing around with someone underage and they sent her away!").

"You'd think they would have found something else to talk about by now," Draco muttered, rolling his eyes, when they had returned to Harry's room after dinner.

They were lounging on his bed, after having made an honest attempt on working on their homework. That attempt lasted for a good five minutes, before they had both decided that some private time for them was in order.
"Give it one more week and then something else will happen to snatch their attention," Harry responded smiling.

Draco sighed and shook his head.

They were quiet for a while until Draco turned around to lie on his side, facing Harry, who looked at him with inquiring eyes.

"What?"

"Hm? Nothing much; just that I missed being with you," Draco breathed out and reached out to caress Harry's jaw with his index finger.

Harry had a mind to tell him he had been with him practically all the time, save for at night, but he understood what Draco meant after a few seconds. While they hadn't been separated for long since they had arrived back at school, neither had they had really time for each other. Until now their free time had been filled up mostly with homework and Quidditch practice with only a few stolen moments between classes where at the most they stole a few heated kisses, which only served to bring them all fired up with no means of relief any time soon.

"I missed you too," he murmured and closed the small distance.

Their hands slipped into hair while their mouths met in a soft kiss. Their lips slid across each other, exchanging light kisses and nips.

Harry was the one who grew bold this time and he shifted a bit, until his right knee slid between Draco's legs and his tongue licked Draco's lips, asking silently for them to open up. He was granted entrance instantly and soon their tongues were curling around each other, sliding across teeth before they found each other again.

Sapphire awoke from her deep sleep when she heard a guttural moan coming from the bed and her ear twitched when she stared at her master, before she jumped off the desk and slipped out of the room, deciding she would get an undisturbed sleep if she slept elsewhere.

Pale fingers busied themselves with removing the small buttons from their holes while Harry worked his tie loose. He took over when his shirt swung open and wiggled out of the garment, letting it fall on the floor. Sliding backwards on the bed to give Draco some space to remove his own clothing, he quickly tugged his zipper down and pushed the fabric down, until he could kick off his trousers, leaving him in his boxers; his socks discarded when they had climbed into the bed.

Looking back at his boyfriend, he couldn't help but stare when Draco's muscles flexed when he folded his trousers and shirt before placing them on the floor.

"You got any lube?" Draco's voice sounded a bit husky and a particular part of Harry's lower body decided it quite liked the huskiness.

"Eh." Harry's eyes slid to his nightstand and he crawled forwards, leaning over Draco's slightly spread legs to reach the drawer. "I think I put it in there," he muttered absentmindedly and rifled through the open drawer, pushing aside some paper, a couple of quills and a watch. The tube was hiding in the back of the drawer and when his fingers skidded across it, he grabbed it with a triumphant grin. "Here it is," he announced and shut the drawer with a small 'click', before handing the tube over.

Draco glanced at it and seeing it still unopened, raised an eyebrow. "Have you bought this recently?"
Harry cleared his throat. "I, eh, had it delivered actually." He blushed when Draco smirked. "What? I could hardly write it on the shopping list when Sirius went shopping," he defended himself.

"That would have been awkward," Draco agreed and his hands closed around Harry's upper arms, pulling him against his body. "And very bad for my health," he whispered against slightly parted lips and nuzzled a smooth cheek with his nose, while one of his hands drifted lower, caressing up and down Harry's arm, before the journey went further on Harry's shoulder and then downwards, rubbing a nipple briefly making his dark haired boyfriend whimper.

A shiver went through Draco's body when Harry let his own hands drift across his chest and he hid a smile, bending his head to catch reddened lips.

At one point, between the kissing and caressing, their boxers came off and were dropped carelessly on the floor, making them groan simultaneously when their engorged cocks pressed against each other.

Feeling Draco's hard prick pushing against his stomach, Harry decided to try something out and he slid downwards, pressing light kisses on Draco's collar bone, between his nipples, over his abs … Draco moaned encouragingly and he spread his legs, creating space for Harry to lie in.

When he stopped sliding down, his mouth was right above Draco's twitching cock and he opened his mouth, his breath caressing the smooth head, which was starting to get slick with pre come.

Draco's moan turned into a surprised whimper when Harry's mouth closed around his erection and a hand shot out to rest on Harry's head, but he didn't push down, for which the dark haired boy was grateful for.

This was the first time he would be giving his boyfriend head and he hoped he didn't screw up. Draco had given him a blowjob a couple of times before and he tried to remember what the blond had exactly done, figuring copying would be the best to do for now.

Slowly he began bobbing his head up and down, taking a bit more of Draco in with every bob down, but he had to pull back a bit when his gagging reflex started to act up. He brought one hand around the part he couldn't reach with his mouth and started to softly squeeze, while he concentrated on sucking and licking. His tongue slid over the wide head every time he came up and he had to admit that he didn't mind the taste too much. Sure it was a bit salty and bitter, but it wasn't bad. Although his cheeks started to hurt a bit; but he didn't stop and started to suck harder, his tongue constantly licking every part it could reach.

"Fuck, Harry," Draco whimpered breathlessly, obviously not having expected Harry to give him a blowjob.

Harry smiled when he heard Draco and hummed a bit, making the blond curse again.

"Shit, so good, so good," Draco muttered and he closed his eyes and the hand in the dark, soft hair tightened a bit.

The next squeeze and his tongue pressing against the slit was apparently too much and he almost choked when his mouth was suddenly filled with a sticky, bitter substance that flooded straight down his throat before he pulled back and began to swallow. He drew back, coughing a bit and wiped away the bit of cum that had dribbled down his chin when the amount had been too much for him to swallow.

"Was it good?" he asked uncertainly and was startled when Draco chuckled breathlessly.
"Good? It was amazing," he grinned and rose up to grab Harry by his arms and he shifted them around until Harry was now lying down on his back. He bent down to kiss him and tasted himself in Harry's mouth.

"Now it's time to give you attention." Draco winked and his lips trailed down Harry's chin, licking a particular spot in Harry's neck, making the boy groan in response.

While his lips closed around a pink nub, nipping and licking at it, his hand scrambled blindly across the bed until his fingers brushed against the cold plastic of the tube. He grabbed it and uncapped it, squeezing a good amount of the lube on his fingers. He rubbed his fingers together to warm up the cold gel and with his other hand, he parted Harry's legs after softly urging him on his stomach.

"Oh," Harry's eyes shot open when he felt a finger pressing against his entrance and he hissed softly when it slid in. He squirmed softly, getting used to the invasion after not having felt it for more than a month and bit his lower lip when his dick brushed against the sheets.

He arched his back when he felt a tongue sliding down his spine and a second finger entered him, and they started scissoring him, spreading him as much as possible while he pulled his legs up until he was kneeling on the bed. Pressing down with his arse, he moaned when those fingers prodded against his sweet spot and his head fell forwards on a pillow, his hands clenching in the sheets.

While a hand began sliding up and down his cock, a third finger joined the other two and the three fingers pushed against his prostate, eliciting a loud moan.

"Fuck, Draco," he moaned gutturally and whimpered softly when the fingers disappeared after giving him a few more prods, leaving him feeling empty.

"I want to see you," Draco whispered against his shoulder and he was softly urged on his back.

"Ready?"

"Hmhm," Harry sighed and spread his legs. He felt Draco's cock pressing against his entrance and then he slid inside of him, pressing forwards until he was completely inside, stretching him more, leaving a slight burn behind.

"Ah, hm," he panted and clasped his arms around Draco's shoulders.

"You okay?" Draco blinked the sweat out of his eyes and looked at him worriedly.

Harry smiled reassuringly. "Yeah, I'm okay; you can move."

Draco pulled back slowly and pushed back in at the same pace, while his lips found Harry's mouth again.

He shifted his hips a bit and with the next thrust, Harry felt him pressing against his sweet spot and he moaned loudly, feeling Draco smile against his lips.

He began to pant and pulled his head back, giving Draco access to his neck, feeling lips sucking at his skin.

"Ah, oh, you – hm, harder, please," he groaned and his hands clamped down on Draco's shoulders when the next thrust was delivered harder.

They picked up their pace and the sweat on their bodies made moving a bit easier, though it also made it a bit more difficult to keep their hands where they wanted to.
"Merlin, you're so beautiful," Draco whispered huskily in his ear and he could feel himself flush a
bit, though it was probably not noticeable, giving how warm he already felt.

The bed creaked softly with every thrust Draco delivered to Harry's body and they both could feel
their orgasm approaching.

"Ah, ah, fuck, Draco!" he called out and he threw his head back, his eyes falling shut when his
orgasm made him see white stars, and it was as if lighting appeared behind his closed eyelids. His
body felt like it was suffering from his own personal mini earthquake and he trembled and shook and
he could feel his cum landing on his stomach.

With his heart still racing, he opened his eyes and Draco suddenly delivered a harsh thrust, which
buried him deep inside his body and he held the blond in his arms, while lips were sucking at a spot
right underneath his ear, and he felt his canal being flooded when Draco came, feeling the warm
liquid hitting his walls. Hands were clenched tight around his sweaty hips and when Draco pulled
out softly, he could feel some of his cum dripping out of his entrance, leaving him wet and sticky.

Afterwards, Draco slid next to him, pulling him in his arms until Harry's head was lying on his
shoulder and casted a spell to clean themselves.

"Stay the night?" Harry asked, when his breath was regular again.

"Of course," Draco smiled and his hand went absently up and down over Harry's arm.

They grew silent and Harry's eyes slipped close. He had missed this, missed lying together with
Draco, missed sleeping together. Last year, it had been easy to sneak in each other's bed and spent
the night together, but with his own private room this year, it had been weirdly enough more difficult
to spend the night together. Most of that had to do with their busy schedules, but they also didn't
want other people to start asking questions if Draco disappeared at night or worse, try to follow him.

Harry was almost lulled into sleep by listening to Draco's heartbeat, until Draco opened his mouth.

"I love you," he suddenly blurted out and his sharp intake of breath indicated he hadn't expected that
to come out like that.

Green eyes shot open in shock and his heart started thumping wildly and he wondered whether he
had heard that correctly.

"What?" he stammered and rose up and leant on his elbow to look at Draco.

A bright blush was visible on Draco's cheeks, even with the candlelight, but he had a determined
look in his eyes.

"I said: I love you," he repeated and swallowed.

"Oh." Harry blinked and gazed at him with wide eyes. He definitely hadn't expected to hear that.

It dawned on him that they were together for almost a year and he really should have expected
something like this to pop up. The thing was with this being his first relationship, he had kind of just
followed Draco's lead, only having a vague idea as to what a romantic relationship entailed.

But this wasn't bad, right? Sure, he hadn't expected Draco to blurt that out now, but it wasn't bad. It
was … nice to hear that actually. Nice to know that the blond's feelings went further than just liking
him.
"Harry? Can you please say something?" Draco sounded nervous. "I know I just blurted that out and I probably should have found a better moment to say it, but really, when is the appropriate moment to say something like that? Saying it after a class has finished is rather weird and during dinner is not really appropriate either. Oh, but I guess saying it after shagging can be interpreted wrong as well. I hope you don't. Interpret it wrongly I mean. Because I really do love you, you know. Can't imagine my life without you anymore and so I thought I should just let you know that. That I love you. Because I really do. And …"

Harry cut off his rambling with a kiss and he chuckled. "Calm down, Draco," he murmured and stuck out his hand to caress Draco's cheek.

Grey eyes stared at him. "Sorry, it's just that I don't want you to think I only said it because we did it," he muttered and sounded strangely petulant.

"I know you mean it," Harry smiled and gave him another slow kiss that Draco responded to instantly. He pulled back reluctantly and smiled softly. "I love you too."

"You do?" Draco's voice reached a higher note and he flushed, clearing his throat. "I mean, good, that's good to hear."

Harry couldn't suppress the snicker from escaping and got his arm smacked as a result.

"Shut up," the blond mumbled and scowled half-heartedly.

"Hm, good night," Harry whispered and wrapped his arm around Draco's chest when he laid back down.

Draco smiled. "Good night."

That night they both fell asleep with a smile on their face, not knowing yet that their lives would soon change completely.
History Part 1

Chapter Notes

Warnings: MPreg starting; some angst; explanation of what happened with Harry during his birthday

Disclaimer: I don't own Harry Potter - J.K. Rowling owns it

!! Notice: The reason why this chapter has a "Part 1" added to the title is because I had to cut the chapter in two, because it would otherwise get way too long. I like to portray the reactions of my characters as realistically as possible and that usually ends up in too long chapters.

The next part will contain a lot of angst - I'm warning you of that already. When you have read this chapter, you'll probably understand why the next one will contain a lot of angst.

That said, the angst is necessary for the development, so it has to be there ^^;

Please pay attention to the warnings in the next chapter - they are important

Chapter 7: History Part 1

10th of October

Remus had always been the one who did the needed research. Whether it was research for their homework or research for the pranks they wanted to pull, Sirius and James had always relied on him when it came to researching stuff. While both of them had been brilliant in school, despite the way they acted and the many detentions they had received, they had detested reading something if it took longer than half an hour. Peter was even worse because he had always struggled through every year, barely getting enough marks to pass.

So the part of research always fell on Remus' shoulders and he didn't mind it that much. From the moment he had learnt how to read, books had become his friends before he met the others. Books had been an escape from the real world for him, particularly after he was attacked and it had been made clear to him that he was not welcome anywhere. The stories provided an escape for him, a way to experience the outside world in his small bedroom.

His love for books had never faded away, even when he gained his best friends. Books were reliable and he could always trust them to give him the answer he needed. If one book didn't provide a good answer, then the next one would or two books combined would be able to answer his question.

He had never encountered a question that he couldn't find the answer to in books.

Until Harry's birthday.

Ever since that faithful night had happened, his mind had busied itself with trying to come up with an answer.
Why had Harry experienced so much pain? Was it tied to his heritage? It had to be, but how come James had never experienced such pain? If that pain was normal in the Potter family, then why had James never gone through that?

It didn't make any sense and that made Remus very frustrated. He had kept a close eye on Harry during the rest of the holidays and now that they were back in school, he paid as much attention as possible to his cub, searching for any sign that something had changed. But there were no changes – at least not as far as Remus could tell.

Aside from that painful night, Harry hadn't experienced any pain and physically he hadn't changed. His magic had grown stronger, yes, but that didn't explain the pain he had gone through. It made it all even more confusing.

The books he had taken from the Potters' vault hadn't provided any answer so far. To be fair, he had taken twelve with him and he had only gone through five so far, so the answer could still be found in the rest.

Because he didn't know what exactly he was searching for, he read everything in the books, which explained why it took him so long to go through every one. Having to teach classes, correct the homework and having been feeling unwell for two days after the full moon certainly took time away from his research as well.

His lover did his best to aid him in his research, but his attention span when it came to reading books hadn't changed during all those years and the book Sirius was reading was more often closed than open.

"Still reading?" Sirius' voice broke through his thoughts and he looked up, blinking.

The clock showed it was eleven thirty - nearly midnight, which explained why his vision was blurry and his eyes felt as if they were burning.

He looked back at the page he had been staring at without taking in any of the words and wondered how long he had sat there without actively reading the page.

"Yeah," he groaned and rubbed his eyes. "I thought I had finally found the answer because this chapter deals with the events surrounding the heritage coming through, but it doesn't tell me much except that bursts of magic can be expected when it comes to exceptionally powerful Potter children."

"Well, he did have a burst of magic," Sirius muttered and came to stand behind him, looking over his shoulder at the page. "But nothing about pain?"

Remus shook his head and sighed. "No, nothing. It's like Harry is the first Potter to experience pain, but that can't be possible. There has to be at least one other Potter who went through the same, but so far I can't find anything!" Frustrated, he slammed his open palm down on the table and the bolt of pain made him grit his teeth.

A hand entered his vision and the book was closed carefully.

"Hey, you've been reading for a long time already. Tomorrow you have to get up early for your morning classes, so why don't you go sleep now, hm?" Sirius suggested and squeezed his shoulder.

"But why can't I find anything?" Remus continued frustrated, though he followed his lover begrudgingly, casting one last annoying look at the closed book that seemed to taunt him.
"We still have some books left; maybe we'll find the answer there," Sirius soothed and softly, but insistently pushed Remus down in their bed, climbing in behind him.

The sheets rustled when they pulled them up to their shoulders and they shifted around, trying to find a comfortable spot. They ended up with Sirius having thrown one leg over Remus' legs and Remus' head lying on Sirius' stretched out arm.

A whispered "Nox" clothed them in darkness.

"How is Harry?" Remus whispered, feeling his tense shoulders relaxing when Sirius started to caress his arm.

"He's doing well as far as I can tell," Sirius replied drowsily. "Moondagger especially is full of praise for him, telling everyone Harry would make a great Head Auror one day." He snickered. "You should have seen Snivellus' face when Moondagger kept going on how wonderful Harry is in his class and how quick on the uptake."

Remus smiled. Severus and Harry seemed to have some unspoken truce going on since last year, but he imagined that when it came to potions, Harry was still a slightly sour subject for Severus. Harry wasn't that bad anymore in Potions, thanks to Draco's help, but he would never be as good as Lily had been and Remus assumed that Severus was irritated because of that.

During their vacation in North America, he had caught Severus and Lucius talking one night, when he had gone downstairs to grab a glass of water. They had been sitting outside, while everyone else had already gone to bed. When Remus heard them talking, he had halted and had stood right behind the door eavesdropping – the exact same thing he had reprimanded Sirius for many times already. And now he had been doing that. All he could blame was his curiosity.

"Has Draco told you his plans yet about what he wants to do after his graduation?" Lucius asked while nursing a glass of Firewhiskey.

Remus' position behind the door allowed him a good view of the two men and he saw Severus shaking his head.

"No, he hasn't mentioned it yet," he replied idly. "Why?"

"He wants a master degree in Potions," Lucius answered calmly.

"Let me guess," Severus interrupted him, smiling sardonically. "He wants his apprenticeship under my guidance?"

Lucius smiled serenely. "Can you blame him for wanting that? I know you're not the boastful type, but you have to admit that you are considered the best when it comes to Potions in Europe – and even outside of it. A Malfoy always wants the best and one can't get any better than having an apprenticeship with you as mentor."

"Flattery won't work with me," Severus sneered. "If he wants that apprenticeship so badly, he'll have to work for it like everyone else."

The older blond chuckled. "I saw the exam results, Severus; my son had the highest marks of his year, even better than that Muggleborn girl Granger."

"Looking through papers without permission, Lucius? How very uncouth of you," Severus remarked snidely and took a sip of his own Firewhiskey.
Lucius ignored the snide remark and continued, "I saw the exam results of young Harry as well – he seems to have improved a lot."

"He has made some improvement, yes." The Potions' master pursed his lips together and broodily stared into his glass.

"But?" Lucius cocked his head to his left.

"If he applies himself in Potions as he does in other courses like Defence against the Dark Arts, then he wouldn't need Draco's help to tutor him," Severus muttered and Remus blinked, not understanding why Severus sounded so troubled by Harry's inability to be good at Potions.

It was silent for a while and Remus was just about to turn around and leave when Lucius started talking again.

"You know," he began idly, as if what he was about to say wasn't that important. "If you want to talk about Lily with him, I'm certain he won't mind if you just start a conversation about her. It doesn't have to be related to potions for you to start. You could talk about your childhood with her."

Severus snorted and he sounded bitter when he replied. "As if he's interested in hearing me talk about his mother. He has that mutt and the wolf to talk about his parents."

"Severus …"

"I'm going to bed," Severus announced harshly and Remus quickly left to avoid getting caught.

"Remus?"

Remus shook his head weakly to get rid of the memory. "Do you know if he got attacked by students recently?"

He felt Sirius shift to lie down on his side and thanks to the good vision of the wolf inside of him, he could clearly see Sirius' face when the man looked at him.

"Some have tried to attack him in the hallways in the last couple of weeks," Sirius murmured and he rolled his eyes. "Clearly those idiots seemed to have forgotten that Harry is the best in Defence against the Dark Arts of his entire year."

"It seems that Molly managed to do more harm than we suspected," Remus mumbled and he felt his anger spike again when he thought of the infuriating woman.

Certainly, the papers were now forbidden to write anything that could be considered slander when it was about Harry, but carefully written speculations were still able to slip through the restraint.

"She'll get what's coming to her," Sirius whispered darkly. "They all do eventually."

Remus didn't need to use Legilimency to know that both were thinking about Peter, who had indeed received what was coming to him after his betrayal.

It was two days later when Remus finally stumbled upon something that could lead them to the answer they had searched for, for a long time now.

Because his classes were done early on Wednesday, he had hauled himself up in his room with the books and had looked through them without stopping once to take a break.
He was bend over the eight book, which was a very old one with pages that looked ready to fall apart if he handled them a bit more roughly.

"Come on, it has to be somewhere in these books," he muttered annoyed and turned to the other page. And instantly froze.

A title seemed to glare at him from the top of the page and the letters shone in the flames of the candles floating near him.

'History between the Malfoy and Potter family'.

There was a history between them? How come James had never told them about this? Or had he never known about it?

From the looks of it, this book had to be at least two hundred years old and James had never been known for his love of antique books. It was possible that he never had said anything about a link with the Malfoys because he hadn't known anything about it.

Could this chapter maybe explain what had happened during Harry's birthday?

Only one way to find out.

'Pureblood families have always strived to keep their blood pure and one way of doing this, is to assure they marry another Pureblood, resulting in Pureblood children, who continue the line.

Usually the marriage is between a man and a woman, but there have been cases where the marriage was between two men or two women. Obviously these unions never resulted in an heir, so the first child was always forbidden to have such a relationship.

The Potter family is an exception when it comes to this particular rule and in extension the Malfoy family as well.

In 1785, Lord Henry Marcus Potter married Lord Lucian Antonius Malfoy against their families' wish for both were the first born children. Both were disinherited as a result, but both refused to divorce (later on they would be allowed back in the family when their siblings died during accidents).

Lucian Malfoy was an expert when it concerned the field of Charms and that would prove to be very useful in his marriage. As it was stated earlier, heirs were not possible in same gender relationships. However Lucian and Henry found a way around it.

There is not much known about the spell – the Malfoy family has always been protective of their creations, so it is likely that this particular spell and its effects can only be found in one of the heritage books in possession of this family; most likely a heritage book written during the nineteen hundreds.

What this author knows, is that four years into their marriage, a baby named Victoria Annabella Malfoy-Potter was born, who possessed characteristics of both men. Five months before the girl was born, nobody was able to see Henry Potter, though there are mentions of him in old newspapers, displaying pictures in which he can be vaguely seen through a window caressing his
stomach, which appeared to be rounded. Rumour has it that Lucian Malfoy was able to create a spell which would grant his husband the chance to carry their child and that his disappearance was to prevent others from seeing his husband in such a delicate state.

*Whether this is true or false can only be confirmed by studying the heritage books of the Malfoy family and this particular family has never been eager to lend out their knowledge.*

Remus stopped reading and stared blankly at the page. While male pregnancy wasn't that common, some men preferred carrying their child instead of using a surrogate, so that wasn't the thing that shocked him.

It was the fact that a Malfoy had married a Potter and had created a spell to make sure that the Potter could carry a child, that shocked him.

What kind of effects did the spell have? Was this somehow related to the pain Harry experienced during his birthday? It seemed unlikely – after all Draco had been as shocked as them so the likelihood of him having stumbled on the spell and having used it on Harry barely existed.

But what if this was the answer they had been searching for? What if the spell was somehow linked to the pain Harry had undergone? He couldn't dismiss this. He needed more information.

Praying that Lucius would be more forthcoming with information than his ancestors, Remus set about writing a letter to the older Malfoy, requesting for the heritage book to be delivered to him. He kept as vague as possible, not entirely certain of his speculation and hoped that Lucius would send him the book.

Hopefully the heritage book would finally deliver a complete answer.

It was another two days, on a Friday, that Lucius' majestic looking hawk landed on the windowsill and kept pecking on the window insistently until Remus woke up and blearily stumbled out of the bed, while Sirius cursed once he noticed the early hour.

"What the hell is Lucius' hawk doing here at this insane early hour?" Sirius growled and sat up in bed, watching his lover opening the window and carefully extracting the big package, making sure the hawk didn't get the chance to attack him. As soon as the weight had disappeared, the hawk immediately took off, presumably having been told to not wait for an answer.

"It's six thirty," Remus replied absentmindedly while opening the brown paper. "It's not that early. You would be getting up in half an hour anyway."

"That's not the point," Sirius grumbled and scowled. "And you still haven't told me why Lucius sent something. What did he sent?"

A short note was included with the book and in Lucius' fine script, he read *'I cannot fathom why you would have a need of this particular heritage book, but I trust you have a very good reason for demanding it. I'd appreciate it if you would let me know what it is you were searching for.*

*Sincerely*

*Lucius Malfoy'*

"Moony?" Sirius asked impatiently and Remus looked at him startled.

"What? Sorry." He shook his head. "I was reading a chapter two days ago which told about a
marriage between a Malfoy and a Potter."

"A marriage between those two families?" Sirius wrinkled his nose and looked mildly disturbed. "James never said anything about that."

"I don't think he knew about it – this marriage dates back to the late seventeen hundreds and James was never really interested in his family history." Remus muttered and walked back to the bed, slipping between the sheets and laid the book on his lap.

"True," Sirius admitted. "But what does this marriage have to do with Lucius sending you a book?"

"Apparently four years into that marriage, a girl was born who bore characteristics of both men – and Henry Potter disappeared five months before the girl was born, although the newspaper got his hands on some pictures which showed Henry Potter caressing his rounded stomach. Plus there were rumours circling around that Lucian Malfoy was very proficient at charms," Remus explained and opened the book, landing on a detailed family tree.

"So what?" Sirius furrowed his eyebrows. "That Malfoy guy was able to create a charm which made Potter able to carry a child?" He sounded perplexed.

Remus nodded; his eyes going quickly over the family tree, until he found in the middle the couple he was talking about – and four lines extending down, leading to two daughters and two sons. Their children. "That's what the rumours were saying, yes. But the book couldn't say much about the spell, because apparently the Malfoy family wasn't very forthcoming with information."

"How shocking," Sirius commented drily.

"Anyway, the book suggested that it was best to look into one of the Malfoys' heritage books, claiming the spell and its effects would be likely found in one of them."

"You think this has something to do with what happened on Harry's birthday?"

Remus bit on his lower lip and looked at his lover. "It's the best lead we have so far. The other books didn't tell anything new."

"Well, checking won't hurt," Sirius sighed and together they bent over the book, going through two pages of the index before they finally found the one they were looking for.

'The Heres spell, developed by Lord Lucian Antonius Malfoy

The Malfoy family have always produced heirs who possess a great amount of power and a great intelligence. Adding new spells or potions to their long list of creations is more common rule than exception, and that is why it was not a shock when Lord Lucian Antonius Malfoy added his own creation to the long line of charms and spells, created by the Malfoy family.

As records shown, Lord Lucian Antonius Malfoy married Lord Henry Marcus Potter in August 1785, much to their families' dissatisfaction. Both men being first borns, it was expected of them to marry a Pureblood woman of good status. However, love seemed to have won in the battle with common sense, even if it left them disinherited for nearly two decades (both were moved back on their family trees in 1805).

Thanks to the diaries left behind by both men, we know now how much the couple longed to have a child of their own. But neither seemed willing to sleep with a woman and Pregnantes potions weren't invented back then.
Luckily for them, Lord Lucian Malfoy was a master in charms and he created the Heres charm. The explanation and the effects written below have been directly copied from his diary.

From the diary of Lord Lucian Antonius Malfoy:

The Heres charm allows a man to carry his own child in a magically grown womb. Once the charm is casted, the magic will form a womb made from the blood and magic of the man and it will move the organs around to fit the newly created womb between them. This is accompanied by a large amount of pain, due to the fact that both magic and blood are used and organs are pushed aside. Soothing potions, Pain relief Potions and spells designed to heal have no effect on the progress, as discovered when the charm was used on the test subject (my husband Lord Henry Marcus Malfoy-Potter).

The pregnancy lasts as long as a normal pregnancy does, if it can proceed normally without any interruptions.

The baby will feed on the nutrition and magic of the man carrying it, but as the man won't grow breasts, it has to be fed with the bottle after birth.

After experimenting, I was able to create a potion that would make the Carrier able to deliver the baby in the natural way (this happened with the birth of my second child, as a Cutting spell combined with a Soothing charm and a Blood clot charm proved to be very risky and near fatal due to the blood loss). I've included the recipe for this particular Muscle relaxer potion in the back of this book. It needs to be taken in once the Carrier enters the ninth month, so that the body will have enough time to prepare itself for the birth.

When my husband confided in me his wish for a third child, I had to make some adjustments to the charm. With our first two children, the charm had to be casted again, considering the magic had dissolved the womb as soon as the child was removed from it.

Having to sit near your husband, while he screams and twists around, trying to escape the pain that seemingly rips him apart, is not something I wish even on my worst enemy. The feeling of helplessness and the realization that, even with his consent, I was the one who brought him this pain was overwhelming and I couldn't make him go through that again for a third time and perhaps even a fourth time, as he had told me he always wanted to have at least four children.

However, I had underestimated the stubbornness that is apparently inherited by all Potter children and my husband finally convinced me to go for a third child. I was able to make him promise me to wait until I had managed to create adjustments to the charm.

It took me a year, but I finally managed to adjust the charm.

I adjusted it so that now, whenever a male Malfoy heir and a male Potter heir fall in love and have a relationship, once they receive their heritage (or with their next birthday in the case of the two heirs forming a relationship later in their lives), the Potter heir will receive the charm automatically. I didn't manage to banish the pain, but the adjustments will make it so that the pain is only experienced once – once the womb has settled, it is there to stay for the rest of his life (unless he removes it permanently).

After finishing reading some peculiar side effects that had occured after the adjustment of the charm,
both men were staring shocked at the last page.

"So what?" Sirius finally broke through the silence that had fallen between them once they had finished reading the page. "Does this mean that … Harry is now able to become pregnant? And that he's bonded magically to Blondie?" His voice went through a higher note at the end.

Remus slowly looked up and stared at him, still reeling from what he had read. Who would have thought that this was possible?

"It seems so," he replied slowly. "The whole description fits what Harry went through on his birthday. He received his heritage and afterwards he went through the pain – apparently going through the process of forming a womb," he muttered faintly.

His cub possessed a womb now? He was able to get pregnant? He really hadn't expected to discover that when he requested the book.

"So if he hadn't gotten together with Blondie, he wouldn't have gone through that pain?" Sirius asked, narrowing his eyes.

Remus nodded warily.

"I've always known those Malfoys were bastards," Sirius cursed and clenched his hands into fists.

"Sirius, you can't blame Draco for this. No, you can't," Remus said firmly when the other man looked at him incredulously. "Draco had no idea this would happen – you saw his face when we entered their room once Harry began screaming. He was panicking as much as we were."

"Fine, maybe I can't exactly blame him, but his ancestor was a huge bastard! Who was he to decide that all Potters should go through that pain once they got together with a Malfoy? He seemed to think that once a Potter is together with a Malfoy, they stay together for the rest of their lives – I know that was common in his time, but it isn't anymore! A child binds them for life, Moony – it looks like a Potter can't have a casual fling with a Malfoy without paying the price for it in the form of a night filled with pain and a child," Sirius snapped. "Harry shouldn't have gone through with this! He never got the choice – what if he doesn't want to carry his children? His choice has been taken away from him before he could even start thinking about it! And why the hell did that son of a bitch assume all Potters would be catchers?"

"I know, Sirius," Remus said soothingly and gripped his hand, ignoring his last comment. "But there isn't much we can do about it now. What's done is done. We can only explain to Harry what we discovered and warn him to use Contraception charms when he has sex with Draco."

"Once he starts doing it," Sirius corrected him absentmindedly and Remus just rolled his eyes, wondering when his lover would finally realize that their cub was growing up.

He looked back at the page. He just hoped they wouldn't be too late with warning Harry. If they were already doing it, the chances of Harry being pregnant were big and Harry having a child now, at his age and with the threat of Dumbledore wasn't a good idea.

But, he thought, closing the book and putting it down on his nightstand, I can't get ahead of myself. First thing to do, is explain to Harry what we discovered.

He turned around to face his lover and interrupted his grumbling about 'those sneaky, vile Malfoy bastards' with a deep kiss. "We still have twenty minutes left," he murmured against red tinted lips. "What do you say about some fun before the lessons start?"
Sirius threw him a look, as if to say he knew that Remus was trying to distract him, but grinned and pulled the younger man on top of him, slipping his hands underneath the nightshirt Remus wore. "You know I never say no to that."

15th of October

Draco showed up in Harry's room at exactly nine thirty in the morning.

"Ready to go?" he inquired and Harry nodded.

Harry stepped first out of the portrait, Draco following him with Mara and Ruby invisible behind them.

"What do you think they need to talk about to us?" Harry asked while they made their way up to the third floor where Sirius' and Remus' room was located.

Draco shrugged and with the next brush of their hands, he grabbed Harry's hand and held it. "I don't know – somehow I doubt it's to have some tea together," he smiled sardonically, remembering Sirius' dark glare when he had found them after dinner had finished and told them to visit them the next day.

"Hm." Harry made a noncommittal sound and the rest of the trip was made in silence, ignoring some of the students who stared at them and were whispering behind their hands, as if it wasn't obvious they were talking about them.

"Moon shine," Harry told the gentleman in the portrait, who guarded the rooms of his godfather and his lover and the man smiled and the portrait swung open, revealing the entrance.

Their pets entered first and as soon as they were inside, they revealed themselves, knowing it was safe for them to do so and stalked towards the fireplace, where they curled up as much as their large bodies allowed it.

"Harry, Draco, good morning." Remus was the first one to greet them and he ushered them to the couch. "Coffee or tea?"

"Tea is fine," Harry mumbled and Draco agreed.

Six minutes later, both boys had a mug filled with Earl Grey tea in their hands while Sirius and Remus were sitting across from them, enjoying a cup of coffee.

"So, why did you call us here?" Harry asked curiously and raised an eyebrow when he noticed how tense the other two men became.

What was going on?

Remus cleared his throat. "You remember that I was doing research about what happened to you on your birthday?"

Harry grimaced, recalling the searing pain he went through – a memory he'd rather forget. "Not like that was easy to forget," he muttered.

Sirius grimaced and Remus continued, "Well, we think we finally found out what happened when you received your inheritance."

He and Sirius shared a look Harry couldn't read – and it made him antsy. What had they discovered that they needed to talk to both him and Draco about it?
"What did you discover?" Draco asked and leant slightly forwards – the only sign that he was feeling worried.

"We can lend you the book if you want to read more, but the gist of it is that in 1785 two men called Henry Potter and Lucian Malfoy married each other," Remus said slowly.

"My ancestor was married to a Potter?" Draco asked perplexed.

"Yes, and it seems that your ancestor was rather proficient when it came to charms," Sirius replied and he clenched his jaw.

"How so?" Harry asked warily. It was interesting to know that one of his ancestors had married a Malfoy, but what had that to do with him?

Remus took over again. "Well …" he hesitated. "Harry, have you ever heard of the Pregnantes potion?"

Harry blinked confused and glanced at Draco when he felt him tense. "No, I haven't. What does that potion do?"

"It gives a wizard the ability to grow a womb and carry his own child," Draco replied and he frowned. "But that potion was invented by a German wizard – not by a family member of mine. And it certainly doesn't need the help of a charm to work."

Wait, wizards could get pregnant? They could carry their own children? Why had nobody ever told him this before?

His mind reeled and he stared at the older men. Of course he hadn't given the subject of children any thought until now – busy as he was with school and surviving Voldemort's threats in general – but it would have been nice if someone had told him, or at least mentioned it to him, that wizards were capable of carrying their own children.

But at least he now knew which potion he had to take if he ever wanted to have children of his own.

However, what link did that potion have with whatever had happened during his birthday?

"Well, before the Pregnantes potion was invented, it seems that your ancestor, Draco, created a charm that would grow a womb created from the magic and blood of the person who would carry the baby," Remus continued and he looked pale. "And he used that charm on Henry Potter; they had four children in total."

"Okay." Draco narrowed his eyes. "It's nice to hear that my ancestor was that great at charms and was able to find a way to give him and his husband children, but what does that have to do with what Harry went through?"

"Your nice ancestor adjusted the charms after the first two children they had," Sirius replied flatly and Harry swallowed nervously when he recognized the hard glint in his godfather's eyes. Sirius was very angry. "He apparently decided that because his husband had carried their children, all Potter men would decide to carry their own children if they were gay."

"Sirius, what …"

"Harry, there is no easy way to explain this, but," Remus hesitated again and then took a deep breath, plunging forwards. "The adjustments of the charm created a couple of side effects. Like a deeper bond between Henry and Lucian; an ability to feel whenever the other one was in danger."
Harry felt Draco tense again and he made a startled sound. He turned to look at him, but the blond was staring fixated at Remus.

"Marks burned into their backs that only became visible when there was danger … And it seems that the charm enables every Potter man to grow a womb when they receive their heritage or later in their lives if they ever get together with a Malfoy," Remus finished his hurried explanation softly. "The pain you went through was a womb being formed of your magic and blood and that organ seeking a place between your other organs. Because you're together with Draco, the charm was set in working again."

"So, what are you saying? That I'm able to get pregnant now?" Harry asked incredulously and he heard his voice gaining a higher pitch.

At any other moment he would have been embarrassed to hear that high pitch, but he didn't give a damn about it now. What he just heard, was beyond his comprehension skills.

Because of an ancient charm, he had suddenly grown a womb? He was able to carry children, because he was together with a Malfoy? Did this mean that if he had never gotten together with Draco, he would never have gone through that pain?

"Harry can get pregnant?" Draco repeated faintly and his already pale skin seemed to have taken a pasty white colour.

"Yes, he can get pregnant now," Remus confirmed and he rubbed his forehead, looking exhausted.

"So that means, Blondie, that you better make sure to use protection once you start doing it," Sirius snapped and his grey blue eyes blazed in anger. "I won't have you knocking up my godson when you are still young, just because you couldn't be arsed to use decent protection."

He narrowed his eyes and his magic seemed to spark around him. "That said, you better hope for your sake you aren't doing it yet."

Draco swallowed – his poisonous tongue that had delivered so many witty remarks seemed to have abandoned him in the face of a protective, angry godfather.

"Harry, are you all right?" Remus asked and looked at him worriedly when he took notice of how silent the young man was.

"It – it's a lot to take in right now," he replied weakly and raked a hand through his hair, tugging at it softly. "I mean, until a few minutes ago I didn't even know it was possible for wizards to get pregnant and now I hear that a centuries old charm enables me to get pregnant because I'm with Draco."

"I know; I wish there was an easier way to break this news, but we're still in shock as well," Remus admitted. "Until a few days ago, we never even had heard of a marriage between the Potters and the Malfoys, let alone one of them creating a charm that has as a side effect that every Potter man can get pregnant once they are together with a Malfoy. But it's the truth. I checked it in one of the heritage books of the Malfoy family."

"My father let you borrow a book of the private library?" Draco murmured and he sounded vaguely surprised, obviously still with his mind stuck at the knowledge that his lover could get pregnant now.

"Yes – though we have to let him know what we discovered," Remus answered and glanced at his still glaring lover, pinching him in his arm to make him stop. "Stop glaring, Sirius."
Harry startled all of them when he suddenly stood up, feeling his legs tremble in shock. He needed to get out of here. He needed time to think. He needed to talk with Draco. Especially talking with Draco was important.

Remus would never lie to him about something as important as this, so they really needed to discuss this between the two of them. But not with Remus and Sirius present.

"I – I need some fresh air. Draco, are you coming?" Harry muttered hastily and left the room quickly, too preoccupied with his thoughts to notice the concerned and worried looks of Sirius and Remus.

The silence that hung between the two boys when they made their way back to Harry's quarters was heavy, both trying to come to terms with what they had just heard. Their pets softly brushed against their hands, but otherwise didn't interact with them.

Once they were safely behind the closed portrait, and were certain nobody would be able to eavesdrop on them, Harry began pacing through his small living room.

"Oh god, I can't believe this," he muttered and clenched his fists. "How is this even possible?"

"I don't know, Harry," Draco replied and he sounded wary. He sat down on the couch and looked at his boyfriend pacing in front of him. "I know your godfather and Lupin were pranksters, but they weren't joking now."

"I know," Harry groaned and stood still, staring at Draco. "That's what makes this so bad. Draco, do you realize what this means?" Without waiting for a reply, he continued, "We have had unprotected sex a few times after my birthday. While the womb was already formed. We didn't use any protection!"

Draco stood up and embraced his trembling lover, rubbing his hands up and down over Harry's back. "Harry, try to calm down first, all right?" he murmured and kissed the top of his head. "Panicking won't help us now. We need a …"

"I know panicking won't help, but god damn it, Draco! Hearing that you somehow formed a womb on your birthday because you're shagging with a Malfoy is not something a bloke wants to hear!" Harry snapped and pushed him away.

Draco let him escape his embrace, if only to prevent the other one from getting more upset than he already was. "Do you think I was happy to hear that I'm the cause of you going through all that pain?" he snapped back. "It's my fault that you went through all that, just because an ancestor of mine created some charm and thought it wise to adjust it."

"You weren't really the cause, Draco." Harry bit his lip and stepped closer to the blond.

Draco laughed humourlessly. "Oh, of course not. You heard what they said: if you hadn't gotten together with me, you would have never gone through all that pain."

Hearing the pain in Draco's voice made Harry step closer until his body was flush against the other one's body and he could embrace him firmly, not wanting to hear that pain any longer. "Draco, it wasn't your fault. You didn't know what would happen. I don't regret loving you," he stated firmly and looked at him with clear, green eyes.

"Not even after hearing you could have avoided all that pain if you hadn't become my lover?" Draco asked doubtfully.

"No, not even after hearing that. Even if we had known about this sooner, before we got together, I
wouldn't have rejected you. I love you, Draco. Going through a change, because of something that isn't even your fault, is not going to change that," Harry replied determined and raised himself up to place a kiss on slack, pale pink lips.

They stood still for a moment before Draco let them back to the couch, Harry following him, not putting up any fight. His panic was subduing, leaving him tired and a bit empty.

"Well, now we know what happened to you, we need to talk about this," Draco sighed and they shifted around until Draco laid spread out on his back on the couch with Harry on top of him, his legs lying between the space created by Draco's legs.

Harry raised his head and linked his right hand through Draco's left hand, intertwining their fingers. "Do you – do you think I'm pregnant?" he finally dared to ask the question that had been plaguing him ever since they left Sirius' room.

Pregnant. Such a surreal word when it concerned him. He had wondered about that in his mind, but now that he had asked it out loud, the reality of it finally came crashing down on him. He could be pregnant now. They had never used protection; how long did it take for him to get pregnant? Would it take months like for some women? Or would one time have been enough?

A cold grip seemed to squeeze his heart and he breathed in slowly and released the air softly, trying to keep himself from having a panic attack.

"I don't know." Draco looked at him troubled. "I don't know how long it would take for you to get pregnant, but we have done it a few times without protection, so …" he trailed off.

"Oh god," Harry muttered and closed his eyes, laying his head down on Draco's shoulder.

He couldn't be pregnant now. That just couldn't happen. Not only was he just seventeen, he still had to finish school and Dumbledore was waiting for his chance to attack him.

He couldn't have a baby now; that would bring all sorts of trouble he wasn't ready to deal with.

"How are we going to find out?" he asked in a small voice.

In a perfect world, he would be able to ignore it; he would be able to just go on with his business, worrying about normal stuff, like finishing his homework on time and winning a Quidditch match. He wouldn't have to worry about a possible pregnancy. But this wasn't a perfect world and he couldn't ignore it, no matter how much he wanted to.

"We could go to the nurse," Draco suggested, but Harry shook his head.

"No – we could have trusted Pomfrey to keep quiet, but I don't trust the new nurse when it comes to this. What if she tells Sirius? Or what if she lets it slip to someone and the press gets to hear it?" he asked rhetorically, shuddering inwardly at the field day the press would have if they got their hands on this piece of news. "Is there another way? Something we can do on our own?"

A hand shifted and came to rest on his lower back.

"Well, I know there is a potion that I could brew which would tell us whether you're pregnant or not. The potion would need a few drops of your blood and then the colour of it will change, depending on the answer," Draco replied thoughtfully, his forehead creased.

"That sounds good – how long would it take to brew?"
"I need to find the recipe first – our schoolbooks don't have it, so I think I would need to look around in the library. I remember reading that the brewing would take three hours."

"All right." Harry breathed out slowly. "We could ask Snape to lend us a cauldron for a few hours."

"I can tell him it's a private project – that way he won't bother to ask what kind of potion it is," Draco murmured, his breath stirring a few strands of black hair. "He's used to me brewing potions on my own occasionally."

Harry nodded. "That's good," he hesitated and peered up at Draco. "What are we going to do if I am pregnant?"

A tense silence hung between them, until Draco freed his other hand and embraced Harry fully, pressing his head against his shoulder.

"Let's worry about the potion first," he whispered. "Once we know the answer, we'll decide what we'll do next."

Harry wasn't completely happy with the plan, but he wasn't feeling up to that particular discussion either, so he didn't protest.

The two laid together on the couch for a very long time, unaware of their pets' eyes staring at them in concern.
History Part 2

Chapter Notes

I have to warn you that this chapter contains a heavy load of angst. That couldn't be avoided considering the situation Harry and Draco are in now and I want to keep it as realistically as possible. So please take notice of the warnings!

Warnings: a lot of angst; MPreg starting; mentions of violence; controversial content (discussion about abortion happens in this chapter; HOWEVER the ending of this chapter will be good I promise - there is a reason why MPreg is one of the general warnings of this story)

! Please pay attention to these warnings. I had one of my best friends check over this part and she assured me that I did well with the whole situation, but be aware that this chapter will be heavy with angst (probably one of the most angst filled chapters in this story). I don't want to offend anyone with this chapter; I tried to imagine how someone in Harry's situation would feel and tried to bring those thoughts over in this chapter. I don't have any experience with this, so I apologize if I did something wrong regarding Harry's reaction.

Disclaimer: I don't own Harry Potter - J.K. Rowling owns it

Chapter 8: History Part 2

The next week passed very slowly, almost torturously slow if you asked Harry.

Finding the recipe for the potion proved to be difficult. Because they didn't want anyone to get suspicious, they couldn't spend as much time in the library as they'd like. When they were done with their homework, they wandered through the library, searching for a book that would seem likely to contain the recipe. Harry had even used his Invisibility Cloak two nights, but had to give up when he was in danger of being caught by Filch.

On Wednesday they had a fight. The next day they would be having a Quidditch training, as preparation for the match that was scheduled for November. Harry saw no harm in going to the training, like he had done all those weeks before, but Draco didn't want him to go. When Harry pressured him until he gave the reason, he was told to his shock that Draco didn't want to risk him getting hit by a Bludger in case he was pregnant. It was the first time since they had received the news that they mentioned the possibility of a pregnancy and it had left him stunned enough for Draco to offer a compromise: he could fly as long as he stayed high up and didn't interrupt Draco when he told the Beaters why they weren't needed during the training. Harry agreed and the training was finished without any accidents.

Finally on Friday, Draco found the recipe for the potion and he quickly had copied it on a piece of paper, before going to his godfather to ask whether he could borrow the potion's lab on Saturday. After hearing it was for a private potion, Snape agreed, not bothering to ask what kind of potion Draco wanted to brew.
It was Saturday afternoon and Harry was staring blankly at the text of the Fidelius charm that the students had been assigned to read as their homework for the upcoming Charms lesson. He had read the first paragraph and now he was trying to read the second one, but the words didn't get absorbed in his mind. Whenever he reached the end of the paragraph, he had to start all over again because he didn't have a clue what it was talking about.

After five tries, he gave up with a frustrated sigh and leant back in his chair, staring at the wall in front of him.

Draco had told him he would be visiting him with the potion as soon as it was finished and to distract himself from the ball of nerves rolling around in his stomach, he had decided that doing homework would sufficiently serve as distraction. His mind disagreed.

All he could think about was that in a short while he would finally know whether he was pregnant or not. And the waiting was terrifying.

He felt ridiculous; he had taken on several Death Eaters and had survived numerous murder attempts of Voldemort himself, not to mention Dumbledore trying to kill him twice already and yet those moments seemed not as terrifying now as the prospect of having to test himself on pregnancy.

Not wanting to dwell on that thought until Draco had arrived, his eyes strayed to the old book lying on his desk. It was the heritage book of the Malfoy family and he and Draco had looked through it, needing more information about the link between the Malfoys and the Potters.

They had read the chapter on the creation of the charm (leaving Harry feeling a bit miffed that Lucian Malfoy had just readily assumed all future gay Potters would bottom – never mind that that was true in his case) and they had even discovered in a later chapter why both a lion and a dragon were engraved on the door leading to the Potters' vaults. The lion belonged to the Potter family, which they already knew, and the dragon belonged to the Malfoy family. The book explained that since the marriage between Henry Potter and Lucian Malfoy, both families were intertwined forever, even if there were no future marriages between. To symbolize their union, the dragon had been added to the vault, though the content of the vault still only belonged to the Potters.

Unfortunately they hadn't found any information about the marks in their backs, save for what Lucian had written down. Draco had admitted to him that when Harry had been attacked by Pomfrey, the blond had felt the exact same sensation Lucian had described, but that he hadn't realized at first what it meant.

"Harry?"

Draco's voice rang through the quarters and startled Harry out of his brooding.

"I'm here," he announced and stepped out of his bedroom.

There was a dark smear on Draco's right cheek and some of the potion seemed to have landed on his robes. In his hand he clutched a small vial and the clear glass showed a very light blue liquid that simmered when it caught the light of the flames in the fireplace.

"According to the instructions, the colour will stay the same if you're not pregnant. Otherwise it will darken to a midnight blue," Draco explained, his eyes glinting oddly.

"Alright; let's do this," Harry sighed and crossed the room to stand next to Draco.

A conjured knife was used to cut in Harry's thumb and he carefully let a few drops of his blood fall
in the vial. A muttered Balm charm healed the small, but deep cut in his thumb and Draco closed the vial with a cork and shook it a few times, mixing the blood with the potion.

Slowly the ruby red blood swirled around in the vial until the potion completely absorbed it. They both held their breaths when the liquid started to bubble and then, seconds feeling like long minutes, they watched how the light blue darkened until it was a midnight blue.

Harry was pregnant.

"Oh god," Harry muttered and he sank through his legs, sitting down on the couch. "Oh god," he repeated, his neck bent and his face hidden in his hands.

His whole body started to shiver when he finally accepted the truth. He was expecting a child. A child that shouldn't have been there if they had known about their heritage before. A child that couldn't be here now because of the danger that was still present in his life.

Draco sunk down next to him and he felt arms wrapping around him.

"Will you let me cast a spell to check how far along you are?" Draco asked softly, but his own trembling arms revealed how shocked he was as well.

"You know the spell?" Harry raised his head, his voice small.

The blond nodded. "I looked it up when I was searching for the recipe." He cleared his throat and glanced away uneasily. "I figured it was better to know the spell in case the potion turned out positive."

Harry sat up, leaning with his back against the couch. "Sure, you can cast it," he muttered and closed his eyes, pressing his hands against them.

Draco muttered something too low for him to clearly understand him and he let his hands fall next to him when he felt a soft tug near his stomach. His green eyes watched blankly how a small, blue bubble appeared in front of them, a thin line shooting out of it, sinking through his skin, making a connection. The bubble bobbed from right to left, up and down and then in the middle of it, a clear space appeared, leaving room for two words to appear: one month. The words glittered red before it turned blue again and then back to red.

"Why is it changing colours?" Harry asked numbly.

"It means that you're almost one month pregnant, give or take a day or so," Draco answered and a quick snap of his wand broke the connection between the bubble and Harry's stomach and the bubble popped, the mist evaporating.

"One month pregnant," Harry repeated in a monotone voice.

So he was pregnant for one month already. At least they had discovered it fairly quickly. That was the only good thing about the situation now.

"What are we going to do now?" he broke the silence after it had dragged on for a long time. He turned his head and grey eyes were staring at him warily.

"What do you want to do?"

The emphasis on 'you' startled Harry and he stammered, "What?"
"You're the one carrying it, Harry, so what do you want to do?" Draco studied his face, his own face blank. "Are we going to keep it? Or … abort it?"

Harry looked down at his clothed stomach, biting down on his lower lip. What should he do? Should he keep it? Or let it be removed? A baby would change a lot in their lives; they were still in school, preparing themselves to graduate and Dumbledore was still out there, waiting for a chance to finish him off. A baby would bring him in more trouble than he already was. If he kept the baby, he wouldn't be able to play Quidditch; Potions, Defence against the Dark Arts and Curses would eventually be dangerous to attend because of the fumes and the spells and him carrying a baby would leave him more vulnerable if Dumbledore attacked him. He didn't know when Dumbledore would attack him; it could be in a few months; it could even be in years. But he would attack one day and either that happened while he was still pregnant or it would happen after the baby was born, in which case the baby would be in danger if Dumbledore discovered its existence. What if Dumbledore succeeded in which Voldemort had failed? Then the baby would be with a parent less.

Aside from the obvious danger factor, there was the fact that he had only just turned seventeen. An adult according to the Wizarding law, but in reality he was still too young to take care of a baby. How would he take care of the baby? After Hogwarts, he wanted to go study further to get a good job – which job it would be, he still had to decide. Studying would take a lot of time – a baby would cut even more into that time. Most of what he would do, would revolve around the baby, whether he studied further or put it off for a while. Was he ready to give up most of his life for a baby? A baby that hadn't been planned? A baby that shouldn't even exist if they had known about the charm before his birthday?

Because if he had known about the charm, he would definitely have used protection every time. Sure, he'd like to have children one day – but he had envisioned that day far in his future, in five to seven years or so. He was still young; he had plenty of time later to get children.

Having a baby now would be too impractical, even if the threat of Dumbledore didn't exist. How could he take care of a child, while he had trouble taking care of himself?

All he wanted to worry about now was whether or not they would win the upcoming Quidditch match; doing his homework well and worrying about Dumbledore's threat. He couldn't worry about a baby as well. He didn't want to be responsible for a life he hadn't been prepared for. Was that awful of him to say?

With everything going on in his life, how could he let a child be born in danger? As long as Dumbledore was still free, he would always be in danger and the old man was too cunning to let himself be caught easily. Having a baby would only bring the baby in danger – what kind of life would that child have if it was constantly in danger of being killed because of who its father was?

But he couldn't decide this on his own. Draco was the other father of this baby and he had as much right as Harry to say what he wanted to do.

He licked his lips and looked up again; Draco turning his head towards him when he saw the movement in his peripheral vision.

"What do you want to do?" Harry asked and continued quickly when Draco looked ready to protest, "I know you said it was my decision, but you're the father as well."

Draco smiled weakly. "I'm fine with whatever you decide, Harry. If you want to keep the baby, we keep it – I'm not going to abandon you."

"And if I remove it?"
"Then I'm okay with that decision," he replied softly. "I just want you to be sure of whatever you
decide. I don't want you to regret your decision later on. If you're sure about removing it, then that's
fine; we can always get children when we're older."

"So if I want to remove the baby, you won't hate me?" Harry asked, closing his eyes; afraid of the
answer he would get.

He tensed when the couch dipped, signalling Draco moving and soon he felt warm arms embracing
him, tugging him closer to an equally warm chest.

"I could never hate you, Harry," Draco whispered. "Not even if you want to remove the baby; I'll
always love you, no matter what."

He felt his eyes burning – a tell-tale he was on the verge of crying – and quickly buried his face in
Draco's shoulder, slipping his own arms around his waist.

"I – it's just … I don't think I'm ready for it. I mean, with school and Dumbledore wanting to get rid
of me, it just isn't a good time now to have a baby," he started blabbing, his hands clenching tightly
in the soft material of Draco's sweater, bunching it up a little. "A baby would complicate things even
more and I don't want it to get hurt by Dumbledore if he knows about it, so …"

"Harry, I understand," Draco interrupted him, his voice calm. "Like I said before: I'll support you
whatever you choose."

A strangled sob escaped Harry's throat and he was hugged tighter.

"You don't have to decide now, all right? We can think about it for a little longer. There's no rush,"
Draco soothed him and Harry nodded.

The week following that Saturday was hell on earth for Harry. His mind was constantly churning,
trying to decide what he should do. On one hand he was grateful that Draco hadn't given him an
ultimatum, but on the other hand he felt that it would have been easier if Draco had forced him to
make a decision instantly, or even simpler, take the decision away from him. He didn't want to make
the decision; terrified at the prospect that whatever decision he took, it would end up being the wrong
one.

By the time Wednesday arrived, he had been asked by Blaise, Sirius and Remus whether he was
feeling well. Blaise had bluntly told him he looked like shit, forgoing the tact his mother had installed
in him. And while Harry felt a bit insulted, he knew he looked terrible. Going through four nights
with little to no sleep because he couldn't stop brooding, would make most people look terrible. He
felt terrible as well. His lack of sleep caused him to make mistakes in class – some so severe like the
case was during Potions that the teacher urged him to leave the class and go to the Infirmary.

He never went. If he went to the Infirmary and the nurse did a regular check-up, she would discover
his pregnancy and he had to make sure that didn't happen. He didn't know much about the privacy
policy in the Wizarding world, but he guessed that this particular nurse would insist on talking to his
godfather about it. Sirius knowing about it, right after basically telling them to not do it until they
were older, would make the man explode and Harry didn't want to anger his godfather.

Of course if he kept the baby, then he and Draco wouldn't be able to keep it a secret for long –
eventually their family would need to hear about it and Harry already paled at the thought of telling
Sirius he was expecting a child.

Throughout the week, Draco offered his silent support, letting him know he was there if he wanted
to talk, but Harry didn't know what to say to him. Ultimately the decision landed on his shoulders because he was the one carrying the baby. Most evenings were thus spent, wrapped in each other's arms while Harry brooded and Draco caressed his back.

Aside from people noticing he looked sleep deprived and unwell, nobody had a clue as to what really the cause was of his fatigue and Harry was grateful for that. He didn't want anyone else to know about this. Of course he hadn't counted in his pets.

On Friday evening, Harry was curled up on the couch, sipping from a mug filled with warm chocolate milk. Draco had told him he would come by later because Snape wanted to talk to him about something related to potions.

His attention was diverted from the fireplace, where flames were merrily dancing around each other, when Ruby slinked into the room, followed by Garin and Sapphire.

Sapphire immediately jumped next to him on the couch, nestling against his bent legs while Ruby sat down in front of him, Garin resembling some kind of exotic necklace in the way his body was curled around the lion's neck.

"What's wrong, Ruby?" Harry asked curiously when red eyes stared at him.

"Are you going to remove the cub, Master?" Ruby asked without preamble, his tail softly swishing from right to left.

He lowered the mug in shock when his brain translated the word to the one he used. "How do you know about the baby?" he asked sharply, putting his drink down on the small table next to him to avoid spilling it on his legs.

"We can smell the scent of the hatchling," Garin replied, his eyes glowing ominously in the firelight.

"Smell?"

Garin raised his body until his head was on the same height as Harry's. "Yes, the sweet scent of the hatchling," he hissed. "A combination of your scent and the one of your mate."

Harry blinked, strangely stunned at the admission that his pets were able to pick up the scent of something that was even smaller than a pea and had a layer of skin and blood around it.

He licked his lips and decided to answer Ruby's question. "I don't know whether I'm going to keep it," he replied honestly.

Ruby seemed astonished – as far as a lion's face could show astonishment. "Why not? A cub shows your union, shows the bond between you and your mate. Why would you want to remove it?" he wondered.

"Because now isn't exactly a good moment to have a baby – I'm graduating this year, so I'm busy with school and Dumbledore is still out there," Harry pointed out. "What kind of parent would I be if I put the baby in danger as soon as it is born? Or what would happen if Dumbledore manages to kill me? A baby deserves two parents – not one killed or even both dead."

He took a deep breath once he was finished. He was right, wasn't he? He knew how it was to grow up without parents – how could he let a baby go through the same thing? A baby deserved to have both parents raising it – not that he doubted Draco would do a bad job; he'd probably be a wonderful dad.
Ruby turned his head almost upside down and gazed at him. "Helping with school is not possible for us, but we will defend you – the old man won't be able to hurt you, your mate or your cub," he reassured his master.

Harry smiled weakly and softly petted his head. "I know you'll protect us, Ruby, but sometimes risks aren't worth taking," he muttered.

If lions could frown, he was certain Ruby would be doing that now; as it was, he merely sighed heavily and laid down in front of the couch.

The following day, Harry was staring bleary at his breakfast, which consisted of two buttered pieces of toasts with strawberry jam on it and a cup of coffee with sugar and milk. He hadn't slept well – this time it wasn't because he had been lying awake, but because of the nightmare that hadn't let him escape until it was nearly morning.

The nightmare bothered him – he knew it was just a dream; probably conjured by his own troubled mind, but that didn't make him feel better.

The dream had actually started off in a pleasant, if somewhat strange way. He had been sitting in what appeared to be a living room on a soft couch. A fire had been burning on his right, casting various shadows so it had to be night. In front of him, on the floor, was a soft, blue carpet with the blanket Luna gave him spread out over it. On the blanket were some magical blocks strewn around that lighted up with a touch, a moving train and a small castle. A large teddy bear with a blue bow with white spots was tightly held in the small, chubby arms of a toddler, who had midnight black hair, pale skin and clear grey eyes when he looked up. The toddler was chattering in his own baby talk to the bear, squealing whenever the bear growled softly when its belly was pushed. The dream Harry was looking at the scene with a loving smile on his face, watching his son play. He had turned his head when he heard a door opening and a moment later Draco joined him on the couch, kissing his cheek and splaying one hand on his rounded stomach, whispering something in his ear that he later couldn't remember.

The scene had been lovely – a picture of the perfect family. But then the fire had gone out suddenly, as if extinguished by a spell and the room had darkened. Their son had dropped his teddy bear and had started crying softly, scared at the ominous feeling that seemed to surround the small family. He and Draco had instantly sprung up; Harry grabbing their son to keep him safe while they both had their wands out.

What happened next still made Harry shudder when he thought about it. Dumbledore had appeared in the room out of nowhere, as if he had Apparated and with a calm face he had thrown a curse at Draco that made the blond scream in agony, dropping down on the floor where his hands were clenched around his ears. While Harry stared horrified at the sight of blood streaming out of Draco's ears and mouth, his child had been suddenly tugged out of his reach and ropes had bound him tightly. His dream turned nightmare seemed to consist of small scenes then; in each scene Dumbledore would smile at him gently, telling him that nobody would have gotten hurt if he had just died like he had been supposed to while he murdered Draco and their child in a different way every time. One time he just used the Killing curse, another time he used a curse that stripped them of their skin and let them bleed to death; in another scene he broke all their bones slowly, leaving the neck and the spine for last … When the dream Harry had lost his voice due to his screaming and pleading, Dumbledore would step forwards every time, conjure a knife and twist it deeply in his stomach, killing his unborn child and leaving him to die slowly from blood loss, staring into the lifeless eyes of his lover and son.
When Harry had finally managed to wake up, he had been bathing in his own sweat; his heart beating so fast he had stupidly thought his heart was trying to escape his chest.

His pets had instantly crowded around him, letting him feel their comfort and all Harry had been able to think of were the lifeless, accusing eyes of Draco and their son, blaming him for their deaths.

The next moment he had rushed to his bathroom, where he proceeded to throw up everything he had had for dinner the other night.

The nightmare had been portraying his greatest fear: that Dumbledore would get a hold of Draco and the baby and would kill them before he finished off Harry.

"Harry, what's wrong?" Draco broke through his thoughts and he looked up startled, right in concerned grey eyes.

He swallowed and swiped his hand across his cheek. "Nothing; just thinking about a nightmare I had last night," he muttered, too tired to think of a small lie.

"You want to talk about it?"

He could feel bile rising up again – and how was that possible when nothing was in his stomach yet? – and he pushed his plate away with a grimace. "I'd rather not," he replied.

Draco opened his mouth, but whatever he wanted to say, was lost when Blaise sat down next to them, opening the Morning Prophet on page two.

"Have you read the news? Apparently the Aurors have some of Nott's relatives in custody and they found three other Death Eaters. The idiots were hiding in one of the houses they used to meet. Can you believe that?" Blaise shook his head incredulously.

"Low or high ranked?" Draco asked, raising one eyebrow and snatched the newspaper out of Blaise's loose hold, ignoring the latter's protest.

"Low ranked," Blaise snorted derisively. "They were probably just important enough to stay in the furthest corner when a meeting was going one I reckon."

Harry read the article together with Draco and had to swallow when the article mentioned that one of the Death Eaters had admitted to planning an assassination on him; the plan had been to lure him out of Hogwarts somehow, kidnap him, torture and kill him before dumping his body in a public place.

He had actually forgotten that there were still Death Eaters out there that the Aurors were searching for. Dumbledore was his greatest worry, because the man was incredibly powerful despite his age, but he should have remembered there might be other people who wanted to take revenge for him getting rid of their master.

He probably could take on most of the remaining Death Eaters if he really had to, because the most dangerous ones were already either behind bars, awaiting their trial or dead. But to be reminded again of how much danger he still was in, just because of who he was, was very unsettling.

A warm weight pressed against his lower back and he managed to hold himself back from squeaking in surprise when he remembered that Ruby was right behind him. He must have sensed his distress through the shared bond and comforted him the only way he could now.

Harry looked back at the photo where a dark haired wizard with tangled, long hair was snarling at the photographer, trying to break free of the Aurors' hold on him. One of his hands drifted slowly to
his stomach and he clenched the fabric of his shirt.

He had made his mind up about the baby. This article was the proof he needed to finally make his decision. There was no need to brood on it any longer – he couldn't keep stalling his decision and this article proved that he was in too much danger currently to consider having a child now.

"Harry?" Draco sneak a glance at his clenched hand and looked at him questioningly.

He took a deep breath and slowly relaxed his hand. "Can we go back to my room? I need to talk to you about something," he muttered.

Draco stilled and then closed the paper, giving it back to a still grumbling Blaise. "Sure," he replied lightly, but his eyes darkened a bit.

Their pets seemed to realize they needed privacy, for they disappeared in Harry's bedroom when they all arrived in his quarters.

Both boys took a seat on the couch and Draco looked at Harry expectantly, though wary. "What do you want to talk about?"

"About the baby."

Draco's fingers twitched and he tensed, letting his breath escape slowly. "You decided what to do?"

Harry nodded and glanced away, finding the flames of the fire more bearable to look at than solemn grey eyes.

"I – it's too dangerous to keep the baby now," he began softly and swallowed. "With Dumbledore and the remaining Death Eaters, it would be too dangerous to have a baby now." He started fiddling with his sleeve and looked down at his lap; finding difficulty meeting Draco's gaze. "A-and I don't think I'm ready for a baby now." He frowned. "I mean we're only just seventeen and there's also school to think of. It's just … now is not the right time." He looked up nervously and finally met grey eyes. "Are you angry at me?" he asked in a small voice.

Draco drew his eyebrows together quizzically. "Why would I be angry at you?" he asked nonplussed.

"Because I don't want the baby now? And … you never said what you wanted to do," Harry replied, anxiety rolling around like a hard ball in his stomach.

Draco shook his head and shifted forwards until he could draw Harry in his arms, pulling him closely to him. A hand slowly rubbed up and down over his back, soothing the tension that had gathered there for a bit.

"Harry, I told you I would follow you whatever you decided. I understand your concern. I'm not going to force you to keep the child or abort it, just because I think that's the best for us," Draco whispered in his ear. "I'm not angry at you; not at all. I just want you to be certain of your decision. Once I make the potion and you take it, there is no going back."

"I know that," Harry whispered back and his eyes started to burn slightly, a desire to cry building up in him. He closed his eyes and pushed his face against Draco's shoulder. "I'm sure; I – I don't want to keep it." A stifled sob escaped his throat. "I'm sorry," he cried and to whom it was directed – Draco or the baby – he didn't know.
The arms around him tightened and Draco put his chin on his shoulder. "You have nothing to be sorry about," he murmured.

Rationally Harry knew he had made the right decision – his life was too dangerous now to allow a baby to be safe in it. So why did his heart feel heavy when Draco told him the potion could be ready tomorrow if he wished that? Why did he have to stifle the urge to cry more when he agreed to take the potion tomorrow; guilt laying as a heavy block on his mind?

And most importantly: why was he getting the feeling he would regret his decision?

_I'm sorry, baby; I hope you can forgive me._

The next morning, Sunday, Harry wasn't present at breakfast. The thought of eating breakfast, while maintaining a cheerful façade towards the other Slytherins as to not make them suspicious, made Harry sick when he thought about what he would be doing in two hours.

In just two hours he would take the potion that would abort the small life growing inside of him. Draco was currently busy in Snape's private lab, preparing the potion. They could have ordered it, but that would have drawn too much attention.

Harry was sitting cross legged on his bed, looking at the family album Hagrid had given him during his first year. His fingers absently caressed the photos and he stared longingly at one in particular which featured his parents holding him sitting against a tree. If he had to venture a guess, he'd say the photo was taken when he was around nine months old. Baby Harry was clapping his chubby hands, soundlessly squealing when James tickled his tummy. The seventeen year old Harry wiped away a few stray tears when his mother lovingly kissed his still unmarked forehead.

How different would his life have been if his parents had never been attacked? Would he still have ended up with Draco? Or would he have found another guy or even a girl? How would his parents have reacted if he had to tell them he was pregnant? Would they have supported him no matter what or would they have gotten furious?

All the photo albums on the world and their friends talking about them couldn't fill the hole that their absence left behind in his heart. It was times like these that he wished even more fervently his parents had never been attacked. He would have given practically everything just to have the chance to talk with his parents.

With trembling hands, he closed the photo album and stood up to lock it up in his trunk again.

Left on his own, save for the presence of his loyal pets who surrounded him with worry practically radiating off their bodies, his traitorous mind started questioning his decision again. Was he doing the right thing, aborting the baby?

Of course it was, he argued with himself. He wasn't in a good position now to have a baby. Being in life threatening danger wasn't exactly a good environment for a baby.

Instead of feeling better, however, he felt worse and it was with a heavy heart that he, two hours later, followed Draco to his adjoining bathroom.

"Once you've taken the potion, cramps will start, but that's normal," Draco explained, handing over the vial with the smoking potion in it. Then he hesitated. "You'll also start to bleed, so it's best if … you sit down on the toilet."

"Bleed?" Harry repeated confused and looked at the vial.
Draco shifted his foot and rubbed his left wrist. "Yeah, the bleeding is because your," he cleared his throat, looking uncomfortably, "womb will be completely … cleaned out and that results in some blood loss."

"Oh." Harry swallowed, nausea creeping up again. "All right, then I'll just go take it," he muttered and turned around.

Before he could open the door of the bathroom, a hand gripped his wrist and he turned his head startled.

"I just want to …" Draco looked lost for a moment. "Just be certain of your decision, all right? I don't want you to get hurt," he whispered.

Harry looked in his eyes and he nodded slowly. "I know," he replied softly.

Lips brushed his forehead and Draco stepped back. "I'll be here if you need me."

He nodded and then stepped into the bathroom, closing the door behind him. After sitting down on the still closed lid of the toilet, he took a deep breath and held the vial up to the light; the dark green liquid swirled ominously in the light of the candles and his hand clenched around it.

This was it. After taking the potion, there would be no going back.

He growled underneath his breath when his trembling fingers refused to cooperate and he closed his eyes, forcing himself to calm down. When he felt his hand was steady enough, he uncorked the vial, letting the cork drop on the floor.

Poisonous green met his own emerald gaze and he rubbed his mouth with his free hand; a heavy load of guilt settling itself as a block in his stomach.

The potion seemed to taunt him and he closed his eyes again.

He was doing nothing wrong. His decision was perfectly reasonable – he had to remind himself of that. Nobody expected him to have a child while he was in this much danger. Draco didn't blame him for wanting to abort their child. They could always have children later on, when they were older, right? Nobody said they had to have children when they were this young – they could wait a few years, maybe travel to a couple of countries; taking a break of everything. When Dumbledore was defeated, their lives would be safe enough to think about children.

It wasn't like this determined his ability as a parent. Terminating this pregnancy didn't mean he would be a bad parent later on. He was thinking about his baby's safety after all.

Against his wishes, he began to wonder how this child would have looked like. Would the child have had blond or black hair? Green or grey eyes? His unruly hair or Draco's easily manageable hair? After whom would the child have taken the most?

His mind unwillingly provided him a picture of a pale child with unruly, blond hair and clear emerald green eyes – the perfect mix of them both. Or a child with tame, black hair and grey eyes.

Two tears slid down his cheeks and splashed on his arm. Was he making a big mistake?

Harry stared miserably at the vial and more tears created a salty trail across his face.

He couldn't go back now – he had to make the right decision.
I'm so sorry …

A trembling hand raised the vial and slowly the liquid left its container. A moment later, the vial dropped to the ground and shattered; the small, jagged pieces glinting like tiny shards of diamonds.

"Are you just going to let your cub be removed?" Mara demanded to know and switched off her invisibility, scowling at him with bright eyes.

Draco was leaning against the wall, next to the bathroom door; his arms wrapped around his upraised legs. He looked at her tiredly. "It's not my decision. Harry is the one who has to carry the baby – I can't force him to carry it, if he doesn't want to," he replied and let his head fall back against the wall with a soft thump.

Mara cocked her head, studying his face and he wondered what she saw. "But you want to keep the cub," she stated confidently and her tail thumped heavily on the floor.

He rolled his shoulders and frowned. "I'm not … averse to keeping it, no," he finally muttered.

She took a step closer, bowing her head a little. Her ice cold breath caressed his face when she spoke and he shivered.

"Then why aren't you stopping your mate?"

He looked at her passively. "I already told you: I'm not going to force Harry to keep the baby if he doesn't feel ready for it. His reasons for not keeping it are valid, Mara. We're both in danger because of the old coot and a baby would probably make it more dangerous," he answered calmly. "We can always get children when we're older."

"I wonder if you and your mate will be able to handle the regret you'll feel soon," she murmured and before Draco could say anything, she disappeared; joining Harry's pets in his bedroom.

Sullenly he sunk back down against the wall and glared at the floor. Mara and the other pets seemed to think it was as easy as flying to keep the baby. They didn't seem to comprehend that he and Harry didn't deem it safe enough to have a baby now. Both boys knew their pets were able to defend them when it was needed, but why take risks?

But he couldn't deny that his heart constricted with pain at the thought that soon the life they had created would disappear. Rationally he knew this was the right choice, but he couldn't help but wondering how their lives would have looked like if they had decided to keep the baby. To have their love physically represented in the form of a baby …

He didn't resent Harry for making this decision, however. He couldn't hate him for removing their baby; he loved him too much to even get angry at him. He'd rather that the pregnancy was terminated than that Harry felt miserable throughout the whole pregnancy and could end up resenting their baby.

Besides they still had other chances. They had plenty of time later to have children. A time when it would be safe to have children. Unlike now.

Angrily he wiped at his eyes, refusing to believe that tears had gathered there. They would get through this. He wouldn't allow this to tear them apart.

Suddenly the sound of glass shattering came through the closed door and instantly Draco was on his
feet, knocking on the wooden door.

"Harry, are you all right?" he asked worriedly.

No reply.

"Harry?"

Straining his ears, he could hear soft whimpers in the bathroom. "Harry, I'm coming in, okay?" he warned him and a hurried 'Alohomora' later, the door opened with a soft click and he slipped inside, freezing when his eyes encountered the floor first.

The sound of shattering glass had come from the vial that had apparently fallen on the floor; various small, jagged pieces were strewn across the floor, glinting in the soft candle light – while they lay in a steadily spreading pool of green potion.

"Harry?" he whispered and took a tentatively step forwards.

Harry slowly raised his head and stared at him, green eyes brimming brightly with tears while his arms were clenched around his stomach. "I – I couldn't do it. I'm sorry; I just – I just couldn't do it," he cried silently, his voice muffled by the sobs he was undoubtedly pushing back. "I know I should have taken it, but, but I can't kill our baby. I just can't. I'm sorry!"

Relief, as sweet as the sweetest Elven wine, shot through him at hearing Harry's confession and in one large step he was in front of Harry, who was still seated on the toilet and he knelt down, not caring whether the potion soaked into his trousers or not. Softly he gripped Harry's hands and pulled them out of their clenched grip, covering them with his own.

"Sssh, everything is going to be okay," he murmured and kissed Harry's right hand, hearing his breath hitch. "I'm not angry at all. I told you, you should choose what you want. We're going to keep the baby, okay?"

"A-are you sure?" Harry stared at him with uncertain eyes, fear lurking in the back of them.

"Yes, I'm certain," he weakly smiled. "I'm happy you decided to keep the baby."

"But what about our family? School? Dumbledore?" Harry began to sound slightly hysterical and Draco quickly hugged him, hearing his heart beating madly.

"Calm down – we'll figure something out, all right? Everything is going to be okay, I promise," Draco swore and raised a hand to caress Harry's tearstained cheek. "It will be okay, you'll see."

Harry said nothing and instead met him in a kiss when he raised his head; his whimpers swallowed by Draco's lips.

While their mouths were joined, two hands found their place on Harry's stomach: one pale and one slightly tanned. They found each other and linked their hands, covering Harry's stomach where the fruit of their love was slowly, but surely, growing.

The upcoming months wouldn't be easy, but together they would make it through them. That was an unspoken promise.
Chapter Notes

As you may have noticed, this chapter is once again titled "Part 1" - that is because if I had put all the reactions together in one chapter, I would have gotten a chapter that was way too long, so I cut it up in three parts.

First part contains Narcissa's reaction. Second part will contain Lucius' and Severus' reaction and the third (and last part) will contain Remus' and Sirius' reactions.

Warnings: MPreg; a bit angst and I hope I portrayed Narcissa's reaction well. I don't have any experience with this particular talk, so I tried to whinge it from what I've read in stories and from what I've seen on tv.

Disclaimer: I don't own Harry Potter - J.K. Rowling owns it

Chapter 9: Informing the family Part 1

30th of October

"What made you decide to not take the potion?" Draco asked an hour later when they had moved to the couch. Harry was sitting between his legs, leaning against Draco's chest and both their hands were placed on his stomach. Sapphire had joined them on the couch; purring and kneading Harry's leg until she had laid down on his lap to take a nap.

Mara and Ruby were lying in front of the fire while Garin was curled up in a dark, cool corner of the room. Rowen had taken residence somewhere near the Owelry – where exactly he didn't want to say and Draco was all too happy to have only one pet following him instead of two to complain about Rowen's refusal.

Harry turned his head towards him; his eyes were still red rimmed from crying, but he had calmed down. "I started thinking about how the baby would have looked like," he replied softly. "And then I started thinking that I probably would be forever wondering what kind of child we would have gotten. And I …" he trailed off and looked away.

"And you, what, Harry?" Draco asked softly and freed one hand to grab Harry's chin and lift it towards him so that the younger boy had to look at him.

Harry seemed embarrassed and he looked down, avoiding the other one's gaze. "I didn't want to kill our baby," he admitted reluctantly. "It's … it's something of us together and I … I just couldn't."

"Well, I'm happy you didn't go through with it," Draco muttered and kissed his cheek.

"And you, what, Harry?" Draco asked softly and freed one hand to grab Harry's chin and lift it towards him so that the younger boy had to look at him.

Harry seemed embarrassed and he looked down, avoiding the other one's gaze. "I didn't want to kill our baby," he admitted reluctantly. "It's … it's something of us together and I … I just couldn't."

"Well, I'm happy you didn't go through with it," Draco muttered and kissed his cheek.

Harry frowned. "If you're happy that I didn't go through with it, then why the hell did you brew the potion in the first place? Why didn't you stop me?" he demanded to know and turned around, dislodging a disgruntled Sapphire from his lap. She meowed softly in complaint, but moved towards the arm of the couch and fell asleep there.

Draco looked at him calmly and answered, "Because while I do want this baby, I wasn't going to
force you to keep it. What kind of person would I be if I made my lover miserable by demanding he kept a child he didn't want?” he asked rhetorically. "I don't want to force you to do anything you don't want to and that includes keeping a child. I told you before, Harry, I wouldn't have been mad at you if you aborted the baby. And I wouldn't have resented you for it either," he added when Harry opened his mouth. "So that's why I didn't stop you; I don't want to make you miserable."

"But wouldn't you have been miserable if I had taken the potion?” Harry inquired and let himself be manoeuvred around until he was straddling Draco's legs with his arms resting on his shoulders.

Draco shrugged. "I would have mourned for a while, but I'd rather have you with me, happy, than unhappy and miserable because you were forced to keep the child."

Harry blinked and stared at him quietly for a while. Draco gazed back serenely. Honestly he didn't understand the point in going on about this, when they had made their decision, but he would wait until Harry got it off his chest, whatever he was brooding on.

Eventually Harry sighed and bent his head down to kiss him. "Sometimes you seem more Gryffindor than Slytherin,” he chuckled weakly and this joke, albeit a weak one, let Draco know that Harry wouldn't pursue the subject further, considering it to be closed now.

Draco smiled back and slid his arms around him, kissing him back. "Don't mention this to the other Slytherins – my reputation wouldn't survive," he retorted mock solemnly.

"Your reputation is safe with me," Harry whispered against his lips and for the rest of the day they didn't leave Harry's quarters; spending their time instead mapping out each other's bodies, content with just caressing and stroking each other until they fell asleep in each other's embrace.

Halloween passed by in its usual festivities, although Harry and Draco didn't engage in the games the Slytherins played now. Harry didn't feel like it and Draco just didn't like the thought of either him or Harry doing something with another person for a dare. Blaise had mocked them and called them cowards, but had to retreat, sulking all the way, when his skin was spelled bright blue with pine tree green spots; Daphne had consoled him, offering soothing words in his ears while behind his back, she had given them an amused grin.

Three days later, on Thursday, Harry looked at the announcement board in the hallway before going to breakfast (still feeling slightly queasy after having rushed to the toilet an hour ago to expel his dinner of last night) and realized with dread that he would have a serious problem in three weeks.

On Saturday, the twenty-sixth of November, a Quidditch match was scheduled with Slytherin and Ravenclaw as the opening match of the year. Normally he would have been ecstatic at the prospect of a Quidditch match, but how could he play Quidditch when he was pregnant? There were Bludgers to think off and Beaters eagerly batting those Bludgers to him to prevent him from catching the Snitch. So far he had been hit twice by a Bludger – once in his second year, courtesy of Dobby and once last year, thanks to Ron – and while he could deal with the pain of a broken bone, he couldn't risk his unborn child. What if the Bludger hit his stomach? Or what if a Bludger threw him off his broom and made him fall?

The risks were too big for him to attempt to try to play. But what could he do? They could hardly play a match without a Seeker. Even if they made the reserve Seeker play in his place, people would be wondering why he wasn't playing. He could hardly explain he was pregnant.

"Shit," he muttered underneath his breath and then hurried to the breakfast table, when his stomach grumbled its protest at the lack of food. How he could feel hungry after throwing up was a mystery
to him, but he wasn't about to complain.

Ruby nudged his hand once when he sat down at the table and he could feel his presence behind him.

He had just started spreading marmalade on his second toast when he was joined by Draco and he lifted his head to accept the kiss the blond gave him.

"Good morning," Draco greeted him and reached for the can with coffee.

"Morning," Harry replied. "Have you read the announcement of the Quidditch match?"

"Yeah, we open the season against Ravenclaw." Draco frowned and looked dismayed at the selection of jam that was present on the table. "Should be an easy match – I've heard who their Seeker is and he's not good enough to compete with you."

Harry felt himself flush a bit at the compliment and cleared his throat. "About that; don't you think we need another Seeker for the match?" He lowered his voice, not wanting anybody to hear this particular discussion.

"Why would we need another … Oh." Realization hit Draco and he grimaced. "Damn it, I hadn't thought of that. You can't play in your condition." He drummed his fingers on the table and sighed. "We can't forfeit the game and we can't play without a Seeker. I reckon there is no other choice than to let the reserve Seeker, Hendric, take your place."

"Hendric? But you told me he wasn't up yet to play in matches," Harry remarked and took a bite of his toast. He swallowed when he was done chewing and continued, "Aside from that, how are we going to explain why I'm not able to play? They'll know we're lying if we tell them I'm sick and we can't tell them the truth."

Draco began gathering his own breakfast and didn't reply, but Harry could see that he was deep in thought.

If by some miracle, the Slytherins believed that Harry was sick, then it still posed a problem every time there was a match – he could hardly say he was sick every time they had to play. And if he had to be honest; while Harry was usually for giving everybody a chance to prove themselves, he had seen Hendric practicing after Draco had complained to him last year about his "horrendous act that is supposed to be flying" and he had to agree with his lover that the boy (who was two years younger than them) wasn't good enough yet to play as Seeker. During practice he had missed the Snitch more often than he had found it and that didn't bode well during a match. It was just a game, but every House played to win.

Having Hendric substitute him as Seeker wouldn’t give them a good shot at winning the game unless they had luck and the boy found the Snitch before the other Seeker did.

"Letting Hendric substitute for you during the game would be risky, but we can't have you playing," Draco muttered and sighed. "The only other option is that someone uses Glamours to look like you and play in your place."

"Glamours?" Harry repeated bewildered. "But for that we still need to tell that person something to explain why I can't play – and why on earth the rest of the school can't know why I'm not able to play. Where are we going to find that person?"

Draco's eyes slid over the Slytherin table (automatically skipping the places where the first through fourth years were seated) and then they rested on one particular person.
He smiled. "We need somebody who we can trust to keep their mouth shut," he started softly.

"Yeah." Harry nodded warily, trying to discover who Draco was looking at.

"Why not Daphne?"

"Daphne?" Harry's exclamation of surprise was louder than he intended and several students turned their heads to look at him curiously. He threw them a glare and once they had turned around again, he bent his head towards Draco and whispered, "Daphne? I'm pretty sure we can trust her, but don't you think she'll want to hear the truth? For that matter, can she even fly decently?"

"Don't worry about the flying – I've seen her flying before, when she joined our practices occasionally before you were sorted into Slytherin. She's nearly as good as us and she has excellent vision. She has more chance at spotting the Snitch than Hendric," Draco snorted. Then he grimaced. "And yes, she'll probably want to hear the truth," he admitted begrudgingly.

"You have known her longer than I have; do you think she'll be able to keep quiet about … this?" He patted his stomach awkwardly, not daring to voice the actual word.

Draco nodded thoughtfully. "Yes, she'll keep quiet about it. She'll realize how dangerous it could be if this news was known, so she'll keep her mouth shut. Although," he added and smirked, "we may have to bribe her with letting her buy stuff for it."

"I think I can live with that bribe," Harry responded dryly and rolled his eyes. "When are we going to talk to her?"

"I believe she has Divination now, so let's talk to her after lunch," Draco murmured and then turned his attention towards Harry's plate, where a half-eaten toast was lying between the crumbles of its predecessor. "Start eating; you haven't eaten enough yet."

"I've already had one toast," Harry protested and scowled.

"You're eating for two now, so having a bit more nutrition in your body won't hurt," Draco spoke softly, but firmly and squeezed his thigh.

Harry opened his mouth to retort, but came up with nothing, so he gave up and resumed eating his breakfast.

They managed to find Daphne on her own when she left the Great Hall after lunch. As soon as she had risen from her seat, Harry and Draco had followed her, having finished their lunch a couple of minutes earlier.

"Daphne, can we talk to you?" Draco called her attention and she turned around.

She furrowed her eyebrows lightly at seeing both Harry and Draco, but nodded cautiously. "Yes, I have some time before I need to go to my next class."

"Not here," Draco murmured and beckoned her to follow them.

"What's going on?" she asked confused when they entered a small, dusty classroom that from the looks of it hadn't been used for many years.

"We need to ask you something," Harry began hesitantly. Daphne would be the first person who would know about the pregnancy and he didn't know whether this was a good idea or not. He knew
she could be discreet when she needed to be, but considering the magnitude of this particular secret, he wasn't so keen on telling other people.

"Oh?"

"We want to ask you to take Harry's place as Seeker during the Quidditch match against Ravenclaw. You need to wear Glamours so you appear to be him," Draco said calmly and leant carefully against a desk, after casting a suspicious glance at it.

"Glamours? Why would I need to pretend I'm Harry and take his place?" Daphne asked and frowned. "If Harry can't play that day, then put the reserve Seeker on the field."

"That's not possible."

"Why not?"

"Because…" Harry bit his lip and shared a look with Draco. The blond nodded encouragingly. "Before I tell you, you need to promise that you won't say anything about this to someone else. Nobody can know about this."

"Not even Blaise?" She furrowed her eyebrows, looking troubled.

"No, not even him. Maybe we tell him about this later," Harry replied and he wiped his slightly sweaty hands off on his trousers.

"All right, I promise I won't tell anyone," she said and looked solemnly, no trace of humour left on her face.

"I – well, it so happens that I'm … It's not easy to say this, but …" Harry stammered, feeling inexplicitly nervous at the prospect of telling someone else about the baby.

"What Harry is trying to tell you is that he's pregnant," Draco cut in and crossed the small space so that he could wrap an arm around Harry's waist.

"Draco," Harry hissed and scowled at him. Did he have to be so blunt about it?

Daphne opened and closed her mouth a few times before she regained her composure. "Oh, well, this is unexpected." She cleared her throat. "I didn't know you were trying for a baby. Not that it's any business of mine, of course, but well, usually people wait until they have graduated."

"We weren't trying for a baby," Draco responded and grimaced. "It's a long story, but this pregnancy wasn't planned at all."

"But you decided to keep it."

"Obviously." Draco inclined his head.

"So in order to keep it a secret, you need me to take Harry's place in the game."

"Yes; our reserve Seeker is not good enough yet to be put on the field and we needed someone we can trust to keep quiet about the real reason." Draco looked expectantly at her. "So, are you willing to take Harry's place?"

Daphne smiled. "Sure; though I'm not as good as you."

"You're nearly as good as Harry, which is good enough against Ravenclaw," Draco replied casually
and hissed when Harry stomped on his foot. "What the hell?"

"How the hell do you manage to combine an insult and a compliment all in one sentence?" Harry shook his head and looked apologetically at the girl in front of him. "I'm sorry, Daphne. What he meant was that you're one of the best flyers in the school."

"I know what he meant, Harry," Daphne laughed and her eyes glittered in amusement. "I don't mind – I'm used to his backhanded way of complimenting someone."

Draco huffed and rolled his eyes.

"All right, let's meet two hours before the game starts so that we can perfect the Glamours," she continued, losing the trace of humour.

"That's good." Harry nodded. "And thank you, Daphne."

She chuckled and embraced him tightly. "Just remember that I'm going to spoil this child rotten." She winked.

"What a surprise," Draco snorted, but smiled.

She looked at her watch and tsk'd. "Sorry, but I really need to leave now if I want to be on time for class."

"Sure; we won't keep you any longer," Draco said and all three of them left the room, sneezing softly when the disturbed dust flew into their noses.

Daphne quickly walked away and Draco grabbed Harry's hand and both of them began to leisurely walk towards Harry's quarters, seeing as they still had time before their next lesson.

"See, I told you it would be fine," Draco told him once the painting closed behind them.

Harry rolled his eyes and sat down on the couch. "Yes, yes, you were right."

Draco smirked and joined him on the couch. "We didn't even have to bribe her."

"What a relief," Harry deadpanned. He turned around so he could look at Draco. "You do realize we still have to tell our family, right?"

The blond grimaced and absently started to caress Sapphire when she jumped on his lap with a sharp 'meow'. "I know," he sighed.

"Who do you think we should tell first?" Harry bit his lip.

"I reckon it's best if we tell Black and Lupin about it first – they are the ones we can immediately talk to," Draco replied and then pursed his lips. "Although I'm not sure whether I'm going to survive that talk or not, because I'm fairly certain your godfather will kill me for knocking up his godson."

"Sirius is not going to kill you," Harry reassured him, but relented when he saw the incredulous look on Draco's face. "All right, he won't be happy with it, probably, but he's not going to kill you. I think."

"Harry, don't take this the wrong way, but I think I prefer being locked up in a room with an annoyed Voldemort, than having to tell your godfather that you're pregnant," Draco said solemnly. "At least with Voldemort I think I have a chance at survival."
Harry rolled his eyes and moved closer to the blond. "Now you're overreacting," he admonished him. "Sirius is more reasonable than you give him credit for."

"You're his godson. I'm not only the one who made you go through that pain thanks to my ancestor's charm, but I also knocked you up. If I ever was in his good grace, I think I just lost that by getting you pregnant before we even have graduated," Draco replied darkly and put an arm around Harry's shoulders, drawing him tightly against his side.

The dark haired boy sighed and put his head on the blond's shoulder. "Sirius might get … upset at first, but I think he'll accept it eventually," he muttered, but his voice was too weak to sound convincing.

To be honest, he was scared shitless at the thought of informing his godfather about the pregnancy. He was fairly certain Remus would accept the news without making too much fuss about it, but Sirius had made quite clear that he didn't expect a baby in the near future. He was probably still living in the delusion that he and Draco were just at the stage of holding hands and sharing innocent kisses – how Sirius could stubbornly believe in that illusion was something Harry didn't understand at all.

How would his godfather react to the news that Harry was pregnant? Somehow he had problems picturing him happy about it. Especially after his reaction when they told them about the charm.

Tension gathered like a ball in his stomach; how on earth would they tell Sirius about the baby without the man getting furious about it? Or worse: disappointed? Harry thought he could handle anger, but he didn't think he would be able to cope with Sirius' disappointment at the news of his pregnancy. He didn't want to disappoint his godfather. But he didn't want to give up his baby either. They needed to find a way to soften the news to Sirius, so that the man wouldn't get in a fit of anger. But how would they do that? He wished he could ask someone of the adults advice about this. Instead of creating boring, dry books about goblin wars, they should write books with advice on how to tell your family you were pregnant. That advice would be a lot more useful than knowing which goblin angered which wizard and vice versa.

Suddenly an idea sprung up in his mind and he blinked. Asking someone advice usually implied that that person had experience with a certain situation. He needed to find someone who had experienced a pregnancy and maybe would be able to tell him how he could inform his family about it. The list of people he knew who had been pregnant before was very small and the list of people who would be willing to talk to him about it was consisted of only one person: Narcissa. Draco's mother.

"Harry?"

"Maybe we could ask your mother to help us telling Sirius and Remus about the baby." Harry sat up and twisted his body so that he could look at Draco properly.

"My mother?" Draco repeated surprised.

"Yeah; obviously she has had experience with pregnancy, so she could tell us how we could best inform Sirius and Remus about it," Harry explained; liking the idea more and more the more he thought about it.

Draco looked at him thoughtfully. "So mother would be the first person to know about the baby."

"Yeah; does that bother you?" Harry asked uncertainly. All this time they had been worrying about how they would tell Sirius and Remus about this, but Lucius and Narcissa had to be informed about
it as well, considering they would be the grandparents of it. How would they react towards the news? After spending time with Draco's parents, he knew they weren't the cold, ruthless people they presented themselves as in public, but would their warm attitude towards Harry still stand after the news of the baby?

"No, it doesn't. I suspect telling my parents will be easier than telling Black," Draco replied dryly. "Although I think it's better to speak to them about it face to face, instead of informing them about the baby through a letter."

"I wasn't going to send a letter – I don't fancy getting it intercepted." Harry shook his head. "Is the manor connected to the Floo?"

"Yes, but it's very restricted."

"Does it have a connection to Hogwarts?"

Draco frowned and was quiet for a few minutes. "I think we're connected to Severus' office, but I'm not sure."

"Well, we can ask him if he'll let us use the Floo," Harry said, feeling oddly relieved that he wouldn't have to tell Sirius about the baby immediately. Funny how it would be easier to tell his boyfriend's parents that he was pregnant than his own godparents. Wasn't it usually the other way around?

"What if Severus wants to know why we need the Floo?" Draco raised an eyebrow and his arms reached out to pull the other boy back to him.

"Say it's private and we tell him about it later?" Harry suggested weakly.

Grey eyes rolled. "You have such well thought out plans," he muttered sarcastically.

Harry scowled at him. "You know a better way to contact your mother?"

"Not without possibly alerting someone else," Draco admitted after a short moment of hesitation.

"That's what I thought," Harry mumbled. "When are we going to contact your mother?"

"Tonight is not possible because we have Astronomy, but we can try to contact her tomorrow after dinner," Draco replied. "What do you think?"

"I guess it's better to tell her as soon as possible," Harry murmured with a sigh.

"It will be all right; I promise," Draco whispered in his ear and Harry nodded, careful to not bump his head against Draco's chin.

He would try his best to believe in Draco's reassurance that everything would be all right, but he doubt he'd be able to completely believe in it until the whole telling the family part was over.

He'd like to believe that informing their family would go smoothly, but the leaden ball of nerves in his stomach told him otherwise.

"Are you sure Snape won't mind us disturbing him now?" Harry asked softly, his voice barely reaching above whispering level.

They were right in front of Severus' quarters now. After dinner had ended, they had waited for an hour in the Slytherin common room - Harry catching up with Blaise, Daphne and Millicent – before
they had made their way through the dungeon hallways.

Draco didn't know when his godfather usually returned to his rooms after dinner, but figured an hour would have given him enough time.

"He won't mind. It's Friday, so it's not like we disturb him during his correcting of homework," Draco muttered, squeezing the smaller hand in his own reassuringly.

"Yeah, but he might get annoyed if we disturb him during his free evening," Harry muttered and he looked pale.

"He won't." Before Harry could even think about turning back – and Draco could see he was contemplating the thought from the way his green eyes were shooting furtive glances at the entrance way a couple of feet away that would lead them out of the dungeons – Draco raised his hand and knocked two times on the door.

His godfather opened the door almost immediately and raised an eyebrow when he saw the two boys standing in front of him.

"To what do I owe this late pleasure of your company?" Severus asked dryly and stepped aside to let them enter.

"Is your Floo connected to Malfoy manor, sir?" Harry asked politely.

"Yes; why?" Severus threw them a suspicious glance.

"We need to contact mother to tell her something," Draco replied calmly; keeping his face blank when dark eyes studied him.

"What is so important that you need to tell her through the Floo connection instead of a letter or during the holidays?" Severus inquired and gestured them further in the quarters, leading them to his small living room.

"It's …" Harry hesitated, then continued rather stiffly, "We can't tell you about it yet – we want to talk to Narcissa about it first."

Draco winced inwardly; that kind of approach was not a good way to get Severus to do them a favour. Instead of trying to placate him, his lover had basically told him he preferred his mother over his godfather. He wondered if Harry was even aware of the implication in his answer.

Severus narrowed his eyes and the suspicious look returned. "Do the mutt and the wolf know about this?"

"Not yet," Draco said, taking over the conversation quickly after hearing Harry huff in annoyance. It wouldn't help their cause at all if Harry snapped at Severus now. He snatched Harry's hand again and squeezed in it comfortingly.

He suspected his lover was still a bit irritated at having been forced to throw up his dinner a while ago when he had suddenly felt nauseous. It seemed that morning sickness had finally piped up, although the term lied about the first part. Draco hoped that the morning sickness would pass soon, because otherwise he feared that quite a few people would find themselves at the wrong end of Harry's wand if they kept taunting him in the hallways, like they continued to do since the beginning of the school year.

"We're planning on talking to them about this … thing after we have talked to mother," Draco
explained and shifted his foot a bit.

"You do know that using a teacher's Floo access to visit one's home is against the rules?" Severus remarked and calmly sat down in his chair, picking up the potions magazine that was waiting for him on the small table in front of him.

"We know, but this is kind of an emergency, sir," Draco replied, wondering if his feeling about Severus' decision was correct.

"We won't be away for a whole evening. We're back in two hours or so," Harry added; his tone betraying a slight hint of impatience.

"If I discover that your reason wasn't sufficient enough to be declared an emergency, I will make sure you regret it. Are we clear?" Severus said harshly and the two boys instantly nodded; both knowing that the older man wasn't bluffing.

"The Floo Powder can be found in the green jar," Severus instructed and his eyes slid over the page where a bubbling midnight blue potion was displayed on. "If you're not back in three hours, I'll personally come to get you. Make sure I don't have to." His dark stare made shivers run over Draco's spine and he hastily turned around, leading Harry to the fireplace.

He calculated the width of the fireplace and nodded satisfied; the fireplace was big enough for them to pass through at the same time. Even after all this time Harry was still clumsy when it came to Flooing and he wanted to avoid him stumbling and risking the chance of falling if he let him through alone.

"Come on," Draco muttered and pulled Harry next to him in the fireplace.

Green eyes stared at him bemused. "Wait, we're going through at the same time? Is that even possible?" he asked sceptically.

"How do you think parents Floo with young children?" Draco retorted rhetorically and then threw the green powder down, stating clearly, "Malfoy Manor!"

The fire turned green and flames burst out around them; wrapping their tendrils around the two boys and took them away. They passed several fireplaces; some showing living rooms, some showing kitchens, others foyers and they even saw what looked like a luxurious bedroom before they finally landed in the fireplace of Malfoy manor.

Harry still managed to stumble a bit when he exited the fireplace, but Draco caught his arm, preventing him from meeting the floor with his face.

A house elf with large, floppy ears and big, brown eyes squeaked startled when the fire spit them out and instantly straightened its back.

"Master Draco Malfoy, sir. Was can Linky do?" the house elf asked in a high, squeaky voice.

"Harry and I need to talk to mother. Is she home?" Draco asked, brushing the soot of his robes and Harry did the same to his.

"Yes, Mistress Narcissa Malfoy is home – Linky will get Mistress." Linky bowed and then added nervously, "Master Draco Malfoy and Master Harry Potter are to wait in the guest room. Linky will send Hally with tea." Linky disappeared with a quiet pop.

"Come." Draco grabbed Harry's wrist and pulled him softly along, leading him out of the foyer and
through a big hallway. They passed four closed doors and entered one near a big window that gave a view of a part of the garden, showing five trees of which the leaves had started to turn red and yellow.

The room contained a soft yellow couch with a chair in the same colour. A rug in a white colour covered the floor entirely and light green drapes were drawn over the large windows, though the waning moon managed to shine weakly through the fabric. The walls were a very pale blue and a small fire was burning in the – for Malfoy standards – small fireplace.

A tea pot with a pattern of blue flowers printed on it was already put on the small, round table between the couch and the armchair. The silver plate contained, aside from the steaming tea pot, three cups in the same pattern; a small bowl filled with sugar cubes and a creamer.

The two boys took a seat on the couch and sat closely next to each other.

Harry took a deep breath and released it slowly.

"It's going to be okay," Draco murmured, recognizing the exhale as a way Harry used to try to calm down.

Harry laughed a bit shrilly and the blond winced. "That's easy for you to say," he muttered darkly. "I don't even dare to imagine how this conversation will play out."

"It was your idea to inform my mother first," Draco reminded him.

"I know that." Harry scowled. "That doesn't make it any easier."

Draco's hand reached out and gripped Harry's chin, pulling his face up and towards him. "Of all the people we need to tell about this, I can assure you that my mother will be the easiest to talk to," he smiled faintly. "Honestly, I think we need to be more afraid of your godfather than of anyone else."

He grimaced.

"Don't remind me," Harry mumbled and pulled his head back when the door opened to reveal Narcissa, clad in a dark purple gown that reached her ankles.

She raised an eyebrow and crossed the room, taking a seat in the armchair. She crossed her legs and folded her hands together. "Draco, Harry; what a surprise," she murmured in greeting. "I have a feeling it isn't just for a social call that you're here," she continued lightly.

"Not exactly, no," Draco admitted. "We actually came here because we need your help."

"Oh?"

"Have you read Lupin's letter about our heritage?"

She nodded. "Yes; it was sent to us a while ago. It was very interesting," she replied, flicking her wand briefly in the direction of the teapot, which immediately started pouring out tea that vaguely smelled like rose. "Even your father had no idea that one of his ancestors developed a charm like that." She gestured them to take their cup of tea, which they did. "Are you here to discuss the letter?"

"Yes, in a way." Draco nodded and then hesitated. How does one tell his mother that he knocked up his lover before they even had graduated from school? Before they even were married? Having a baby out of wedlock was something that was frowned upon in the Pureblood circles and the Malfoy family had always been very strict about this particular thing. He could remember his father mentioning once that fifty years ago, a Malfoy heir was casted out of the family, because he had
gotten a girl pregnant before they were married. The fact that she had been a Halfblood probably had been a reason as well.

And now Draco was in the same situation.

"Draco, what's wrong?" his mother asked, her eyes lightening up with concern.

"Narcissa, we came here to tell you that," Harry hesitated and then seemed to decide that just blurting it out was the perfect solution. "that I'm pregnant. We didn't know about the charm before I got my heritage and by the time we were told, it was … too late." He winced, his eyes shifting down towards his lap, while his cheeks coloured in shame.

Draco gripped his hand tightly, wordlessly showing his support. He would have tried to bring the news more gently, instead of being blunt about it like Harry had just been, but there was no going back now.

"I see," she answered calmly and studied them coolly.

"I know this isn't very convenient now, but we have decided to keep the baby," Draco took over, forcing himself to stay calm.

"You are certain about that?" Narcissa asked idly and took a sip of her tea.

"Yes, we're certain," Harry replied; his whole body was tense. He looked ready to strike like a panther at the first sign that something was amiss. "We're not giving this baby up either."

She sighed and looked at them with a weird look in her eyes. "I wished you'd at least waited until you were graduated before having children," she murmured and placed her cup down on the table.

"It's not like we decided to have children now; it just happened," Draco muttered defensively and then raised his voice when his mother looked at him with reprimanding eyes. "Are you … angry?"

"Angry?" she repeated and tapped with a finger against her lips. "No, I'm not angry. A bit disappointed that you got Harry pregnant at your age, yes, because we raised you with values, but not angry."

Draco flinched and decided that he'd rather faced her anger than her disappointment. For some reason her disappointment stung him more and made him feel like he was a small child again awaiting his scolding.

"You two do realize that it won't be easy." She gazed at them thoughtfully.

"We realize that, yes," Harry answered softly and swallowed; his eyes seemed bigger against the pale palor of his face. "We didn't decide this on a whim."

"If you are certain about your decision, what help do you need?" she asked; her eyes lightened up a bit and Draco wondered whether that was a good sign or not.

"We ..." Harry glanced at him and took a deep breath. "We don't know how to tell Remus and Sirius about the baby. I was wondering whether you knew how to tell them about it." He fidgeted a bit, shifting from one side to another on the couch before Draco stopped him by placing a hand on his thigh.

"You didn't tell them yet?" his mother asked incredulously.
Draco shook his head. "No, we don't exactly know how to tell them," he admitted begrudgingly. That and there was that little fact that sometimes his cousin scared the hell out of him – and that was when he hadn't done anything wrong. What would he do once he got to hear that Draco had knocked up his godson? Somehow he doubted the man would stay as calm as his mother now.

His mother sighed and shook her head. "Darling, I'd had thought you would know who to approach first about this," she said, sounding as if she was scolding him.

"Who to approach first?" Harry repeated; a frown starting to form on his forehead.

Her eyes flicked towards the dark haired boy. "Yes; out of the two of them, Remus is the most approachable."

"You mean that we should talk to Lupin first?" Draco asked slowly; mulling over the idea quietly in his head.

Mother inclined her head, giving him a tight smile. "Yes, inform him first about it and then you can inform my cousin."

So Lupin would be acting as some kind of barrier when the time came to inform Black. Draco could see the appeal in that. It was obvious that Lupin was the calm one of both men and he suspected he had more chance to survive that particular talk than he had when they informed Black first.

"I was wondering if … if you could talk to Sirius about the baby?" Harry asked nervously and he bit his lower lip.

She furrowed her eyebrows. "Why would I need to talk to my cousin about it?"

"Because …" Harry glanced at him and Draco nodded, encouraging him to go on. "I figured you would know how to tell Sirius about the baby," he mumbled, his eyes sliding downwards, finding the floor very fascinating apparently.

"Harry, you and Sirius are closer than him and I. I don't think your godfather would appreciate it if he heard such important news from me and not from you directly," she replied in a neutral voice. "Why don't you want to talk to him?"

Harry sighed and looked at her rather sullenly. "Because I'm afraid he'll get mad at us and he'll try to hex Draco," he admitted petulantly and with red cheeks.

"I don't think he's able to be mad at you, Harry," Mother replied soothingly and a faint smile appeared on her face. "And I doubt he'd hex Draco; he knows that you love each other."

"Mother, Harry's godfather believes that we're still in the stage of holding hands and the threatening look he sent me when he and Lupin told us about Harry's inheritance, told me quite clearly that he wouldn't be pleased if we announce Harry is pregnant in the next five years or so," Draco deadpanned and thought to himself that if Black had a say in it, he and Harry probably wouldn't have taken the final step until they were forty or so. "I'm pretty certain he won't appreciate the news of Harry's pregnancy now. And I'm almost completely certain that I wouldn't leave that conversation unharmed."

"Oh." Mother blinked surprised, as if she hadn't expected her cousin to act so violent towards any mention of the couple taking it further than holding hands. Then she shook her head. "Be that as it may, Sirius wouldn't want to antagonize Harry by hurting you. He would however be displeased if
he had to hear from me that Harry's pregnant. So boys, you'll have to tell him about it. I can't help you with that."

Harry sighed and looked at her pleadingly. "Can you at least be there if we tell him? As some sort of back up?" he asked hopefully.

Draco had to admit he liked that thought – with his mother nearby during the conversation, Black would hopefully be deterred from acting violent towards him. And well, they would need her support. He thought he and Harry could handle Lupin on their own, but with Black he'd prefer to have some support nearby.

His mother studied them thoughtfully for a moment and he could feel how tense Harry was. Hell, he was pretty tense as well.

"Fine; if you give me the hour and the date, I'll be there when you inform Sirius about the baby," she gave in and threw them a warning look. "Don't wait too long however."

"We won't," Draco assured her and gave her a grateful smile. "Thank you, mother."

"Yes, thank you, Narcissa," Harry smiled at her weakly, but he seemed relieved.

So they would talk to Lupin first and hopefully have him act as some sort of mediator when they talked to Black. And if they warned her on time, his mother would even be willingly to come and give them some mental support.

Her promise reassured him that they would at least one person who would support them.

"Of course, Draco, before you and Harry inform his guardians about the news, you need to talk to your father about this first," his mother interrupted his thoughts.

He swallowed, suddenly feeling inexplicably nervous. "I have to tell him the news now?"

"Yes, he needs to know as well. Besides," she suddenly smirked. "your father would be very miffed if he got to hear the news of his grandchild as last."

Well, there was no point in avoiding that conversation. His mother was right; they were here already and his father had the right to know that he would be a grandfather over eight months.

"I reckon he is in his office?" he asked warily and pulled his hand off Harry's thigh.

"Yes; he is dealing with his correspondence, but I'm certain he'll make time for you," she replied confidently.

"All right; I'll go inform him now," Draco responded and stood up, schooling his features in a calm mask.

"I'll go with you," Harry said quickly and wanted to rise off the couch.

"No, Harry, this is something that Draco needs to do on his own," his mother reprimanded Harry softly and then gave her son a stern glance. "Now go; you don't have much time left before you need to return to school before curfew."

"I'll be right back," Draco murmured to Harry and left after his lover nodded with a slight grimace on his face.

Praying his father would be in a good mood, he made his way to his father's office; feeling like he
was walking towards his own doom.
"Why does Draco have to do this alone?" Harry asked suspiciously.

If he had to be honest, he didn't want to be alone with Narcissa right now. He knew she approved of him as a lover for her son, but would her approval last now that he had gotten pregnant?

"It's traditional for Purebloods that the father of the child informs his father about it. It's the duty of the son to bear the news of a new heir to his father on his own," Narcissa replied calmly and gestured towards his cup. "Drink, Harry, before it gets cold."

Resisting the urge to tell her he would just cast a Heat charm if that happened, he picked his cup back up and took a sip from it.

"Have you decided what to do during the school year?" she asked after a moment had passed in silence.

He stared at her confused. "What do you mean?"

She gestured towards his stomach. "I mean, have you decided whether you're going to let the school know that you're carrying a child or are you going to hide the pregnancy?" she clarified and poured more tea in her cup.

"Oh, eh, I haven't thought of that yet," he mumbled bemused. It hadn't crossed his mind that everyone would know about the baby once his pregnancy progressed. How could he have been so stupid to forget that crucial fact? Considering the way most students either avoided him or went out of their way to antagonize him, he didn't think it was a good idea if they knew about the baby. What would they do once they heard that news? Somehow he couldn't imagine the students taking it well and his hands clenched around his cup.

He would have no other choice than to hide his pregnancy. But was that even possible? Even with large clothes, it would eventually be obvious that his stomach would be big.

"How far along are you?"

"A bit more than a month," he replied, startled by the question.

"Hm." Narcissa narrowed her eyes and looked at him calculatingly. "Chances are big that you'll give birth at the end of the school year then. Of course with babies you never know, but I estimate that you'll go in labour around the end of June."
"Oh." He blinked, not certain what kind of response he should give to that. He hadn't thought about the labour date yet, but after doing a quick math, he had to agree with Narcissa that the baby was likely to arrive at the end of the school year. He wasn't sure how to feel about that.

He almost jumped two feet in the air when Narcissa clapped her hands and a house elf popped up in the room immediately.

"Fetch me parchment, quill and ink," she ordered and the house elf bowed, snapped two fingers together and the requested material appeared on the table. "That'll be all," she dismissed the house elf and after one last bow, it disappeared again.

Without preamble she immediately started to write something on the parchment, which appeared to be some kind of list.

"Eh, Narcissa?" Harry asked uncertainly and glanced at the paper, trying to read it upside down.

She looked up and for the first time since they were here, she smiled at him warmly. "I'm making a list of everything you're going to need in the upcoming months – and the months following that," she replied, adding the last bit almost absently.

"Everything I'm going to need?" Harry repeated confused.

"Yes, we need to make certain that you'll get the necessary potions, like vitamins and some Nausea reducing potions as well, which you'll going to need soon. Then there are the maternity clothes you'll be wearing once you start showing," she began to sum up. "You'll also need equipment for the baby, like a crib; a wardrobe, clothes; pacifiers; toys; diapers; bottles. Everything a baby needs. You won't need to worry about a house, because my son told me you accepted his request to live together in the manor he got for his inheritance. And, because I'm fairly certain you don't want other people to know about the baby, I'll order some magical belts for you that will hide your stomach once you start showing. It will create the illusion of a flat stomach."

"Eh, won't it harm the baby?" was all Harry could think of to ask. He was getting rather overwhelmed by the sheer number of things he would need. Of course he had already figured out that he would eventually need stuff for the baby like the crib and such, but he hadn't thought about the clothes or even potions he would need to take. Merlin, he was too unprepared for this.

"No, no," she reassured him. "All these belts do is create an illusion, like a Glamour, only stronger. It won't interfere at all with the baby's growth."

"Oh, that's – that's good to hear," he stammered, feeling panic threatening to overwhelm him when he imagined all the things that would happen in the upcoming months. He and Draco clearly hadn't thought those aspects through when they had made the decision to keep it.

Narcissa seemed to realize that he was getting overwhelmed and on the verge of panicking, for she placed the quill and the paper down and stood up, walked over towards him and sat down next to him.

Her eyes gazed at him gently and she extracted the cup out of his hands, putting it down on the table, before she grabbed his hands in her own and squeezed softly in them.

"Harry, darling, everything is going to be all right," she said soothingly.

An embarrassing, high chuckle escaped his throat and he could feel his cheeks burn in shame.

"That's what your son says as well," he muttered, staring down at his hands enveloped by slightly smaller, pale ones.
"And he's right," she said firmly. "Harry, you don't need to worry. I know what you and the baby need, because I went through the same thing. I'm going to help you with this."

"So you're not angry?" he asked in a small voice. His chest tightened at the prospect of facing her anger. So far she hadn't shown exactly what she thought of the baby. Did she accept the news because she was genuinely happy with it? Or did she only accept it because both of them had made it clear that they would keep the baby?

"Oh sweetie," she suddenly sighed and the next moment he was engulfed between two warm, slender arms that cradled his head against her shoulder and his nose was filled with the smell of lilies. "Of course I'm not angry at you. Why would I be?"

"Because I got pregnant now?" It came out as a question and Harry hated the way his voice wavered. He wasn't a small child that needed to be coddled and he squeezed his eyes shut, when they started to burn. Why on earth did the urge to start crying threaten to take over? He was seventeen, for Merlin's sake! There was no need for him to cry.

"Harry, you didn't know about the charm, so it isn't your fault that you got pregnant now. Sure, it probably would have been better if you and Draco were older before starting on children, but it is what it is," she murmured and a hand came up to caress his hair. "I'm not angry, dear. How could I be angry when you're giving me a grandchild?" She tilted his chin up and looked straight into his eyes. "I love you like my own son, Harry. I see how happy you make my son and it's clear to me that you two love each other very much. If you two hadn't been serious about each other, then yes, I would have been angry about it, because then this baby wouldn't have a stable home."

To his shock she kissed his forehead softly. "You not only gave me a second son when Draco introduced you to me, but you're giving me a grandchild now as well. There is no way I could ever be angry with that or hate you."

He bowed his head and a few hot tears escaped, making a trail down his cheeks before they spat apart on his pants. He hadn't known how relieved he would feel once he heard Narcissa's reassurance. Of course having Remus' and Sirius' acceptance would even be better, but it was good to know that at least one person would be on his side.

Narcissa didn't actively acknowledge his tears, but she hugged him again. "Your parents would have been proud of you, Harry," she whispered and he hid his face against her shoulder, hugging her back while a weight seemed to fall off his shoulders. He had always wanted to hear that his parents would have been proud of him, especially now.

"Everything will be all right, I promise," she spoke soothingly and Harry let himself tentatively believe in the promise, secure in the knowledge that he had Draco with him and Narcissa on his side at least, if things would turn out less than all right.

Draco took a deep breath to steel himself and knocked on the closed door in front of him, waiting with bated breath for the permission to enter.

"Yes!"

His father didn't seem surprised to see him entering the office, though that probably had to do with the wards alerting the master of the manor of their arrival.

"Draco, is there something I can do for you?" Father asked and rolled up the letter he had been reading. 
He came closer to the desk and halted in front of it. "Yes, I want to talk about the heritage Harry received."

Father raised an eyebrow. "Take a seat."

Draco sank down in the comfortable chair and forced himself to not fidget in agitation. His father wouldn't approve of such behaviour, stating it wasn't befitting for a Malfoy to behave like that.

"It was an interesting letter that Remus sent me," Father mused and gave him a sharp glance. "I assume you have read the heritage book."

"Yes." Draco nodded, even though it hadn't been posed as a question. "Together with Harry."

"Do you have any questions? I do have to admit that I'm still doing more research about this, as I wasn't made aware of this particular part of the Malfoy history," Father continued and while he sounded neutral to an outsider, Draco could hear the small note of irritation hidden in his father's voice. He probably didn't appreciate the fact that this particular part of history had been hidden in books that nobody looked through unless they had a good reason.

Like they had now.

"Not a question. I want to talk about a specific part of the heritage," Draco replied, keeping his voice as even as possible.

"Which part?"

"The part that states that Harry is capable of carrying children now."

"Ah yes." His father frowned slightly. "That was a particularly interesting part. The complexity of the charm is very intriguing; especially the part of it activating whenever a Malfoy becomes a couple with a Potter. I'm doing research about that mostly, so that we won't be surprised if you and young Harry decide to have children in the future. It's better to avoid complications after all."

Well, he wouldn't find a better opening than that. "Father, I need to tell you something."

Grey eyes – eyes that he had inherited – looked at him expectantly.

He opened his mouth, ready to confess, but the words got stuck in his throat and he closed his mouth again, wondering how on earth he was supposed to tell news of this particular magnitude. How could he tell his father that he would need to sped up the research, because there would be a baby arriving in eight months? How could he inform his father that he had basically thrown every Pureblood rule out of the window by knocking up Harry, when they were still in school and not even engaged?

His hands clenched into fists and he stared at the floor, keeping his breathing as calm as he could. It wouldn't do now to start panicking. But the prospect of facing his father's anger, or worse, his disappointment seemed to have stolen his voice and his nerves and he was seriously beginning to consider writing a letter and leaving it behind before fleeing back to Hogwarts. He didn't care that that sounded cowardly. He didn't want to face the disappointment that would surely appear on Lucius' face once he heard that his son had gotten his boyfriend pregnant at the age of seventeen.

"Draco, what do you need to tell me?" His father broke through his thoughts and when he looked up, a glint of concern had appeared in his father's eyes.

"It's … Because Harry and I didn't know about the charm before his birthday, we never used any
protection," Draco admitted and he began to feel uncomfortably warm.

"Are you telling me that Harry is expecting your child?" Father's voice had cooled a bit and Draco couldn't hide the flinch that went through his body.

He nodded and swallowed; not looking his father in the eyes, he continued, "Yes, we found out a week ago. He's almost a month and a half pregnant. We have decided to keep the baby."

There. He had said it. There was no going back now.

The silence that reigned after his confession seemed to ring in his ears and he closed his eyes in resignation, deciding he could do nothing but wait what his father would say about this.

But there was one thing that he was absolutely certain about and that was that he wouldn't give up his baby, even if his father ordered it. He didn't want to lose his father, but when it came down to choosing between him or the baby, he would choose his child without a doubt.

"Are you absolutely certain you want to keep it? A baby is going to change your lives completely," his father finally broke the silence and Draco was shocked to hear that he sounded calm instead of furious or disappointed. That didn't mean he was in the clear yet though.

He took a deep breath and then looked his father straight in his eyes, wanting to show that he wouldn't go back on his decision. "Yes, we thought about it and we're certain we want to keep it. We realize it won't be easy, but we won't give up the baby."

His father studied him, his face unreadable. "And what if I told you, you wouldn't be welcome anymore in the manor? If I decide to disinherit you?" His voice was soft, but dangerous.

This was what he had been afraid of. But he wouldn't back down.

"I would regret being disinherited, but there is nothing you can do that would make me even considering giving our child up. So, if you think it's necessary, you can disinherit me, but that won't change our decision," Draco spoke firmly, but inside fear was swirling around in his stomach and he felt faintly nauseous.

Their gazes never wavered and the tension – that had been hanging around them – broke when his father nodded approvingly.

"I'm glad I managed to raise a son who knows the importance of family," Lucius said calmly.

Draco managed to avoid having his mouth fall open from shock, but it was a near thing. Did his father really approve of the baby?

"I know you're a responsible adult, but know that you can always come to me or your mother if you need help with the baby – in fact, I'm fairly certain your mother is already making lists of the necessary equipment your baby needs," his father continued dryly.

"You – you are not angry?" Draco asked baffled.

Father raised an eyebrow. "Why would I be? Yes, it would have been preferable if you and Harry had started on children when you were older instead of now, but you made it quite clear that you wouldn't go back on your decision. I only want you to realize that it is not going to be easy, taking care of a child at your age."

"We realize that," Draco murmured and wetted his lips. The tension in his body seemed to slowly
disappear after his father's reassurance that he wasn't angry.

Abruptly Lucius rose up from his chair and came to stand next to him, giving his shoulder a squeeze. "Then you have my approval. Don't hesitate to write me if you find yourself in need of assistance. I'll make sure that I have my research completed soon, so that you know what to expect."

Draco closed his eyes in sheer relief. "Thank you, father."

"I'm proud of you, son. Don't ever doubt that," Lucius murmured and gave his shoulder one last squeeze before he released him and sat down again behind his desk. "Now I think it's best that you and Harry go back to Hogwarts, before you're too late."

Draco nodded and stood up. A quick glance at the clock standing next to one of the big bookcases showed him that time was indeed running out for them. If he wanted to avoid his godfather coming through to personally retrieve them, he and Harry had to leave now.

He had opened the door already when his father's voice made him halt.

"Draco?"

He turned around and looked at his father inquiringly.

A faint smile was visible on the older man's face. "Take good care of Harry and my grandchild."

Draco smiled and nodded. "Of course," he replied and slipped out of the office.

He gave himself a moment, leaning against the wall while trying to steady his still trembling hands. That had gone better than he expected.

Relief coursing through his body, he made his way back to his lover and mother. Even if Lupin and Black didn't react well, at least they would have his parents to count on.

Lucius stared thoughtfully at the door which was closed after his son's departure. He had to admit that he never expected to hear such surprising news so early in his life. Of course he had realized that what Harry and his son had together wasn't merely a flirt – that was evident in the way they looked at each other and how they behaved when they were together. Then there was the fact that Draco had requested Harry's name to be put on the document that would transfer one of the Malfoy properties to him once he became of age.

Living together was a big and important step in the Pureblood culture and it wasn't something that was to be treated lightly. Even the most promiscuous Pureblood knew better than to take a fling to his or her manor. A manor was a sacred sanctuary; a place where the children of a couple could grow up safely and the magic infused in the building would protect and nurture anyone who lived there for an extended period of time.

So for his son to have asked to have his boyfriend's name on the same paper meant he was very serious about his relationship with the Potter heir. It wouldn't surprise the older Malfoy that Draco would soon ask Harry to marry him – even if Lucius had given his son a bit more slack when it came to traditions, he had made sure that Draco realized that a manor was a sacred place and that he should only share it with the one he intended to have as spouse. Too many different lovers and the manor's magic would weaken in its confusion as to whom it needed to protect.

He couldn't say he had been surprised that Draco has asked for Harry's name on the document. He had even expected it, but had left it up to Draco to start the conversation about it.
Lucius smiled faintly when a memory of a nervous looking Draco popped up in his head, who had given him a whole speech as to why he thought Harry's name needed to be on that paper. His son had never looked so flustered before and it had made Lucius realize just how far his son had fallen for the dark haired boy.

Shaking his head to dispel the memory, he glanced at the letter in front of him. It was sent by his cousin Marcus, who spent the majority of his time studying the heritage of Purebloods. He had published several books already, each one talking about the history of a Pureblood family; its specific traits like magical talents that was only inherited by that particular family or certain looks; family members and their various allegiances … Lucius had never managed to figure out how exactly his cousin managed to get his hands on that valuable – and often sensitive and highly guarded – information and the younger Malfoy couldn't be persuaded into giving away his methods.

When Remus had sent him the letter with the explanation, the first thing he had done was contacting Marcus, asking him to search every piece of information he could find with regards to the Potter family. The Potter family was one of the few oldest Pureblood lines that Marcus hadn't researched yet, so the man had been very accommodating and had sent a thick package together with the letter, in which he had written or copied down everything he had found about the Potters.

According to Remus the Potters hadn't known much about the charm, because the Malfoy family had carefully guarded that secret, but it could never hurt to see what the Potters did know about it. It would help for example if another Potter had gotten together with a Malfoy later down the line so that he could compare the two situations.

While he had been waiting for his cousin's reply, he had gathered all the books that dealt with Lucian Malfoy and he would study those together with the information Marcus had gathered about the Potters.

With a sigh, Lucius rolled up the letter and put it in the first drawer of his desk. He had thought he would have at least a year before the subject of pregnancy would come up, but of course, when it came to the Boy-Who-Lived, he really should have expected to be given even less time than that.

He didn't fault them for not using protection though – it wasn't their fault that they hadn't known about the charm sooner. Lucius was certain that if the boys had been told about Harry's heritage before the boy turned seventeen, they would have been smart enough to use protection.

Broodingly he stared through the window on the opposite side of the room, which showed various stars twinkling softly.

When Draco had confessed that Harry was expecting his child, he was shocked. He had assumed that with this news they would wait until they had at least graduated before thinking about children. That would have at least cleared one obstacle in their lives.

He would have reminded his son about Dumbledore and the big threat he posed, but he assumed the boys had already taken that into consideration before they decided to keep the baby. They were both responsible, despite their young age, so he couldn't accuse them of going about this whole affair lightly.

And who was he to forbid his son from keeping the baby? Yes, the circumstances were not favourable, but they would have to work with what they got. He would do everything in his power to make sure that they wouldn't be in danger and that they would survive the future confrontation with Dumbledore.

He couldn't bear to think about losing his son and Harry, but to think he could now potentially lose
his grandchild as well … No, he wouldn't allow that to happen. He didn't care what he had to do, but he would protect his family.

A soft knock on the door alerted him to Narcissa's presence and he turned his attention towards her when she entered.

"I assume from Draco's face that the conversation went well?" she asked lightly and walked forwards until she was standing in front of his desk.

He nodded slowly. "Yes, he has my support with the baby."

"I thought you would give him your support, but our son seemed to fear the opposite happening," she replied, shaking her head.

"Did I give him such a bad image of myself that he would fear talking to me about a delicate issue like this?" Lucius frowned, not liking the thought that his son was afraid of which subjects he could breach with his father.

"The blame doesn't lie with you, dear," his ex-wife soothed him and sat down on the chair previously occupied by their son. "I presume that every young man of his age would be nervous to tell his father about his upcoming fatherhood."

"It's going to be a tough year for them," he said softly.

She bent forwards – a lock of her blond hair falling across her cheek – and grabbed his hand, giving it a soft squeeze. "Yes, but we'll be there for them whenever they'll need us," she stated firmly.

He smiled at her. "Draco is lucky to have a loving mother like you," he complimented her.

She laughed softly. "And he's lucky to have you as a father and Severus as his godfather."

After having briefly shown him the list of all the things she wanted to buy for Harry and their grandchild, Narcissa bid him goodnight and left to her own private wing.

Yes, the boys wouldn't have it easy. But they wouldn't have to do it all alone; that Lucius would make sure of.

Dark eyes shifted from the page detailing the proprieties of Mermaid blood to the fireplace when the fire flared up green and spit out his godson and Potter. He snorted inwardly when Potter stumbled a bit, but was caught by his arm on time by Draco and he heard him mumble an embarrassed 'Thank you'.

"So you are able to read a clock," Severus drawled and closed the book, directing it with his wand back to its place on the bookshelf.

"Yes, you made sure I managed that, uncle," Draco replied dryly and muttered a quick charm that got rid of the ashes on his and Potter's robes.

"Thank you for lending us your fireplace, sir," Potter muttered and shot him a quick glance before he looked away.

That quick glance was enough for the older man to notice the red rimmed eyes and the flushed cheeks. Against his will he started to wonder what exactly had happened during their talk with Narcissa. For that matter, what had been so important that they couldn't say it in a letter or talk to her
face to face during the holidays?

"Good night, uncle," Draco said and before Potter could open the door to escape, a sharp snap of Severus' wand locked the door with an audible 'click'.

"Sir?" Potter asked warily.

"You two are going to tell me exactly why you needed to talk to Narcissa now instead of waiting for a holiday," Severus replied calmly. "And don't even try to lie to me, because I will know."

His godson shared a look with Potter and the dark haired boy frowned. They seemed to have a quiet conversation, which unnerved the Potions master a little.

"Fine, let's tell him," Potter sighed suddenly and scowled lightly.

"We had to tell him sooner or later," Draco murmured and Potter shook his head, but let himself be pulled to the armchair opposite of Severus'. Draco sat down first and pulled the other boy on his lap and linked his arms around Potter's waist.

"We went to talk to mother about the letter Lupin sent my parents," Draco started.

"Which letter?"

"The letter about my heritage," Potter replied quietly.

Severus narrowed his eyes. He had heard of Lucius what had happened during Potter's birthday as soon as the blond man had received the letter. Initially he had thought Lucius had been joking when he told the whole story about the charm, but when the older man had looked at him solemnly and had offered to show him the book where the information could be found, he had had no choice but to believe him.

He shouldn't have been that surprised though – Potter seemed to always find himself in weird situations. It figured he wouldn't have a normal inheritance either.

Later, after Lucius had left and he had been nursing a glass of Firewhiskey, he had mused over the fact that James Potter probably would have been horrified to hear that an ancestor of the Malfoy family had assumed all gay Potter men would bottom and that had made the whole thing slightly more bearable. Of course the thought of future Potter children running around made him scowl – especially if they would inherit their father's tendency for attracting trouble – but hopefully by the time they started on children, he would have quit his teaching job already and so wouldn't be bothered by them.

"I thought you had read all the information that could be found about Potter's inheritance in the book your father sent?" Severus answered when it became clear that neither of the two boys would divulge more information without any kind of prompting from him.

"Yes, and we went to talk about something specific to my parents," Draco said and he looked on his guard.

"If I remember correctly, you told me you needed to speak to your mother – not your parents," Severus said softly, but his tone warned them not to play games with him. "Why did you need to speak to both your parents?"

"Because it was my duty as the Malfoy heir to inform my father of the same news we brought to my mother," Draco replied neutrally and his arms tightened momentarily around Potter's waist.
That action coupled with the wording of Draco's reply made Severus suspicious.

"And what kind of news did you bring them?"

This time it was Potter who replied. "We told them that I'm," he hesitated before seemingly gathering his courage and he continued, "that I'm pregnant. Because we didn't know about the charm and so we didn't use any protection."

Severus closed his eyes and focused on his breathing. Potter was pregnant. They were barely seventeen years old; students on the verge of graduating and were in danger because of Albus and they were expecting a child now.

This is just wonderful, he thought sarcastically.

"I take it you decided to keep it?" he inquired, keeping his voice neutral.

"Yes, we're not giving our baby up either," Draco replied and the stubborn look in his eyes warned Severus that he wouldn't be swayed.

Potter's eyes told the same.

"Is this the reason why you needed to use the Potion's lab in the last couple of weeks?" he asked when he remembered the two times when Draco had requested to use his lab privately. He hadn't thought much of it, had written it off as his godson experimenting as preparation for his studies after his graduation, but in the light of their news, Draco's requests suddenly took on a whole other meaning.

Draco nodded warily. "Yes, the first time was to brew the potion to test for pregnancy."

"And the second?"

"A potion that would abort the baby."

Severus could do nothing but stare at that admission.

"I wasn't certain at first whether it was a good idea to keep the baby," Potter replied curtly. "So Draco made the potion, though in the end it wasn't needed."

"What made you decide to keep it?"

Potter shrugged, his eyes locked on the carpet. "I couldn't go through with it." was all he answered.

"You two do realize that a pregnancy isn't to be taken lightly?" Severus said harshly. "Especially not with Albus waiting for a chance to finish what he started. Are you really certain you want to bring a baby into this world with Albus still on the loose?"

Both boys flinched; Potter clenched his hands and bit on his lip, while Draco scowled at him.

"Yes, we do realize this is serious," he bit out and Severus was startled to hear the hostile tone. He had expected such a tone from Potter, but not from his own godson. "Do you really think we didn't think this through? It's not like we decided this on a whim! We know the consequences and we realize how dangerous it is now with the old coot still running free. But we're still having this baby."

He took a deep breath. "I'd like to have your approval as well, because you're my godfather, but there is no way we are giving up our child."

"Potter, you're certain of your decision?" Severus asked after a moment had passed in silence.
"Yes, I'm absolutely certain of it," Potter replied confidently and this time he didn't look away from Severus' stare. "I'm not planning on giving up our baby; no matter what happens."

Severus sighed and closed his eyes for a moment. "If that is the case, arrangements will have to be made regarding your classes," he said curtly. "How far along are you?"

"Almost a month and a half," Potter replied and Severus could see tension leaving his shoulders.

"I assume Narcissa has already talked to you about what you'll need to keep this hidden from the other students."

"Yes, she said she would send me a belt as soon as she found a good one," Potter grimaced and Severus silently wondered how overwhelming Narcissa had been. Giving that this would be her first grandchild, he imagined she hadn't hold back when she told them what they would need.

"I can't give you a free pass for my class, because other students would get suspicious, but I can give you a list of charms that will prevent the fumes from harming the child," Severus continued neutrally.

Potter looked at him in shock, but then nodded; his eyes conveying his gratitude.

"What about the other lessons?" Draco spoke up after shooting Potter a look that the Potions master couldn't interpret.

"You can use Shield charms designed to protect a particular body part during Curses and Defence against the Dark Arts. The other classes shouldn't give you much trouble, but I have to inform the other teachers about this, so they are warned about it."

"Can you wait with informing them until we have told Lupin and Black?" his godson asked and for the first time he sounded nervous.

"Yes, but inform them quickly. It's better to not leave the other teachers too long in the dark," Severus warned him and he inwardly grimaced at the task he had taken upon himself. It had been quite a while since Hogwarts had last had a pregnant student and considering this time it was Harry Potter, there were bound to be some outrageous reactions.

He would need to devise a lie about the exact reason how Potter had fallen pregnant – it was better that not too many people knew about the inheritance.

"Thank you, Sev," Draco smiled.

"Don't thank me, brat," he shook his head. "Go to your dormitory – Potter, you to your quarters – now."

They both left after wishing him a good night and he sighed when the door closed, leaving him alone in the room; the crackle of the fire the only loud sound in the otherwise silent room.

The upcoming months wouldn't be easy for them and he hoped they really knew what they had gotten themselves into.

Shaking his head, he extinguished the fire and entered his bedroom. He needed to go to sleep now, because undoubtedly Narcissa would fire call him early in the morning tomorrow. He remembered the various potions a pregnant person needed to take and he was fairly certain Narcissa would demand he would be the one supplying Potter with them.

Sometimes he wasn't too sure whether it was a good thing that Narcissa had readily accepted his
relationship with her ex-husband.

He felt a bit – a bit, not much – sorry for Potter. Narcissa was a force to be reckoned with when she wanted to be and no doubt Potter would be the recipient of that in the upcoming months.

At the very least that would make her stop nagging him about his apparent "lack of free time". Maybe the unborn child wasn't such a bad thing, if he took that into consideration.

After a final thought about hoping that the child would mostly take after Draco to prevent future trouble making, Severus fell asleep; unaware that a particular portrait had followed the entire conversation between him and the boys and was mulling it over in his head.
Chapter 11: Informing the family Part 3

6th of November

Two days after their confession to Draco's parents and Snape, Harry received the list with charms he could use to protect his baby against the potion fumes and the dangerous spells during Curses and Defence against the Dark Arts from Snape, who delivered it to him during the afternoon. The man spent a while explaining the way the spells worked and showed him how to move his wand during the incantations. Before the older man left, he also handed over the first batch of potions that Harry would need to take every two days to ensure that there would be no problems during his pregnancy.

Expecting it to taste foul, like all the other potions he had had to consume in the last six years, he was therefore surprised when the two potions tasted slightly sweet with a hint of peaches.

Narcissa had already sent him three books that would explain male pregnancy in more details and what experiences he could expect during the upcoming eight months. The letter she had included assured him she was tracking down a belt for him and that she was comparing various belts to make sure he got the best.

After reading some bits and pieces of one of the books, he realized that the nausea he had been experiencing the past couple of weeks was called morning sickness and that it was a normal part of the pregnancy. The book estimated that morning sickness would last until the third month at most, though there had been cases of men who experienced morning sickness during their whole pregnancy.

Harry fervently wished he wouldn't be one of the unlucky ones and that the nausea would stop when he reached his third month. He didn't particularly fancy seeing his dinner back after he woke up.

"I see my mum has started her shopping spree," Draco said casually when he entered the living room after dinner.

Harry snorted and looked up. He was lying propped up against two pillows on the couch, his legs
stretched out with Sapphire on his lap and Ruby lying next to him on the floor. Garin was gone, hunting for some rats. Mara pushed her head softly against Ruby's head and the latter growled sleepily before making some space on the large carpet, so that Mara could lie down as well.

"In retrospect us worrying about your mother's reaction seems silly," he replied dryly and lifted his legs up so that Draco could sit down on the couch.

Sapphire meowed a sleepy complaint and fusssed a bit before she found a comfortable spot again on Harry's stomach.

"I suppose she's excited about her first grandchild," Draco said absentmindedly and reached for the second book that was balancing on the arm of the couch.

"Where did you go after dinner?"

"I went to check up on Rowen, see if he needed something," the blond replied and browsed through the book quickly before placing it down again. "He seemed to have found a comfortable spot in the Owelry, near Hedwig."

"Good for him," Harry chuckled and closed his book.

"Did you finish your homework?"

"Yeah, though I had to use four different books just to complete that essay for Snape," Harry grimaced. It hadn't been fun to search for the appropriate books and then look through them to find something suitable for his essay.

"Severus will be pleased with your dedication," Draco chuckled and the other boy rolled his eyes.

Draco placed his hands on Harry's legs and looked at him contemplatively, his mood suddenly turning solemn.

"What?" Harry frowned and he slowly caressed Sapphire's back, making the now adult cat purr appreciatively.

"When are we going to tell Lupin and Black about the baby?" he asked softly.

Harry bit his lip and his hand stilled on Sapphire's back. "I don't know, but I guess we need to tell them soon. I reckon it's best to start with Remus like your mother told us," he replied; not looking forward to that talk. "She promised us she would be there when we tell Sirius, so I think we better not wait too long with that conversation either."

"Well, we can't visit Lupin in his quarters, because Black will mostly likely be present then," Draco mused and stared thoughtfully at the flames in the fireplace. "Our best bet is to catch him when he has a break. But we have to have some free time as well."

Harry called forth his schedule in his mind and went over the hours mentally. They had two free hours after Defence against the Dark Arts on Wednesday and he thought he had seen Remus correcting assignments afterwards, which could indicate that he didn't have a class to teach then.

"What about Wednesday?" he said out loud and elaborated when Draco stared at him blankly. "We have a free period after Defence and I think Remus is free then as well. We could talk to him next Wednesday."

Slowly the blond nodded. "Yeah, that's probably the best moment," he muttered. His hand reached
out and grabbed Harry's only free hand. "Then there is the matter of check-ups."

"Check-ups?" Harry repeated puzzled. What kind of check-ups was Draco talking about?

"Yes, for the baby." Grey eyes shifted towards his stomach before they looked at him again and he muttered a soft ‘oh’ in understanding.

"You're going to need a check-up soon, but who are we going to ask for that?"

"Can – can you do the check-ups?" Harry asked and he flushed underneath Draco's astonished look. "I mean, you're studying Healing and you knew which potions to brew and which spell to use to check how far along I am," he muttered uncomfortably.

To be honest, he'd rather have Draco do the check-ups than the new nurse. He didn't want to think ill of the woman, but in the situation he was in now, he couldn't afford accidental leaks. And he had to admit that he was still feeling a bit rattled from his latest experience in the Infirmary. He knew that it hadn't been really Pomfrey who had cast the curse, but he still couldn't completely shake off the feeling of terror he had experienced during that moment he had been suffering. To allow a woman he didn't know at all to cast spells on him, especially in the state he was in now … No, he didn't feel comfortable at all with that.

"I don't have a problem with that, except that I don't want to risk hurting you," Draco replied, his eyes troubled.

"Hurting me?" Harry looked at him astonished. "How on earth would you hurt me?"

"For one, the book we use doesn't say much about pregnancy, let alone spells used for the check-ups," Draco answered patiently. "And two, I'd have to search those spells in the library and frankly I don't trust myself to be able to perform the spells right if I had to study them on my own." He shook his head. "I'm sorry, Harry, but I'm not going to risk hurting you or our baby, because I botched up a spell."

The firm, closed look on Draco's face told Harry that this was one particular subject he wouldn't be swayed on and he sighed, feeling a bit disappointed.

"I still don't want to go to the nurse for this," he muttered and raked a hand through his hair.

"We could ask my mum whether she knows someone we can trust and who wouldn't mind coming to Hogwarts regularly," Draco suggested after a moment of silence.

"I guess that's our only option." Harry heaved a sigh and Sapphire huffed, apparently having enough of the distraction around her, because she jumped off his stomach and stalked out of the room, presumably going to his bedroom. He shook his head amused; at times his cat had a real prissy attitude.

"Whoa!" he exclaimed shocked when an arm slid around his back and pulled him up; another hand guiding him until he was seated on Draco's lap, chest to chest. He raised an eyebrow. "Is there any reason for this?"

The blond quirked a smile. "I just missed this," he mumbled and a hand guided his head down until his lips pressed against Draco's.

Both weren't particularly in the mood to do something more than kissing and so minutes passed in silence; their mouths connected to each other, their tongues seeking each other out.
"I love you," Harry whispered once they broke apart with a soft gasp.

Grey eyes glittered. "I love you too."

Harry's stomach muscles tensed a bit when a cool hand slipped underneath his sweater and laid flat on his stomach.

"And I love our baby as well."

Harry smiled and still with the hand securely against his stomach, he caught Draco's mouth again in another breath taking kiss; deciding in the back of his mind that tender moments like these were still too far apart and he wouldn't mind experiencing them more.

"Read the next chapter by Friday and we'll discuss it then," Remus smiled and then dismissed the class.

Instantly the scraping of chairs being hastily pushed backwards and the loud chatter of the students filled the classroom; books were closed with a heavy 'thud' and quickly shoved inside their bags. The students left the classroom in a steady stream; most eager to return to their dormitories where they could either relax or start their homework already and others hurrying off towards their next class.

Only two students stayed behind and stayed seated until everyone else had disappeared.

Remus – who had sat down behind his desk, ready to start correcting the assignments – looked up in surprise when his sharp hearing still picked up two heartbeats in his classroom and he blinked when he saw Harry and Draco still seated in the last row (their places since a few weeks when it became clear that some students found it more interesting to practice their spells and curses on both boys instead of their real test subject).

"Harry, Draco, what are you doing here?" he asked curiously.

"Ready?" Draco murmured in Harry's ear and the younger boy nodded, feeling his heart starting to beat quicker in anticipation of the upcoming conversation.

They placed their bags on a desk in the front row and came to stand in front of Remus' desk. Harry hid his shaking hands behind his back when he saw Remus' nose twitch and the man frowned, as if he was smelling something he didn't recognize.

Oh god, what if his smell is as good as Ruby's and Garin's and he can smell the baby?, Harry thought and his breath hitched when the first small tendrils of panic started to wrap around his mind.

Since they had been told of his inheritance, he hadn't been in close contact with the older man like he was now and unlike last time, there were no scents of tea and sugar masking the air between them.

Even with them wanting to tell the news now, Harry didn't feel comfortable with the knowledge that Remus might be able to smell the baby. Surely the sense of a werewolf wasn't that strong?

"I – we need to tell you something," Harry began and swallowed, willing himself to ignore the ball of nerves that seemed to be growing bigger with each second that passed.

"That sounds serious," Remus muttered and glanced at Draco.

"It is," Draco replied; his hand – hidden from Remus' sight – reached out and grabbed one of Harry's sweaty hands, wordlessly showing his support.
Remus made a sound as if he clucked his tongue and muttered a spell to lock the door and raised a strong privacy shield.

"I didn't think you'd want to risk the chance of getting heard by someone else," he explained when he saw Harry's baffled look.

"True," Draco murmured.

"So, what do you need to tell me?"

"It's – it's about my inheritance," Harry began and hesitated for a few seconds, before continuing, "More specifically about the part that says I can get pregnant now."

He could practically feel Remus tensing in response and winced slightly.

"Oh? What about it?" Remus sounded calm, but Harry saw him sniff the air again delicately and his shoulders hunched a bit. Well, chances were big that Remus already suspected what they wanted to say.

"It's … I am …" He couldn't go further. His throat seemed to clamp up and he clenched his free hand to hide the trembling. Not daring to look in amber coloured eyes, he glanced down at the floor, taking deep breaths to calm himself down.

_Come on_, he silently urged himself on. *If you can tell Snape you're pregnant, you can tell Remus as well.*

Looking up again he opened his mouth, but at being confronted with Remus' worried face, the words in his throat shrivelled up and disappeared, leaving him there standing like a fool with his mouth half open before he closed it again. He could feel his cheeks flushing and he shut his eyes tightly.

How was it fucking possible that he could go up against the most dangerous Dark Lord the world had seen in centuries, but he didn't have the guts to inform his honorary godfather that he was expecting a child? What the hell was wrong with him?

As he had done during the talk with Snape, Draco came to his rescue again.

"We wanted to tell you that we discovered a few weeks ago that Harry is pregnant," Draco said clearly and he freed his hand, only to snake his arm around Harry's waist and pull him closer to his side until Harry could lean his head against Draco's shoulder if he wished to do so. "And that we have thought about it and we have decided to keep the baby."

Outwardly the blond boy showed nothing but a calm face with steadfast eyes, but Harry could hear – and Remus probably as well – how his heart was thundering and his breathing seemed to have picked up its pace a bit.

All the air seemed to leave Remus' body and he slumped back in his chair, a hand coming up to rank through his hair warily.

"Oh cub," he sighed and Harry thought he could detect a hint of disappointment in his tired voice. He flinched and told himself he wouldn't cry. It was bad enough he had been blubbing like a child when he and Narcissa had been left alone and he wouldn't do that again. He would be stronger now; crying wouldn't help his cause at all. It would be useless to spend his energy in crying.

He had made his decision and he knew he needed to accept the consequences – even if that meant that Remus would be disappointed in him.
But was it so stupid to have hoped for a positive reaction? Even if they were still only seventeen and with Dumbledore being a threat?

He bowed his head, knowing he wouldn't be able to deal with seeing Remus' disappointment. "I'm sorry," he whispered and his hands started to fiddle with the edge of his shirt. "If we had known about the charm, we would have used protection, but it was too late by then. I'm sorry; I didn't mean to get pregnant now!" he pleaded, hoping that the older man would believe him.

"I know you didn't mean to, Harry," Remus replied quietly and that did nothing to improve Harry's mood. "I just wished …" He shook his head and glanced at them sharply. "I hope you realize that having a baby with Dumbledore on the loose is not a good idea?"

"We know, but I don't want to get rid of our baby," Harry muttered and looked outside the window. "It's not like we decided this on a whim," he continued and felt how Draco pulled him tighter against his side. "I'm sorry, but even though the baby isn't planned, I don't want to give it up."

"And we hope that you'll accept that," Draco took over and then added almost casually, "But even if you don't, we are still keeping this baby. So you better get used to the thought of becoming a great uncle over eight months."

Harry let out a strangled sound that could have been a choked laugh or a muffled sob. He couldn't believe that Draco had said that!

"Well, I never thought I would hear this so early in my life," Remus finally said after a moment – too long in Harry's opinion – had passed in tense silence.

"We never thought we would be parents so early in our lives either." Draco responded dryly. "Life works in mysterious ways I suppose." He shrugged and Harry couldn't decide whether his calm demeanour was an act or whether he really didn't care that Remus could get angry about this.

"That's one way of looking at it," Remus snorted and then almost lazily pointed his wand at Draco, making Harry gasp in shock and Draco keeping him grounded where he stood when he made a move to stand in front of him.

"Draco, what …"

"I trust you will take good care of my cub and the baby?" Remus asked and his eyes flashed almost feral, making Harry understand for the first time since meeting Remus why people would be afraid of a werewolf in his human form. Remus looked ready to jump over the desk and rip Draco apart if he so much as dared to utter a wrong word.

"Of course – I love Harry and I love our baby already; I'd do everything for them," Draco answered and looked Remus straight in his eyes. This time Harry was almost completely certain his calm act was real. Which didn't make sense at all.

How could he be calm when a wand was pointed at his face and with the other man practically threatening him?

"Good." Remus managed to make that one word sound like a growl. "If I ever hear or see you mistreating them, I'll make sure you'll regret it."

"I understand."

What on earth was happening now?
Harry shifted his foot a bit and furrowed his eyebrows. "Remus?" he asked uncertainly. "Does this mean that you, well ..." He stopped talking, not certain how to pose his question.

"I accept your decision to keep the child, yes," Remus replied calmly and after throwing the blond one last warning scowl, he tucked his wand back in his pocket and the dangerous, feral eyes changed back to concerned, warm ones. "While I am worried about how this will affect the whole situation with Dumbledore, I'm not going to force you to remove the baby. I reckon we'll have to be more careful from now on and make sure that no news about your pregnancy is leaked to either the student body or to people outside Hogwarts."

"Narcissa is going to provide me with a belt to hide the pregnancy," Harry muttered, feeling confused about the sudden turn of events. He had thought Remus would get angry at them for not using protection or for their decision to keep it. The man most likely knew that they had already taken the last step in their relationship, but that didn't necessarily mean that he would accept the news of the pregnancy as well. And considering how protective the man could get at times ...

Remus nodded thoughtfully. "Yes, I'd reckon a belt would be the easiest and best solution," he mused.

"Are – aren't you angry?" Harry stammered in a small voice.

"Why would I be angry?" Remus sounded sincerely confused and that didn't help clear up Harry's confusion.

"Because I'm pregnant now, even though you warned us about the charm."

"Harry, unlike Sirius I realize that you're adults now, capable of making your own decisions. I know that you didn't plan this pregnancy and it isn't your fault we discovered the existence of the charm so late," Remus replied, shaking his head. "I believe that you would have used protection if you knew about your inheritance on time."

"Of course we would have," Draco muttered.

"And I trust you have talked about this and didn't decide this on a whim."

Mutely Harry shook his head.

"Then I see no reason why I would be angry with you," Remus concluded and looked at him calmly. "Yes, it probably would have been better if you had waited with having children until you were older, but it's useless to think about what ifs. We'll just have to be very careful now and make sure you're always protected. Besides," his lips twitched as if he wanted to smile, "wolves are pack animals and I'm pretty certain the wolf in me would give me a very hard time if I became angry at you for keeping the baby. As far as the wolf is concerned your baby is already part of the pack."

"You can smell the baby?" Draco asked surprised; apparently he hadn't noticed Remus' earlier sniffing or he hadn't paid much attention to it.

"Yes. Not very well, because the scent is very faint, but I picked it up once you came to stand here," Remus responded amused.

Harry expelled the breath he had unconsciously hold in; relief shooting through his body. He hadn't realized just how afraid he had been of Remus' reaction until it was finally over. Narcissa had assured him Remus wouldn't get angry, but he hadn't been able to completely place faith in her reassurance.
"Harry, did you really think I would be angry?" Remus asked softly and leant forwards, leaning on some papers with his elbows.

Harry shrugged and could almost feel his cheeks redden in embarrassment. "A bit, yeah, because I know it's dangerous to have a baby now while Dumbledore is still out there," he muttered, ignoring for now the soft squeeze Draco gave his side. "And I know it's kind of stupid to keep the baby now, but I can't give it up." His voice wavered at the end and he blinked rapidly.

"Oh cub," Remus sighed and Harry started when the older man suddenly stood in front of him.

The arm around his waist and Draco's presence next to him disappeared and were replaced by two warm arms that pulled him into a tight embrace, filling his nose with the scent of lavender and old books. "I'm not mad at you at all. A bit shocked that you're pregnant already, but not mad. I'll be there to help you with the baby and whatever else you need. It's going to be alright."

Harry could do nothing else but nod and he embraced the older man back tightly.

Hours later, they were lying underneath the sheets in Harry's bed. Dinner had passed rather peacefully, with only a few students muttering about Harry turning dark or Draco manipulating him. Thanks to the anti-nausea Snape had supplied him with, Harry barely felt any discomfort anymore, except for the mornings when he still had to expel his dinner of the night before.

They had done their homework in the library, joined by Blaise, Daphne, Millicent, Dean and Neville (which at first had made the atmosphere rather awkward, until everyone had relaxed and had focused on their work). Afterwards Draco had followed Harry to his quarters, though not before he had dropped his books in the dormitory.

After having discovered the benefit of a private shower big enough to host both of them, they had changed into their pyjamas and had slid between the sheets. Garin had curled himself around one of the bedposts; Sapphire had kneaded a spot for herself between their legs at the end of the bed and Mara and Ruby lay on each side of the bed, the flames on their tails the only light in the otherwise dark room.

"See, I was right: we had nothing to worry about Lupin," Draco muttered and Harry shifted closer to his side with a huff.

"Shut up; it could have happened that he reacted badly," Harry replied petulantly.

The blond chuckled in the dark, half dry hair. "It could have, yeah, but it didn't."

"I still don't understand how you could stand there so calmly while he had his wand pointed at you." Harry frowned and threw one leg over Draco's thighs.

He could feel the blond shrug. "I do admit that at first I thought he would hex me," he admitted rather sheepishly. "But he's more sensible than that – besides, I know he's protective of you; if he hadn't warned me, I would honestly have been shocked."

"More like threaten," Harry murmured darkly. His head was lying on Draco's shoulder and he felt an arm being draped over his stomach. He sighed and bit his lip. "Now we only need to tell Sirius."

"Yeah," Draco answered apprehensively. "When do you want to go talk to him?"

"Well, Remus told us to get it over soon, so maybe this weekend?" Harry tilted his head so that he could look at Draco's face. Draco probably felt his stare, because he looked down a bit; giving Harry
the chance to look in his eyes instead of at his cheek and mouth. "Do you think your mother will be available then?"

"Considering this is about the baby? Yeah, she'll be available then," Draco snorted softly. "I'll send her a letter tomorrow. Is Saturday okay with you?"

Harry rolled his shoulders. "Yeah, fine with me," he muttered and then yawned, hiding it on time behind his hand.

"Guess it's time to go to sleep," Draco murmured amused and after sharing a soft kiss, they closed their eyes; Harry falling asleep easier than the days before.

After asking Sirius whether it was okay with him if they visited him and Remus on Saturday, Harry discovered once again that when you weren't looking forward to something, that particular thing seemed to arrive much quicker than you wanted. Thursday and Friday seemed to fly by and thanks to Snape's list of spells, his stomach was constantly protected during the Defence against the Dark Arts lessons. The potions were doing their work as well and his nausea was reduced to only being momentarily nauseous during the morning, right after waking up.

Then, sooner than he'd wanted, Saturday arrived and with that the moment when they would inform Sirius about the baby.

The first thought he had upon waking up was that he wasn't ready to get out of bed. Not even the faint nauseous feeling could get him out of his comfortable sheets and he was perfectly content to just stay in bed and not do anything else for the whole day.

Alas, he hadn't counted in Draco and Narcissa, who arrived shortly after he had managed to doze off again.

"Harry, wake up."

A hand was softly shaking his shoulder and he moaned disgruntledly.

"What?" he muttered irritated, cracking open one eye to see Draco sitting next to him on the bed.

"You need to get up," the blond informed him. "You still need to eat breakfast and take a shower before we go to your godfather."

"Can't I just stay here?" Harry closed his eye again and burrowed deeper into the soft, fluffy pillow. "I don't want to get up."

"Harry James Potter, you will get out of bed immediately or you'll find an eager bucket ready to dump ice cold water on you." Narcissa entered the bedroom and tapped her wand against her leg. "And don't think I wouldn't do that," she threatened when Harry shot her a calculating look.

Not fancying meeting an ice cold bath, Harry was forced to give in and he disappeared in the bathroom, muttering darkly underneath his breath.

When he entered his small living room, the table was loaded with plates covered with toast, scrambled eggs, boiled tomatoes, some sausages and a can filled with orange juice.

"I won't be able to eat all that!" he protested, but let himself be pulled down on the couch by Draco.

"Just try to eat as much as you can," Draco replied and gave him a quick kiss on his temple. "Ready
"No," Harry answered in a deadpan manner and he filled his plate and started to eat slowly.

Narcissa took a sip of her steaming cup of tea. "It'll be all right, Harry. Sirius may be rash at times and often acts before he thinks, but he has his heart in the right place," she said calmly.

Harry snorted. "Yeah, but it's the acting before thinking that worries me."

"Remus and I will be there to give you support – even my cousin isn't foolish enough to attack either one of you with us nearby."

Harry wasn't certain whether that was supposed to assure him or not.

Half an hour later, the trio was standing in front of the portrait guarding the entrance to Sirius' and Remus' room. Mara, Ruby and Garin hadn't accompanied them; they had told their masters that they would be safe enough for now, but it had been clear to both boys that the animals had seemed rather occupied. With what, they didn't know. Harry could only hope it wouldn't end in a bad way for him or anyone of his family.

"Please enter," the man in the portrait smiled and it swung open.

They stepped through and were greeted with the smell of coffee lingering through the whole quarters.

"Ah, you're here already." Remus came into view with a smile. "Good morning, boys, Narcissa."

"Morning," Harry muttered, coming to an abrupt halt near the couch.

"Good morning," Draco replied, managing to give the older man a small smile.

"Good morning," Narcissa greeted him.

"Good morning!" came the cheerful voice of Sirius and he showed up behind Remus, his face gaining a surprised look when he saw his cousin standing in the middle of the room. "Narcissa, what are you doing here?"

She nodded towards the boys. "I'm here on their behalf."

"On their behalf?" Sirius repeated baffled and threw Harry a confused look.

Harry took a deep breath and jerked his head towards the couch. "Draco and I need to talk to you about something – I think it's better if we sit down."

Sirius narrowed his eyes in suspicion, but he slowly sat down, absently placing a hand on Remus' thigh when the man came to sit next to him.

With a flick of her wand, Narcissa enlarged one of the chairs so that Draco and Harry could sit together while she occupied the other one.

"So what do you need to talk about?" Sirius asked with a frown marring his forehead.

"It's …" Harry shared a look with Draco before he continued, "It's not something we planned on; it – it just happened."
"What are you talking about?" his godfather asked, sounding fairly baffled.

"You remember our talk about my inheritance?" Harry started to feel ill and wondered absently whether it was his morning sickness popping up again, despite having thrown up already or whether it was just feeling generally sick because of the upcoming confession.

"Of course I remember – it's not something that I can forget easily," Sirius answered and glanced at Remus. "Moony, do you know what this is about?"

Remus nodded slowly. "Yes; they already told me about it."

"Why the hell did you know about this – whatever this is – first?" Sirius scowled and pursed his lips, looking remarkably well like McGonagall when she was in a furious mood.

"Does it really matter?" Remus sighed and shook his head. "Just shut up and listen, Padfoot."

Sirius huffed and crossed his arms. "Fine, go on."

"Well … after that talk, Draco and I needed to perform a test," Harry went on, his voice wavering slightly at the end.

Draco took his hand and discreetly squeezed in it, ignoring Sirius' raised eyebrow at the gesture.

"A test," Sirius repeated slowly. "What kind of test?"

"It's … please don't get mad, all right?" Harry pleaded, not quite daring to look Sirius in his eyes.

"Harry, what kind of test?" Sirius asked neutrally, but with a hard tone and the atmosphere seemed to charge itself with tension.

Harry took a deep breath and looked down at his lap, whispering, "A – a pregnancy test."

"A pregnancy test," Sirius replied flatly and Harry could see Remus tensing in response to Sirius' tone of voice.

This conversation was not going well. He knew that; Draco knew that, hell, everybody in this room knew that.

Draco's grip on his hand tightened to the point where it was almost painful and Harry shot him a glance; grey eyes were staring directly at Sirius, his face not giving away anything he was thinking of.

"Because we didn't know about the charm, we didn't use any protection, so the test turned out positive. I'm almost two months pregnant," Harry rushed through the last sentence, his heartbeat loud in his ears, almost drowning out the sound of his blood rushing through his body and his sped up breathing.

There; it was out. He had finally told the last person who really mattered to him about the baby. There was no going back now.

An eerie silence fell over the room and eventually Harry gathered enough of his courage to raise his head and look up – straight into furious, blue-grey eyes. He flinched in spite of having prepared himself for this possible reaction and felt his heart thudding louder; his face growing uncomfortably warm.

The flinch seemed to trigger Sirius' verbal reaction at last.
"How could you be so stupid?!" Sirius snapped furiously, startling the other occupants in the room. Remus tried to calm him down by placing a hand on his arm, but the Animagus impatiently flung his arm away. "Even without the charm, why the hell didn't you use any protection? I thought you knew about the risks of unsafe sex?"

"It isn't like Draco has diseases," Harry protested. "He would have told me before we started to have sex."

"Oh yes, because you obviously can trust a Slytherin to always speak the truth," Sirius replied sarcastically and continued, before either one of them could interrupt him, "Aside from that, why on earth didn't you use a morning after potion?"

"I was already almost a month pregnant by the time we performed the test," Harry bit out, his anger finally rising to the surface. He really didn't like what Sirius seemed to implicate and wondered why he was reacting so angrily, while he normally was the most laid back one of them all. "A morning after potion wouldn't have worked."

"There are other potions that could have solved this!" Sirius retorted harshly, his eyes flashing dangerously.

"I'm not going to kill my baby!" Harry snapped and glared to hide the hurt that had blossomed up with Sirius talking about those potions. "We've decided to keep it. And our baby is not a problem that needs to be solved!"

"So you think it's a smart idea to be pregnant with Dumbledore out there?" Sirius wildly gestured towards the window. "You're already a bloody target as it is, without adding a baby to it. You really want to make it fucking easy for Dumbledore to kill you? And let's not mention your age!"

"Do you really think we haven't thought about Dumbledore before we decided what to do with the baby?" Harry hissed, ripping his hand free from Draco and balling it into a fist. "We know what we're doing and …"

"Obviously you don't, because otherwise you would have done the smart thing instead of this!"

"Sirius, I think it's time for you to calm down," Narcissa spoke in a low, but warning voice and she had risen up from his seat, looking at him coolly.

"Come on, Sirius, go to the bedroom so that you can cool off for a bit and then we'll talk further," Remus murmured, but his voice warned the other man not to test him.

Mostly that tone of voice worked, but now however he seemed immune against it.

"Are you calling me stupid?"

"Harry, calm down; getting worked up is not good," Draco spoke softly in his ear, having risen up when Harry did.

"If you weren't, you would have known that keeping this child is the most stupid thing you can do now!" Sirius shouted and in that moment he resembled the crazed man that had just broken out of prison. "Honestly, I had expected you to be smarter than this!"

It hurt.

It hurt a lot that Sirius didn't accept the baby like the others had done. The man he had thought would always support him and be there for him seemed now intent on breaking him down so that he would
get rid of his child.

His whole body started to tremble and he felt tears burning his eyes, willing to go outside. How had he ever thought there was a slight chance that Sirius would act reasonable? How could he have been so mistaken?

"You know what?" Harry breathed harshly and threw the man who called himself his godfather a poisonous glare. "Fuck you! I'm done listening to you!"

Before tears could fall down, Harry stormed out of the room, ignoring Remus' shout and Narcissa's plead to wait in the hallway.

The last thing he heard before the portrait fell shut behind him was Draco, whose fury after seeing his lover hurt was now unleashed on a shocked Sirius.

"HOW COULD YOU TREAT HIM LIKE THAT, YOU BASTARD?"

Harry didn't stay to hear the rest of the shouting match and instead hurried down the hallway, wanting nothing more than to disappear right now, forget that the whole past hour had ever happened. Maybe this was all just an awful nightmare and he would wake up soon in his bed.

His vision blurred and the few students he passed on his way pointed at him and started whispering to each other. Someone tried to stop him by shouting a taunt, but he ignored that person and tried to keep himself together until he was in his room.

He left the bright lights of the entrance hall and exchanged them for the soft, dimmed lightening of the dungeons. Just a bit further and he could disappear for a few hours. Nobody would be able to bother him there.

Harry had almost reached the portrait guarding his room, keeping his eyes on the stone tiles the whole time, when he suddenly bumped against something soft, yet unyielding and he stumbled backwards. A hand shot out and grabbed him tightly around his upper arm, pulling him back from his fall.

"Potter, do take notice of your surroundings," Snape bit out irritated and released his arm.

"I'm sorry, sir," he muttered and blinked, hoping the tears wouldn't fall down now. He already felt bad and hurt enough – he couldn't deal with the added humiliation of Snape seeing him crying.

"What happened?" Snape asked suspiciously. "And do look me in the eyes when you answer; it's common courtesy."

He took a deep breath and looked up, staring at a point near Snape's face. "Nothing happened," he answered flatly, hiding his trembling hands by stuffing them in his pockets. "I just didn't notice you were standing here, sir, sorry."

"Potter."

That particular infliction in Snape's voice let him know that the man wasn't planning on letting him go without pushing further. Damn it, why on earth couldn't Snape go back to silently loathing him? At least that would have made it easy to pass by him.

"Nothing happened. Excuse me, I need to finish my Transfiguration assignment," he mumbled and hastily walked past Snape, dancing right on time out of the man's reach when he wanted to grab his shoulder.
"Dragon scale," he murmured and the dragon in the portrait huffed, smoke circling out of his nostrils, before the portrait swung open and Harry slipped inside.

His trembling legs collapsed underneath him when he reached the couch and he sunk down on it, pressing the palms of his hands against his eyes. A shuddering breath rankled through his body and he bit his lower lip hard. A faint taste of copper alerted him to the fact that he had bitten too hard.

"Master, what happened?" Ruby's concerned voice rumbled through his head and he looked up through a veil of tears, seeing the large lion standing right in front of him.

Sapphire slunk from underneath the table and jumped on the couch, butting her head against his leg; offering her silent support.

"Did you talk to your family?" Garin hissed and slithered up Harry's legs, travelling across the couch, before draping his head on Harry's shoulder while the rest of his body was resting on the back of the couch.

"Yes," Harry answered, petting Sapphire slowly with one hand. "It didn't go over well."

That had to be the understatement of the year. He still couldn't comprehend how angry Sirius had been. Sure, he hadn't expected him to be happy about it initially, but the way he reacted …

Before either of his pets could reply, the portrait swung open and revealed an annoyed looking Snape.

"What are you doing here?" Harry sat up straight, feeling Garin slither closer to his shoulder as to not fall between him and the couch. "And how did you get in?"

"There is a defence mechanism built in the portraits, called a password," Snape replied sarcastically and Harry flushed, feeling a spike of embarrassment. The man came closer and his dark eyes swept around the room. "How odd. For someone claiming to have a need to finish an assignment, your surroundings are surprisingly bare," he mocked. "Even if you had managed to memorize the entire book, I'd assume you still need parchment and ink to write your assignment. Or do you and the mutt have some kind of mental bond that allows you to transfer your homework that way?"

Harry clenched his teeth and forced himself to stay calm. "I was just planning to start, sir," he answered flatly. "I'm still allowed to pay attention to my pets, right?"

"Potter, do not waste my time," Snape suddenly spoke softly, but his eyes gazed at him coolly. "You are not a child anymore, so cease this childish sulking and tell me what happened that made you distraught."

"I'm not sulking," Harry snapped and glared at his professor. "And why do you care about how I feel?"

"I am the Head of your house and as such have an obligation that requires me to pay attention to any problems my students experience," Snape said and sat down on one of the single armchairs, fixing Harry with a hard gaze. "Aside from that, you're carrying a child and your emotions can affect it. I won't have Narcissa complaining to me if something were to happen to you or her grandchild."

"It doesn't really matter," Harry muttered and looked away. "It was just a stupid argument, alright?"

"An argument? With whom did you …" Realization flashed across Snape's face and Harry swallowed. "You talked to the mutt about the baby, am I correct?"
Harry nodded and the hand on Sapphire's back stilled while his other one clenched into the fabric of his pants. Garin and Ruby were looking between the two men, content for now to let the older man – who smelled like herbs – take charge and take care of their master.

"What did he say?"

Harry shook his head, feeling something blocking his throat. He didn't want to repeat the things Sirius said; didn't even want to think about them anymore. If he didn't think about them, he could try to pretend that the whole exchange had never happened.

"Potter, do not test my patience. What did Black say to you?" Snape asked and he sounded like he was gritting his teeth.

"None of your business," Harry muttered and felt his eyes burning again. Shit, he couldn't start crying now. "I didn't ask for you to come here, so you can leave if you want."

"I'd thought you would have realized by now that keeping things to yourself isn't a smart thing to do," Snape remarked and Harry stiffened. "Then again, I suppose you don't learn from your mistakes."

That made Harry snap.

Severus could see the exact moment that Potter gave up on his flimsy attempt of nonchalance. His eyes shone with repressed tears and his breathing became laboured, making the older man wonder if it had been better to bring a Calming Draught with him.

"We told Sirius about the baby and he didn't take it well," Potter murmured, rubbing a hand fiercely over his eyes.

"How did he react?"

Of course the stupid mutt had to be an idiot and react badly. He wondered how that idiot had managed to live for so long with his temper and idiocy.

"Badly," Potter replied with a bitter laugh. "He said I was stupid for keeping the baby, saying I was too young and that it was unsafe with Dumbledore still around – as if we don't know that!" He lowered his hand and stared at Severus with eyes that shone full of hurt, making the Potions Master feel uncomfortable. He really didn't deal well with raw emotions. "He said it would have been better if – if I had aborted the baby." Potter brought his arm protectively around his stomach. "I don't understand why he got so mad. I know he didn't want Draco and I to have sex, but it's not our fault that we didn't know about the charm until recently."

Potter's voice was small, disturbingly childlike and to Severus' horror, tears started dripping down Potter's cheeks, the boy not able anymore to hold them back. A hand came up to cover his mouth, but Severus could still hear the muffled sob and he threw his eyes up, wondering what on earth he had done to deserve being stuck with a crying Potter again.

"Potter," he started slowly. "You know the mutt can be a real idiot at times. He has a short temper, and he was wrong to take it out on you, but he'll come around."

He really detested comforting somebody, because he wasn't good at it, but currently he was the only one around who had a chance of calming Potter down. Absentmindedly he wondered where his godson was, but focused his attention back on the conversation when Potter spoke.
Potter shook his head. "You didn't see his face," he replied miserably. "He really was furious – I have never seen him that mad before. I know we're young, but is it that bad that we want to keep the baby?"

It had been a while, but Severus could feel the urge to hex the mutt sneaking up again. He knew how vulnerable pregnant people were – especially pregnant men – and he still had opened his big mouth. What on earth had made him decide that blowing up on Potter had been a marvellous idea? For that matter, why had he reacted that badly? Severus could understand the man not reacting well, because of Dumbledore and his threat, but from what Potter had told him, the main problem was the baby itself and Potter's age.

Did the man really think Potter and Draco would have kept their hands to themselves? Severus' lip curled up slightly. He would be the first to state that carrying a baby while having a powerful wizard after you wasn't a smart idea, but even he knew Potter and Draco had not gone over the decision lightly. They weren't idiots. They both knew well what exactly was at stake here.

Instead of driving Potter away, Black should have done the smart thing and showed his support. Wasn't that what Gryffindors did?

Severus snorted silently. Apparently not. And it seemed that this particular ex-Gryffindor was quite a hypocrite as well.

Movement from his peripheral view made him turn his head slightly and he saw that Potter had pulled up his legs on the couch with his arms wrapped around them and his face hidden behind them. His shoulders shook with silent sobs and the Potions Master hesitated. He knew something that would hopefully show Potter that Black was likely to change his mind about the baby, but he wasn't certain whether he was ready to give that piece of knowledge away.

It was part of his memories of Lily and the thought of giving one of them away – even when it was to her son – made him almost balk in protest. His memories of her had been carefully guarded behind a thick Occlumency shield for years and he had never spoken of them to anyone else.

Those memories were his and he wouldn't allow the ignorant responses of other people to taint them.

But maybe giving up one memory wouldn't be that horrible. And it wouldn't be to a random person, but to somebody who would most likely treasure it, because it was about Lily.

After one last moment of hesitation, Severus stood up and sat down stiffly on the couch.

Potter stiffened and raised his head, staring at him with red, puffy eyes.

"Potter, I am certain Black will change his mind about the baby," he spoke softly.

Potter opened his mouth, presumably to protest once again, but Severus cut him off before he could even start talking.

"Because if he doesn't, he would be a hypocrite. And if there is one thing that most Gryffindors are not, it's a hypocrite."

"What are you talking about, sir?" Potter asked with a frown on his face and wiped away the few tears escaping down his cheeks.

Severus sighed and looked down at his clasped hands. "You know your mother and I were friends?" he started, hiding the bitter tone in his voice.
Potter nodded slowly, regarding him warily.

"Like friends do, she often told me what was on her mind, even when she had started dating your father," Severus continued and he could feel the boy shifting; his attention piqued at the mention of his parents. "Mostly it was about nonsensical things, like a fight she had had with another girl or an argument with your father. In our seventh year however she confided into me something that had deeply troubled her, but at the same time had made her happy."

"What had happened?" Potter asked softly, sounding like he was holding his breath.

Severus looked up and gazed calmly at him. Those big, deep green eyes – the mirror image of hers – were staring at him in rapt attention, the crying having stopped for the moment. "She had a pregnancy scare."

"What?" Potter sounded surprised.

"In the middle of seventh year, on a January evening, she told me that she and your father thought she was pregnant," Severus answered, his voice flat; his eyes shifting towards the fireplace. He could picture the scene clearly, despite it being a long time ago. The couch overflowing with pillows on which they were seated; their mugs filled with hot chocolate milk, prepared by the house elves; the fire dancing upon her red hair; her green eyes staring at him in worry, fear, yet tinged with excitement as well … "She was three weeks late and they had ordered a pregnancy test, which she would be taking four days after our conversation. Lupin, Black and Pettigrew had been informed about the possibility and from what Lily told me, they were all willing to help and support her, in case she was pregnant."

"But she wasn't."

"No. She confided into me a week later that while she had been worried about having a baby at her age and was relieved that she wasn't pregnant, she was sad as well that the test had turned out negative," Severus replied and looked at Potter again. "Even Black had been disappointed that the test was negative. It seemed that he had been looking forward to being the godfather of it."

Potter opened his mouth and seemed conflicted. "But," he murmured bewildered. "they were just seventeen back then. I'm the same age and he told me that I'm too young."

Severus inclined his head. "I assume he thinks you're too young – despite what had happened during our seventh year – because you are his godson and he worries about you. No parent likes to realize that their children are growing up, Potter, and that includes godfathers."

Potter fidgeted, looking down at his lap, before peering up at Severus with troubled eyes. "Do you think … do you think mum and dad would have reacted well if they heard I'm expecting a baby at seventeen?"

Severus stilled and then answered calmly, "While they probably would have scolded you, they would have shown their full support. I'm completely certain of that. Just like I'm certain that the idiotic mutt will realize the error of his ways and will change his mind about the baby."

Potter smiled weakly. "Thank you, sir."

Severus snorted and stood up. "I'll be taking my leave now then. Unlike some, I still have work to do."

He walked towards the door and before he opened it, he turned around. "Potter."
Potter looked at him expectantly. "Yes, sir?"

"Remember that even without the mutt's support, you still have others supporting you," he murmured. "The mutt may have to be wary of foreign liquids finding their way in his goblet, though," he smirked and then left the room, ignoring the shocked gasp behind him.

This had better be the last time he needed to comfort Potter.

"If you ever make Harry upset again, I'm going to make certain you'll live to regret it!" Draco finished his rant, breathing heavily. "Don't even think of coming near Harry if you're not going to apologize for being a bastard!" he snapped and stormed out of the room, leaving a heavy silence behind.

The portrait closed with an audible 'click' and he took a deep breath. He couldn't believe he had said all that. The moment Harry had left the room, he had exploded and had chewed out Black, not leaving him any room to talk.

Clenching his fists, he leant against the wall, a bit further ahead, waiting for his mother to emerge. He wanted nothing more than to find Harry and comfort him, but he had to say goodbye to his mother first. She hadn't stopped him during his whole rant, but that didn't mean she would appreciate him not saying goodbye to her.

"Shit," he muttered and closed his eyes, his heart finally starting to slow down its erratic beating.

He still didn't understand what had made Black react so badly towards the mention of their baby. Sure, he hadn't expected him to be happy about it – especially not after the way he had looked at Draco a while ago – but to get so pissed off? He hadn't foreseen that. Neither of them had; even Lupin had looked shocked and there was not much that could rattle that man.

Was it the fact that they were only seventeen? That Dumbledore posed a dangerous threat? Or, Draco swallowed, was it because it was his baby that Harry was expecting?

Black had never reacted badly towards him, but he hadn't exactly shown his approval either. What if Black did have something against him? What if he wouldn't have been that furious if Harry had expected someone else's baby? Was it just because it was his baby that Black had gotten angry?

"Draco."

Treading lightly over the carpet and with her gown rustling over the floor, his mother made his way to him.

"Mother," he murmured and looked at her. He grimaced. "How badly did I fu- mess up?"

She looked calmly back. "You gave my cousin a lot to think about," she answered and smiled faintly. "While you probably could have brought it over in a better way, I think this was the best way to shake him awake."

"Do you think he'll accept the baby?"

She beckoned him to follow. "He will. While he acted outrageously just now, he still loves Harry and he'll come to accept the fact that he's pregnant. I assume he needs time to adjust," she murmured.

Slowly they made their way to the dungeons – ignoring the whispering that rose up around them – and Draco frowned. "Time to adjust? Adjust to what?"
"To the fact that his godson is growing up and is no longer a little boy he can protect against the world," Mother replied amused.

"But Harry wasn't a little boy anymore when Black found him again," Draco said bewildered.

"No, but in his mind, Harry would stay the innocent boy, who needed protection against everything bad and evil." She came to a halt and studied him, before placing a soft kiss on his forehead, making him blink in response. "No parent wants to see their child grow up, even though we all know that that day will arrive. Sirius should have handled it better and should not have let his emotions get the better of him, but in the end he reacted like every other parent, who finally realizes that their child is growing up and there is nothing they can do about it. Give him some time, Draco. He'll come around, you'll see."

"And what if he doesn't?" Draco asked warily.

"Then you and Harry will still have the rest of us," Mother answered determinedly. "But don't worry, son. Everything will be all right."

"I hope so," he muttered darkly, not certain how Harry would react if his godfather never wanted to speak with him again.

"I can see myself out through Severus' Floo. Go to Harry, Draco," she murmured. "He needs you now."

"Thank you, mother," he smiled gratefully and after kissing her cheek, he turned around and briskly made his way to Harry's quarters, where he hopefully was. Harry needed him now.

Harry felt better after his talk with Snape and with Draco near him, but he couldn't help but feel hurt when the weekend passed by without Sirius showing up. He had hoped that his godfather would have wanted to talk after he had had the time to think everything through.

He didn't know what he would do if it turned out that Sirius didn't want to see him anymore and because that thought was terrifying, he preferred to ignore it.

Draco had been a comforting presence throughout the weekend. He hadn't said much about what had happened after Harry had left the room; only that he had told Sirius what exactly he thought about his reaction. Harry felt there had been more to that particular talk, but Draco wasn't forthcoming with new information and so he had given up on pestering him about it.

Transfiguration that Monday after the disastrous weekend had a very awkward start. Harry had waited until a group was about to enter the classroom and had mingled between them, Draco following him after a shake of his head.

They had chosen places in the back of the classroom and for the entire two hours Harry kept his head down, not wanting to draw any attention towards him.

Sirius had greeted them all jovially as usual, but Harry had seen the slight bags underneath his eyes and he couldn't help but wonder how the rest of the weekend had gone by for the older man. Knowing Remus, the man probably hadn't made it an easy time for the Animagus and Harry felt guilty for causing a disagreement between the couple. It was bad enough he and Sirius had had a fight; he didn't want to be the cause of a fight between Sirius and Remus.

"Harry, class is over," Draco murmured in his ear and he looked up startled.
Indeed; the rest of the students had started talking animatedly whilst packing their bags.

"Oh," he muttered and blinked, shoving his own books in his bag.

"Common room, your room or the library?" Draco asked while they made their way to the doorway. They had a few hours free before dinner started.

"Maybe the …"

"Harry, can I talk to you?"

Harry froze, his fingers tightening around the strap of his bag. Draco tensed next to him and he could feel the curious stares of some students who passed by them.

"Now?" he asked flatly, turning around slowly.

Sirius looked at him with unreadable eyes. "Yes; you don't have class now, right?"

Harry shook his head mutely.

"Then we have time to talk," Sirius stated and nodded towards Draco. "Can you leave us alone for a moment?"

"I don't think that's a good idea," Draco replied with a frown and Harry saw from the corner of his eye how the blond gripped his wand tightly.

"I'm not going to do anything to Harry. I just want to talk," Sirius said patiently, though his eyes flicked warily towards Draco's wand. "I recall you said I was allowed to do that."

Draco breathed out slowly. "Fine. But I'm going to wait outside," he warned Sirius and the other man nodded.

"Fair enough."

"Give a shout if you need me," Draco breathed in Harry's ear and pressed a quick kiss on his mouth.

Harry nodded and watched how Draco left the room, closing the door behind him, after throwing a concerned look at him.

"So what do you want to talk about?" Harry asked warily and he shifted a bit, making the bag slide until it was slightly in front of his stomach.

"I want to talk about the baby," Sirius replied and took a deep breath. "Why don't you sit down?"

Harry opened his mouth to refuse, but Sirius' pleading look made him change his mind and he took a seat at the first desk, placed in the middle row.

"What about it?"

"Before I say anything else, I want to apologize," Sirius muttered and sat down at the edge of his desk. "I shouldn't have gotten so angry and most importantly, I shouldn't have said those things to you."

"Did Remus tell you to do this?" Harry asked sharply. Sirius' apology wouldn't mean anything if the man only offered it, because Remus had forced him to do that.
"No, he didn't," his godfather replied and he faintly smiled. "Although he did tell me quite clearly what he thought of my behaviour. I'm sorry I reacted like that; I went too far."

"Yes, you did," Harry murmured and ignored Sirius' small flinch. He wasn't trying to be deliberately mean, but Sirius had went too far with his reaction and he didn't see the need to act as if that hadn't been hurtful. "Why did you react like that?"

Sirius heaved a sigh and grimaced. "It's …" he paused and after a moment of hesitation, continued softly, "I thought that everything would be over once Voldemort was gone. With that bastard gone, I thought you would be able to finally live the life you deserved. But instead of that, Dumbledore stepped in to take Voldemort's place and even though I hate that backstabbing son of a bitch, I have to admit that he is one of the strongest wizards that the Wizarding world has known. And that scares me, Harry. I don't want to lose you to that man; all because he deems you too dangerous to stay alive." He looked at him with a pained look in his eyes. "I do think, though, that you have a decent chance against him. That's what kept me optimistic. Until Remus and I read about the charm. A baby takes a lot of your energy away; not only physical, but also magical. Even more so in a male pregnancy."

"I know that; Draco and I read the book as well," Harry said and shifted on the chair. He had never heard Sirius speaking so solemnly and it honestly worried him.

"If you know how much of your energy will eventually be taken away by the baby, can you blame me for getting worried? You were already at risk before, but this baby makes you twice as vulnerable and I don't want to think about what will happen if Dumbledore decides to attack you now," Sirius replied and a hint of frustration shone through his voice. "I know that you and Draco didn't plan this baby, but I am worried about you, Harry. I finally have my family back; I can't stand the thought of losing you or Remus. I already lost part of my family when your parents were killed. Their deaths nearly killed me – I don't think I would be able to go on if I lost you or Remus."

"Sirius," Harry murmured and stood up, crossing the small distance between them to hug the older man. "You're not going to lose me, I promise."

Sirius chuckled weakly and Harry felt his arms tightening around his body. "You can't promise something like that, pup. Not with Dumbledore as your enemy."

He sounded so miserable that Harry pulled back a little and stared him right in his eyes. "Sirius, listen to me. I'm not planning on leaving you or anyone else of my family. I was able to handle Voldemort – I can handle Dumbledore as well. Besides, I have you, Remus, Lucius, Narcissa, my pets, even Snape to help me," he said firmly. "And Draco will do anything to protect me and the baby."

"I know," Sirius smiled weakly. "That was clear this weekend."

"I know that I'm taking a huge risk by keeping this baby," Harry continued, hands clenching down on Sirius' arms. "And I thought I would be able to remove it."

He felt Sirius jerk in surprise.

"But I couldn't. I can't kill my baby and you don't have the right to ask that of me. I want this baby, despite the risks and I want you to be a part of the baby's life. You said you finally had your family back – well, I finally have a family after all these years. I don't want to lose you, but I don't want to choose between you or my baby. And it's not fair of you to ask that of me," Harry said, taking a deep breath once he was finished talking.

"I know; I never should have implied that you were better off with removing it," Sirius muttered.
"I'm not going to make you choose between the baby or me, Harry."

"So do you accept the baby?" Harry asked and resisted the urge to squirm. Sirius' answer would decide whether he would still have the man in his life or not.

Sirius nodded. "Yes, I accept it."

"Thank you," Harry whispered and hugged him again, burying his face in Sirius' shoulder.

"Do you accept my apology?"

Harry nodded and he heard Sirius sighing in relief.

"I don't like fighting with you," he muttered.

"I don't like it either," Harry replied, his voice slightly muffled through the fabric.

"Merlin, I can't believe I'm going to be a granduncle before I'm forty years old," Sirius mumbled bewildered and Harry laughed.

"Harry?" Draco's voice called out muffled from behind the door and Harry shook his head, pulling back.

"I need to start on my homework," he sighed.

"Go on," Sirius chuckled and released him. "Just make sure to rest on time. If you're like Lily during her pregnancy, you're going to need the rest."

Harry rolled his eyes. "Don't worry. Draco will make sure I don't overwork myself. I don't want to imagine how bad he'll get in a few months," he muttered darkly.

Sirius cocked his head slightly to the left and said gruffly, "You know, if I have to be honest; at first I wasn't certain whether I liked the thought of you and Blondie being together."

Harry stared at him surprised. "Oh?"

"Yeah, thought he might take advantage of you," Sirius went on and his fingers patted the wand lying on the desk. "I already had several curses in mind in case he ended up hurting you."

"Eh, those curses won't be necessary," Harry replied uneasily. Draco's fear of being cursed by Sirius hadn't been that farfetched after all apparently.

"I know they won't. He's good for you; I can see that," Sirius said and looked away, as if he was ashamed for admitting that little fact.

Harry stared at him surprised. "Oh?"

He received a nod in response and he put his hand on the door knob to open it, but halted. "What made you decide that Draco is good for me?" he asked after a moment of wavering about the question.

When he turned his head, Sirius looked at him intently. "The way he defended you last weekend. And the way he looks at you when he thinks nobody sees him. It's the look James often gave Lily. You look at him like that as well. That's how I know he's good for you," he answered softly.

Harry didn't know what to say to that and with flushed cheeks he left the classroom.
Draco immediately took him into his arms. "How did it go?" he asked worriedly.

"Like you said; everything turned out all right." Harry answered smiling.
Chapter 12: Quidditch

26th of November

Nearly two weeks after Harry's talk with Sirius, it was Saturday and the first Quidditch match was about to start in just two hours, officially opening the season.

"Stand still, Harry. I need to concentrate on the Glamour and I can't mess it up," Daphne murmured almost absentmindedly.

She was already dressed in Harry's Quidditch robes and Harry's Firebolt was resting against the wall. Harry tried to stop his fidgeting, but that was difficult with Daphne staring at him. He had never dealt well with people staring at him and he definitely didn't feel comfortable underneath such a concentrated gaze like Daphne was giving him now. Her eyes were fixed on his face, while her wand tapped her nose, forehead, lips, cheeks, her eyelids … She muttered the last syllable of the Glamour spell underneath her breath and her face started to softly glow. A mask appeared in front of her face and it slowly morphed into Harry's face. Once the mask was constructed, it shifted backwards until it sank down on Daphne's skin, attaching itself to her face. Harry's own face stared back at him and Harry stared at it, disturbingly fascinated with it.

Next Daphne changed her hair into his own messy, black coloured one and three other spells made a Glamour wrap around her entire body, making it look like Harry's.

"Flitwick was right; you do have a talent for Charms," Sirius commented from his post next to the door.

Obviously still feeling guilty about his initial reaction to the news, Sirius was eager to offer Harry any help he needed. If Harry had found him prone to worrying before, it was nothing compared to now. Only three days after their conciliation, Sirius had breached the topic of the Quidditch match, already demanding of Harry that he promised not to play in it to avoid harming the baby, before Harry could explain their plan. After he finally got gotten enough time to inform his godfather about the plan, Sirius had insisted on being there when Daphne applied the Glamours, stating that he could provide an objective opinion on how well the Glamours had been made.
Having found no real reason to object, Harry had given in with a sigh.

Draco, who was also clad in his Quidditch robes, stepped forwards and nodded thoughtfully. "Yes, if I didn't know better, I'd say you were the real Harry."

"Oh my, a compliment from Draco Malfoy – who would have thought I'd ever see the day when that would happen?" Daphne smirked and Harry blinked, not sure whether that particular emotion suited his face or not.

Draco rolled his eyes. "Don't get used to it."

"Do you have your Cloak, Harry?" Sirius asked and glanced out of the window.

"Yeah," Harry murmured and patted his pocket.

"Good," Sirius nodded. "You best put it on as soon as we leave this room. Normally everyone is already outside, but there are always a few stragglers."

"Good luck, Daphne," Harry murmured and she smiled.

"Thanks," she muttered and grabbed the Firebolt, studying it with a keen eye before she followed Sirius out of the room.

"Good luck to you too," Harry smiled faintly and turned towards Draco.

Draco snorted and reached out to put his arms around Harry. "It's Ravenclaw – we can win that match with our eyes closed," he replied haughtily.

Harry snorted. "Don't make the mistake of underestimating them. You never know – they could have gotten better since last year."

"As if," Draco smirked. "Do I get a good luck kiss?"

"I thought you didn't need good luck?" Harry raised an eyebrow, looking at the blond amused.

"Good luck kiss, regular kiss; I don't particularly care what kiss. I just want a kiss," Draco stated and his grey eyes glittered.

"Because you asked for it so nicely," Harry murmured and one of his hands slipped over Draco's neck through his hair while their lips met in a soft kiss.

Draco muttered something too low for his ears to pick up and took a step closer, pushing his leg between Harry's legs. A tongue licked his lower lip briefly and he parted his lips, meeting the other tongue with his own.

Their breathing started to sound loud in the otherwise silent room and Harry vaguely registered a hand sliding down over his back and coming to rest on the swell of his arse. The heat of Draco's hand broke through the barrier of his trousers, heating his own skin and he jumped a bit when his arse was squeezed firmly.

Harry broke the heated kiss with a gasp and they both blinked. "I," he licked his lips, cleared his throat and tried again, "I think it's time for you to go to the pitch."

"Yeah, guess so," Draco breathed out. He pressed a quick kiss on Harry's bruised lips. "I'll see you after the match."
Harry nodded and he gave Draco a quick squeeze in his hand, before he threw his father's Invisibility Cloak over him and followed his boyfriend out of the room.

While Draco went to the dressing room to give his team a last pep talk, Harry chose another pathway that led him to the teachers' stand on the Quidditch pitch. To avoid raising questions when someone felt a presence that couldn't be seen, Remus had suggested that Harry sat next to him during the match, so he could still watch it without alerting anyone of the students to his presence.

His pets had also been forced to stay in his room – same went for Mara, who had chosen to wait in Harry's quarters as well – because even though they could turn invisible, Ruby and Mara were both too big and their presence would be felt if they had joined Harry. The animals hadn't liked the plan at all, but had given in when Harry pointed out that he would always have someone near him who could protect him if necessary – never mind that he was perfectly capable of defending himself if he needed to.

He took the stairs that led up to the teachers' stand and had to press himself against the wooden wall momentarily when Sinistra passed him in a rush.

When Harry arrived at the top, he spotted Remus and Sirius sitting in the back at the left side – a space left open between their two bodies.

"I'm here," he murmured and tapped Remus on his shoulder.

Remus' hand twitched a bit and his eyes flicked upwards to where he thought Harry was standing – he wasn't that much off either.

"Good, you can sit between us," he murmured, barely moving his lips and he shifted a bit, widening the space between him and Sirius so that Harry could sit comfortably.

"Thanks," Harry muttered and sat down between the two men, being mindful of the cloak. He shuffled his feet underneath the bench and plucked a bit on the cloak until he was certain that his whole body was covered.

Because it was nearing December, everybody was wearing scarfs, thick coats and woollen hats to protect themselves against the biting cold and the harsh wind. Even with the extra layer of clothes, Harry shivered when a cold wind swept against him. For once he was glad that he wasn't participating in the game – as a Seeker he would have to fly the highest of them all in order to seek for the Snitch and with the cold wind getting worse at every new height, that never was a pleasant task. He hoped Daphne had remembered to cast a Warming charm before she went up in the air.

Loud cheering rose up from all the stands when both Quidditch teams stepped out on the field – the Slytherin team clad in silver and dark green and the Ravenclaw team dressed in blue and black.

Draco shook hands with the Ravenclaw's Captain – a sixth year boy named Eric Hulldric – and Madam Hooch released the various balls with a sharp whistle. The Snitch hovered between Draco and Daphne for a moment before it shot upwards and disappeared from sight – for the moment.

Another sharp whistle and both teams kicked themselves off the ground and flew up in the air. The game had started.

"This year's season opens with a match between Slytherin and Ravenclaw," a Ravenclaw girl of the fifth year named Selena Goodwill started the commentary. "Last year Ravenclaw nearly missed the Cup – will they do it better this year?"

Loud cheering from the Ravenclaw stand made it clear that the students there were certain they had a
chance.

"Oh, there goes Malfoy! He has the Quaffle in possession – will he manage to score the first point? Lemstreng tries to intercept him, but misses! It’s up to the Keeper Alden to stop Malfoy. Ah! Malfoy aims, throws and scores! Ten points for Slytherin!"

Immediately the Ravenclaw (joined by the Gryffindors) students started to boo, but they were practically drowned out by the cheering of the Slytherins.

Ravenclaw was the next to score. Both teams were surprisingly evenly matched and Harry smirked, knowing he could tease Draco about this later. That would teach him to underestimate his opponent.

Daphne was doing well so far. Both she and the Ravenclaw’s keeper – Cho Chang – were circling high above the others, keeping an eye out for the Snitch. At one point, Daphne had suddenly taken a dive and everybody had hold their breath in, so certain that the Snitch had been located. As it turned out, Daphne had apparently gotten bored of hovering in one place and had seemingly decided to trick Cho into believing that she had spotted the Snitch. At least Harry thought she wanted to trick Cho, because he could imagine no other reason as to why she would suddenly make such a dive when Cho hadn't indicated she had seen the Snitch. He had to admit though that Draco had been right when he had assured him that Daphne was one of the best flyers in the school. While she didn't have Harry's natural talent or Draco's skill, she was still very good and Harry doubted anyone would notice that the Harry Potter flying on his broom wasn't the real one.

The game had been going on for nearly two hours and Slytherin was leading the match with 160 points to 130 when Daphne suddenly dived down, sweeping past two surprised Ravenclaw Chasers with Cho in pursuit.

Harry squinted and gasped softly when he saw the golden glint hovering above the grass. The Snitch had been spotted and Daphne was the first one to have seen it.

Of course in Quidditch that didn't mean much. If Daphne wasn't careful, Cho could still catch the Snitch and it would be game over for them. But Daphne proved that she had skill and when Cho came flying next to her, stretching out her arm, Daphne blocked her roughly by smacking her arm away.

Cho pulled up again, not wanting to crash into the ground, but Daphne only pulled up at the last second and she shot back up at full speed.

At first Harry thought the Snitch had managed to escape, but then Daphne lowered her speed to hover in the centre of the pitch and with a big grin she held up her hand, showing clearly the Snitch fluttering futile in her fist.

The response was instantly – while Slytherin cheered and roared, Ravenclaw and Gryffindor shouted their displeasure while the Hufflepuffs were torn between cheering and expressing their displeasure.

"And Harry Potter caught the Snitch! Slytherin has won with a staggering 310 points! Slytherin has won the match!"

Harry jumped up and clapped his hands while cheering loudly – in the ruckus that was going on, nobody would notice his voice. Even Remus and Sirius were cheering.

That was when it went wrong.

While the crowd was still cheering or shouting, the teams had started their descent to the ground where they would go on to the showers.
Most of the team members had made it to the ground and were congratulating each other with Daphne being the last one to descend. She was still very high up when the broom suddenly jerked, throwing her weight to the left.

"What the hell is she doing?" Sirius muttered bewildered.

Another jerk and the broom threw her weight to the right. Without any warning the broom suddenly flew up again vertically, forcing Daphne to cling on to the broom in order not to fall off and crash into the ground.

"Something's wrong!" Harry said alarmed and jumped up, his heart starting to beat wildly. He could hear Daphne shout in alarm and by then most of the crowd had realized that something had gone wrong. They all jumped up and started to shout, pointing at Daphne who was now trying to stay on a broom that was desperate to throw her off.

Draco, who had already arrived on the grass, had kicked off again and was speeding upwards, trying to reach Daphne before the broom succeeded in throwing her off.

Draco had only breached half of the space between them when Daphne suddenly cried out in anguish and even from this distance Harry could see smoke coming off from her gloves – which resulted in her taking her hands off the broom. The broom did one last jerk and finally succeeded in what it was trying to do; Daphne fell and started to plummet to the ground, screaming in fear and pain.

Harry's breath halted in paralyzing fear and his hand shot to his wand – and halted, because he didn't know any spell that could delay her fall.

Luckily Draco had finally caught up to her and he managed to catch her, pulling her up on his broom.

"Oh thank Merlin," Remus muttered, but he still looked worried.

Harry heaved a relieved sigh, grateful that Draco had managed to catch her on time.

However he had been too quick with his relief. A sharp wind suddenly rose up and smacked against Draco's broom, throwing him off course. Harry could see Draco grabbing the broom handle while trying to keep both of them balanced, but a next wind gust came down on them and Draco lost control of his broom; the wind seemingly not wanting him to get control over it.

"Draco!" Harry shouted in panic, but his scream was drown out in the panicked screaming of the other students.

McGonagall pointed her wand and snapped a spell that Harry had heard Dumbledore uttering in his third year, when he had been the one to crash down. The spell enveloped Draco and Daphne and brought them to an abrupt halt while the wind was screaming in anger around them.

Both of them were safely lowered to the ground and the ruckus started all over again.

McGonagall was making her way down to the pitch and Harry started to follow her, wanting to get to Draco as soon as he could, but was halted by Remus, who took his wrist and pulled him back.

"Remus? Let me go; I need to go to Draco," he snapped, tugging in the hopes that Remus would let go.
Remus shook his head. "No, Harry, you'll need to wait."

"What? Why? I need to …"

"How do you think people will react when they see two Harry Potters on the field? As far as the students can see, you're already there on the pitch, being tended to by the Mediwitch," Remus replied calmly, though his eyes looked warningly at Harry. "Just wait a bit; McGonagall knows of your situation, so we can go see Draco later when there aren't as many people around as now."

Harry gritted his teeth, but had to admit that the man was right. He couldn't go to Draco now, because to the students' knowledge, he was already there, recovering from his near fall.

"Fine," he muttered petulantly. "But as soon as the coast is clear, I'm going to Draco."

"Understood." Remus nodded and then shared a glance with Sirius, whose forehead was marred with a frown. "Let's wait in McGonagall's office. She has managed to get your broom down, so maybe we'll be able to discover what went wrong."

With his heart still beating wildly in his chest and a bunch of questions floating through his head, Harry numbly followed Sirius and Remus to McGonagall's office.

"Thank you, Melinda, that will be all," McGonagall interrupted the new nurse's fussing briskly and Draco looked up.

Both he and Daphne had been brought to the Infirmary immediately so that the nurse could take a look at them. Draco didn't have any physical or internal wounds – McGonagall's spell had managed to stop them on time before they smacked against the ground.

Daphne however had second degree burns on her hands, which were now covered by a dark purple gel like substance that was meant to cool the burns and heal them. She was still wearing the Glamours, though Draco had seen them flickering twice already. The exhaustion and the nearly fatal fall were catching up to Daphne and he knew they would have to leave soon if they wanted to prevent the nurse from discovering the truth.

"I think they need to stay for the night for observation," Melinda replied and frowned, putting bandage around Daphne's hands. "Who knows what side effects that near fall could have caused."

McGonagall raised her eyebrow and glanced at the two students. "Mister Malfoy, Mister Potter, do you feel well enough to leave the Infirmary?"

"Yes, I wasn't even harmed," Draco replied instantly, wanting to get out of the Infirmary and to Harry as soon as possible.

"The potion is working, so I'm feeling better," Daphne answered softly, studying her bandaged hands with critical eyes.

"Good, then follow me, please. We need to discuss this recent event." McGonagall beckoned them and both of them slid off the hospital beds and – ignoring the nurse's dark muttering – followed the Headmistress to her office.

"Is Harry …" Draco started, but McGonagall broke him off.

"Mister Potter is waiting in my office, joined by Professor Lupin and Professor Black," she replied brusquely. She glanced at the Firebolt floating next to her. "We need to figure out what happened, so
As soon as the door opened to let them through, Draco had his arms full with a babbling Harry, who was touching him with frantic hands.

"Hey, I'm okay, really," Draco said hastily. "Not even a bruise."

"Do you know how worried I was? I thought you were going to crash!" Harry snapped and he sounded a bit hysterical.

Draco embraced him and pressed a kiss on Harry's cheek. "I know you were worried, but I assure you, I'm not harmed in either way. Daphne has second degree burns, though."

Harry turned around in his embrace and gasped when he caught sight of Daphne's bandaged hands. "Merlin, how are you feeling?"

"My hands still sting a bit, but most of the pain has been reduced, thanks to the potion," Daphne smiled weakly and shrugged. "The nurse was quick to put the potion on my hands, so I'm not going to have any scars."

Harry opened his mouth – most likely to do something as stupid as apologizing, if Draco recognized the look on his face correctly – but McGonagall spoke up, forcing them to turn their attention to her.

She was standing behind her desk with the Firebolt hovering above her desk. Lupin and Black were standing next to the desk, casting a suspicious glance at the broom.

"Miss Greengrass, you may drop the Glamours now," she murmured.

Severus had told McGonagall about the baby a few weeks ago and they had come to the decision to keep it a secret from the rest of the teachers for as long as possible. Not because they didn't trust the others not to spill the secret to the students or worse, the press, but because they both knew that most of the teachers would have acted irrationally, because it was Harry who had gotten pregnant and not some anonymous girl.

None of the teachers had ever shown contempt towards Draco or had showed their disapproval of his relationship with Harry, but Draco was no fool – when it came to the Saviour, a lot of people turned irrational and he wouldn't have put it past some of the teachers to voice their protest loud and clearly.

Daphne nodded and tapped her wand against her face, hair, collarbone and legs and the Glamours were dispelled, melted away until she had her own appearance back.

"Good. Now we're here to determine what went wrong during the match." Her dark eyes peered at them, her lips pursed together. "Miss Greengrass, did the broom give any warning that it would start to act strange?"

"No, it flew normally until the first time when it tried to shake me off," Daphne replied, her eyebrows furrowed. "One moment I'm bringing it down to the ground and the next, I'm trying to hold on while the broom was trying to throw me off."

"Mister Potter, have you experienced your broom acting oddly in the last couple of months?"

Harry blinked and shook his head. "No; my Firebolt has never acted weirdly before. This is the first time it acted like this."
"Hm." McGonagall narrowed her eyes and studied the sleek handle of the Firebolt. "Is it possible that the charms on this broom are malfunctioning?"

Black shook his head. "No; maybe the charms would stop working if the Firebolt was fifteen to twenty years old or so, but Harry has had him for only four years. That's not nearly long enough for the charms to weaken. Besides, even if for some reason the charms started to weaken quicker, the broom wouldn't have acted this dangerously immediately."

"What do you mean?" Daphne asked bewildered.

"I mean that the charms wouldn't have disappeared this quickly. One moment you were flying without problems and the next, you nearly had an accident – charms don't disappear that suddenly."

"So, what are you saying? That somebody messed with the broom?" Draco said slowly, trying to wrap his mind around the exact events of this morning.

Black grimaced. "That's a possibility, yeah," he admitted grudgingly. "It can't be a fabrication mistake, because then an accident like this would have happened way sooner. Heavy protection charms like the ones casted on this broom don't disappear that sudden either. So that only leaves the option of sabotage."

"But who would want to sabotage my …" Harry started and then halted abruptly; a look of realization crossing his face and Draco felt him tense up in his arms.

Lupin looked resigned. "There is a high possibility that Dumbledore is behind this," he murmured and casted a dark look on the broom.

Fawkes let out a sad, high chirp.

"But the wards didn't warn us," McGonagall pointed out with a frown. "And even with Albus being stronger than us, these wards have been put in place with the help of Hogwarts herself – there is no feasible way in which he could have passed the wards without raising alarm. He wouldn't even be able to disband them, thanks to the old magic that Hogwarts used."

"He wouldn't need to pass the wards," Draco spoke up when realization hit him. "If he has someone helping him in Hogwarts, he could have passed on the necessary spells and let this person do his dirty job."

"But the brooms are locked up in the shed and unauthorized people, people who don't know the necessary spells to unlock the shed, can't enter it since a Ravenclaw student tried to sabotage a Gryffindor's broom in an attempt to win the match in 1985," Daphne retorted and crossed her arms in front of her chest.

"They wouldn't have needed to enter the shed," Harry murmured and his eyes gained a distant sheen, as if he was looking at a memory. "In my first year, during a Quidditch match, Quirrel cursed my broom when I was already up in the air. It's only thanks to Snape that I didn't fall off my broom back then."

"I remember that," Draco muttered and grimaced. "For weeks people kept speculating what could have happened to have you suddenly losing control over your broom while you were flying perfectly before."

"But none of the teachers were casting spells now," Lupin remarked. "I would have known if they did, thanks to my sharp hearing."
"Who said it has to be a teacher?" Black replied with a dark look in his eyes. "It's clear none of the teachers caused the accident, because you didn't hear anyone of them cursing the broom. So it has to be a student."

"But would a student have the power necessary to accomplish such difficult spells?" McGonagall asked. "I don't know a lot about brooms, but I do know that it isn't easy to curse a broom, because of all those protection charms."

Black shrugged, looking contemplatively at the hovering broom. "Most students in this school probably wouldn't be able to produce enough power to use those curses," he admitted. "But not every student has mediocre power – look at Harry and Malfoy. Or even Lovegood and Zabini."

"This person doesn't have to have a large magical reserve," Remus added. "It's all about the power and intention when it comes to curses powerful enough to mess with a broom and if this person was determined to succeed, then that would have been enough to grant them enough power to curse the broom."

McGonagall sighed and closed her eyes, sinking down in her chair. She rubbed her temples and opened her eyes again, staring at them sharply. "If there is indeed a student in contact with Albus, then it's safe to assume that Albus would have ordered the student to cast other spells after these curses to avoid detection through Priori Incantatem. That rules out testing the students' wands." Her fingers rapped sharply against the surface of her desk. "And Priori Incantatem would have been the best way to uncover the culprit."

"In other words, we're stuck," Black said dryly and grunted when Lupin stepped on his foot, scowling at him.

"Well, whoever is responsible for this, this person won't be happy after having failed his or her attempt to kill Harry," Daphne replied and threw a worried look at Harry. "I mean, obviously they believed I was Harry, because otherwise they wouldn't have cursed the broom, right?"

Lupin nodded, his lips tightly pressed together.

"So what are we going to do now?" Draco asked and tightened his embrace. Harry leant back against his chest and he could feel warm hands covering his own.

"We can't risk another attack like this," McGonagall replied and she regarded Harry with troubled eyes, making him move his feet restlessly. "The next time someone could get seriously hurt or even get killed. I see no other option than to cancel Quidditch this year. At least that way there won't be any accidents involving brooms being cursed and people being thrown off the brooms."

"The students aren't going to like this," Black muttered with a grimace.

She threw him an annoyed look. "Probably not, but I'd rather hear them protesting a bit because of the lack of Quidditch, than having to tell parents that their child had an accident, or even worse died."

"Is there any way to discover who cursed my broom?" Harry asked, throwing a quick look at the broom in question.

"I'd suggest using Veritaserum, but it's illegal to use without explicit permission of the Ministry and questioning all the students would take too much time. And there is the possibility that the person in question manages to shield that particular memory," she added with a sigh.

"Do you really think this student is capable enough to use such specific Occlumency?" Lupin asked
and he sounded sceptically.

She scowled. "Weren't you the one who suggested that enough power used behind a spell could make even a wizard or witch of mediocre strength succeed in using the spell?" she retorted and raised an eyebrow.

Lupin coughed uncomfortably and grimaced. "Yes, but …"

"Then for now our hands are tied," she cut him off. "I'll send a letter to the Minister, requesting him to put the search for Albus in a higher drive. He needs to be apprehended before something else happens." She stepped away from her desk and approached the painting of an old man, whose brown eyes were regarding her calmly. One of the former Headmasters. "Leonard, I need you to inform every painting in the castle to put more of their strength in the defence wards. Especially the ones that are closest to the wards."

The man bobbed his head. "Certainly, Headmistress McGonagall. I'll inform them immediately." He rose up from his chair, making the pages of the book he had been reading flutter and then disappeared out of the frame.

"Potter, I need you to be more careful now," she ordered and turned around to look at him with a hard glint in her eyes. "As long as we don't know which student is aiding Albus, you'll need to be on your guard. Do not wander off alone. Make sure that someone else is always with you and keep your pets near you. In case of an attack, they can help you."

"All right," Harry answered, but the look on his face clearly stated his displeasure of the new order.

"I've also been recently made aware of a useful map that certain pranksters," she ignored the amused smiles on Black's and Lupin's faces, "created of Hogwarts. Keep that at all times with you – you never know when it may come in handy. Same goes for your father's Invisibility Cloak."

She nodded to Daphne. "Miss Greengrass, thank you for being willing to help Potter, despite everything that happened; please make sure that the wounds on your hands don't worsen."

"Yes, professor," Daphne replied and carefully flexed her hands, hissing almost inaudibly.

McGonagall gave them a sharp nod. "You may leave now. Go directly to your dormitories. I'll speak to the students during lunch."

They said their goodbyes and left the three adults behind.

"Well, this was an interesting morning," Daphne broke the silence after a short while.

Draco snorted. "That's one way to put it."

"Do you really think a student is capable of cursing a broom?" Harry asked softly and he frowned.

They arrived at the bottom of the staircase and the gargoyle slid aside to let them pass through.

"You heard Lupin – he never heard any of the teachers using a curse, so that leaves only the students," Daphne answered and shivered when the cold November wind made the windows rattle.

"I can't believe anyone would willingly help Dumbledore, even after the Ministry gave warning about him in the paper," Harry muttered and they made their way down to the dungeons.

Draco and Daphne shared a look; both knowing that the other one was having the same thought.
"Harry, normally I would have agreed with you, but you remember how the students reacted – and are still reacting – with your new place in Slytherin. If the old coot gave this person a convincing speech, then it's not that far-fetched to consider the possibility of a student helping him," Draco pointed out and reached for Harry's hand.

"I know that," Harry snapped annoyed and then shook his head. "I know, but it's just so hard to believe that someone would even go as far as trying to kill me, you know? I mean, I was used to murder attempts from Voldemort or his Death Eaters – I'm not used to having my life being threatened by a student."

"There you are! I was wondering where you two went to – you weren't in the Infirmary and I … Daphne?" Blaise approached them once they appeared in the dark dungeon hallway leading to the Slytherin common room and he looked perplexed. "What happened to your hands?"

They came to an abrupt halt and Draco cursed inwardly. He had forgotten about the small fact that Daphne was Blaise's girlfriend and of course he would notice that her hands were bandaged – they hadn't informed the Italian boy about the pregnancy yet, so he hadn't known about the plan to have Daphne using Glamours.

"Maybe it's time you two told him about it?" Daphne broke the awkward silence and she bit in her lower lip, before releasing it quickly.

"Tell me about what? What's going on?" Blaise asked suspiciously. "Daphne, why are your hands bandaged?"

Harry sighed and looked at Draco. "I guess it's time we inform him about it. What do you think?" he asked, glancing at Blaise, who was growing more and more confused with every second that passed without explanation.

Draco clucked his tongue and nodded. "I guess we have no choice. At least he can keep his mouth shut," he murmured darkly.

"For the love of Merlin, will someone please tell me what is happening?" Blaise exclaimed frustrated and scowled at them.

"I think it's best if we go to my room," Harry muttered. "I don't want anyone else to overheard this." He turned around and choose the path that would lead them to his quarters. "Besides, our pets are probably worried," he added.

Draco beckoned Blaise and Daphne to follow them (both had been informed earlier why Harry had gotten his own private quarters, though they didn't know where it was nor the password that was required to enter the rooms). It seemed that it had become time to inform his best friend about his impending fatherhood.

Well, he thought faintly amused. At least this time it won't be as nerve racking as the other times.

One had to count the small blessings in life after all.

"So you discovered no disturbances in the wards?" Remus asked and Salazar shook his head.

"No, I apologize, but ever since the wards have been erected, I have sensed no interruption in them. They are still working like they should be."

Remus and Sirius had left Minerva's office after they had discussed the Quidditch match in more
detail. They had had the intent to go to their own rooms, but had been stopped by the doe Patronus of Snape, who had urged them to come to his quarters immediately.

Bewildered and quite curious, they had turned around and had instead of going up, gone down, into the dark, cold dungeons.

When they had arrived in Snape's quarters, Lucius had already been there, seated on a comfortable armchair with a glass of Old Berton's Cognac in his hand.

It turned out that Salazar had wanted to speak to them after he had been informed by the other portraits of the happenings on the Quidditch field.

"Well, damn," Sirius muttered and frowned. "It seems that a student is really working together with that bastard. How the hell are we going to discover who that student is?"

"That I can't help you with," Salazar replied and shook his head, crossing his leg over the other one. Snape looked at him sharply. "Is there something you can help us with?"

"As a matter of fact, yes, I think I can help you with something."

That got everyone's attention.

"With what exactly can you provide us help?" Lucius raised an eyebrow and took a sip of his cognac.

"Ever since young Mister Potter found me and brought me here, I've wondered what had become of my comrades," Salazar started and he frowned. "You see, each one of us has one portrait to avoid Hogwarts becoming confused should one of us use magic. The plan was to have our portraits in a private chamber next to the library where people could come talk to us if they needed help."

"There is no chamber next to the library," Remus interrupted and he furrowed his eyebrows. As someone who had spent the majority of his school time in the library, he was well acquainted with the hallway and its different rooms wherein the library was located and he had never seen a room right next to the library.

"That's because that chamber operates on the same system as the Room of Requirements does," Salazar replied faintly amused.

"Room of Requirements?" Lucius repeated, placing his glass down at the table.

"It's a room on the seventh floor that's hidden unless you know exactly where it is located," Sirius explained. "You need to walk three times in front of the hidden door and think of the room you need or the thing you need and after three times a door will appear. Basically that room can provide anything as long as it isn't a human being or animal. Harry had the meetings for the defence club there."

"I never heard of that room before," Lucius muttered.

"That's because very few know of it," Sirius smirked.

"Indeed, but with this particular room you had to tap seven times on the wall and then the door would appear," Salazar said and tapped his fingers on the arm of his chair.

"I assume that the students were made aware of this chamber?" Snape inquired and stared intently at
the Founder.

Salazar inclined his head. "Yes, each year the information was given at the beginning of the Feast."

"How come we never heard of it?" Sirius asked bewildered.

"Ah," Salazar breathed out and he acquired a glowering look. "That's because our dear ex Headmaster decided that we were being too smart and too independent for him to handle and he managed to remove us from our wall when Hogwarts was distracted by Giants of the North attacking. By the time she discovered our absence, it was already too late for her to help us."

"So you were separated and put into different places all over Hogwarts?" Lucius asked, a pensive look on his face.

"Not exactly." Salazar shook his head. "This is what I was investigating last year. While I was indeed put in a hallway that nobody used – and therefore the chance of someone discovering my presence was almost non existant – it seems that the other three have been removed completely from Hogwarts."

"What?" Remus stared at him stupefied. "What do you mean, removed completely? As in they aren't in the castle anymore?"

"No, I can't feel their presence anywhere; none of the portraits have seen them or spoken to them after that one night and Hogwarts hasn't any knowledge about their whereabouts either," Salazar answered and he sounded faintly annoyed. "So it seems that Albus brought my three comrades somewhere else; a place where they can't come into contact with either Hogwarts or someone else."

"All right, so this proves that Dumbledore is even more of a bastard than we already thought," Sirius said and he narrowed his eyes. "But why do you suddenly come up with this story?"

"Black, would it kill you to just shut up and be patient?" Snape bit out annoyed.

Salazar gazed at them serenely before his mouth curled up in a small smile. "I couldn't help but overhearing Mister Potter's conversation with Potion's Master Snape a couple of weeks ago."

"What conversation?" Lucius raised an eyebrow.

Snape hissed and he scowled. "You mean the conversation in which they told me Potter is pregnant."

Salazar nodded. "That one indeed. Now after what happened last year, I can imagine that Mister Potter has brought himself into more danger by deciding to keep the child."

"We warned them of the danger, but they have assured us they know what they are getting into," Lucius murmured.

"Of course; I am in no way accusing them of being airheaded Hufflepuffs. From what I have seen, Mister Potter and Mister Malfoy are responsible adults," Salazar replied and huffed amused. "But that doesn't eliminate the fact that with this baby, Mister Potter has become more vulnerable in case of an attack."

"Where are you going with this?" Remus asked calmly, but narrowed his eyes.

"You need a way to defeat Dumbledore for good."
"Yes, we know." Snape rolled his eyes. "But as I'm certain you remember, Albus isn't exactly a weak, old man who will let us bind him without putting up a fight. The four of us are probably not strong enough to keep him contained during the Binding," he continued bitterly.

"That is why you need a strong Binding ritual," Salazar answered calmly.

"Well, yes, I can understand that," Lucius said. "But as Severus has told you, the four of us are not strong enough to keep him contained during the Binding."

"Do you know which beings can create the strongest Binding ritual?"

The four men stared at him; all of them getting the feeling they knew where Salazar was leading this conversation to.

"A Nemean; an Akeyra; an Izo leopard; a Aer eagle and four Masters of the Elements," Salazar summed up and tapped each name off on one of his fingers. He then smirked at them. "The four Masters of the Elements don't have to be alive; their ghosts or magical residue leaked into portraits will suffice for this type of ritual."

"You mean …" Sirius started slowly, a look of incredulity passing over his face.

"Currently you're looking at one Master of the Elements – and your godson and his partner possess the four Elemental Creatures," Salazar answered and his smirk grew more pronounced. "You have five beings at your disposal already – only three left to go. Are you ready to start the hunt for the three other beings?"

The four men glanced at each other and all knew they didn't need to speak out loud to confirm what they all knew.

*Well, this certainly is an interesting day,* Remus thought bewildered.

It wasn't every day you got challenged by a Master of the Elements to complete a hunt. And who were they to say no to it?
Godric Gryffindor Part 1

Chapter Notes

Originally this chapter wasn't supposed to get cut into two parts. But the chapter is turning out to be quite long, so I decided to cut it into two to make the reading easier and to give you something to read while I work on the second part.

I'll try to have the next chapter out as soon as possible.

Warnings: eh, nothing special in this chapter to be honest. Just the building up to the discovery of the first Master of the Elements

Disclaimer: I don't own Harry Potter - J.K. Rowling owns it

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27th of November

The day after the disastrous Quidditch match Draco and Harry had taken to staying inside Harry's quarters. The day before during lunch, McGonagall had announced that Quidditch would be discontinued for the entire school year and like predicted, the students didn't react well to that. Even with the Headmistress' explanation that it was to avoid more accidents like the one that had occurred during the match, the students weren't placated and had been pissed off that their favourite sport got banned.

The rest of the day the whole castle had been swallowed up by a pool of frustration and anger and at least nine students had been sent to the Infirmary first and then to their Head's office in that order to receive their punishment of attacking other students.

Considering the Slytherins were still regarded warily at best and hostile at worst by the other Houses, Harry had thought it best to stay in his room for the rest of the weekend, to give the rest of the school the time to cool off. Even though he could defend himself well and was using the protection charms around his stomach every time he went outside his rooms, he didn't want to risk getting hit by a spell. So he and Draco were cooped up in his quarters – not that they minded much.

"Yes! I'm finally done with that essay for Care of Magical Creatures!" Harry exclaimed and groaned when he stretched his arms. For the past three hours he had been working diligently at his three foot long essay about the Nundu, a giant animal that looked similar to a leopard. Fortunately for the students, Hagrid had decided that trying to import a real Nundu was too risky, considering it took more than a hundred wizards to subdue the dangerous animal and had ordered them to write an essay about the habitat and ways that the Nundu could be subdued aside from Stunning spells.

Draco looked up from his own essay of Healing. "I'm surprised Hagrid actually gives you homework," he remarked casually and Harry threw him a glance.

"Occasionally he does, but that's only when it concerns animals that he either can't find or are too dangerous to import," he replied and rolled up the parchment after the ink had dried up, putting it next to his essay for Defence against the Dark Arts and Curses.
He saw Draco opening his mouth and anticipating the sharp, cynical retort, he shook his head and said, "Don't."

"You don't even know what I was going to say!" Draco protested petulantly.

Harry stood up and after stretching his back, he made his way across the room, sitting down on the couch next to Draco, who had pushed his essay further away on the table.

"I've known you since I was eleven, Draco – it doesn't take a genius to imagine what you were going to say," he retorted drily.

Draco rolled his eyes. "You have to admit that that oa – Hagrid's opinion about what's dangerous and what's not is shrewd," he shot back, clumsily covering up his half formed insult.

Harry grimaced, knowing that the blond was right. "All right, so he gets a bit enthusiastic sometimes," he muttered and shrugged.

"A bit," Draco snorted. He shook his head and glanced at Harry's stomach. "How's the morning sickness by the way?"

"Well, it's easing up a bit," Harry replied. "Not that I complain."

Draco sighed. "Well, you're three months pregnant now – we really need to do the first check-up."

"Yeah, but who's going to help us?" Harry frowned, biting his lower lip. "I don't want to go to the Infirmary, but going to Saint Mungos is even more risky."

"No other option than to contact mother," Draco murmured and grabbed a blank sheet of parchment. "She'll probably be able to help us."

Harry watched passively how Draco started writing the letter to his mother, requesting her help. He shifted a bit, crossing his legs and wondered what the first check-up would entail. The baby was still very small, so they couldn't identify the gender yet. But check-ups consisted of more than only checking the gender, right?

"What is going to happen during the first check-up?" Harry asked when he saw Draco finishing up his letter.

"Hm?" Draco glanced at him surprised. "You don't know?"

Harry shrugged, his eyes gazing down at the carpet, while his fingers began to tug at the small, thin threads that made up the couch. "I've never known a pregnant woman before, so …" he trailed off.

"Well," Draco started thoughtfully. "The check-up is to make sure that the baby is growing as it should and your vitals and that of the baby will be checked as well. Depending on the results, you can get more potions prescribed if it's deemed necessary."

"Oh Merlin, not more potions," Harry groaned, scowling at the ground.

Draco ignored his interruption and continued serenely, "And they'll probably check your magic levels as well."

Harry looked up curiously. "My magic levels? Why?"

"You know how the baby is feeding of your nutrition?"
Harry nodded, feeling confused as to what this had to do with his magic.

"Well, the same goes for your magic. The baby not only needs part of your nutrition to grow, but part of your magic as well. The baby also needs the magic of the other father to grow, so it's always recommended that both parents stay close to each other. So they'll check your magic levels to make sure that everything is balanced and that not too many magic goes to the baby or too little."

"What happens if the other parent isn't close enough?"

Draco looked gravely. "Then there is a possibility that the pregnancy will get terminated, because of the great imbalance of magic in the baby," he answered softly.

"What?" Harry stared at him shocked and his hand flew out to cover his stomach almost automatically.

"But you don't have to worry about that, Harry," Draco hurried to reassure him. "Parents can easily be apart for weeks before the situation starts to get bad. They would have to be apart for months to land in such a dire situation."

Harry swallowed, his mouth dry. "I didn't know that," he whispered. "I thought that it would be like a woman's pregnancy. None of the books said it could be so dangerous."

"That's because those books were written by people who have lived their whole life in the Wizarding World – they assume that everyone knows about this fact," Draco replied calmly and turned around to face him completely, taking Harry's hands in his own. "Hey, no freaking out, all right? Nothing is going to happen with our baby. The check-up is just a formality, that's all."

"Sorry," Harry smiled ruefully. "I don't know why I started to panic so quickly. It's not like you and I are separated for long."

Draco smiled crookedly. "I think that your, eh, father instinct is making itself known."

Harry looked at him questioningly and Draco elaborated, "Because you're the one carrying the baby, you'll worry more easily when it comes to the safety of the baby. It's natural."

"I could do without the panicking, though," Harry muttered darkly and Draco chuckled, kissing him on his lips.

They broke apart when they heard the painting open and Remus appeared in the living room, raising his eyebrow when he saw them sitting on the couch with their homework spread out around them.

"Remus," Harry said surprised. "What are you doing here?"

Remus smiled thinly and the look in his eyes sharpened, making both boys sit up in wary. "I'm sorry for disturbing your study session, but I need you both and your pets to come with me."

"Why?" Draco frowned.

"Salazar told Sirius, Severus, Lucius and I something very interesting and you need to hear it as well," Remus replied, his gaze flickering from them to Ruby and Mara when they slunk out of the bedroom, Sapphire sitting sleepily on top of Mara's back. Garin slithered from underneath the couch, and slid across Harry's body until his body was draped across his waist with his head right next to Harry's ear.

"My father is here?" Draco asked perplexed.
Remus nodded. "He stayed the night after he got informed about the Quidditch match," he murmured and turned around.

"Oh." Draco blinked. "Do I need to pick up Rowen as well?"

"No need," Mara informed him drily. "Rowen is on his way."

When they exited Harry's quarters, the sound of flapping wings reached their ears and they turned their heads, seeing Rowen flying towards them, his eyes glittering eerily in the candle light.

Rowen landed carefully on Mara's back and cocked his head. "Is it time?"

The question seemed to be directed at the animals and not their masters, even though the three men could hear Rowen through their mental link.

"Yes, a Master of the Elements has made his decision," Ruby answered and yawned.

"Master of the Elements?" Harry repeated with a frown. "What are you talking about?"

Mara snorted and started to make her way to Snape's quarters. "You'll find out soon enough what we're talking about."

Harry pursed his lips in annoyance, but followed Mara, clearly having no other choice.

Sirius looked up from his place on the couch when they entered the living room and narrowed his eyes when the animals came into view.

Sapphire meowed in greeting and jumped on the couch, purring while she kneaded one of the thin pillows.

"Are your quarters big enough for all of us?" Sirius questioned with a raised eyebrow.

Snape smiled thinly and responded in a poisonous tone, "Dogs should stay outside, so if you feel cramped, you can always leave, mutt."

Sirius threw him a dark glare and opened his mouth to deliver a venomous retort, but Remus shook his head sharply.

"Not now, Sirius. Harry and Draco need to hear Salazar's plan," he sighed and beckoned the boys to sit on a transfigured couch, considering all the other available seating furniture were already occupied.

"Salazar's plan?" Draco repeated suspiciously and glanced at the portrait, who smiled serenely back.

Mara snorted and laid down on the rug between the couches and armchairs. Rowen snapped his beak in irritation, because his grip on Mara's back became unsteady when she started lying down. He ruffled his feathers in agitation and squeaked in warning until Mara stilled with a huff.

Ruby rolled his eyes and laid down next to Mara, both their tails brushing against one another and shooting off little sparks every time the flames touched.

Garin slid off Harry's shoulders and curled up on Ruby's back, looking like a bumpy, round pillow.

"What is this plan?" Harry furrowed his eyebrows, not understanding what was going on. The older
men seemed tense, yet at the same time looked determined to do something.

"Have your pets informed you about their origin?" Salazar asked, placing his right leg over the other one.

"Origin? I assume you're not talking about their original home," Draco remarked, his eyes narrowed. Salazar chuckled and shook his head. "No, I'm talking about their name – the name which is very well known in legends. Legends, Mister Malfoy, which you should have heard of before."

"About which legends are you …"

"The legend of the Elemental Creatures and the Masters of the Elements, Draco,' Lucius clarified, casting an intense look at the animals, who returned a blank stare.

Draco's breath stilled from surprise. "But those are just legends! Rumours based on stories from the time of Merlin!"

"Obviously they weren't just merely rumours," Snape remarked drily. "The proof is lying on my carpet and hanging on the wall."

"What are you all talking about?" Harry asked bewildered, having the feeling he was missing out quite a bit.

"I assume you are not familiar with the legends of our world, Mister Potter?" Salazar remarked, not looking surprised at all.

Bemused, Harry shook his head. From what he had heard so far, it seemed that his and Draco's pets and Salazar were connected somehow with this particular legend of the Elemental Creatures. But what on earth was this legend about?

"In short, the Elemental Creatures were said to have immense power and each one of them was bonded to an element of the earth – that's why they are called the Elemental Creatures. There is only one of them – as long as the current Creature is alive, no other Creatures will be born. In that aspect, they are related to the Phoenix," Draco started to explain, a distant look in his eyes. "Legends say that if the time came for the Creatures to die, they each built a nest and then disappeared in their own element; the Creature of Fire would disappear in a giant flame, the Creature of Water would be swept away with water, the Creature of Air would be taken up by a strong wind and the Creature of Earth would get buried. From their ashes, a new Creature would be born."

"And, eh, what do these Elemental Creatures do? Do they stay in a certain place or …" Harry trailed off, slowly starting to realize where this story was going to.

Draco blinked and looked at him. "They are elusive beings – the last semi-official record states that they were seen by Merlin's side, which led to researchers of that legend concluding that they were drawn to people with incredible power – more powerful than other people and whose amount of power nearly reached that of the Elemental Creatures. You can imagine of course why only stories are told about these Creatures."

"Yeah, I can see that," Harry muttered and looked at his pets warily. "But what does that have to do with these Masters of the Elements?"

"I'm getting to that," Draco smiled faintly. "The Masters of the Elements are very powerful wizards and witches, who have a bond with the elements of nature. Even after their deaths, they keep their title. The link between these Masters and the Elemental Creatures is simple: either they have a bond
with the Creatures or they have been in contact with them." He threw Salazar a half exasperated glance and continued, "There are a couple of known Masters: Merlin, Morgana, Circe and it was rumoured that the Four Founders were Masters as well." The blond snorted and looked at his father shrewdly. "I'm guessing that particular rumour is an actual fact?"

Lucius nodded. "Yes, Salazar confirmed it today."

Harry mulled over the information he had been given. So, the Founders were the Masters of the Elements and apparently his and Draco's pets were unique animals called Elemental Creatures.

He blinked and rubbed thoughtfully over his forehead. Well, he had known that his pets couldn't possibly be normal. But to hear they were unique creatures …

Shaking his head, he felt a spike of annoyance shooting through his body. His pets had been with him for nearly two years now and yet had never cared to mention that particular fact. How many other things had they kept silent about? What reason did they have to keep quiet about it?

"Is there a reason why you never mentioned this to us?" Harry asked irritated and scowled.

Mara looked up and replied flatly, "You never asked."

"Of course; because everyone always asks their pets whether or not they are special," he muttered darkly and Sirius snorted amused.

"But what does this have to do with whatever Salazar has planned?" Draco frowned and absentmindedly reached out with one arm to hug Harry against his side.

"Before we can explain the plan, we have to ask first whether you have heard of Binding rituals?" Remus asked and shifted a bit on his seat.

"Is that a ritual meant to bind someone's magic, so it can't be used anymore?" Harry replied idly and blinked when the others looked at him in astonishment. "What?" he asked rather defensively.

"How do you know that?" Sirius questioned surprised. "Binding rituals aren't in the curriculum of Hogwarts."

"Oh." Harry licked his lips and moved restlessly on the couch. "Last year when Draco and I had lessons in Dark Curses, I read a paragraph about Binding rituals in one of those books."

"And I have heard about them, because my great grandfather was saying that some … people were better off without magic," Draco added and a disturbed look crossed his face momentarily before his expression smoothed over.

Harry caught a glimpse of the dark look and squeezed Draco's thigh, receiving a terse smile as response.

Lucius seemed to mutter something along the lines of "Should have Silenced him like I intended to," but Remus continued in a slightly louder voice, "At least we don't have to explain what such a ritual entails; that makes it a bit easier," he smiled weakly.

"You see, we had thought about using a Binding ritual on Dumbledore to defeat him," Sirius said, taking over the explanation. "But we had the problem of not being strong enough to subdue the old bastard while we perform the ritual." He scowled and huffed, but continued in a strained voice, "So Salazar told us about the plain where he and the other Masters, together with your pets, would loan us their power while we'll perform the ritual."
"Would their power be enough to bind the coot for the rest of his life?" Draco asked, cocking his head to the right.

Salazar chuckled amused. "Have no fear – our powers combined will be more than enough to ensure that Dumbledore won't ever pose a threat again." His teeth glinted ominously when he smiled.

"So we need the rest of the Founders if we want to succeed with this plan," Harry said slowly. "You were placed in an unused hallway, so could the rest of the Founders be found in other unused places in Hogwarts?"

"That's where a problem rises," Snape muttered, grimacing.

"A problem?" Harry echoed bemused, feeling resignation starting to settle in his body. Of course it wouldn't be easy to even start putting the plan together – they didn't have that much luck.

"My comrades cannot be found in this castle anymore. It seems that Dumbledore managed to take them away when Hogwarts was fighting off the Giants of the North," Salazar answered darkly and even with him being merely a painting, Harry could feel him radiating a murderous aura, making him shiver in apprehension.

"So we have a good plan, but not all participants," Draco said flatly. "Marvellous."

Lucius regarded him calmly. "That is why our main objective for now will be searching for the three other Masters and retrieve them."

Draco raised an eyebrow and looked sceptically. "That is obvious, but where on earth are we going to search? I very much doubt that Dumbledore has left behind a list with the locations," he snorted.

"With that attitude, you won't find them, no," Snape barked and his godson was sufficiently cowed, knowing better than to push his luck.

"But Draco has a point," Harry remarked. "Where are we going to search? We have no clue as to where to start searching and we can't narrow down the possible locations without at least one clue."

The other men scowled lightly, but couldn't argue with that. How would they start searching without even one clue as to where to start? The stakes were high, yet their chances were not looking good.

"If I may make a suggestion?" Salazar broke through the broody silence.

"Knowing the old man, he probably would have hidden my comrades in places with a lot of magic – that would make it easy to hide their presence," Salazar mused. "I'd suggest you start compiling a list of old places filled with a lot of magic and which are isolated. And places he could be familiar with. Those places are the best option for now."

Sirius nodded slowly, his eyes looking distant while his fingers tapped on the arm of his chair. "That makes sense," he murmured thoughtfully. "It would certainly give us a place to start."

"That is settled then," Lucius said abruptly. "We will compile a list of possible locations and we'll discuss that list next week."

"All right." Harry nodded.

Old, isolated, magic filled locations, huh? Hopefully the library would be helpful.
"Don't let anyone else know about this, understood?" Snape said sharply.

Harry rolled his eyes and huffed. "We're not stupid," he muttered and threw the older man a glare when he had the audacity to snort.

"Is there anything else that we need to talk about?" Draco asked.

Remus shook his head. "No, you can go back."

They said their goodbyes and left, together with their pets, back to Harry's quarters.

"Well, that was an interesting talk," Harry murmured and sank down on the couch, staring thoughtfully at the crackling fire.

Ruby yawned and curled up in front of the fireplace, Mara joining him, while Garin slithered underneath the couch and Sapphire jumped on the furniture and demanded to be petted. Rowan had gone back to the Owelry.

Draco frowned and sat next to his lover. "Yes, it was. It isn't going to be easy to compile a list of such places," he mused and Harry leant against him, putting one arm around Draco's waist.

"Do you think the library could offer some information?"

The blond heaved a sigh. "I don't know; it's worth a try of course. But we'll probably have to search in the back of the library to find books about a subject like that. It's not like students have a need for that kind of information."

Harry bit his lip. "It makes me wonder why Dumbledore removed the other three Founders. I mean why leave Salazar in the castle, but take the others away? That doesn't make any sense."

Draco shifted a bit, which caused Harry's head to land on his chest, making him look up at the blond.

"Well, what if he just wanted to separate them and he only knew four places?" Draco said slowly and his hand started to absentmindedly caress Harry's stomach over his shirt. "It couldn't have been easy to take the Founders off the wall, even with Hogwarts distracted. So what if he assumed it would be easier to leave one Founder in the school, but without any contact to the wall or with other portraits and hide the other three somewhere else?"

Harry furrowed his eyebrows, thinking it over. "That is a possibility," he muttered after a short moment of silence. "It's not going to be easy to find those places."

Draco snorted. "When has anything ever been easy when it is connected with you?" he asked rhetorically and chuckled softly when Harry smacked his arm in retaliation.

"Shut up," Harry huffed and slightly pouted.

Silence covered them like a blanket and they stayed in that position for a long time; Harry drawing circles on Draco's arm while Draco's hand caressed his stomach.

When the clock announced it was three p.m. Harry stretched and sat up with a groan. "Guess it's time we start on our homework again," he muttered and stood up.

Draco groaned in dismay. "Guess we don't have a choice," he murmured and pulled one of his books towards him while Harry made his way over to his homework.

He had just started reading a text for his Charms homework and was about to take notes when a
hissed curse startled him. "What's wrong?"

"I forgot to give the letter I'd written to my mother to my father. He was here and I could have given it to him, because that would have been quicker than owl post," Draco replied and smacked his forehead, glaring at the offending letter in question, as if it was its fault that the blond had forgotten about it.

Harry snorted amused, not used to Draco doing such an unMalfoy thing like smacking his forehead. "Well, go on then. Maybe if you're quick, you can still catch him. Otherwise you have to go up to the Owelry."

A heavy, frustrated sigh escaped Draco's mouth, but he picked up the letter and quickly left the room, while Harry chuckled softly before he sobered up and started on his homework.

"Do you have something?"

Classes were over for today and both boys could be found in the library, seated on a table far from the other ones, giving them a sense of privacy while they were surrounded by piles of thick, old books; Madam Pince threw them suspicious looks whenever she passed them on her quest to reorganize the entire library, but as long as they didn't damage her precious tomes, she didn't say anything.

Draco snorted and threw his quill down, rubbing distractedly over his hand. "Not much. I thought about Stonehenge, considering there is a lot of magical residue in the stones and I even wrote down the Black and the Malfoy Manor – though I suppose that was a waste of ink, because I seriously doubt Dumbledore managed to enter those manors undetected." He glanced at the dark haired boy sitting across from him. "Do you have anything?"

Harry shook regretfully his head. "I don't know much about magical places and these books don't provide much information. I thought about adding Gringotts to the list, but would Dumbledore put the paintings there?"

"No; it's useless to add that one to the list," Draco replied calmly. "Even if Dumbledore had been planning on putting the paintings there, the goblins wouldn't have accepted them."

Harry furrowed his eyebrows and looked at the blond quizzically. "Why not? I thought goblins didn't ask questions when it came to stuff being deposited in the vaults?"

"Usually they don't question it, no." Draco shook his head and brushed his hair out of his face. "But even they have certain restrictions – like items belonging to the Founders. They won't accept any item that belonged to the Founders – even a painting – because they don't want to risk Hogwarts getting mad."

Harry blinked and asked bemused, "Why and how would Hogwarts get mad at the goblins? I mean, it's a castle – it can't move or throw curses."

Grey eyes looked at him incredulously. "Are you serious?"

"What?" Harry asked and narrowed his eyes, not liking the condescending tone he heard.

"Hogwarts contains so much magic that she would easily be able to attack Gringotts if she wanted to, by just throwing a mass of pure magic at them," Draco explained, casting a wary look at the walls. "The Founders are connected to Hogwarts – hell, they built her after all – so she wouldn't like it if their items were hidden away in the Gringotts' vaults."
"So the Founders didn't have vaults then?" Harry asked perplexed.

"Oh, they did have them and I assume they deposited items in those vaults, but that's just it. If the Founders deposited their own items, Hogwarts wouldn't consider it a problem, because it's the Founder's decision. However someone else putting a Founder's item in their own vault, would be considered stealing by Hogwarts." Draco shrugged and took up his quill again. "The goblins have never been stupid – they are not about to risk their lives or their bank just for someone stupid enough to try and deposit a Founder's item."

"Oh." Harry blinked and stared down at his own parchment. After hearing Draco's explanation, he realized how little he still knew about the Wizarding World; would there ever come a time when he had finally learnt all what he need to know about this world? Or would he continue to be baffled and had to have things explained to him, because he hadn't been raised in this world?

"Well, either way, Gringotts can be removed from the list."

Harry nodded and resigned himself to browsing through another old, dusty book.

A shadow fell over their table and when they looked up, they saw Luna standing there, gazing at them with large, blue eyes while she was holding a small, black raven chick in her hands.

Harry wondered how on earth she had managed to pass Pince with the chick in her hands.

"Luna, what are you doing with that bird?" he asked curiously and cocked his head.

She smiled softly and petted the small head carefully, the bird letting out a shrill squeak. "The Nargels pushed him out of his nest," she murmured. "It can't fly yet, so I'm taking care of it."

"That's nice of you," Harry smiled and ignored Draco's baffled look. Even after all this time, his lover still didn't know how to act around Luna.

She blinked and leant over the table, her eyes sliding across the titles of the books and both boys tensed up. Even though Harry trusted her, he didn't know whether he could trust her with information as sensitive as this was.

Her blue eyes studied the books and then turned towards them, giving them an intense look that made Harry feel as if she was looking right into his soul.

The tense moment was broken when she started humming and straightened her back again.

"You know," she started dreamily while she raised the raven chick higher up in the air. "No matter how old people become, they always have a place in their heart for their home. There will always be something in their heart that tells them to return to the place where their life started. Moving forwards is good – but sometimes, going back is better." She threw them a mysterious smile. "After all, no matter what happens, you can't break your ties with your family."

She bowed, smiled brightly and then skipped away, her blonde, braided hair swishing back and forth on her back.

"What on earth was she talking about?" Draco asked flabbergasted, staring shocked at the disappearing girl.

Harry, however, frowned and stared at the first book on the pile nearest to him. Luna had been acting mysterious and cryptic like always – but usually she had a good reason for that. She was dreamy, yes; was not like anyone else, no; but she wasn't stupid either. She had her own view on the world
and it had become obvious long ago to Harry that she knew more than most people.

What had she been talking about? About family. About not being able to cut ties with them and about how people needed to go back sometimes instead of going forwards.

What did she mean with that? *Return to the place where life started* …

Could it be that … No, that would be too farfetched, right? There was no way Dumbledore would have been able to … But they had trusted him, so he could have easily gained access …

His hand shot out and grabbed the nearest tome and he flipped it open, his finger gliding across the index page, looking for the name he knew had to be in there.

"Harry?"

He ignored Draco's questioning gaze and continued looking through the index. He knew he had seen it somewhere in this book. He had quickly gone through the text, having thought it couldn't have been an option. But taking into account Luna's cryptic message, that place suddenly seemed far more reliable to contain a painting.

Letting out a soft, but triumphantly noise, Harry quickly flipped the pages until he landed on the needed chapter.

"Harry, what are you looking up?"

Harry raised a finger in the air to silence the other one and murmured, "Hush, Draco; I'll let you know in a minute what I've found."

Draco huffed, but returned his attention to his own book, though he kept shooting furtive glances at Harry, who was now completely immersed in the text.

'The Potter family – sometimes mockingly referred to as the Light family by their enemies, because of their preference for Light magic – is one of the oldest Pureblood lines that have survived the various wars plaguing the Wizarding World.

Like every other Pureblood family, the Potters pride themselves on having a famous, powerful ancestor who started the line. The Potter family is the only family that can state with absolute certainty that they are descendants of Godric Gryffindor, one of the Four Founders of Hogwarts and a Master of the Elements.

Other families have tried to lay claim on Gryffindor's name and heritage (including objects like the Sword, the Sorting Hat, vaults with books and gold, other objects which can be found in Potter Manor, etc.), yet only the Potters have proven to possess Gryffindor's blood.

Godric Gryffindor's heritage includes: the Sword (forged by the Wise Dragon and the Head Goblin); the Sorting Hat; the first of the Deathly Hallows, being the Invisibility Cloak (this is only a rumour, as nobody can state whether these Deathly Hallows really exist); the wand, made of …'

Harry stopped reading, his eyes staring blankly at the old, yellowed page.

Could the possibility of Gryffindor's painting being located in his family's manor be true? If they would visit the manor, would they find one of the missing Founders?
"All right, I believe I've waited long enough now," Draco interrupted his thought process annoyed. "What have you been reading?"

Harry licked his lips and spent a moment gathering his thoughts before he turned to face Draco and he replied softly, "Luna wasn't sprouting random things just now."

"Could have fooled me," Draco sneered derisively.

Aside from a reprimanding look, Harry ignored the blond's comment and continued, "She was giving us a hint where we can find the first Founder."

"A hint?" Draco repeated sceptically, but seemed intrigued all the same.

"Yes." Harry nodded and tapped on the page talking about the Potters. "When she talked about the necessity of going back and not being able to cut ties with the family, she was saying we need to go to Potter Manor – the place where my life started." He shoved the book to Draco, pointing at the paragraph mentioning Gryffindor. "Look, it says here that the Potters are heirs to Gryffindor – what if Dumbledore put Godric's painting in the Potter Manor?" Without realizing it, he started talking quicker in his excitement over his discovery. The more he thought about it, the more plausible it started to sound.

"All the requirements fit! It is an old place; filled with old magic; being a manor, it's most likely secluded and Dumbledore is most likely familiar with it. It all fits!"

Draco raised his eyes to look at him after reading quickly through the text and frowned, looking doubtful. "Harry, are you certain we can trust Lovegood? Her cryptic comment could have meant anything or nothing at all. There is a reason why the students nicknamed her Loony, you know."

But Harry was shaking his head and replied, "She isn't crazy, Draco. I trust her with my life and I trust her on this. Besides," he said, lowering his voice, casting a wary glance around him to make certain nobody was listening in on their conversation. "One of her cryptic messages already turned out to be true."

"What are you talking about?" Draco asked perplexed.

"The blanket she gave for my birthday – that's a baby blanket. Remember the card that came with it?" Harry's hand dipped down briefly to touch his stomach. "She knew I would get pregnant, Draco – that's why she sent that blanket."

Draco scowled and hissed. "Couldn't she have warned us with a clear message instead of that cryptic one?"

"Luna doesn't act like the rest of us," Harry reminded him and arched an eyebrow. "Besides, would we have believed her if she had told us I can get pregnant?"

Draco grumbled and looked put out, but didn't retort.

"So what do you think? Should we check out Potter Manor?"

Draco sighed and raked a hand through his hair. "I guess this is our best option so far. At least we have some kind of proof to back up our idea." He stared broodingly at the book. "Do you know where the manor is located?"

Harry chuckled sheepishly and rubbed the back of his neck. "Eh, I don't know to be honest. The Will never gave me the exact location."
Draco threw him an exasperated look and opened his mouth, but was cut off by Pince.

"The library is about to close," she snapped and stalked to the next table, urging the students there to leave.

Both boys grimaced and hurriedly packed their bags, directing the books to their places with magic as soon as they were certain Pince wasn't near to scold them about their 'vulgar treatment' of her books.

Mara and Ruby were brushing against their hips with every step they took while they made their way back to the dungeons, neatly avoiding the traps that Peeves had set up.

They had just arrived in the entrance hall when Draco's owl swooped through an open window and landed on Draco's shoulder, holding out his leg while he softly hooted a greeting.

"Good evening, boy, what do you have for me?" Draco murmured surprised and relieved the bird from his burden. "It's from my mother," he said surprised when he glanced at the name.

"Probably her answer," Harry muttered. "Let's read it in my room."

Draco nodded and put the letter in his pocket. He petted the owl's head and said apologetically, "Sorry, boy, but I don't have any treats with me now. If you'll come back tomorrow during breakfast, I'll give you some bacon."

His owl hooted in apparent agreement and after nipping his finger lovingly, he flew away to his spot in the Owelry, while the boys continued their way to the dungeons.
Chapter Notes

Author's note: Yes, you are not wrong: this is indeed a new chapter - and I didn't make you guys wait for more than a month! A slight improvement LOL I'm working on the next chapter already, so I try to have that one posted as soon as possible, but you know the drill by now.

Anyway, yes, this is the second part, but they won't encounter Gryffindor yet *clears throat* I know I said in the other chapter that they would encounter Gryffindor, but well, the chapter was starting to get really long and I figured I best gave you something to read instead of making you wait longer for who knows how long. So there will be a third part in which they will finally encounter Gryffindor (I swear they will really find him in the next chapter)

Warnings: hm, nothing really special. A check-up for the baby and the departure to Potter Manor

Disclaimer: I don't own Harry Potter - J.K. Rowling owns it.

Chapter 14: Godric Gryffindor Part 2

"Let's see who mother recommends," Draco muttered once he and Harry had settled themselves comfortably on the couch, while their pets were enjoying the warmth of the fire in the fireplace.

Harry nodded and together they started reading.

Dear son

Before I give you my recommendation of a trustworthy Healer, I hope you won't mind my asking how you and Harry are doing. I sincerely hope Severus' potions are helping Harry, for I recall how bad my symptoms were when I was pregnant.

I want to apologize for not replying immediately, but I was doing research as you both deserve the best Healer. I found a very trustworthy, reliable, good Healer. You will probably be surprised to hear that this particular Healer is none other than Harry's guardian, Remus Lupin.

He apparently received his Healing's License two years after he graduated, but because of his magical creature status, it seems he was nowhere hired, despite his qualifications.

I presume you will not find anybody else who is better suited for this job than Mister Lupin. I suggest you ask him whether he is willing to perform the check-ups.

Should he not be willing to perform these check-ups, let me know and I will give you the name of the Healer who helped me.

Take care of yourself and of Harry and the baby.

All my love
"Remus has a Healing's License?" Harry asked incredulously, squinting his eyes as if that would improve his reading abilities.

"I take it he never mentioned it?" Draco retorted drily, but most of his attention was still on the letter. So Lupin had a Healing's License; that would of course be easy for them if the man agreed to help them.

Draco sincerely hoped Lupin would agree to help them, because he was probably the only Healer Harry would be willing to trust now.

Not that Draco could blame Harry for his distrust after what had happened in the Infirmary and the whimsical nature of the public towards their Saviour, but it made it difficult to find someone Harry was willing to trust.

"When are we going to ask Remus about the check-ups?" Harry broke through his musing and Draco glanced at him.

"We could ask him this weekend; we're meeting up with them to talk about the locations after all," he replied idly and folded up the letter.

"Do you think we'll be allowed to go to Potter Manor if they decide to go?" Harry asked curiously and kicked off his shoes, stretching his legs and flexing his toes in his socks before he curled them underneath him.

Draco looked at him, slightly amused. "So certain Lovegood is right with her comment?"

Harry shrugged and looked back with bright eyes. "I don't see why she would be mistaken now," he replied calmly. "If she says we can find one of the Founders there, we will find one."

Draco didn't see the need to hide his exasperation and rolled his eyes, prompting the other boy to scowl and give him a stomp.

Draco let a small chuckle escape and rubbed the sore spot on his arm and then answered, "They need you to come along with them, because as a Potter, you're the only one who can bypass the wards and reset them to allow the rest of us to enter. And there is no way I'm staying behind," he added with a scowl.

Harry blinked and looked worried. "How am I supposed to reset the wards? I've never done that before! Is there some sort of spell for it?"

"No, there isn't a spell for that. It's a complicated theory, but just remember for now that the combination of the wards recognizing you as the rightful heir and your will, will be sufficient enough to reset the wards," Draco answered soothingly and shook his head when Harry still looked worried. "Harry, there is no need to worry about it. If we go to the Manor, you'll know what to do once you're inside the wards."

"If you say so," Harry muttered unconvinced and gasped when his legs were suddenly pulled from underneath him, making him fall back on the couch.

Draco wrapped his legs around his hips and hitched them slightly higher so that Harry could get a better grip around him. He bent down and smirked; his lips were right above Harry's and when he breathed out slowly, Harry opened his mouth almost automatically, while his arms came up to wrap
around his shoulders.

"What?" he asked softly and looked at him curiously.

"I think it's time I take your mind off your worries," Draco murmured and smiled when an airy chuckle escaped Harry's throat.

"Oh? How are you going to do that?" Emerald green eyes glittered amused, though his pupils slowly grew bigger as if he already had predicted what Draco would answer.

Draco smirked and whispered into Harry's ear, "Why don't I show you?"

Harry's squeak and moan that followed Draco's statement were enough evidence to prove that Harry didn't mind Draco showing him what he meant.

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3rd of December

Remus blinked and put the paper down, musing over the content of it.

They were once again all seated in Severus' quarters, various papers laid out on the table while their content was being discussed.

Most of the locations they had found had seemed slightly logical at best, but Harry's discovery was the most interesting of them all and it made him wonder why he and Sirius hadn't come up with it. They had after all visited that particular manor before when their best friend was still alive, but it hadn't come up once in either of their mind to write down that location.

"So Miss Lovegood gave you the hint?" Severus asked sceptically.

Harry nodded, his hands slightly clenched in his lap. "Yes, she must have seen the titles of the books we were looking through and made the connection. She didn't outright state that we had to go visit the manor, but she did hint at it."

"You mean, she made a cryptic remark and then pranced away with her head in the clouds like usual," Draco muttered underneath his breath and stifled a yelp when Harry gave his thigh a pinch, scowling at him.

Severus looked irritated. "Didn't I specifically told you to keep the research a secret?"

"We did, sir," Harry retorted, slightly annoyed. "But Luna has always had a way of discovering things."

"You think we can trust this Miss Lovegood?" Lucius asked and he looked concerned.

Remus thought it was both his worry that they were being misled by the girl and him wanting to avoid a discussion between Harry and Severus that made him interrupt the conversation so suddenly.

Harry gazed at him calmly. "We can trust her, yes. If she says one of the portraits is in that manor, then we'll find one. She has never lied to me before."

"Well, it does sound plausible," Sirius said slowly, his eyes scanning the paper again.

"Have you seen the portrait in the Manor?" Lucius asked interested.

Sirius shook his head. "No, but that's not surprising. We tended to stay in James' wing, because that
one was big enough for all of us. We didn't see the need to go anywhere else in the Manor.

"So there is a big chance that we'll find the portrait if we search through the other wings," Remus added.

"So it is already decided that we will go search in Potter Manor?" Severus raised an eyebrow and sounded as if he was suppressing a sneer.

"Do you have a better idea?" Remus retorted calmly, but quickly enough as to prevent his lover from making a snide remark.

Sirius threw him an annoyed look, but he ignored his look and heard him huff in irritation, making Remus hide a smile.

His lover could be adorable in a weird way sometimes.

Severus glared at him venomously, but kept quiet.

"Thought so." Remus nodded satisfied.

"So it's decided? We'll start with Potter Manor?" Draco asked for confirmation. His hand was intertwined with Harry's and placed on Harry's thigh.

"It seems to be the best option now," Lucius confirmed. "We will probably have to Apparate, because the Floo network won't be connected between Hogwarts and the Manor."

"Yeah, about that." Sirius cleared his throat and looked uncomfortable. "We don't know the coordinates."

Harry blinked and furrowed his eyebrows. "What do you mean 'you don't know'? You just said that you visited my dad at the Manor!" he said incredulously.

"Yes, but your grandfather made it Unplottable after James and Lily moved to Godric's Hollow," Remus answered. "The information of the coordinates disappeared when the Manor was made Unplottable."

"Why did he make it Unplottable?" Harry asked bemused.

"As extra precaution – normally the Manor's defence wards would have been enough to keep Voldemort and his followers out, but he wanted to be certain." Sirius shrugged.

"Then why did my parents move out?"

"What do you mean?"

"If the Manor was as safe as you said it was – why did my parents move out then? Wouldn't it have been safer to stay in the Manor instead of relying on a Fidelius charm?"

"Harry does have a point," Draco said and he frowned. "I never gave it much thought, but it's indeed strange that the Potters decided to move out while they had a Manor that would have protected them."

Remus opened his mouth, but closed it again when he realized he didn't have an answer. Now that he thought about it, it was indeed strange that James and Lily had moved into a small cottage. When they had announced their moving, they had all been too busy with putting up Protection charms and Repelling spells to question their decision. He knew James' father had accepted Lily, despite her
blood status, so it couldn't have been that they had been kicked out.

What had made the couple decide to move out from the one place that could have protected them?

"I don't know, Harry," he muttered. "We were so caught up in the war that we never really thought about how strange it was for them to move out."

"But now that you mention it, it is strange that they exchanged the heavy protection for a cottage under the Fidelius charm," Sirius piped up and his fingers tapped on his leg. "I know Charlus offered to let them have a wing, but James never said why he refused that."

"I believe Albus convinced them to move into the cottage; for which reasons I do not know," Severus murmured and his dark eyes flashed momentarily with something Remus couldn't identify.

Harry looked troubled and he shifted a bit, his free hand clenching into a tight fist.

"Well, if it's Unplottable, how are we going to find it?" Draco asked and he casted a glance at Harry. His look seemed to convey something, for Harry took a deep breath, shook his head and the troubled look in his eyes cleared up, making space for a determined gaze.

"There is one spell that would be able to get past the restrictions of the Unplottable spell," Lucius mused and his eyes narrowed a bit. "I have to look it up in one of the books in the Manor, because I can't recall the specifics of it now, but that one should be able to help us find out where the Potter Manor is located." He crossed his legs. "I can look it up tonight and I'll let you know tomorrow what we need to do."

"Sounds fine with me," Sirius said, nodding. "When we have the coordinates, we'll need to ask Minerva to let us go visit it. I can't imagine her being happy if she found out we went without informing her." He winced and Remus grimaced, both recalling how furious she had gotten at times when the Marauders had done something that she considered to be way out of line.

"Now that that issue is settled for now, kindly remove yourselves from my quarters, as I still have work to do, unlike others," Severus spoke up harshly.

Remus raised an eyebrow, but decided it wasn't worth it to go against Severus and stood up, tugging on Sirius' arm to make him stand up as well.

"Will we meet up tomorrow here as well or in our quarters?" he asked and Sirius made an annoyed tsk sound.

"I suppose people will start to question why three professors are regularly meeting up in the dungeons, so I propose we'll meet up in your quarters tomorrow," Lucius replied and Severus snorted, but didn't object.

"All right." Remus nodded. "We'll see you tomorrow then."

They exchanged their goodbyes and the four of them, with Mara and Ruby following their masters exited the quarters, stepping outside in the chilly dungeon hallway.

Sirius stretched his arms and cracked his wrists, making Remus wince and grimace. He hated it when Sirius made his bones crack.

"Well, at the very least we know where to start our search now," he sighed and rubbed his neck. "Who would have thought the painting would be in Potter Manor?"
"Remus, can we ask you something?" Harry asked and he sounded strangely nervous.

Remus blinked surprised. "Sure, what's the matter?"

With a quick snap, Draco had raised up a Privacy bubble around them and Remus felt Sirius tensing up beside him.

"Harry is due for his first check-up and we asked mother whether she knew someone who could help us," Draco started and looked at him speculatively. "She did some research and it turns out you have a Healing's License."

"So we want to ask you whether you want to do the check-ups," his cub added and his hand fleetingly dipped down to his stomach.

"You want me to do the check-ups?" Remus repeated baffled and wasn't certain whether he had heard correctly. They wanted him to do the necessary check-ups?

Yes, he did have a Healing's License, but various Healers had been quick to inform him that his magical being status would never get him any job as a Healer. Nobody would trust a werewolf to heal him or her and Remus had been forced to stop applying for a job as Healer when every application was turned down as soon as they had made the link between his request of having two days off each month and his lycanthropy.

As a result, it had been years since he actually had practiced Healing. Aside from the occasional healing of cuts and bruises, he hadn't had anything to do with Healing and his knowledge had become passive instead of active.

He was certain he could recall the necessary spells and wand movements if he needed to, but the knowledge didn't come as quickly anymore as during the days when he was still practicing it daily.

"Yes; I don't trust anyone else," Harry replied and his jaw tightened visibly. "I don't want to risk either the students or the press finding out about the baby and frankly, I only trust you with this." Deep green eyes looked at him with complete trust.

It was stupid. Harry's reply shouldn't have made him feel like he was about to cry. He was nearly forty years old – there was no reason why his breath hitched and why his face felt uncomfortably warm, his eyes prickling; a tell-tale sign that he was about to start crying.

But it had been so long ago that he had heard the words 'I only trust you with this'. Lily had been the last one to utter those words when she had gone into labour a week earlier than expected and he had been the only one who had been qualified enough to help her. He had panicked in the beginning, certain he would screw up and harm either the mother or the child or even both, but Lily had calmed him down, assuring him she trusted him with her and her baby's life and that she didn't trust anyone else to help her deliver her son.

It went without saying that James and Sirius trusted him, even after discovering his dark secret, but nevertheless it had felt good to hear that he was trusted, despite the fact that he turned into a monster each month.

After Lily, nobody had ever spoken those words to him again. And now here they were, seventeen years later; Lily's son stating the same thing she had said.

"Remus?" Sirius murmured softly in his ear and brought him back out of his thoughts by touching his arm fleetingly.
He threw him a quick smile and turned back around to address the couple in front of him, "If that's the case, I'll be happy to help you."

Harry sighed relieved and his shoulders relaxed. "Oh thank Merlin. I was afraid you would refuse."

"When do you want to have the first check-up?" Remus asked, forcing himself to push back the memories of Lily and instead bring back the necessary knowledge to perform the check-up.

"Is it possible to have the check-up now?" Draco requested and his arm slipped around Harry's waist, the latter relaxing into his embrace.

"Eh, yes, no problem," Remus replied bemused. "It's probably easier to do the check-up in your room."

Harry nodded and they all made their way to Harry's quarters; the dragon yawned when Harry muttered the password and after lazily flicking his tail, the portrait swung open.

"All right, you can just sit down on the couch and bare your stomach. This shouldn't take long," Remus instructed and grabbed his wand.

While Draco and Harry sat down on the couch – Draco urging Harry to lay down so that he wouldn't have to keep holding up his sweater – Sirius chose to sit down on one of the armchairs, his gaze flicking between the boys and Remus.

Remus took a deep breath and closed his eyes for a small moment. Once he was certain he remembered all the necessary spells for the first check-up, he crossed the room and came to a halt in front of the couch.

"Okay; first, I'll check your vitals and your magic level," he murmured, giving the explanation both for the boys' and his own benefit. If he didn't talk through the whole procedure, explain what he would be doing next, he worried that he would forget a vital part. Talking throughout the whole check-up would prevent that from happening.

The first spell created a soft purple light that enveloped Harry's body for a few seconds before it disappeared again and left a paper with the information behind. Remus casted a glance at it and from the looks of it, there was nothing wrong with either Harry's or the baby's health. He had been worried that Harry's lack of proper food when he was a child would have damaged him internally, but so far it seemed everything was progressing smoothly.

"Both you and the baby are healthy," he smiled and put the paper down. "I'm going to check your magic level now."

Harry nodded and didn't move when the next spell – in the form of a dark orange bubble – slid across his stomach, over his heart and floated above his forehead, before it disappeared with a soft 'pop' and two bars appeared above the boy: one a soft red, tinged with green and the other one a midnight blue, mixed with purple.

"Are those our …" Draco trailed off, staring curiously at the two bars floating in front of his face; both were equally big, though the blue one seemed a bit broader than the other one.

"Those are your magic levels, yes." Remus nodded and pointed to the soft red coloured one. "That one represents Harry's magic; the other one your magic. And if I do this …"

A quick snap and flick of his wand and the two bars became separated; a third smaller bar appeared between them. This one was coloured a very light green, though it had hints of red and blue mixed in
"That bar represents your baby's magic."

"And is that a good sign or …" Harry bit his lip and his nervous look didn't escape Remus' notice, nor his clenched fist.

Remus smiled reassuringly. "Yes, this bar is a good sign. See how it's exactly the half of yours? It means that your baby is getting enough magic."

"Oh thank god," Harry muttered and closed his eyes in relief.

"I told you it would be fine," Draco murmured in a chiding tone, but even he seemed relieved to hear the confirmation.

"Can you show the baby already?" Sirius suddenly asked and when Remus looked at him, he had to hide a smile when he noticed the concentrated frown on Sirius' face.

Despite the rocky start, Sirius seemed already fond of the baby and Remus was reminded of how impatient Sirius had become every time Lily had had a check-up scheduled. It figured he would be impatient now as well.

Chuckling softly, Remus turned and was met with the expectant, hopeful faces of both Harry and Draco.

"Can you? Can we really see the baby already?" Harry asked excitedly and his eyes shone.

"You won't see much yet, as the baby isn't that big yet, but yes, I can show you the baby already," Remus gave in and after making the bars disappear – them making a sharp sound as if glass that shattered – he muttered the spell that would call up a screen in which an image of the baby would be projected, once he connected the spell with Harry's stomach.

A thin, rose coloured thread shot out from the screen and touched Harry's bare stomach, who twitched a bit when the spell forced a connection with his magic. The thread seemed to vibrate and it let out a soft tingling sound, as if it were a bell dangling in the wind.

The screen, that had been filled up with grey smoke, slowly cleared up until the background of it was dark and a very small light grey spot could be found near the upper right corner.

"This grey spot is your baby," Remus said softly and pointed towards the little, bright spot.

Harry blinked rapidly and laughed weakly. "It's so weird to see it like that," he muttered and Remus saw how Draco grabbed his hand and squeezed in it.

Grey eyes shot to him and they glittered harshly in the light of the fire. "Could you …" Draco hesitated and then cleared his throat and went on in a gruff voice, "Could you create pictures of it? I think my parents would like to have a copy of this and well, I want one as well." He looked away as if he was embarrassed by his request and his cheekbones acquired a light red sheen.

Remus smiled indulgently and flicked his wand twice, gently murmuring the Copy spell. The flaw of this spell was that it delivered three copies as the minimum amount, so that left them with one copy too many, but it was the only spell capable of copying down the ultrasound, including the movements.

He snatched the copies out of the air – careful as to not wrinkle them – and handed them over to
Harry, who accepted them eagerly with a big smile.

While the couple studied one of the copies with wonder visible on their faces, Remus cancelled the other spells; the screen disappearing with a loud 'pop'.

Harry looked up, a grateful smile adorning his lips. "Thank you for doing the check-up. We really appreciate it," he told him sincerely.

Remus shook his head with a bashful smile. "No need to thank me. I'm glad to be of help," he reassured his cub.

Handing over two copies to Draco, Harry turned around to face Sirius and absently pushed his sweater back down, covering his stomach. He offered the copy in his hand to a bemused looking Sirius and asked, "Would you like to have this copy?" He smiled faintly. "Seeing as you are going to be the great godfather of our baby."

Sirius stiffened and Remus saw his eyes mist over, his hands clenching on his lap before he abruptly stood up and quickly left the room; stepping hastily out of reach of Remus' grabbing hand.

"Sirius!" Remus called out, but his lover ignored him and the painting fell shut behind him.

The remaining Marauder sighed and slid a hand over his face.

"Did I say something wrong?" Harry asked confused and he looked troubled; the arm he had extended slowly lowering until it rested on the arm of the couch.

"No, Harry, you did nothing wrong," Remus reassured the worried teen quickly; his sharp hearing picking up the fading footsteps of the other man.

"Then what's wrong?" Draco narrowed his eyes. "I thought he had accepted the baby?"

"He has, don't worry about that. It's just …" Remus sighed again, looking at the boys tiredly. "You probably brought up a memory of James or Lily and sometimes he can't handle that."

"What kind of memory then?"

"Probably a memory of when James asked him to be your godfather by handing him a copy of the ultrasound."

"Oh." Harry stared at the copy, biting his lip.

"Give it to me; once Sirius has calmed down, he'll be happy to have a copy," Remus murmured and stuck the copy in his pocket. "I'll see you both tomorrow."

They said their goodbyes and Remus left the two boys, whose attention was redirected to the copy.

Shaking his head, a fond smile tugging at his lips, Remus hurriedly made his way to their private quarters; nodding politely to a few students he passed by in the hallways.

Like expected, he found his distressed looking partner in their living room, seated on the couch while sipping from a tumbler filled with what appeared to be Firewhiskey.

"You made them worried," Remus announced and sat down next to him.

"Not my intention," Sirius muttered petulantly and took a sip of his beverage.
"What happened?"

They sat in silence for a while; Sirius seemingly needing time to gather his thoughts.

Finally he heaved a sigh and discarded the glass on the table.

"Everything that just happened reminded me of James and Lily," he started and gazed blankly at his left sleeve. "I remember James asking me to become godfather when he showed me the first ultrasound and Harry calling me that … I don't know; it just became too much."

He shook his head and laughed hollowly. "I know I shouldn't think like that, but it seems that history is just repeating itself. I can't help but wonder whether Harry and Blondie will end up like Prongs and Lilyflower." Light coloured eyes looked at him in anguish. "I can't go through that again, Moony. I can't lose part of my family like that again!"

"And you won't," Remus stated determined and pulled the other one in his arms to comfort him. "We are better prepared now and we have powerful allies; history won't repeat itself. We won't let him win."

"I wish I could be as confident as you," Sirius chuckled darkly.

Remus just tightened his hold, closed his eyes and buried his face in Sirius' shoulder; praying to Merlin he was right and that they wouldn't have to bury a Potter and his partner again.

"For the Familia ritual, we will need your blood, Harry," Lucius announced the next day.

They were seated in Remus' and Sirius' quarters; Lucius had announced he would be coming over during the afternoon and after lunch, Harry and Draco had followed the two older men to their rooms.

Draco's father had arrived together with Snape and had immediately started explaining the ritual he had discovered in a book. The book was on the table, open on the page of the ritual. The pages were a light yellow, indicating the fairly old age of the book.

All the rituals described had been written in Latin and thus Lucius had translated the text for the benefit of those who couldn't read it; them being Harry and Sirius. Sirius hadn't wanted to learn Latin and Harry had never had the chance to study it.

"So I need to let a few drops fall on the map and then it will give the right coordinates?" Harry questioned to make certain he had understood the ritual correctly.

Lucius nodded and leant back in his armchair. "Yes, your blood will be able to bypass the restrictions of the Unplottable spell."

"All right," Harry muttered and was vaguely aware of his pets' gaze on him when he made a small cut in his thumb with a muttered spell.

Ignoring the slight stinging of the small wound, he pressed his thumb and index finger together tightly until a few drops of his blood bloomed up and fell down on a large map that showed the outlines of England and Scotland. The few drops of blood glowed softly for a moment before they were absorbed by the parchment.

They all held their breath when a small, blue spark appeared suddenly on top of the map. The spark bobbed up and down over the paper; going from left to right and up and down.
After a couple of minutes spent in anticipated silence with the spark trembling all over the map, the spark stopped moving and a sharp whistle cut through the air before the spark burst apart and disappeared.

Slowly, a pair of coordinates appeared on the map, as if it was being sown on.

"Thank Merlin," Sirius muttered relieved and rubbed his cheek. "I was worried that Charlus had completely moved the Manor to a whole other location. He just hid the exact coordinates, making us forget about them."

Harry looked at him incredulously. "How on earth do you move an entire manor?" he inquired sceptically, while rubbing absentmindedly over his healed thumb, courtesy of Draco.

"It can be done, but it requires a lot of magic and energy of the master of the manor, so it's only done if it's absolutely necessary," Remus replied with a shrug.

"So what are we going to do now?" Harry looked from one person to another. He didn't have his Apparation license yet, so the coordinates meant nothing to him, but they finally had an exact location.

Snape looked up and replied calmly, "We will discuss it with Minerva. I imagine she would not be pleased if we left right now."

Sirius grimaced. "Yeah, probably not. Let's call her over now and then decide when we'll leave."

Salazar, who had followed them to sit in the painting displaying a rocking chair in a small, cosy library, clucked his tongue and stood up. "I'll give her a quick visit and tell her, her presence is needed."

Without awaiting a reply, he disappeared out of the painting, leaving a thoughtful silence behind.

McGonagall appeared exactly six minutes later, looked annoyed. "There better be a good reason to call me here on a Sunday," she warned them and approached the group. She frowned when she noticed the map spread out on the table.

"You remember us mentioning that we were searching for a location to find one of the Founders?" Sirius started.

She gave him a look of derision. "Yes, Sirius, I remember that conversation clearly, seeing as it only happened five days ago," she replied, light scorn audible in her voice.

To his credit, Sirius only flushed slightly and cleared his throat before he continued – ignoring Snape's amused snort, "Yes, well, we think we have located Godric Gryffindor."

She blinked surprised. "You did? That's wonderful news. Where do you suspect he's hidden?"

"Harry thinks we will be able to find Gryffindor in Potter Manor, because the Potters are direct descendants of Gryffindor," Remus replied and produced the text that Harry had discovered.

McGonagall accepted the book and after adjusting her glasses, read the page quickly. "It is a reasonable assumption," she agreed and handed the book over to Remus. She narrowed her eyes and looked at them suspiciously. "But I suspect that is not the reason why you called me."

"Despite your House, you still managed to retain your common sense," Snape mocked and ignoring her scathing glare, he went on, "We have attained the coordinates of Potter Manor and want your …
permission to allow us to visit the place." His upper lip curled up at the mention of permission.

"I cannot allow you to visit that place during the week," McGonagall replied and pursed her lips. "However, if you can be discreet, you are allowed to leave during the weekend. I assume the entire group is going?"

"That's the plan. We need Harry to bypass the wards," Draco spoke up. "And I'm not planning on staying behind."

She let out a sound that sounded suspiciously like an amused snort. "Of course. Well, you are allowed to leave the school ground for one day, on the condition that you will be back by the evening. Three professors and two students missing will after all be noticed if you stay away longer."

"That is fine. One day should normally be enough if we leave early enough," Lucius answered and took a sip of his tea.

"However, may I inquire as to which means of travelling Mister Potter will be using?"

"What do you mean?" Harry furrowed his eyebrows and stared bemused at the Headmistress. "Can't Sirius or Remus Side-Apparate with me?"

"Unless you want your little brat to get Splinched during the process, I wouldn't recommend Apparating or Side-Apparating for the duration of your pregnancy, Potter," Snape remarked with a raised eyebrow.

"The baby can get Splinched?" Harry asked worriedly and one of his hands unconsciously curled around his stomach.

Lucius leant forwards and patted his knee in a comforting manner. "Harry, there is no need to worry. While you are indeed advised to not Apparate while you're pregnant, Narcissa has a device that will allow you to travel without any problems. She used it during her pregnancy and Draco is proof that the device is safe."

Sirius muttered something underneath his breath which Harry didn't catch, but whatever it was, it made Remus jab him harshly in his ribs and glare at him.

"Oh, okay, that's good," Harry replied weakly and his hand relaxed.

"Do you have an idea as to when you will leave?" McGonagall asked curiously, adjusting her hat absently.

Remus glanced at the others, shrugged and replied uncertainly, "Would you mind going next Saturday? It's probably best if we leave as soon as possible."

"Will Narcissa be willing to loan the device to Harry?" Sirius asked and raised an eyebrow.

Lucius chuckled softly. "Don't worry about that – Narcissa will be more than happy to help Harry."

Not trusting Harry's ability to keep his balance during the travelling, Draco had Apparated together with his father first to the place given to them by the coordinates, so he could be there to catch Harry in case he lost his balance.

Because the wards didn't acknowledge them, they Apparated on a spot in the middle of a giant field, with tall grass that swayed rather fiercely in the wind and some old trees. Draco looked around and
couldn't spot any house near them nor a manor.

"Where do you think the Manor is located, father?" Draco asked and shivered when a gust of wind tore through his robes. He quickly casted a Warming up charm and sighed softly in relief when warmth enveloped his body and chased away the biting cold.

His father narrowed his eyes and looked around slowly. "The wards are keeping us out by putting up Glamours," he murmured and nodded his head to a point right next to them. "If you concentrate, you should be able to feel a soft hum – that's the magic of the Manor keeping it hidden from us."

Draco furrowed his eyebrows, but closed his eyes and concentrated deeply. He shut out the sound of the howling wind and the rustle of the tall grass; he ignored the rodents bustling around them, preparing themselves for the winter.

There.

Right next to him, the air seemed to hum and he could almost imagine the wards strengthening themselves, doing their best to keep the Manor hidden from undeserving eyes.

"Pay attention, Draco. Harry should appear any moment now."

Draco's eyes shot open and he nodded briskly. The device his mother had given to Harry made sure to envelop the person carrying it in a protective shell, while it transported the person away to the coordinates spelled into it. According to his mother, it was similar to Apparating only that with this device, Harry's body wouldn't be squished together and he shouldn't feel nauseous either. The device ensured a safe landing as well, but they had all quickly agreed that Harry's balance couldn't be trusted, even with the device and had decided that someone should be on the other side to catch him.

Harry had been offended by the notion that he wouldn't keep his balance, even with the device ensuring his safety, but he had later admitted to Draco that he felt better, knowing that somebody would be there to catch him in case he did stumble.

The air started shimmering in front of him, making the rest of the landscape surrounding the air blurry, and then Harry appeared; his eyes closed and the device clenched tightly in his closed hand. The bubble surrounding him popped away and Draco was immediately next to him, ready to catch him if he so much as stumbled an inch.

Emerald green eyes opened slowly and Harry blinked, shaking his head, appearing a bit dazed.

"Are you all right?" Draco asked concerned.

Harry looked up at him and slid the device in his pocket. "Yeah, it was just a weird feeling, being transported like that," he chuckled weakly.

"Well, at least we have finally found a Wizarding way of transport where you don't fall flat on your arse," Draco smirked and dodged the punch Harry wanted to give his arm.

"Not funny," Harry huffed and scowled.

"Hey, it's a good thing!" the blond chuckled and Harry just sighed and shook his head.

Garin's head poked out from underneath Harry's robes and he looked around, his tongue slipping out to taste the air.

"Lots of magic in the air," he hissed through their mental link, ensuring Draco understood him as
well.

As it would be too much of a hassle to bring along all their pets, the animals had decided Garin would be the one who would accompany them on their journey.

Three loud 'POP's' announced the arrival of the three other adults and they landed behind Harry.

"All right, now what?" Harry asked and his eyes flitted around, taking in the scenery. "What do we have to do in order for the Manor to appear?"

"Well, the wards will react only to your magic, so you need to release some of your magic," Lupin answered calmly.

Harry frowned; a confused look crossing his face. "How do I do that?"

"Enter a light meditative state, connect your mind with your magical core and pick out a thread from it and release that thread," Severus instructed brusquely. "That piece will connect with the wards of the Manor, which will force it to drop its invisibility."

"I need to do what?" Harry asked perplexed and his eyes gained a blank look.

From his spot, Draco could practically hear Severus' teeth gnashing together and the older man pinched the bridge of his nose, closing his eyes while he uttered something in annoyance.

"Explain it again, but easier," Harry snapped irritated and glared.

Severus' glower could have set one of the trees on fire. "I already explained it in an easy manner!" he hissed. "I cannot comprehend why your feeble mind is not able to understand the simple concept of releasing your magic."

"Severus," Father said warningly.

"Listen, Harry," Draco quickly interrupted, wanting to prevent the conversation from taking a turn for the worse.

Harry – luckily – shifted his attention from an annoyed Severus to him; his face showing frustration.

"Imagine your magic as a ball of yarn with a bright colour," Draco explained and rolled his eyes when Harry raised an eyebrow sceptically. "Just close your eyes and imagine that until it seems like you can touch it if you reach out your hand."

He pointedly ignored the amused and questioning looks of the others – or in Severus' case a sceptic look – and waited until the dark haired boy nodded slowly.

"Okay; I got it. Now what?" he murmured, still keeping his eyes closed.

"Good. Imagine yourself reaching out and picking out one thread. Once you have it, imagine that you open your hand and let the thread be swept away by the wind."

A concentrated frown marred Harry's forehead for a few minutes.

Then, at the same moment green eyes revealed themselves again, a blast of pure, strong magic was released in the air; nearly knocking the group off their feet.

"Well, it looks like you succeeded, Harry," Black remarked, sounding slightly winded.
They turned around to look at the direction of the blast and nearly gaped at the sight that greeted them.

"Oh wow," Harry breathed out and his eyes widened.

Draco would have teased him about his comment, deeming it too bland to properly define something, but this time it seemed to be the only appropriate comment that encompassed the brilliant beauty that was Potter Manor.

Even partially hidden behind large gates – made out of wood and metal – everyone could see how beautiful the Manor was.

The architect seemed to have been inspired by Hogwarts and medieval castles, as the Manor looked like a smaller replica of a castle. The walls were a pristine white colour and the large windows looked open, despite the fact that long, cerulean blue drapes hid the interior from prying eyes.

Two round, long towers were built on each side of the building, giving off the impression that they were watch towers.

Despite having been closed off for Merlin knew how long, the large garden surrounding the Manor looked extremely well kept: the grass had been cut evenly; fallen leaves could not be spotted, in spite of the presence of barren trees and flowers, that did well during the winter season, were slowly starting to bloom.

A long path, covered with small, black stones, started from the gates and ended right before the seven steps leading up to the front door; the main path split sideways into several smaller paths that led someone following them to the various flower beds; giving the visitor the chance to admire the scenery.

The garden didn't stop when it reached the Manor, but instead went further on each side of the building, giving the assumption that the domain was larger than anticipated.

Despite the sheer size of the Manor (it seemed to have around four to five floors, not counting the attic and basement), it looked invitingly as if the Potters were still living there, ready to welcome friends and other visitors.

But Draco knew that wasn't possible; if a Potter was still living in the Manor, Dumbledore wouldn't have been able to put Harry with the Dursleys. While he had had the power to ignore the Will – unfortunately – he wouldn't have been able to go against a Potter. If a Potter had still been alive when Harry's parents were killed, a charm would have been set in motion that would have transported Harry to his living relative instantly. The charm was used by Purebloods to prevent someone from kidnapping their children.

So with no Potters alive in the Manor, had it been the house elves who took care still of the entire property?

While it wasn't weird that the Potters had employed house elves – they were a Pureblood family after all – it was strange that the house elves had stayed to take care of the Manor even with their masters dead.

As soon as the last inhabitant of a manor died and was buried, the house elves left, as they had lost their purpose of serving with their masters gone.

So why had the Potters' house elves decided to stay?
Draco caught his father's gaze and father's eyes confirmed they both were brooding on the same question.

If they entered the Manor, what could they expect to happen?

"So have the wards reset themselves or do I still need to do something to allow you to enter?" Harry broke the silence and cocked his head to the left.

Black cleared his throat and replied gruffly, "The wards protecting the Manor from sight have acknowledged your magical signature, but the inner wards need something else to recognize you as the rightful heir."

"Let me guess: my blood?" Harry snorted and rolled his eyes.

"That is what the wards need, yes, as it is only your blood that can prove you're the legitimate heir," Father admitted warily.

Harry exhaled noisily. "Purebloods and their obsession with blood." He sounded disgusted, but continued before anyone could remark upon it, "So where do I need to, you know, give my blood to the wards?"

"When you stand in front of the gate, you'll see a small gap right above the lock. There will be a sharp pin in it; you need to prick your thumb – just a bit – and the wards will take you inside once they recognize you," Black explained, glancing up with dark eyes at the building. "Once you're inside the wards, you should have complete command over the property and you can command the wards to change themselves to let us in."

"Don't worry; you'll know what to do once you're inside," Lupin added when Harry's face gained a worried look.

"I hope so," Harry muttered darkly and strode to the gate.

They all saw him press his thumb lightly in the gap and a tremor went through the ground, leaving them on unsteady legs, before Harry got transported in a flash behind the wards.

Draco could only hope that Harry's magic would know enough to take command over the wards.
Chapter 15: Godric Gryffindor Part 3

There was a soft humming, as bees buzzing around during the summer, audible. Harry looked around warily, wondering whether his arrival had alerted someone or something. But no, aside from the slight humming and the static charging clinging to the air, nothing seemed to be amiss.

And that made him on edge. The whole atmosphere was too peaceful; it didn't feel natural. But he couldn't pinpoint what was wrong. Whatever it was, it made his skin prickle, his muscles tense and his magic ready to lash out at the slightest provocation.

"Garin," he hissed; his hand gripping his wand tightly.

"Yes, something does not feel right." Garin replied and his tongue slid out to taste the air. "Give permission to your mate and family; we will need as much power as is available."

Harry nodded his consent and decided to use Draco's guidance again to force the wards to accept them.

Relaxing his body, his arms loosely next to his hips, he closed his eyes and visualized his magic as a bright ball again. As soon as he had a clear image of his magic – it felt very warm and vibrated as if it wanted to imitate a purring cat – instead of picking out one single thread, he softly coerced his magic to spread out in steady streams, letting it hook itself in the wards.

When his magic had a steady grip, he soundlessly ordered it to open the defensive and offensive wards for his family, making it accept them.

The defence wards pulsed brightly in protest, strengthening themselves, while the offensive ones
reared back like an offended horse and shot off hot sparks in indignation.

Apparently the Manor had gotten used to protecting itself and it wasn't about to surrender easily.

But he was a Potter, the rightful heir to this place and he would be damned if he let the Manor win this battle.

Determined to make the wards bend to his will, Harry poured more of his will and magic through the threads connecting him to the wards and slowly, very reluctantly, both wards finally shuddered and buckled, giving in.

With one last push of his magic, an opening appeared in the shields and Harry's eyes shot open while he gasped; his forehead felt clammy, the sheen of sweat on his skin clashing uncomfortably with the cold wind.

"Well done, Harry," Remus praised him when the group entered through the gate.

Harry felt the wards instantly closing behind them and received the impression of a sulking cat, making him conceal a snort.

"Are you all right?" Draco asked concerned and rushed to his side; his eyes flying over Harry's body in worry.

"Yeah; the wards just didn't want to give up quickly," Harry replied with a weak smile.

"Something doesn't feel right," Snape murmured and he narrowed his eyes.

"No, the air feels different." Sirius frowned, looking around. "It's too …"

"Peaceful?" Harry offered and his godfather nodded.

"Yes, too peaceful, too quiet. It didn't feel like this when we last were here."

Remus' eyes studied the Manor sharply. "Well, standing here won't help us. Let's go inside," he suggested.

"Ever the impulsive Gryffindor," Snape muttered darkly, but followed next to Lucius.

The group slowly made the trek up to the Manor, following the main path, and all kept their wands in their hands, their senses wide open, ready for any disturbance that could occur.

They were a bit less than ten feet away from the seven steps, when the air right in front of the steps shimmered and Harry and Draco halted immediately. It seemed the Manor had prepared extra defences.

A large, square, grey tile appeared on the gravel and a click was heard before a dark whirlwind appeared.

Harry's mouth dropped open and Draco cursed vehemently.

A large, midnight purple coloured bird was left behind when the whirlwind died down. It had three balding heads with black eyes that glared at them hatefully. It was huge; his legs were the same height as Harry and his claws were as long as Harry's upper body and glinted dangerously in the weak sunlight. Most of its feathers were rumpled and broken and bald patches over his body showed a spotted, grey skin.
The grotesque bird screeched loudly, its three heads swinging from right to left while it ruffled its battered wings in agitation.

"What the hell is that?" Draco asked horrified.

"I don't know. I've never heard of a three headed bird looking like that," Remus answered apprehensively.

"That is because a monstrosity like that shouldn't exist," Snape spoke through gritted teeth. "Even in the Encyclopaedia of Bestia esoteria this beast is never mentioned and that book is the most extensive one written about creatures."

"So what? This thing is the result of an experiment?" Harry exclaimed shocked and the second head of the bird snorted harshly.

"This does not look good," Lucius muttered and cursed lowly. "Sirius, has James ever mentioned a defence like this? Or someone in the family doing experiments?"

"No." Sirius clenched his jaw and glared at the bird. "None of the Potters experimented with animals and their defence existed out of the wards and their own magic."

"Then why is that ugly thing here?" Draco snapped.

"Get back!" Remus yelled suddenly.

Harry felt himself being pulled back hastily by Draco and they stumbled back. Right on time, because the next moment a giant claw slammed down on the ground, right where they had been standing.

The bird screeched loudly again and stamped heavily down, but didn't come further.

"Shit, how are we going to get passed that?" Harry asked wide-eyed. None of the books they had consulted, had said anything about a giant, ugly bird defending the entrance to Potter Manor. But if the Potters hadn't put the bird there as defence, how had the bird managed to enter this place? Or had someone else put him there as defence? But why?

"We're not going to get passed that," Remus said grimly. "We'll need to defeat it if we want to have a chance to enter the Manor."

"And how do you propose we defeat that thing?" Draco raised an eyebrow, finally relaxing the grip he had on Harry's wrist. "That thing is huge and I doubt it'll keep standing there calmly while we come up with a way to attack it."

"Why is it still standing there?" Harry remarked when he realized what was wrong with the current situation – aside from having a huge bird as opponent.

"What do you mean?" Sirius asked confused.

"It could easily smash us if it wanted to, but it just keeps standing there," he replied and jerked his head to the three headed bird. "I doubt it's because he wants to give us a fair chance to defeat it. What if it can't move beyond that place?"

"You think a magical barrier is keeping it contained?" Lucius said slowly, his grey coloured eyes hooded.
Harry nodded. "Yes; that would explain why it hasn't followed us and why it only appeared when we came near its spot."

"So you can use common sense," Snape sneered lightly.

"So someone is trying to keep us out?" Draco wondered out loud and his jaw tightened. "Why? And who managed to do this?"

"The who and why is not important now," Sirius retorted. "We can argue about that later. We need to find a way to get rid of that bird."

"How are we going to find a way to defeat it if we don't even know what it is?" Draco inquired and hissed softly when the three heads of the bird simultaneously let out a shrill screech.

Harry winced and wondered whether the bird was planning on deafening them first. "Every beast has a weak point, so we need to find the weakness of this bird."

"You make it sound so easy," Draco muttered darkly and Harry shrugged.

He knew it wouldn't be easy, but he was certain that once they'd found the bird's weakness, they would be able to defeat it quickly. It wasn't as if they had any other choices.

"Neck," Garin startled Harry with his hissing.

"What?" he hissed questioningly.

"Neck and eyes. The one who doesn't belong on earth has weak necks and eyes. Easily damaged," Garin replied and he sounded strangely elated, on the verge of snickering – if snakes were able to snicker.

The snake slid higher up Harry's body; his long, strong body wrapped snugly around Harry's torso and his head popped up right above Harry's left shoulder; his eyes glowing ominously when they regarded the agitated bird that had started pacing up and down, its heads constantly swinging from one side to another. "So easily damaged. Not very resilient. Weak muscles."

Garin swayed from left to right and looked eager to attack and devour.

Harry swallowed loudly; because his pets were ready to comfort him whenever he was distressed and eager to defend him, it was easy for him to forget that his pets were the most dangerous animals on earth and could be quite vicious when they wanted to be.

Like now.

"What did Garin say?" Remus interrupted his musing.

Harry blinked and – ignoring Garin's excited hissing – answered, "He said that the neck and the eyes are the bird's weakest points."

"That makes sense," Lucius murmured. "Three of us could attack the eyes – that shouldn't require close contact as long as the people attacking have good aim. The necks, however, will be problematic."

"The eyes get attacked from the ground, so the necks could be attacked from the air," Draco suggested, looking thoughtfully.

"Interesting idea – except none of us have the means to fly. Unless you have managed to sprout
wings all of a sudden?" Snape sneered.

Draco scowled. "Of course not. But do you have a better idea?" he sneered back.

Ignoring the growing argument behind him, Harry raised his wand and shouted, "Accio brooms!"

"While it worked during the Triwizard Tournament, I very much doubt it will …" Snape's snide remark got cut off when a loud 'bang' was heard from somewhere behind the Manor and two brooms shot past the bird, practically dancing out of reach when one beak tried to snap them in two.

The two brooms – of the old brand Comet after closer inspection of the handles – came to a stop in front of Harry and kept hovering on the height of his hips.

"Oh yeah, I had forgotten they had a broom shed in the back," Sirius said blankly. "Didn't think the brooms were still here, though."

"They are not the quickest, but they will be enough to get us in the air to attack the necks," Harry spoke, keeping his face blank. That wasn't easy, because Snape's sour face amused him greatly.

"Well, we only need to decide who is going to attack what and with what kind of spell," Remus said; his eyes warning both Harry and Snape to behave themselves.

"Draco and I can use the brooms, while you distract the bird by attacking the eyes," Harry suggested, his mind racing through possible spells he could use to sever the neck muscles.

He doubted a simple Cutting spell would be enough.

"Absolutely not!" Draco snapped instantly and Harry stared at him.

"Why not? You and I are good flyers," he said confused.

"Are you fucking kidding me?" Grey eyes grew wide eyed. "You're not going to fly and attack that beast from that position!"

"What's wrong with my flying? I understand why I couldn't fly during the Quidditch match, but it's not like there are flying objects like a Bludger here," Harry retorted sharply.

"For the love of … You're pregnant and there is a giant bird wanting to kill us and you don't see anything wrong with you wanting to fly and bringing yourself in a vulnerable position?" Draco snapped, his eyes piercing into green ones. "You do realize that one of those heads could easily attack you? You're not flying on your fast Firebolt, you're flying on a slow broom that won't allow you to do the necessary manoeuvres to evade that bird when it's needed! Use your common sense!"

Harry flinched in spite of his will and bit his lower lip. "If I stay out of the range of the heads, they wouldn't be able to reach me. It doesn't even look able to fly, because it would have done so already," he argued. It wasn't like he didn't understand the risks, but he was a good flyer. Both he and Draco were the best flyers of their group, so it made sense for them to take the broom and attack in the air.

"So what you're saying is that you don't mind risking your life or that of our baby," Draco sneered and glared.

"That's not fair, Draco! You know I would never risk the baby!" Harry hissed and honestly felt hurt and insulted that the blond thought he didn't care about the baby. He was confident when it came to his flying skills and he knew that as long as he stayed out of reach of the heads, then the bird
wouldn't be able to attack him, even with the slow broom.

"Are you really that thick?" Draco waved sharply at the brooms in front of Harry. "You climb on that broom now and fly up to that bird and not only would you be risking your life, but you would most definitely risk our baby's life. How you could not understand that simple fact is beyond my comprehension!"

Draco's heated glare made him shift his feet nervously. Draco had expressed his distaste for Harry's 'stupid taste for reckless endeavours' and while he had berated him before, he had never been as angry as now. His whole body seemed as tense as a tiger awaiting the moment to strike and his eyes glittered in fury; his hand clenched tightly around his wand, which shot off sparks in response to its master's anger.

"Harry, Draco is right," Remus spoke up softly and Harry turned to look at him helplessly. "You are indeed one of the best flyers in this group, but you're also in the most vulnerable state of us all now. We can't let you risk the baby. These Comets are fairly old and while they were the fastest brooms back when they were first brought out, they really aren't that quick in comparison to the brooms now. One wrong move and you could end up seriously hurt."

"Who's going to take the brooms then?" Harry asked dully and stepped away from the brooms. Despite what the others seemed to think, he really didn't want to risk the life that was growing inside of him, but they needed to defeat the bird quickly.

"I'll take one broom," Draco replied and he seemed to have calmed down, now that he was certain Harry wouldn't make an attempt to fly and attack the bird mid-air.

"I'll take the other one," Sirius announced and stepped forwards to grab one of the brooms.

"All right." Lucius nodded. "Then the rest of us will attack the bird from the ground. Harry, please stay behind us."

Harry frowned and wanted to protest, but the heavy glance of Snape stopped him. So far the man had – surprisingly – not made a cutting remark about the whole argument, but Harry got the feeling that if he dared to voice his protest now, the Potions Master would personally make sure that he wouldn't be able to participate at all in the fight.

So he sighed in defeat and nodded. At least he wasn't completely forbidden from joining the fight.

"Okay, Blondie, the best curse to use in this situation is …" While Sirius explained the darker variation of the Cutting spell (making Harry wonder idly when his godfather had learnt that particular curse) to Draco, who followed his explanation with a heavy frown and darkened eyes, Lucius tapped his cane on the ground and looked at his lover.

"Severus, do you know any spell that would leave enough damage for Draco and Sirius to finish off the bird?"

Snape's mouth tightened and he looked faintly annoyed. "I am a Potions Master, Luc, not a Spell Master."

"What about the Cutting spell?" Harry suggested.

Remus shook his head. "That wouldn't be enough. We're talking about an animal that technically shouldn't exist, so that means it will probably have some magical layers that are protecting its vulnerable spots. A Cutting spell is too weak to slice through those layers."
"In other words, we will need to use a curse if we want that thing to sustain some damage," Snape snorted and looked annoyed.

"What kind of curse should we use then?" Harry questioned and tried to recall all of the curses he had learnt so far. They could use the Suffering Eye curse, but that one required a lot of concentration and if the curse didn't hit the eyes right in the middle, the curse wouldn't have any effect. Considering the fact that the bird was still trashing around, this particular curse would be no good to them.

"Would the Flaming Iris curse be sufficient enough to serve as a distraction?" Lucius inquired and his eyes were slightly narrowed.

Remus nodded slowly. "Yes, that should suffice. At the very least it will give Sirius and Draco enough time to sever the neck muscles."

"What is the Flaming Iris curse?" Harry asked confused. From the word 'iris' he gathered it had something to do with the eyes, but he didn't have a clue as to what the curse actually did. The books he had read about curses had never mentioned this one and he wondered whether it was a curse that was only mentioned in books that belonged in the Restricted Section.

Snape threw him an indescribable look and answered gruffly, "The eyes are burned from the inside out if the curse hits one of the eyes. It keeps burning until there is nothing left but empty sockets. Sometimes the magical fire even spreads out to the brains and consumes that."

"Oh," Harry brought out and felt queasy at the mental image. He cleared his throat and shook his head in an attempt to get rid of the gruesome image. "So what is the spell for it?"

"Inflammae oculum," Lucius replied and removed his wand from the cane. "Make certain to put the stress on 'oculum'; if you put the stress on the first part of the spell, then the curse could rebound and hit you instead."

Harry grimaced and gripped his wand tightly.

"Okay, do you guys have a spell ready?" Sirius asked when he was done conversing with Draco.

"Yes," Remus replied and nodded. "You've chosen as well?"

"Yes; let's go, Blondie," Sirius called out and stepped on the broom, bringing it up immediately in the air.

"I have a name," Draco muttered darkly and threw a scowl at his cousin, before he followed the man up in the air.

Harry allowed himself a fleeting smile, before he focused his attention on the bird again. The four men on the ground approached the bird slowly; the three heads swerved in their direction and the six eyes stared at them, studying them intently.

If they wanted Draco and Sirius to succeed, they needed to keep most of the bird's attention on them – which would not be easy with three heads swinging restlessly around.

They stopped at a distance of nine feet, with Harry staying behind the three older men. When the dark haired boy discreetly looked up, he noticed his lover and godfather hovering above the three heads, having put enough distance between them and the creature to avoid immediate danger.

Draco caught his eyes and smiled fleetingly, giving a small nod.
Harry quirked his lips quickly and took a deep breath.

"Ready?" Remus murmured; his amber coloured eyes fixed on the head on the right.

They nodded and right when the second head was starting to look up, they started chanting the curse, their wands trained on the dark, piercing eyes.

As soon as the first curse reached one of the eyes, the bird started screeching madly; feet stamping on the ground in panic while it flapped its wings in front of itself. The wings came up as if it wanted to protect its eyes and the heads swung around, beaks snapping wildly; the screeching intensified in volume when one of the beaks bit harshly into the neck of the other head.

The bird started stamping around, whirling around while its feathers were shed in its fury.

With the bird presenting its back, their wands lost the connection and they hastily lowered their wands to avoid the curses lashing back at them.

However the bird had turned around too late, for the curses had taken effect.

Harry felt bile coming up and he clamped a hand over his mouth when he saw big, black red liquid drops dropping down and splashing apart on the bird's talons and the ground.

Even though Harry knew this bird was their enemy and that if the roles had been reversed, the bird would have killed them without a shred of remorse, he still felt sick seeing a creature suffering like that.

"It is not enough," Snape suddenly stated.

Confused and still feeling nauseous, Harry looked up and after a short moment he understood the problem.

While they had succeeded in distracting the creature, the bird had been moving around so much that Sirius nor Draco had had a chance to hit the bird. They were circling above the bird, trying to find an opening, but the beast was thrashing around so much that they had to spend more time ducking and avoiding the frantically moving heads and wings than actually casting the curses.

"Maybe we should try the Shatter curse?" Lucius suggested.

Before either one of them could reply, a loud curse tore through the air and Harry gasped, feeling his heart skipping several beats when he saw Draco avoiding a sharp beak narrowly.

"Draco!" he yelled and suddenly the left head snapped around in his direction and the beak opened, spewing bright green, slimy liquid at him.

Curses escaping them, the group jumped apart just in time. The second the strange liquid hit the ground, a foul smell hit them and the gravel melted, creating a small, dirty grey hole.

"Harry!" Draco cried out in worry.

Before he could reassure the blond boy, he and Remus were thrown against the ground several feet away when the third head had seemingly blasted a ball of compressed air at them. The attack had hit the ground between Harry and Remus, but it had been enough to throw them off their feet.

Harry landed with a harsh smack against the ground and all the air in his lungs left him with a painful whoosh.
It took a few tries before he got air back in his body and he groaned in pain. Around him he could hear the bird's screeching, yelling and the impact of attacks hitting the ground.

Scrambling up with a hiss, his hand darted around to search for his wand and to his relief, he soon found it a few feet away from him. He snatched it off the ground and had to close his eyes for a few seconds when a wave of dizziness swept over him.

Feeling Garin tightening his body around his stomach, he asked, trying to stay calm, "Garin, are you okay?"

"Yes; the hatchling is okay as well," Garin replied.

"You're sure?" he asked in a small voice and when the snake gave him a reassuring hiss, he took a deep breath and let it out slowly, feeling the spike of relief coursing through his body. His baby was fine; the fall hadn't hurt it.

"Harry, are you okay?" Draco asked frantically and jumped off the broom, landing next to the boy on the ground.

Harry looked up and gave him a small smile. "Yes, I'm okay," he murmured and stood up on shaking legs. "Garin protected both of us."

"Thank Merlin," the blond uttered in relief and Harry squeezed his hand softly.

"How is your wound?" Harry asked concerned when his attention was caught by a long cut across Draco's stomach. His robes had parted, showing the rip in the sweater; the blood from the wound had darkened the fabric, matting it to his skin.

"Don't worry; it's a shallow cut," Draco replied and threw a bored look at the cut. "I'll heal it later."

Harry frowned, not completely convinced, but decided to trust Draco's judgement. Looking around, he saw Lucius and Snape standing various feet away on the bird's left side, casting various spells and curses that made the bird screech louder – a feat Harry hadn't thought was possible.

Remus was kneeling next to Sirius to Harry's right and seemed to be casting spells on Sirius' left arm; Sirius staring at his arm with a scowl.

"How are we going to defeat that bird?" Harry asked and a hint of annoyance seeped through his voice.

"That's what I have been trying to figure out," Draco answered irritated. "The bird is blind now, but it's attacking in a frenzy and it won't give us an opening."

"So we need to make it stop attacking first," Harry muttered, narrowing his eyes, trying to find an opening between the vicious attacks.

"Or at the very least make it slow down," Draco remarked.

"None of the curses seem to damage the bird." Harry bit on his lower lip.

So the only way to defeat the creature was to hit the necks, but how would they manage to slip through the furious attacks without getting heavily injured or even killed?

Garin shifting his body around his stomach and raising his head pulled Harry out of his racing thoughts and he looked down.
Garin had opened his mouth and his long, dangerous looking fangs had shot forwards, making the snake look even more threatening.

They needed to slow down the bird ... Make it slow down its attacks.

Harry blinked and reached out with a hand to touch the top of Garin's head.

Garin hissed softly and turned his head. "Master?"

Harry stared at him pensively before switching his attention to his wand and then to the broom still in Draco's hand.

"Master?" Draco sounded wary. "What are you thinking?"

An idea started to form in his mind and Harry smiled. "Garin, you are poisonous, correct?"

"Yes, it is the strongest poison in the world," Garin replied.

"Can you inject poison in such a way that it paralyzes the victim?"

"I should be able to, yes."

Harry nodded and addressed his lover, "I think I have an idea. If Garin bites the bird, he could use his poison to paralyze the bird and when it slows down, we can fly above it and cut off the necks."

Draco furrowed his eyebrows. "That could work," he started slowly. "If I strike at the right moment, then I should be able to cut the necks and take it down."

"Would the Comet be able to carry two people?" Harry asked and studied the broom sceptically.

"Two people? Why would it need to carry two people?"

Harry raised an eyebrow. "Because you won't be able to attack and hit all the necks on your own," he replied, grimacing when the bird let out a high pitched scream. "So you could sit in the front and I in the back. What is the curse Sirius taught you?"

"Harry, are you trying to piss me off on purpose or do you really have no clue why this plan of yours isn't a good idea?" Draco drawled and narrowed his eyes.

"Harry, are you trying to piss me off on purpose or do you really have no clue why this plan of yours isn't a good idea?" Draco drawled and narrowed his eyes.

"What the hell is wrong with my plan now?" Harry asked insulted. "You were agreeing with it not even a minute ago."

"For the love of Merlin, Harry! You're carrying my baby and I'll be damned if I bring you two in danger! Do you honestly think that flying above a gigantic, furious bird that tries to attack anything in its vicinity is a safe thing to do for a pregnant person?" Draco sneered and his magic seemed to spark in response to his anger.

"Why the hell do you always think I'm endangering the baby on purpose?" Harry snapped and took a step closer to the blond, ignoring Garin's hiss. "I know I have to be careful, but we don't have any other plan! The first plan failed and now the attacks aren't even hitting it! If we want to get into the Manor, we're going to have to defeat that bird and it looks that only we two can still decently use a broom and have a chance of evading the bird's attacks."

Draco clenched his jaw and looked at Remus who was now moving on to healing Sirius' stomach
while Snape and Lucius had retreated further back to avoid the attacks that the bird was rapidly firing off.

Harry stayed silent, letting the scenery speak for him. Both of them were the two best flyers in the group and with Sirius wounded, only they would be able to attack from the air while still avoiding the bird's attacks. It would all just be a matter of perfect timing and constant awareness of their surroundings once they were up in the air.

"What if you fall off of the broom? Or what if the bird manages to attack us and we aren't able to avoid it completely?" Draco finally asked and looked at him with troubled eyes. "I don't want to risk either you or the baby, Harry; you can't ask that of me."

Harry took the few remaining steps and raised his hands to cup Draco's face between them, looking him right in his eyes. "Look, contrarily to what you may think, I am not keen on putting either myself or the baby in danger," he spoke softly. "I know that I am more vulnerable now, but that doesn't mean I've grown weaker. Garin will attack the bird first and as soon as it slows down, we will fly up and finish it. The bird obviously can't fly, so as long as we stay out of reach, we will be fine."

"Harry …"

"Do you trust me?"

"What?" Draco asked bewildered, his own hands coming up to cover Harry's.

"Do you trust me?" Harry repeated his question.

"Ye-yes."

"Do you trust me to keep our baby safe?"

Draco stared at him, seemed to study his face and Harry forced his hands to stop trembling. He didn't know what he would do if Draco confessed he didn't trust him to keep their baby safe, but he did know he would feel very hurt. He wanted his baby to be safe, to never know the danger he had been forced to encounter from a young age, and he would do his best to ensure that safety. No matter what the rest might think of him, he would never deliberately put his child in danger. But he also knew that they couldn't keep on fighting like this. Sooner or later, they would all get hurt to the degree that the bird would be able to finish them off and the dark haired young man was determined to survive this trip.

Draco sighed softly and pressed his forehead to Harry's, closing his eyes. His hands dropped their hold over Harry's and dropped down to embrace his waist; one hand pressed against his still flat stomach. "Of course I trust you to keep our baby safe," he murmured and opened his eyes; liquid silver locking onto emerald green. He smiled wryly. "Can you blame me for being worried about you and the baby?"

"No, but you can't blame me either for being worried about you," Harry murmured back. "I don't want you to go up against that bird alone, even with Garin paralyzing it."

Draco heaved a trembling sigh and pursed his lips. "You'll sit behind me and you'll use the Protective Bubble charm. If you don't do that, I won't hesitate to put you in the Body Bind Spell, understood?"

Harry frowned, but nodded his agreement; realizing this was the best concession he would get.

"Okay," Draco murmured and pulled his hands away, taking a step back which dislodged Harry's hands. "I assume Garin will attack now?"
"Yes and when Garin returns, it will be our turn," Harry answered and started explaining their plan to Garin in Parseltongue, making certain the snake knew what was expected of him.

They would be in deep trouble, after all, if something went wrong.

Draco did not like the plan at all. The plan on its own was brilliant and had a high success rate, but he was bothered by the part Harry would have.

He loathed the thought of Harry being in close proximity with the beast. Could he be blamed for that? Was it not normal that he wanted to keep his lover and unborn child safe?

A soft touch on his upper arm made him look up and he saw Garin slithering across the grass towards them. Had Garin managed to inject the poison?

"Garin managed to bite the bird in its leg," Harry announced – answering Draco's silent question – after Garin had reclaimed his place around his stomach and had hissed something in a tone that even in Draco's ears had sounded satisfied.

"All right, how long do you reckon we will …" Draco cut off his own question when the bird suddenly squeaked in confusion and halted its attacks.

Even from his position, Draco saw how the bird suddenly dropped down, as if its legs had disappeared into thin air. The wings, that just a few seconds before had been beating wildly up and down, were fluttering weakly and the three heads were slowly turning around, the eyes half lidded with blood still dripping sluggishly down.

It was still launching attacks, but those were not nearly as powerful as they had been before and most attacks, like the wind and fire ball, seemed to evaporate in the air before it even managed to cross the distance between the bird and Draco's father and Severus.

"Now is our chance," Harry said and Draco nodded.

He climbed back on the broom and the broom dipped lower for a moment when Harry sat down behind him. He felt the warmth of Harry's chest against his back; Garin pressed against his lower back while an arm sneaked around his chest and Harry's legs brushed against his own.

He waited until he heard Harry uttering the charm before he pushed off the ground, flying up in the air. The broom buzzed and trembled underneath his hands, but it carried their combined weight without too much trouble.

The bubble appeared with a barely audible chime and Draco started when the bubble closed around him as well.

"What …"

"You're not less important than I am, so you better get that in your head," Harry huffed and gripped Draco's waist with both hands. "If I need to be in a protective bubble, you need to be as well. We're partners, no?"

Draco chuckled and directed the broom to the creature that was screeching and squawking furiously. "Of course we are. Hold on."

Vaguely he heard Black shouting something and even his godfather snapping something angrily, but he ignored them in favour of the bird. He pushed the broom to go faster and the broom bent and
swerved to the left like he had intended to when a large wing came up to smack them down.

The cold wind whistled harshly in his ears when he ducked underneath the other wing and shot back up, narrowly avoiding the sharp beak of the third head; he heard the sound of something scraping against metal and deduced that the beak had bounced off the bubble.

He forced the broom to go higher when the head in the middle rose up and snapped at them.

"Ready?" he asked loudly, his voice carrying above the furious screeching.

"Yeah!"

Harry started their attack by using the Sweeper's hex which slapped the head in the middle to the front, baring the neck for them.

Before the head could turn back, Draco hissed the curse Black had taught him and an invisible knife cut out a large slice of flesh from the neck, severing the arteries, making the blood splash up with a horrible squelch sound.

The head dangled to the front; the bone attached to the spine the only thing left connecting the lifeless head to the large body.

The head on the right got sliced off completely after Harry's fire spell had distracted it. The remaining head put up more resistance, constantly turning around: protecting its neck as if it had learnt from its comrades' fate. It refused to be distracted, no matter which spell or hex Harry used and Draco was contemplating flying to the ground and discuss with the others which spell they could use to defeat the final head, when Harry suddenly shouted in a desperate tone, "Petrificus Totalus!"

Draco's mouth dropped open when the third head suddenly froze in the middle of looking up; of all the spells that had been used, a simple one like the Full-Body Bind curse was the most effective? How did that even make sense?

"Eh, Draco? Could you please finish it off? I don't know how long the spell will last," Harry said urgently and Draco shook his head, snapping the curse one final time.

A soft 'thud' was heard and the still paralyzed head fell down on the ground. As soon as the head touched the ground, steam started to rise up from the corpse and Draco was just in time to fly higher when flames suddenly burst into existence and surrounded the dead body of the bird. The flames crackled and hissed; the dark purple colour looking rather menacingly before they died out as sudden as they had appeared and what was left of the bird was nothing more than grey ash that quickly got scattered over the entire garden when a gust of wind rose up and took the particles with it.

"I think we can go down now," Harry murmured breathlessly.

Draco swallowed, nodded and directed the broom towards the ground. It was only when they were both safely back on the ground that Draco took notice of the fact that both their clothing was splattered with blood and he wrinkled his nose when the rusty smell of the drying liquid entered his nostrils.

"What the fuck were you thinking?" Black snapped and marched over to the two boys, Lupin trailing behind him.

Draco wanted to answer, but Severus interrupted him harshly, "I could expect such idiotic recklessness of Potter, but I had assumed you possessed more common sense!" He glared at his godson. "What went through your head that you thought pulling a stunt like that would be a smart
"We used the Protective Bubble charm and we were always out of the bird's reach," Harry argued and scowled; his hand came up to wipe some droplets of blood off his cheek. "We couldn't keep attacking like we were doing before; the bird is dead now, isn't it?"

"Harry, we were just worried," Lupin interjected calmly, though he looked quite pale. "We saw you and Draco flying to the bird without any clue as to what you had planned, so we obviously became worried."

"But you also saw that we were doing fine. We knew what we were doing," Harry answered stubbornly and crossed his arms.

Draco placed his hand on Harry's shoulder and squeezed softly, feeling how tense the other one was. He looked at the four other men and said, "Listen, I realize we should have discussed our plan with you, but we didn't want to waste time." He took a deep breath and continued, "We took precautions and we didn't get hurt, but we did manage to defeat the bird. And now we can enter the Manor; are we really going to waste time arguing whether or not our plan was a smart idea?"

"Aren't you getting quite cheeky?" Severus narrowed his eyes.

Father sighed. "Draco is right; the bird is defeated. It is useless to keep on arguing here. But," his eyes sharpened, "we will talk about your reckless behaviour when we are back at Hogwarts."

Harry murmured something underneath his breath – Draco suspected it was something unflattering – but nodded and then the group finally entered Potter Manor, treading carefully on the steps in case they encountered another hidden trap.

They stepped into a large hallway; a large staircase that seemed built out of black marble was in front of them on their right side, clad with a soft blue carpet. The blue carpet also covered most of the stone floor in the hallway.

There was one closed door on their right and two closed ones on their left. The doors were slightly smaller than the front doors and were made of some type of sturdy wood that Draco didn't recognize; the door knobs were covered with gold leaves.

Two large tapestries covered the walls; one depicting a couple of magical creatures like a unicorn and a Phoenix with each magical creature set apart by the form of trees that were sown in the fabric and the other showing a magical duel between two wizards.

From the sight of the hallway on its own, it was clear that the Potters had been a very prestige Pureblood family.

The silence that had descended on them was broken by a high squeak and they all whirled around to see a house elf standing in front of one of the closed doors; his eyes were big and bright yellow, his ears rather pointed and he wore some sort of scarf that bore the Potter crest.

"Young Master Harry has finally returned!" The house elf scurried forwards until he was a few inches away from the startled boy and the elf bowed deeply, until his crooked nose touched the floor. "Hinksy is welcoming the young master. Hinksy hopes young master be happy with state of manor."

"Eh, yeah, thanks," Harry stammered and his startled look was enough indication that he hadn't expected this kind of welcome from the house elves.
Then again, Draco mused, it's not like Harry ever had personal house elves. The only house elves he
knows are those of Hogwarts and the one living in Grimmauld Place.

Hinksy squeaked again, his eyes growing bigger – it appeared he wasn't used to being thanked.
"Welcome back, Lord Black and Master Lupin," he continued after recovering from the shock. He
turned to bow at Draco, his father and Severus, though he seemed to hesitate a bit. "Welcome, Lord
Malfroy, young Master Malfroy and Master Snape. Hinksy hope masters and lords enjoy their stay."

"Hinksy, where are the others?" Black asked, casting a look at the hallway.

The house elf straightened his back and clacked his heels together. One snap of his fingers later and
six other house elves popped into the hallway, all dressed similarly as Hinksy. One house elf stood
out against the rest in that he was the oldest one: proof being there in large, white tuffs of hair
sprouting from his big, flappy ears and the many wrinkles on his face and knobby hands.

"Welcome back, Master Harry," the house elf greeted in a deep voice and bowed. "We are glad to
see you are well." The house elf suddenly fixed Hinksy with a stern look. "Hinksy, I realize you
have not be in this situation before, but surely you know that you should clean the clothes of our
master and guests immediately. Especially because Master Harry is in a delicate state now."

"Hinksy is sorry, Beldric," Hinksy squeaked fearfully and with two other snaps, Draco felt a soft
wind flowing through his clothes and when he looked down, his clothes were repaired and clean
again, as if the fight had never occurred.

The same had happened to Harry's clothes. At least they would not attract attention from the other
students when they returned.

"Delicate state?" Harry repeated baffled.

Beldric gazed at him calmly. "You are carrying the heir to the Potter and the Malfroy family,
correct?"

"How did you-"

"House elves are sensitive to magic of wizards and witches," Draco replied and shrugged. "They
have to be, so they can take care of the family. They can feel the baby's magic already."

"Indeed," Beldric smiled faintly. "It has been a while since a male Potter became a partner of a
Malfroy. We is happy that family line be continue."

Beldric must have served the Potters for a long time already to have his manner of speaking almost
equal to that of a human. It was not unheard of that house elves with a long service would slowly
change their manner of speaking to resemble a human's speech; it was especially useful for a nursing
elf to experience that change, because that elf could help developing a child's speech. The nursing
elves received the utmost respect of both the family they served and from their own family, because
they had been deemed good enough to be the personal elf of a magical child – an occupation every
house elf strived to have.

This known fact about house elves made Draco wonder whether Beldric had been a nursing elf.

"Beldric, I'm sorry, but we can't stay long," Lupin stated apologetically.

"I know. Masters and lords have return to Hogwarts." Beldric bobbed his head, not looking
offended.
The other house elves, however, looked visibly disappointed; their large ears dropped and they looked sad.

Harry took a step forwards. "We need to go back soon, but we need your help first."

Draco exchanged an amused look with his father when the house elves' faces instantly brightened when they heard their master's request.

"Was cans us help Master Harry with?" the smallest – and clearly the youngest, judging by his speech pattern – house elf asked excitedly.

"We are searching for the portrait of Godric Gryffindor and we think he's hidden somewhere in this Manor," Harry explained. "Do you know whether we can find him here?"

The house elves exchanged a look and Draco narrowed his eyes. The elves seemed apprehensive, uncertain; as if they were not certain what to do.

"Plicky is sorry, Master Harry, but us cans not go visit Lord Gryffindor," Plicky squeaked fearfully and wringed his hands together fretfully.

"Why not?" Harry asked surprised.

"I suspect Albus put up a ward to keep everyone away from the Founder," Severus spoke up and sounded slightly bored.

Plicky nodded quickly. "Yes, Mister Dumbles puts up wards, so us elves cans not find Lord Gryffindor."

"What are we going to do now?" Draco's father frowned.

"Mister Dumbles put up ward to confuse elves, but not portraits," Beldric suddenly smirked; his eyes gained a rather vicious glint and Draco was reminded once again why angering the elves of another family was not a smart idea.

"Helky, warn Master Henry family will visit," Beldric ordered and an elf with orange coloured eyes immediately disappeared with a 'pop'.

"Please follow; I bring masters and lords to portrait who can help you."

Beldric led the group up the stairs, while the other elves disappeared, presumably going back to their duties.

Draco felt Harry slipping his hand in his and after casting a look at Harry's overwhelmed face, Draco squeezed softly in the clammy hand, prompting a grateful smile.

They went through three corridors, passing various closed doors and paintings and statues, climbed another staircase and were nearing the corner when they heard two male voices conversing.

"I thought your line had died out after that Dark Wizard attacked the heir?" one man questioned.

Another man clucked his tongue. "You really have no tact at all; I can only hope your descendants possess more tact than you." The man sounded exasperated. "And if you had paid even the slightest bit of attention, you would have known that their son survived the attack. Who else could have forced these wards to change? Only a legitimate Potter heir can do such a thing."

"So he got past the old fool's traps, huh?" the other man wondered out loud and then chuckled. "At
least the trait of stubbornness is still being inherited. I have not heard any other trap springing in action though – what do you think happened?"

"Most likely the house elves managed to disable them. The trap in front of the entrance kept them from disabling all the traps inside, but clearly the fool's plan failed and the house elves managed to disable the rest. I can hardly imagine they would want their new master to arrive in a trap filled home," the other man answered idly.

The group passed the corner and then halted abruptly when they came face to face with Henry Marcus Potter and Lucian Antonius Malfoy: the men who had first brought the two families together.

"Well, look what we have here: one Potter, two Malfoys, one son of the Prince family if I'm not mistaken, one Black and a gentleman who I unfortunately do not recognize," Lucian smirked.

He and his husband were seated in a comfortable, dark couch with a cosy living room as background.

"Even after all this time, you can still spot a Potter by his messy hair," Lucian smirked.

"It is better than having fair skin that easily burns," Henry retorted and threw his husband a poisonous sweet smile.

Lucian rolled his eyes and huffed.

"Merlin, it's like looking into a mirror," Black murmured and he sounded vaguely horrified.

Before Draco could reply, Henry hummed when he noticed Harry's hand in Draco's and leant forwards. "Oh my, it seems history is repeating itself." He sounded amused.

His husband threw a look at their intertwined hands and snorted. "Well, I suppose it is better than a family feud."

"You both are seventeen, correct?" Henry asked thoughtfully.

"Yes." Harry scowled. "It took Remus a while before he found your explanation of that part of my inheritance."

"Oh." The painted blond blinked. "I would have thought you had read about your inheritance before you became of age. Has the world deteriorated so much that young people are not even aware of their own inheritance before they undergo it?" He tsk'd. "How appalling."

Forest green eyes flared up in anger. "I was raised by the Muggle family of my mum until I was eleven. So sorry that I did not think of immediately checking all the books in case some blockhead decided to add another part to the inheritance I didn't even know I would receive!" Harry spat.
"Harry, calm down," Draco muttered soothingly and touched Harry's upper arm while Garin popped his head out from underneath the robes when he was alerted of his master's distress.

"Lucian Antonius Malfoy, what have you done?" Henry hissed and narrowed his eyes.

"Oh my, you are a feisty one – is that a fixed trait of the Potters?" Lucian murmured surprised.

"Lucian, answer me! What did you do?"

"Your husband decided to make lasting changes to the pregnancy spell he put on you and made it so that every Potter who enters into a relationship with a Malfoy will develop a womb when they either receive their inheritance or with their upcoming birthday, thanks to the charm being set to work." Severus' lip curled up slightly. "Unfortunately nobody was aware of this little fact until Potter received his inheritance."

"What are you implying?" Henry narrowed his eyes and pursed his lips.

"I'm pregnant," Harry replied tersely.

"You did not think of using protection?" Lucian sneered lightly.

"Lucian, keep quiet!" Henry suddenly snapped, startling everyone. "You and I will have a talk later about your audacity regarding this charm matter." He glared and Lucian looked away with a dark scowl. "These men possess limited time, so let us not waste time with bickering."

"So sensible Potters do exist," Severus muttered drily.

Harry rolled his eyes, but otherwise ignored Severus' remark.

"I apologize for cutting to the chase, but as you mentioned: we don't have a lot of time left," Father said calmly. "Albus Dumbledore has proven he is an enemy, rather than an ally and already has attempted to kill Harry. We are planning to stop him by using a Binding ritual and the portrait of Salazar Slytherin has offered his and the other Founders' help. We were doing research and Harry discovered that the Potters are descendants of Godric Gryffindor, which leads us to suspect that his portrait has been hidden somewhere in his manor when Dumbledore took the portraits off the wall."

"When we asked the house elves whether they knew about this, they told us that Dumbledore put up wards that keeps them away from the portrait," Lupin took over. "They also told us that you might be able to help us find Gryffindor."

"Enlisting the help of the Founders and an Elemental Creature, huh?" Lucian smirked. "You could not have found better allies than them. Very well. It is true that the wards keep out the house elves and other unwanted guests. We can lead you to the corridor where Lord Gryffindor's portrait is located and we will instruct you what to do to get rid of the wards."

"Thank you," Harry said rather coolly, but Lucian only chuckled and he stood up together with Henry.

"Please follow us," Henry smiled.

Henry continued to make small talk during the walk; asking Harry in which House he was sorted (Lucian looking stumped when Harry explained that a ritual had put him in Slytherin); which subjects he had chosen for his last year; how far along he was which led to him giving the boy tips on how to deal with possible aches that could come up like a sore back; and even apologized profusely for the fact that Harry had ended up with the Muggle family who had resented his mother,
to which Harry had uncomfortably waved off his apology, stating that it had not been any of the Potters' fault – how could it have when a Dark Wizard had decided to make James and Lily his target?

While Henry entertained Harry, Sirius and Remus with stories about things that had happened in the Manor, Lucian had taken to talking with his descendants and Severus; the latter offering a look of interest when the blond man mentioned an experiment in which he had combined a Levitation charm with Gravitation Reduction potion.

The group and the two men in the portrait were walking deeper into the manor; passing by what had once been the wing of James Potter – a large Gryffindor banner was still hung above the door and the wing of Harry's grandparents, who had apparently had a preference for light blue and light green colours.

The portraits, through which Lucian and Henry were walking, were either made up out of landscapes, landscapes containing magical creatures who only glanced at the two men with a disinterested face or other family members of the Potter family: aunts, uncles, cousins, great-grandparents … They all smiled brightly at Harry, welcoming him home and ushering him to come back once he had graduated.

Harry thanked them and promised to come back later, but Draco saw how a look of sheer longing crossed Harry's face each time they passed yet another family member of his lover. For someone who never had had the chance to experience a real family, the eagerness with which the portraits were welcoming him home and talking to him had to be overwhelming and Draco offered his silent support by placing his hand on Harry's back.

Harry glanced at him and offered him a wavering smile; his eyes showing his appreciation for Draco's support.

Draco had lost count of how many corners they had turned and how many corridors they had walked through, but he took notice of the fact that the air suddenly started to feel heavier, more oppressing. The hairs on his back were raising and instincts were screaming at him to turn back before it would be too late.

He grimaced; this had to be one of Dumbledore's other tricks. It was likely that the bastard had put up various curses that induced fear in the victim and were intent to keep unwanted visitors out. At least this proved that they would be stumbling upon Gryffindor's portrait soon.

He glanced around, studying the walls. Even here the walls contained portraits, but they were all devoid of living beings: the only things filling up the painting were landscapes like a grass field, the foot of a mountain, a small forest …

After having encountered so many family members and magical creatures just a few minutes ago, it was unnerving to suddenly face portraits that only showed a quiet landscape.

"Dumbledore made sure that the people residing in the portraits here were casted out of their homes by putting Resistance spells on them," Lucian commented casually.

"How come you two are able to go through them then?" Black asked and raised an eyebrow.

Henry offered him a wolf like grin. "The old man is one of the cleverest people I have met so far, but his entire plan of keeping everyone away from Lord Gryffindor depended on the wards not being breached by someone with Potter blood. As soon as Harry changed the wards and you defeated the obstacle in front of the door, his entire spell work had lost all its foundation and the house elves were
able to remove each trap and most of the curses." He threw a look behind him. "If they hadn't done that, you would have encountered at least six more traps before you would even reach the centre of this manor."

"But you'll have to ignore the Fear Projecting curse though," Lucian added. "I'm afraid the house elves will take longer to remove that one, because that's one of the strongest that was put up."

"Did he put up these curses when he brought the painting here?" Lupin frowned.

"Of course not." Lucian shook his head and clucked his tongue. "Even he was not that bold that he would dare to raise curses when the Manor had still inhabitants. No, he did this later."

"When was it?" Henry mused out loud and tapped with his wand against his thigh. "I believe he came back a year after he placed you with that Muggle family."

"Where were …" Draco's father started to ask, but was silenced with a quick head shake of Henry.

"Careful now, or you will come into contact with the ward," Henry warned the group and he and Lucian halted in their own frame.

They were standing in front of what seemed to be a dark, thin curtain that swayed lightly in a non-existing breeze. It blocked the rest of the way by swaying from one wall to the other.

No matter how hard Draco tried, he could not see past the fluttering curtain and it suddenly hit him that he was not looking at a real curtain, but instead at the physical manifestation of the ward that Dumbledore had put up.

"What kind of ward is this?" Harry murmured next to him and he sounded bewildered.

"The type of ward that they do not teach students anymore," Lucian replied drily. "It repels any living being or anything that resembles a living being like a portrait."

"Is that not a Dark Ward?" Black questioned and he furrowed his eyebrows, looking mildly disturbed.

"That it is," Lucian answered and chuckled briefly. "Surprising, is it not? That the defender of the Light as people liked to call him, would use such a dark type of ward."

"How do you disable this ward?" Draco asked and absentmindedly twirled his wand between his fingers.

He tried to remember whether he had ever heard of this type of ward before. Most wards were placed in the light magic category, because they were aimed at defending people or places. However, there was a select few wards that had the intention to harm anything or anyone that tried to tamper with it. He could vaguely recall reading about wards like this one years ago, but the memory was vague and any information he had found back then, had since long left his memory.

"Wards like this one all have one weak spot," Henry explained, looking at the ward with clear contempt. "If all of you aim a Crushing curse at the weak spot, the ward will collapse and disappear."

"And behind this ward, Gryffindor's painting can be found?" Severus sounded wary; his eyes studying the ward intently.

"Yes; get rid of this ward and you will be able to retrieve Lord Gryffindor," Lucian responded.
"How will we be able to locate the weak spot?" Harry asked and he bit his lip.

His question was answered by Garin, who peeked out from underneath his robes and hissed something to Harry. Harry frowned and hissed something back.

The snake turned his head to look at the ward and glanced back at its master, letting out another string of hisses.

Draco shifted his feet a bit when the hissing continued and thought that he should not find Harry speaking Parseltongue that hot.

Shaking his head, he forced himself to pay attention instead of letting his mind wander into dangerous territories.

"Garin said he found the weak spot," Harry told the group once the hissing had ceased. He nodded towards the upper left corner. "The weak spot is right in that corner. If we aim our spells at that corner, the ward should go down."

"It is a good thing you brought an Elemental Creature with you," Henry smiled and then inclined his head. "It was a pleasure meeting you, Harry. Do come visit again."

"You are welcome as well," Lucian told the rest of the group. He smirked. "It is about time that this manor has more than only Gryffindors visiting."

"We will," Harry promised with a small smile.

"All right, we have wasted enough time today," Severus snapped and raised his wand. "Let us disable this ward, so that we can retrieve the painting and return to Hogwarts."

"Everyone ready?" Lucius asked and the rest nodded, all pointing their wands at the upper left corner. "On the count of three. One, two, three!"

Several dark orange coloured lines, resembling lightning bolts, escaped their wands and blasted through the upper left corner. The curtain like ward stopped swaying and seemed to freeze up, resembling a sturdy wall suddenly. It glinted mechanically as it was suddenly made out of iron, but a second attack made it burst apart like an air bubble and the sound of glass shattering was heard, before the ward completely disappeared.

Cautiously, aware that there could be another hidden trap waiting for them, they crept forwards until they passed another corner and came to a stop in front of a low table, placed underneath a small window.

On the table a large portrait stood with a man, dressed in blood red robes, sitting in a large chair, with one hand resting on a book in his lap.

Dark brown hair, tinted with grey, shifted a bit when the man raised his head and looked at them, his auburn coloured eyes regarding them sceptically.

"First time in all those years that I am able to have a conversation with someone else aside from myself and it turns out to be a bunch of brats," Godric Gryffindor groaned exasperatedly and sneered. "Dear Merlin. At least brats are preferred than our mighty Headmaster. I assume that you are here to take me back to my rightful place at Hogwarts? Do not be careless fools; if even one book is out of place by the time I am back in the school, you will regret it." He threw them a sour, scathing look and huffed when they just stared at him in shock. "Well, what are you waiting for? A written invitation? Get on with it!"
Well, Draco thought faintly amused. *It seems Severus will get along splendidly with Gryffindor. Who would have thought that?*
Chapter 16: Christmas

18 th of December

The body next to him in bed shifted slightly and an arm came up to close loosely around his waist; warm, naked skin against his.

He blinked sleepily and turned his head, seeing the vague outline of his lover curled up next to him. He brought his arm higher up underneath the sheets and carefully placed his hand on his lover's stomach.

Harry murmured something inaudibly, but didn't wake up.

Draco stared at the relaxed face of Harry and was again struck with a wave of wariness. It was hard to believe that just a week ago, they had battled a giant bird and had retrieved Gryffindor's painting while meeting Harry's family members. It felt so surreal, as if he had read about it in a book instead of having experienced it himself. Was this how Harry felt every time he had managed to survive danger? This surreal feeling of not being certain whether the adventure had really happened or whether it had been all just a dream?

After they had retrieved Gryffindor – all the while ignoring his dark muttering – they had returned on their tracks, so that they could go back to Hogwarts now that they had succeeded in their retrieval...
On their way to the entrance, Harry had suddenly halted and had been staring out of the window. A short glance revealed him staring at a smaller building in the garden behind the Manor; it had looked like a miniature version of the Manor with a black roof and white walls. Black, who had noticed they had stopped following them, had turned back to look at what had caught their attention and had instantly stiffened at the sight, a heavy mood descending upon him. He had reluctantly admitted that that building was the Potters' mausoleum and it held all the graves of the Potters, bar that of James and Lily Potter, because they were buried at Godric's Hollow.

Draco started to caress Harry's cheek lightly, careful not to wake him up. After some resistance, Harry had been allowed to go take a look at the mausoleum. Draco had wondered whether his lover wanted to be alone during his short visit, but a short tugging had convinced him otherwise and the two had gone to the mausoleum alone, the other adults realizing that it would be for the best if they did not follow them.

The two boys had halted in front of a large, black, marble plate that was hanging right in the centre of the door; white letters had been cut out to form the names of all the deceased wizards and witches who had once been part of the Potter family.

When Harry had touched the first name on the top of the memorial plate, a small photo had appeared right next to the name, revealing the face of his grandfather, Charlus Potter. The further down they went, the further back in the past they went. Each name had glowed once they were touched lightly and they all had the photo of the wizard or witch who had carried that name during their lives.

Harry had barely pressed his hand against six names when Draco had taken notice of his trembling hand and his eyes that had started glittering with unshed tears.

Without saying anything, Draco had pulled his lover in his arms and Harry had pressed his face against his shoulder, his own arms coming around the blond's waist, squeezing it tightly. They had stood there for a while; Draco staring at the long list of people who Harry never had had a chance to meet while the dark haired boy had been taking shuddering breaths.

Eventually, Harry had pulled back, having been able to compose himself. Red rimmed eyes had looked up and Draco had bent down to give him a slow kiss. Harry had thrown one last look at the mausoleum before they had made their way back to the rest in silence, their hands intertwined.

Draco sighed and traced his fingers over full lips. Harry had not wanted to talk about their time at the mausoleum and Draco had been concerned with the heavy mood that had settled over his pregnant lover throughout the whole weekend.

He closed his eyes and an amused huff escaped his lips, when he remembered what had happened to drag Harry out of his dark mood.

They had hung Godric's painting in Severus' quarters, next to Salazar's. The Founder had grumbled upon finding himself in the dungeons, but had no choice and had acquiesced with a grumble. Salazar had quickly brought his friend up to date with everything that had happened from the moment Godric had left Hogwarts and for a few days, the man had been rather calm, mulling over the things he had been informed of and discussing the plan with Salazar, ignoring all the other occupants in the room.

However, the Friday after Godric's retrieval and after they had agreed to meet in Severus' quarters to discuss the possible locations of the other Founders, Lupin hadn't been able to join them, due to the fact that the full moon had been the night before. Black hadn't joined them either, because he had
been taken care of his lover.

At first it had seemed as if Godric would ignore the missing presence of the two men, but then in the middle of their conversation, he had abruptly asked where they were.

"The Potters were descendants of Godric, so maybe we should start researching who the descendants of the two others are?" Lucius suggested with a frown.

"Where are the other two?" Gryffindor suddenly asked rather brusquely.

Harry stared at him blankly. "Who do you mean?"

Gryffindor scowled. "The other two men who were with you in the manor."

"Ah." Harry's face lit up in understanding and he replied, "They are resting. They had a … rough night."

"Rough night as in what kind of rough?" Auburn coloured eyes narrowed in distrust.

Harry sighed and he sounded slightly irritated. "Does it matter what kind of rough? It's none of your …"

"Lupin has a condition that disables him every month for a few days and the stupid mutt stays with him to make sure he ingests the appropriate potions," Severus sneered and looked annoyed at having the conversation about the Founders interrupted.

Harry scowled at Severus and Draco hastily grabbed his hand, before his lover would unleash his scathing remark; he really didn't want to see another argument unfolding between those two.

"A few days every month?" Gryffindor looked thoughtfully, and then he seemed to realise what Severus had been implying with his condition comment. An ugly sneer appeared on his face. "You mean to tell me that that man is a filthy werewolf? And a Black takes care of that thing? Did that bloodline degenerate that much that …"

"SHUT UP!" Harry's scream startled everyone in the room, including the portraits. He sprung up and pointed his wand at a baffled Gryffindor. "I don't fucking care whether you are one of the Founders, you don't fucking insult my family, got it?"

Apparently not knowing when to keep quiet was one of Gryffindor's bad traits, for he sneered, "Oh please, you have to understand why werewolves are disgusting creatures – they don't even deserve to …"

"Shut. Up." Harry's eyes glowed eerily and suddenly a blue spark shot out of his wand and zoomed towards Gryffindor's painting, the frame actually rattling against the wall when Harry's unknown spell hit him.

Draco gaped when he saw the result of Harry's angry, magical outburst: Gryffindor's mouth had seemingly melted together, preventing the man from uttering any sound. Gryffindor himself looked stumped and his hands rose up to touch the melted skin.

"I didn't mean to do that. I didn't even know I could," Harry said blankly, breaking the heavy silence. Ruby looked up and purred his approval, making Draco snort inwardly – of course the lion would approve of any action if it meant Harry would be defended in some way or another. Never mind that Harry himself hadn't been the focus of the verbal attack now.
"I assume that your desire to silence my dear friend was enough for your magic to react," Slytherin spoke and his eyes glittered amused.

Gryffindor threw him a scathing glare and Slytherin chuckled. "You have but only yourself to blame for this debacle, Godric. You have always been too hot headed for your own good."

Harry cleared his throat and looked uncomfortably. "Well, you shouldn't have insulted my family," he muttered and glared at the Founder. "Remus is one of the nicest people I know and he doesn't deserve to be badmouthed by someone who doesn't even know him."

Severus sighed. "Well, at least it wasn't a student this time. I cannot state whether that is a good or a bad thing," he murmured darkly.

Slytherin snickered. "Don't worry about it, Harry. Hogwarts will return his ability to speak soon."

And indeed, half an hour later, Gryffindor's mouth unsealed itself again with a soft, ripping sound and the man grimaced, rubbing over his mouth.

Harry looked at him apprehensively, but to his and to the others' shock, Gryffindor suddenly gave him an appraising look and said, "At least you are not a weak minded fool who would stab his own family in the back. Good, we need more wizards with your attitude."

Ignoring the flabbergasted look on everyone's face, Gryffindor continued the conversation as if nothing out of the ordinary had happened.

After that little mishap with Gryffindor, the dark mood clinging to Harry seemed to have been lifted and Gryffindor himself had grown to be a bit more amiable towards them – even towards Black and Lupin.

"Hm, Draco?" Harry's sleepy voice broke through his thoughts and he turned his head to look at Harry, who stared back at him through half lidded eyes. "Is it time to get up?"

Murmuring a quick Tempus spell, the clock revealed it to be four thirty.

"No, we still have a few hours before we have to get up," Draco murmured and placed his wand back on the nightstand.

Harry hid his yawn behind a hand and snuggled closer to the blond, letting his eyes slip close. "Hm, all right then," he muttered. "I'm going back to sleep."

Draco smiled faintly and – tightening his arms around Harry – he closed his eyes as well, following his lover into the dream world.

20th of December

"I still can't believe that bitch had the nerve to say that about you," Draco hissed viciously when they made their way to Curses after they had finished their Potions' class.

Harry tightened his lips and did his best to ignore the stares and whispers that had started again after the article in today's Morning Prophet.

Molly Weasley had once again managed to convince the newspaper to print a story of hers which had had the purpose of discrediting Harry – again.

This time she actually had had the nerve to imply that Harry rescuing Ginny in his second year had
been nothing but a ploy to get him in the good graces of the family. In reality, according to her, Harry had Stunned Ginny and brought her to the Chamber of Secrets, where he would later rescue her so that he would get the image of a hero. This explained why Harry had been the only one who knew where to find the Chamber of Secrets and how to open it.

It was a low blow, but because she never really insulted him, only implied bad things about him, Harry doubted the Ministry would act on their promise to keep a leash on the press. 

_Because that means they would actually have to do something_, he thought sourly and went up another staircase.

It shouldn't have surprised him, really, but he had had the hope that the student body would have grown smarter by now and would realise that this was just another try of Molly to bring him down.

How silly of him to have expected actual common sense of the students. He really should stop assuming that people would be smart when it came to newspapers.

"Let's just try to ignore it, okay?" he murmured and stepped aside to let some second years of Hufflepuff pass. "I'm really not in a mood to deal with this now."

Draco threw him a sympathetic look. "All right, but the first idiot who dares to attack you, will have a meeting with my wand."

"I have no doubt about that," Harry snorted, but a small smile grew on his face.

"Did you cast the spells?" Draco murmured in his ear when they entered the classroom after Moondagger had opened the door.

Harry nodded slightly. It had become a routine question for Draco to ask whether Harry had casted the protection charm around his stomach. Every lesson required another protection charm, so depending on the classes, he had to renew the charm three to four times a day.

They took their seats in the middle of the row closest to the door; they had quickly discovered that being surrounded by their fellow Slytherins in the front and the back was safer than sitting in the back of the classroom.

With one glare, Moondagger managed to silence the entire class. He snorted and leant against his desk, twirling his wand between his fingers. "Last week I introduced you lot to curses designed to target the organs and bone structure. This week I will attempt to enrich your knowledge with curses that target the nerve structure in the body." His narrowed eyes flitted from one student to the next. "As always, the curses I will let you attempt, will be fired at the practice dummy." He pointed at the face less, human like doll standing in the back of the classroom. "If I see one curse straying towards one of your fellow students, detention will be the least of your problems."

Threat hanging in the air, he clapped his hands and grabbed the handbook lying on his desk. "Turn to page seventy-eight. We will start with a curse that will twist the nerves in the limbs together."

The lesson continued without mishaps until nearly the end. Moondagger had hit the doll with the Multi spell and had directed four students at once to cast their spells at the dolls. The students had to use a curse which would turn the nerves into liquid; this curse was known for the crackling sound it made when it hit its target and with its loud noise, it practically drowned out other noises in the classroom.

The four students were standing next to each other in the middle of the room and the other students formed a half circle around them; the desks were shoved to the walls to provide a lot of space. To
make certain only the four appointed students would practice the curses, Moondagger had ordered the other students to place their wands down on their table.

It happened when the four curses collided with the practice dummies.

Harry watched intently how the curse of a Ravenclaw student hit the dummy and was seemingly absorbed by it. The practice dummy started to tremble and the limbs were waving around madly and the doll sunk to the floor.

So absorbed was he in studying the effects of the curse that he didn’t pick up the words of another curse.

He did however hear the sharp gasp coming from Draco and he had just turned his head to ask his boyfriend what was wrong when Draco suddenly jumped in front of him and blocked his sight.

"Draco, what …"

He didn't get the chance to finish his inquiry, because a jagged, black line hit Draco fully in his back and the blond let out an agonized scream, sinking down on his knees.

"Draco!" Harry followed his lover on the ground, where the blond started to tremble, curled up in a ball, while his hands were scrambling over the floor, trying to grip something. "Draco?"

"Hu-hurts," Draco brought out through his clenched teeth and his eyes rolled back in the sockets, several spasms going through his body.

"Nobody leaves this room!" Moondagger snapped and the other students stumbled backwards, being driven back both by Moondagger's dark glare and Ruby and Mara snarling and circling around the two boys.

"What's happening to him?" Harry asked the ex Auror and the first tendrils of panic started to close around him. What was that curse and what was happening to Draco? Why had someone fired a curse at him?

Moondagger approached them, being wary of the still growling animals and studied Draco's trembling form.

Harry had gripped the flaying arms to avoid Draco from hurting himself more, but he felt helpless.

"Sir, could you help me bring him to the hospital? The nurse will …"

"The nurse won't be able to help him, Potter," Moondagger interrupted him harshly and Harry stared at the man blankly.

"Why not? Do you know the counter curse?"

"Potter, the curse Malfoy was hit with is the Hostile Corpus curse," Moondagger murmured and pity shone through his eyes.

Numb.

That was how Harry felt now. He slid his eyes towards Draco’s face that was grimacing in pain and his hands tightened around the violently trembling arms.

Moondagger had made a mistake; there was no way Draco was hit by the Hostile Corpus curse. Because if he was, that meant …
He bit his lower lip hard enough to taste copper, but he couldn't care less about that. Vaguely he heard Moondagger questioning the other students, demanding them to tell him who fired the curse, but he didn't care about that. How could he care about that now, when Draco was … when Draco was …

There were few curses that didn't possess a counter curse. The most famous one was the Killing curse and the Hostile Corpus curse was another one. It essentially meant that the body would start attacking itself violently and the nerve system and organs would be the first to suffer under the never-ending attack. The curse had been developed in such a manner that a counter curse was not possible. Several brilliant Spell masters had, throughout the years, tried to develop a counter curse, but every single one of them had failed.

After the curse was cast, the victim had around two hours to live, though those last two hours would be filled with agonizing pain. Because of that, anyone found guilty of using the curse was either sentenced the Kiss or lifelong imprisonment.

"This is not happening. You're not … you can't …" Harry tried to bring out, but something seemed to block his throat, preventing him from getting his words out. From the corners of his eyes he saw a bright blue spark and suddenly the both of them were cut off from the rest of the group by a bright blue shield that sparked dangerously. Not particularly interested in the origin of the shield nor the shouting of the students and Moondagger, Harry tangled their fingers together and squeezed tightly into Draco's hands. "You can't leave me, you hear me? I need you; we need you," he choked out and on an impulse, he brought their linked hands to his stomach. "You said we would get through this together! You can't …"

"So- sorry, it-it hu-urts," Draco whimpered and another violent spasm ranked through his body.

This could not be happening; they had fucking survived Voldemort! Draco could not be dying, because a student fired a curse! He couldn't …

"Put your hands on his forehead and stomach." Mara suddenly slipped through a small hole in the shield. The shield made a hissing sound, before it closed again behind her.

"What?" Harry jerked his head to the right to stare at her.

"Put your hands on his forehead and stomach, now!" she growled impatiently and Harry hastily complied.

"Close your eyes and concentrate on your magic," she instructed him and bewildered, he did what she said. "Concentrate on the burning feeling in your back and direct your magic to it."

"What am I …"

Before Harry could finish his question, a sudden tug at his stomach made him nearly fall over and he felt something pulsing in his lower back. Before panic could rear its ugly head again, a sudden, ferocious roar filled his ears and arms, as hot as fire, seemed to embrace him fleetingly, before they left him and hovered over his hands.

"Whatever you do, do not open your eyes."

Breathing quickening, he felt two hot hands closing around his own, fusing with his skin and even without opening his eyes, he knew they were glowing fiercely. Underneath his hands, he felt another spasm running through Draco's body and he swallowed.
Knowing he could trust Mara, even without having any idea what was going on, he let himself be swept away by his magic and let it do whatever it wanted to do, trusting it would know what it should do.

He didn't know how long he sat there, kneeling; his sense of time was thrown off from the moment he found himself in the midst of his magic whirling around him. He didn't know what the students were doing, what Moondagger was doing and whether the culprit was caught, but what he did know, was that when he finally opened his eyes, he stared right into wide grey eyes.

Draco laid in front of him, one hand splayed across his chest while the other one gripped Harry's leg.

His magic retreated and he briefly closed his eyes when cool fingers flitted across his face, his magic darting around his head, before it sunk back into its core, filling him with wonder and a sense of contentment.

"Harry?" Draco asked him with a hoarse voice.

Harry smiled and bent down to press their lips together. "You're back," he whispered against dry lips. His hand on Draco's forehead shifted upwards to stroke through the sweaty, blond hair. "Sleep now. You need it."

Despite the wariness in his eyes, Draco threw him a trusting look and closed his eyes with a soft sigh.

The hand in blond hair stilled and Harry sat up. His lips tightened and his eyes narrowed.

They had gone too far now. He had been lenient so far, as the curses and spells hadn't been that serious, but this time they had gone too far. And he would make them pay.

Mara and Ruby, who were slowly lowering the shield, purred when they felt the rage coming off their master's body and their eyes glowed ominously.

It seemed their master had finally had enough.

Gaining awareness was a slow process. He wanted to sleep some more; had the faint hope that more sleep would make him stop feeling like he was dropped from his broom at a great height, but he knew that he should wake up. He couldn't keep sleeping, even though the thought was tempting.

Slowly grey eyes opened and they were looking at a light blue ceiling. The walls were painted in a darker shade of blue and that coupled with the closed door and the more luxurious sheets made him realize he was most likely laying in a private room in the Infirmary.

He turned his head and saw Harry standing in front of the only window. A faint frown marred his forehead, but his eyes shone with a strange calm. One hand laid on the windowsill while the other one was slowly caressing his stomach.

Their soft breathing was the only sound that filled the room and Draco felt as if he was hypnotized, his gaze focused on the hand moving across a flat stomach.

He must have made some sound, because Harry turned around and his eyes lightened up. Quickly he crossed the room and sat down on the bed, his dark hair looking even more ruffled than normal.

Before Draco could even attempt to ask his first question, Harry had bent down and fastened their lips together. Hands held his face tenderly, which was a sharp contrast to how harshly Harry was
kissing him. Gasping sounds were muffled thanks to their lips and Draco returned the kiss with equal force; his arms coming up to close around Harry's neck.

When they finally separated, their lips were slightly swollen and very red; their breath released in soft pants.

"Don't ever do that to me again, you hear me," Harry murmured and a thumb caressed his cheekbone.

Draco shifted a bit and winced when he felt his muscles protest. "What exactly happened?"

His memory was fuzzy. He could remember hearing the first syllable of a curse, saw the wand aimed at Harry and remembered covering Harry with his body before the curse was fully launched. After that, all he could recall was a lot of pain. Agonizing pain and the sensation of his nerves getting fried and his organs squeezed.

Evidently somebody had managed to cure him and bring him to the Infirmary, but what exactly had occurred during the time he had been semi-conscious?

Harry sighed and straightened his back, though he kept one hand on Draco's cheek. "You were hit by the Hostile Corpus curse," he replied after a short moment of hesitation.

Draco blinked and wondered whether he had heard Harry correctly. "Are you sure? Because that curse has no …"

"No counter curse, yeah, I know," Harry answered and his eyes darkened momentarily. "But Moondagger recognized it from your symptoms and your fingers were starting to turn blue after just two minutes."

"Then why …"

The dark haired boy frowned and retracted his hand. "I somehow managed to heal you." The next exhale made his hair flutter. "Mara instructed me the entire time and somehow my magic managed to cure you. Afterwards we brought you to the Infirmary and the nurse did a check-up. Aside from sore muscles, there is nothing wrong with you. She does want to keep you here for a few days in case something happens."

"You think it's the bond that managed to help you heal me?" Draco asked softly and entangled their hands together.

Harry nodded. "Sirius and Remus came by earlier and when I described what had happened, they told me they had read a passage in the book that the bond enables someone to heal his partner. Apparently Henry and Lucian had something similar happening to them."

"The bond is getting more and more complex to understand, instead of easier," Draco muttered and frowned.

How much more would they discover about the bond? What other things was it capable of? If it was able to heal a non-curable curse, did it have any limits?

"You shouldn't have done it, though."

Harry's statement brought him back out of his musings and he looked at him confused. "I shouldn't have done what?"
"Jumping in front of me. You could have died, bastard," Harry said through clenched teeth and a spark of anger lightened up in his eyes.

Draco couldn't resist rolling his eyes. "Yes, of course, I should have just let the curse hit you and then both you and our baby would have died. Are you stupid? Why on earth would I just let a curse hit you?"

Harry seemed to struggle with something and for a moment it was quiet. Conflicting emotions were crossing his face rapidly and Draco stayed silent, giving the other one time to collect his thoughts.

"It's … I don't – I don't need protection all the time, just because I'm pregnant," Harry finally answered and he sounded troubled. "I'm capable of protecting myself and I don't want you to throw yourself in front of danger. Do you have any idea how it felt like, knowing you were dying and I couldn't do anything?" His eyes glittered with unshed tears.

"Yes, I know, because I felt the same thing when I saw you being attacked by Dumbledore and by Pomfrey," Draco replied forcefully and struggled to sit up. "Harry, even if you weren't carrying my baby, I still would have protected you. I love you and I'd do anything to keep you safe."

"You could have pushed me aside, instead of jumping in front of me!" Harry accused him and angrily wiped his hand across his eyes. "You're always scolding me for jumping head first into danger, but what do you think you just did? You threw yourself in front of a curse that could have bloody killed you! Damn it, Draco! I need you and … The baby needs both of us; not one parent dead, because …"

"I know," Draco whispered and closed his arms around Harry, pulling him closer. Harry leant his forehead against his shoulder and arms came around his waist and tightened.

"Don't ever do that again," Harry whispered against his shoulder and Draco merely embraced him tighter.

He couldn't promise something like that; doing that would be the same as stating he didn't care what happened to Harry.

Looking back at it now, he admitted quietly to himself that he probably should have just pulled Harry out of the way and let the curse hit the wall, but at that moment all he could remember thinking was that he had to protect Harry, that he couldn't let him be harmed.

For a while, they just sat together, embracing each other. Draco's hand rose up to run through unruly, black hair and in turn Harry softly rubbed his neck.

"Did they manage to find the one who fired the curse?" Draco eventually asked and absentmindedly wondered how late it was.

Harry nodded and shifted closer to him. "Yes, it was someone from Ravenclaw. He apparently has a crush on Ginny and had decided that I should pay for bringing her into danger," he answered and sounded bitter.

"So he decided to use a deadly curse, just because of a crush?" Draco asked incredulously and his hand stilled. Weren't Ravenclaws supposed to be smart?

"Hm; there is probably more to it, but that's all that he was willing to say to McGonagall," Harry said and sighed.

"What is McGonagall going to do with him?"
"She called the Aurors and let him be taken away. His trial will probably happen somewhere after Christmas. For now he'll be staying in Azkaban."

"How did they find out who did it? I can hardly imagine that guy would be willing to admit it."

Harry let out a strange huff, as if he was half amused. "Clearly you underestimate our pets. I don't know how they did it and frankly I don't particularly care either. They singled the guy out and grabbed him by his robes when he tried to run. He admitted to using the curse after … the use of Veritaserum that Snape brought."

Draco raised an eyebrow at the small pause. "Did something else happen?"

"Why would something else have happened?"

"You paused right before saying he was given Veritaserum," Draco pointed out. "Was he given something else?"

"Not really," Harry admitted hesitantly.

Draco pushed him back a little to study his face. Green eyes flitted to his own, before they looked away while a red sheen coloured cheekbones. Shoulders rose up as if Harry wanted to make himself smaller.

"What did you do?" The blond asked softly and pulled Harry's chin up so that he could look him in his eyes.

Harry fidgeted and avoided his eyes.

"Harry?"

"Master punished the attacker," Ruby suddenly spoke up.

Startled, Draco turned his head and saw Ruby standing up, approaching the bed. Mara was still laying down on the floor, though her eyes were alert and trained on them. Garin was curled up on her back and seemed to be dozing off.

"Ruby," Harry spoke tersely and glared at the large lion.

Fiery red eyes stared at him calmly. "Master was right in punishing the attacker. Master had to defend his mate."

Harry clenched his jaw and looked away, though his face revealed his embarrassment.

"What did you do, Harry?" Draco softly repeated his question.

"I may have used some spells that convinced him to confess," Harry grudgingly admitted and he seemed ashamed of himself.

Draco blinked and then smiled, giving Harry's hand a squeeze. "Thank you," he simply said.

Harry's face coloured more, but he gave a small smile back.

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23rd of December

The story of Draco being attacked and the perpetrator sent to Azkaban went through the entire
school in no time at all and the rest of the week, students kept a wary eye on Harry and Draco (who was released from the Infirmary on Thursday). There were no more attacks, but it was obvious that the student body didn't know what to think of the couple now.

Harry wasn't too bothered with the wary stares of the other students; as long as nobody attacked him or Draco, he didn't care what they thought about him.

On Friday, most students were huddling together at the station, waiting for the train to take them to London, so they could start their holiday.

After exchanging letters, it was decided that Harry, Sirius, Remus and Snape would spend the holidays at Malfoy Manor. Sirius had protested at first, claiming he didn't wanted to intrude, but Narcissa had been firm in her decision and had even resorted to threatening Sirius with colouring his hair permanently green if they didn't spend the holidays at the manor.

Remus had interfered and after a long discussion, both parties had agreed that Sirius, Remus and Harry would spend Friday and Saturday at Grimmauld Place, so that the Weasley brothers could visit Harry and exchange gifts. Even though the twins, Bill and Charlie had accepted Draco, they still didn't feel comfortable around Lucius and Narcissa and in order to avoid an awkward atmosphere, the decision was made to keep both families separate for now (Harry was hoping that both families would manage to reconcile in the near future, because he didn't want to choose between them).

When they arrived at the station after an uneventful train trip, Draco and Harry embraced each other, sharing a sweet kiss.

"I'll see you Sunday," Draco smiled and pressed another kiss on Harry's lips.

Harry smiled back. "Yes, I'll see you Sunday."

"Don't forget to take a picture when you tell them the news," Draco murmured in his ear and his eyes twinkled mischievously.

Harry rolled his eyes exasperatedly. "Behave," he muttered, though a smile tugged at the corners of his mouth.

Draco winked and then left to join his parents.

"Ready to go?" Sirius asked once he and Remus had collected their bags.

Harry nodded and after putting the coordinates of Grimmauld Place in the device Narcissa had lent him, they all appeared in front of Grimmauld Place.

"Thank Merlin it'll be only for two days," Sirius muttered darkly and they entered the house after it appeared in front of them.

Harry and Remus shared a look, but didn't speak up.

A couple of hours later, Dobby and another Hogwarts house elf were preparing dinner. When Dobby had somehow discovered that "the great Harry Potter" would have dinner with guests, he had eagerly offered his help, not wanting Master Harry Potter to stress himself by preparing the food.

Harry had protested, said that he, Remus and Sirius would be able to prepare dinner on their own (well, Sirius was a doubtful case), but Dobby would have none of it and insisted on helping them.
Sirius had shrugged and had told the house elf to do what he wanted, as long as he didn't mind the sour house elf Kreacher.

Charlie (who had taken two days off to visit Harry), Bill and his wife Fleur (who was happy to see Harry again) and the twins arrived in the afternoon; all of them sporting a big grin.

"Dad is held up at work, but he said he'll visit tomorrow," Charlie explained, when Remus inquired after Arthur.

"Glad to see you can function – "

"Well without Blondie attached to your hip," George finished his brother's sentence and both flashed a grin.

Harry snorted and rolled his eyes. "We're not that bad, guys," he protested and got his hair ruffled in response.

"You're so cute – "

"When you're in denial," Fred snickered and greeted Sirius and Remus.

"I am 'appy to see you again, 'Arry," Fleur smiled and kissed him on both cheeks, bringing with her the scent of roses.

Harry smiled back. "Glad to see you as well, Fleur." He nodded to the man joining her. "Bill."

Bill shook his hand and grinned. "Glad to see you're well, Harry."

Several plates with snacks beautifully arranged on it popped up on the table in the middle of the room and eight glasses appeared next to it. A bottle of Elven wine and apple juice was put next to them. Plates with raw meat on them were placed on the floor for Ruby, Garin and Sapphire and Harry was pretty certain that Hedwig got her own festive meal.

Glasses filled with wine were passed around and Remus handed Harry a glass with sparkling apple juice.

The difference in drinks didn't go unnoticed by the Weasleys.

"Can our little Harry – "

"Not hold his drink?" George teased and both boys grinned widely.

Sirius raised an eyebrow and looked at his godson imploringly.

Harry shifted his feet a bit and took a deep breath. Tightening his fingers around his glass, he looked them all in their eyes and answered, "It's a rather long story, but eh, I'm expecting a baby. I'm three months pregnant."

For a minute shocked faces stared back at him, before Fleur left her place next to her husband and came forwards to hug him. "Congratulations, 'Arry! I am so 'appy for you!" Her light blue eyes sparkled in delight and she pressed a firm kiss on his forehead.

"Damn, this means that there will be – " George started with wide eyes.

"Soon a mini-Malfoy walking around?" Fred finished the question and he gaped at Harry. "Can't decide whether that will be – "
"A good or a bad thing," George continued and then laughed. "Still, congratulations, Harry!"

Harry rubbed the bridge of his nose and smiled shyly. "Thanks, guys."

At least telling them hadn't been as nerve wracking as it had been with Sirius or Draco's parents.

The rest of the evening flew by with laughter and a lot of talking, though all had unanimously agreed to avoid the topic of Ron, Ginny and Mrs Weasley.

The following day, Arthur joined them, looking tired but happy and as soon as he heard the news of Harry's pregnancy, he congratulated him wholeheartedly.

They shared presents that evening and for the first time in a long while, Harry was fully relaxed, enjoying the amiable atmosphere that hung in Grimmauld Place's living room.

He had missed talking with the Weasleys and resolved to meet up more often. He may have lost Ron and Ginny, but he hadn't lost all Weasleys and that thought warmed his heart.

25th of December

"Have you thought about where you'll give birth?" Narcissa suddenly asked and immediately a hushed silence fell over the others.

After the Weasleys had left that morning, Harry, Sirius and Remus had packed their bags again and had Floo'd to Malfoy Manor (Lucius had opened the Floo for the amount of time they had needed to pass through).

Currently they were seated in the spacious living room, enjoying their orange flavoured tea and caramel flavoured biscuits, while the house elves were preparing the Christmas dinner.

Draco and Harry were sitting next to each other with Sirius and Remus on Harry's side. Narcissa occupied an armchair while Snape and Lucius were seated on a couch, placed across Narcissa's armchair.

Harry blinked and lowered his cup of tea. "Eh, no, not really."

"We still have a couple of months to think about that," Draco added after taking a sip of his tea.

Narcissa waved her hand. "Something as important as that should not be put off for long," she informed her son and threw him a piercing look.

Draco sighed softly. "I assume you have thought about suitable locations?"

"Of course I have," she smiled and nipped from her tea. "I am certain, Dragon, that your father has told you about the importance of the manor, correct?"

Harry furrowed his eyebrows and felt quite lost. What had a manor to do with the place where he would have his baby? Remus seemed puzzled as well, though Sirius was frowning thoughtfully.

"Of course." Draco nodded and absentmindedly wrapped his arm around Harry's shoulders. "A manor represents a fortress and is the best defence a family has. The magic of the people inhabiting it makes the wards of it stronger and in return for the magic freely given by the inhabitants, the manor protects the family."

She nodded approvingly. "Exactly. This is why I advise the two of you to spend the Easter holidays
at the manor you were given when you came of age, Draco. That particular manor hasn't had any inhabitants for a long time and it is best that the wards get used to your presence before the baby arrives."

"You want Harry to give birth in that manor," Sirius suddenly stated and raised an eyebrow.

"Yes; they will be living there after they graduate from Hogwarts and you know as well as I do, Sirius, that it is tradition to give birth in your home. A baby is vulnerable and with them occupying the manor during the Easter holidays, the wards will recognize them immediately when Harry is in labour and will provide the best protection," Narcissa stated confidently.

"But what if Harry goes into labour when he's still in Hogwarts? Babies don't always arrive on time," Remus pointed out.

"I'm still here, guys," Harry murmured, feeling a bit annoyed that they were talking about him as if he wasn't there.

Draco snorted and gave his shoulder a quick squeeze.

"Then we'll use the device to bring him to the manor," she answered idly. "I am not going to let my grandchild be born in a castle full of hostile magical signatures."

Remus opened his mouth, but Snape cut him off abruptly. "Wolf, don't bother. Once she gets an idea stuck in her head, you won't convince her otherwise. Just accept the fact that Potter and Draco will spend the Easter holidays at the manor and that the baby will be born in that same manor."

"So, I don't have any say in this?" Harry didn't know whether to be amused or annoyed.

"None at all," Lucius smiled and shook his head. "Narcissa knows what she is talking about, Harry and it is true that it is better for the baby to be born in the place where you'll live for the rest of your life instead of a castle meant to provide education."

"Of course I know what I am talking about," Narcissa huffed and threw her ex-husband a scowl.

Before either one of them could speak up, a house elf popped up in the room and announced in a high, shrill voice, "Dinner is ready. Mistress and Masters are to present themselves at the dinner table."

They all followed the house elf to the large dinner table and were presented with various dishes steaming with delicious food. It didn't take long for them to sit down and enjoy the delicious food.

After the last plates – which had contained dessert – were transferred to the kitchen and they were all given warm chocolate milk to enjoy, the group went back to the living room where presents were waiting for them underneath the glittering Christmas tree.

Mara and Ruby immediately curled up in front of the large fire, their soft purring accompanying the crackle of the fire while Sapphire kneaded a pillow in the right shape to sleep on. Rowen was already tucked away in the Owelry together with Hedwig and Garin was curled up on a fluffy rug in a corner of the room where it was slightly cooler.

After checking the label on each present, the boxes were quickly divided so that everyone had a pile of gifts in front of them.

Lucius opened his first. From Narcissa, he received a new set of robes and a holster for his wand. Sirius, Remus and Harry had managed to procure the complete set of "Pureblood Families: a
Snape had given him a new journal and a note hidden between the pages made Lucius silently huff in amusement, though Snape refused to meet his knowing look. From his son he received two thick tomes which had blank covers. The covers seemed made from soft leather and Lucius' eyebrows rose up in surprise when he opened the first one and glanced at the title.

He looked at his son and Draco merely shrugged and returned a blank gaze, making Harry silently wonder what exactly was written in those books. Not wanting to pry, he didn't ask.

Snape was the next one to open his presents, though he only started unwrapping them after he got nudged in his ribs by the older blond (for which Lucius received a dark glare). He rolled his eyes when he saw that Narcissa had gifted him special lotions that promised to get rid of potion stains both on skin and clothing.

"I can brew these potions whenever I want," Snape pointed out calmly and put the box next to him.

"But now I have given you incentive to actually use them. After all, it's rude to not make use of a gift," Narcissa smiled sweetly and ignored the glowering look she got as reward for her remark.

Lucius and Draco had given him five books about potions that had been written by Potion Masters during the fifteenth and sixteenth century. Remus and Sirius had pitched in to give him a silver cauldron and a silver ladle. Snape merely nodded his thanks, but Remus smiled in response.

As he had not had any clue what to give Snape, Harry had resorted to keeping it safe and had bought vials of various heights and forms for potions to be stored in. Snape studied the glass and copper vials and nodded slowly at Harry, who hid his smile.

Narcissa laughed delighted when she received fancy dress robes from Snape, Lucius, Sirius and Remus. She winked and said teasingly, "What, did you men not know what to buy me?"

"Dress robes are the safest gifts for a society woman like you, 'Cissa," Sirius chuckled, though he seemed surprised at the coincidence.

She shook her head amused and carefully placed the robes next to her so that they wouldn't get wrinkled. Her eyes glittered when she unwrapped the silver necklace her son had given her. A single amethyst stone, shaped as a rose, dangled from the necklace.

"Thank you, Draco," she smiled and kissed his cheek.

When she opened Harry's present, her breath escaped her in a soft gasp and her eyes widened.

"Harry …" she trailed off, staring at him perplexed.

In her hands, she held a box which contained a thin silver ring which was adorned by a single garnet stone. Carefully engraved in the stone was the Potter's emblem. Being of Pureblood descent, Narcissa immediately realized the meaning of this particular ring.

"I, eh, I found a journal of one of my great aunts and she mentioned that she had given that ring to her mother-in-law," Harry muttered and could feel his cheeks heating up. "She said it was used as a symbol to represent the union of two families. And I thought I would … give it to you."

Narcissa carefully slid the ring around her finger and then rose up from her chair to embrace Harry, who started but quickly hugged her back.
"Thank you, Harry. I am really honoured to wear this ring," she whispered and soft, cool lips touched his forehead before she returned back to her seat.

Draco caught his eyes and gave him a soft smile, making his cheeks redden even more.

Luckily for him, Sirius and Remus decided to divert the attention to them unwrapping their presents so that Harry had time to calm down.

Narcissa had given them an invitation to enjoy a dinner for two at a high class restaurant, which she assured them was not led by people discriminating against magical creatures. Sirius received a book about the most difficult spells in the Transfiguration field and Remus one about Defence against the Dark Arts.

When they both opened a small box which was given to them by Draco, their eyebrows rose up and they stared at him; in Remus' case, he was speechless while Sirius looked more calculating.

"What did Draco give you?" Harry asked curiously and leant slightly forwards.

Remus picked up the object and held it in the air. It was a small, crystal ball that rested on a marble stand. A strange mist was drifting inside the ball and it was coloured a milky white.

"What is that?" Harry asked perplexed. He didn't think Draco had given them a crystal ball meant for divination. If he had, he would need to have a serious conversation with Draco about gifts that pertained to their interests. Divination wasn't one of their interests.

"It's tied to the baby's magical signature," Remus spoke slowly while his eyes studied the ball critically.

"And what does it do?"

"It lets us know when the baby will need us in case both of you are unavailable to care for the baby," Sirius replied in a flat voice. "When we're not needed, the mist will be white. If however the baby feels distressed and needs help and you're not near, the mist will turn various shades of red, depending on the urgency."

"Interesting choice of gift, darling," Narcissa remarked and her eyes glittered oddly.

Draco shrugged half-heartedly. "I trust them more with the welfare of our baby than Blaise and Daphne. They are good friends, but when it comes to the baby …" he trailed off uncertainly and his cheeks flushed in embarrassment.

Remus smiled and carefully placed the ball back in the box. "Sirius and I really appreciate your gift, Draco. Thank you."

Sirius didn't say anything, but nodded once with pursed lips.

Remus chuckled and shook his head when they opened the box Harry had given them.

"Can't have your duelling skills becoming rusty," Harry grinned.

In the box were two books about the best way to duel and spells especially designed to duel. It also included various small boxes which, when unfolded, would provide targets to practice on and mattresses to fall on.

"Your turn to open the presents, Harry," Sirius grinned and gestured towards the pile waiting in front
of Harry's feet.

The first one on the pile was a small, rectangular box wrapped in bright red paper. Harry picked it up and was surprised at the light weight.

"Wait, that one needs to be enlarged," Sirius muttered suddenly and leant forwards to tap his wand on the package.

Immediately the box was enlarged until it was laying on both Harry's and Draco's legs.

"What on earth did you buy?" Harry asked puzzled and narrowed his eyes when he saw Sirius' large grin. A tad apprehensively, he ripped the paper and gaped when a picture of the Thunderbolt 6000 – the newest released broom, said to be three times as fast as the Firebolt – greeted him. "Sirius, you didn't!"

"But I did," Sirius laughed.

"This must have cost a lot! You didn't have to buy one – my Firebolt works just fine," Harry retorted and bit his lip. If his Firebolt (which was tucked away in his trunk) had been broken, he could have understood – sort of – why Sirius had bought him a new broom, even when he could have afford to buy one on his own.

"Harry, for the love of Merlin, don't act so stubborn and just accept the broom, all right?" Sirius huffed and raked a hand through his hair. "With someone cursing your Firebolt, I'm not comfortable with you using that one. I should have done this sooner, but during that time I didn't know I had to do that. Before I wrapped the broom, I put some extra protection on it – if someone tries to curse this broom, the curse will rebound and the effect will be twice as powerful."

"Of course you'll have to wait with flying properly on it until the baby is born," Remus added and didn't look as if he wanted to scold his lover for spending such an excessive amount on one broom, which led Harry to assume that the older man probably agreed with Sirius' reasoning.

Harry sighed resigned and put the broom on the floor. "Fine, but you're not allowed to buy another broom for me," he replied firmly.

Sirius rolled his eyes and muttered something underneath his breath.

Remus' gift turned out to be a golden Snitch.

Harry stared at him surprised.

"In case you still want to play some Quidditch after you graduate," Remus explained bashfully and shrugged.

"Thanks," Harry smiled and placed the box on the broom.

The next package, gifted by Lucius, contained both a book about curses and a white cradle with a silver bow.

"Narcissa has already been looking at furniture for the baby's room, but I managed to get this one before she did," Lucius chuckled and ignored his ex-wife's slight pout.

"Thank you; it's beautiful," Harry murmured and could easily imagine his baby sleeping peacefully in the beautiful cradle. With a smile, he put it next to him, stacking the book on top of the large box.
Narcissa’s gift turned out to be some regular sweaters and trousers, maternity sweaters for men and rompers in various colours like soft purple, light blue, white, dark green. Some of the rompers had pictures on it like a laughing sun or dancing flowers.

"You can never be too early with getting some decent clothes for both you and the baby," Narcissa gave as explanation for the diversity in clothes. "The rompers adjust to the baby until he or she is one years old and then you'll have to buy new clothes."

Harry laughed delighted and Draco chuckled. "Thank you, Narcissa."

The next gift was from Draco and it contained a leather holster for his wand which had protection spells woven into the leather and a charm in the shape of a tiger, which could be added to the thin bracelet he had received last Christmas.

"The tiger is a symbol of protection and I added a few more protection spells to it," Draco said and helped Harry connect the charm to his bracelet. "I figured you could use the extra protection."

Harry rolled his eyes, but smiled and gave the blond a kiss on his cheek. "Thank you."

There was one thin gift left and Harry stared at it puzzled, wondering from who it came. He picked it up and the way it easily bent and folded beneath his grip made him realize the package contained some kind of clothing.

Thoroughly confused, he slowly opened it and blinked when he saw the content. It was a dark green romper, but instead of it being a regular one with a picture on the front, this one would make the baby resemble a mini dragon. It even had a mini tail attached to the back with dark green spikes stitched on it. Two brown horns at the top were filled with wool so that they would point upwards when the hood of the romper was pulled over the baby's head. Two large green eyes were stitched on the edge of the hood and around the neckline small, sharp, white teeth, resembling those of a dragon, were stitched.

Two small mittens that ended in claws filled with wool were attached to the arms of the romper.

"This is cute," Harry chuckled and held up the romper in the air, showing it off to everybody. "And it shows who the father is."

Draco smirked and took the romper in his own hands, turning it around to look at the tail. "Did you buy this, mother?" he asked curiously, absentmindedly touching the spikes on the tail.

Narcissa narrowed her eyes. "No, I didn't. Lucius?"

"No need to look at me." Lucius shook his head.

Remus and Sirius also denied buying it.

"Then who did …" Narcissa suddenly pursed her lips and scowled at Snape, who raised his eyebrow. "Really, Severus?"

Snape looked calmly back. "I have no idea what you are talking about."

"Are you already trying to win over my grandchild by buying it cute clothes?" she accused him, though her eyes glittered with amusement.

"Why on earth would I buy something cute for the brat?" Snape sneered and crossed his arms.
"Because you secretly have a soft spot for the baby already?" she teased him and laughed.

He scowled. "I do not have a soft spot for that brat."

"Whatever you say, Severus, whatever you say," she replied lightly.

When she looked away and Snape caught Harry's eyes, Harry gave him a small smile. The older man looked away almost immediately, but Harry thought he could see his face soften a bit.

Draco was the last one to open his presents. His mother had given him several sets of robes made of high quality fabric, sweaters and trousers. From his father he received a thick file and he nodded gratefully to his father, making Harry wonder once more what was exactly written in the file.

Snape had given him a Potions book aimed at students studying the art on a higher level. Remus gave him a book about the best Quidditch tactics (some of them not quite legal) which made Draco laugh.

Harry had had a hard time finding something suitable for Draco and had eventually settled on combining Draco's two major interests: Healing and Potions. It had taken some time, but he had eventually tracked down a shop that sold books which showed through examples how Healing spells could be combined with potions.

Draco thanked him by pressing a soft kiss on his lips.

There was one gift left and Draco opened it with an apprehensive face when the tag on it mentioned it was from Sirius.

Not able to contain his curiosity this time, wanting to know what his godfather had bought for Draco, Harry shifted a bit closer to the blond, so that he could look at the content of the gift.

It turned out to be a small, copper locket with the Black crest proudly displayed on it. Harry didn't really understand what it meant, but he did feel Draco stiffening and staring at Sirius wide-eyed.

Sirius refused to look at him and studied the bright wrapping paper strewn around the floor. "Take good care of it – it's a rather old artefact and I'd rather not have my mother coming back from beyond the grave to haunt us because you managed to break it," he said gruffly.

"I swear I'll take good care of it," Draco replied solemnly and carefully closed the box in which the locked was displayed.

"Draco?" Harry inquired softly and Draco shook his head softly.

"Just a Pureblood tradition," he replied distracted and glanced back at the closed box.

A few hours later, it was decided they would all retire to bed. His mother informed everyone where they could sleep and that was when Black started to protest the arrangements.

"But they are still too …"

"Sirius, Harry is pregnant; it's in the child's best interest if the parents spend the night near each other," Mother replied and she sounded slightly exasperated.

"But they …"

"Sirius, you know that the baby needs both of their magic," Lupin interrupted him and threw him a
Black continued to mutter underneath his breath, but didn't protest when Harry and Draco bid them good night and left to retire to Draco's bedroom.

Draco's bedroom was in a separate wing, so when they arrived at the top of the stairs, they went left instead of right, which would have led them to the guests' wing and his parents' wing.

While they crossed two corridors before going up another staircase, Draco contemplated the gift he had received from Black. Honestly, he hadn't expected to get anything from the man, even with the objects he had chosen for Black and Lupin.

Harry had thrown him various confused looks after he had unwrapped Black's gift, but he hadn't been able to answer those looks. He still couldn't believe Black had given him this particular artefact.

The copper locket belonged to the Black family and the owner of it would pass the locket on to whomever he or she deemed fit as a partner for their child. It was a symbol of acceptance.

Draco didn't quite dare to hope, but he couldn't quell the longing for Black's acceptance of him. Ultimately it didn't really matter whether Black accepted him or not, because Harry had made it quite clear he chose for him and Lupin had expressed his acceptance, but as he was Harry's legal guardian (and thanks to old Pureblood traditions) Draco wanted Black to give him his acceptance.

Was this locket the first step to Black accepting him? Or was he getting ahead of himself?

"Draco?"

Draco blinked and was surprised to discover they had already arrived in front of his closed bedroom door.

"Ah yes," he muttered and opened the door, gesturing for Harry to enter first.

While Harry was slowly walking around the large bedroom, admiring it, Draco hastily put his gifts away and grabbed a small box he had hidden in one of the pockets of his bathrobe. He had ordered it weeks ago, just a while after they had told Black about the baby. He hadn't been certain at first when to give it, but eventually he had decided that today would be a good day to give it to his lover.

He only hoped Harry wouldn't think the gift was weird or inappropriate.

"You have a very nice bedroom," Harry complimented him when he turned around.

The dark haired boy was sitting on the edge of the large bed; his fingers playing absently with the soft sheets. His presents had been placed on Draco's desk with the crib on the floor.

"Thanks," Draco murmured and stepped closer to Harry. When he was right in front of his boyfriend, he kneeled down until he was sitting on the floor, looking up at confused green eyes.

"There is one more gift I want to give you," he murmured.

Harry blinked. "Oh?"

"It's not really for Christmas," Draco said and after slightly hesitating, he continued, "It's a gift, because we're together for one year now and I wanted to get you something to show how much you mean to me."

"Damn, Draco, I didn't buy anything for this occasion; I'm so sorry!" Harry exclaimed horrified. "I
swear I've not forgotten that we're together for a year, but I didn't think we …"

"Harry, it's fine! Don't worry about it," Draco reassured him. "I just wanted to give you something."

Harry still looked troubled, so Draco quickly withdrew the box from behind his back and showed it to the boy.

"Did you know there are symbols someone can use to show how many years they are together?" he started conversationally. "Being together for one year is often shown by the gemstone olivine." With that said, he opened the box and showed Harry the small olivine stone on the thin, golden ring.

Rendered speechless, Harry plucked the ring out of the box with trembling fingers and held it in front of his eyes.

"I know that the ring could be misunderstood by the public if they see you wearing it, so that's why I enchanted it to stay only visible for our eyes," Draco continued hesitantly. "Of course, if you don't mind everybody seeing it, then I can remove the charm, but I thought you wouldn't want unneeded attention, so …"

"It's beautiful," Harry interrupted him suddenly and looked at him with glittering eyes. "Thank you," he whispered and let Draco slide the ring around his right middle finger. "Now I feel so guilty for not buying you anything."

"Don't," the blond assured him and rose up to sit next to him on the bed, admiring the way the candle light caressed the gemstone and made it shine. "I'm already happy that you accepted it."

"You can be incredibly sappy at times, you know," Harry teased him, though even in the candlelight, Draco could see his flushed cheeks betraying his embarrassment.

Draco huffed. "See if I do something nice for you again," he muttered.

Harry chuckled and kissed his cheek quickly. "Is there a set time we have to get up tomorrow?" he whispered and his hand shifted over Draco's leg to his hip, slipping underneath his shirt.

Raising an eyebrow and eyeing the sneaky hand amused, Draco shook his head. "No, as long as we are up before eleven o'clock, mother and father don't particularly care if we sleep a bit longer than usual."

"Good," Harry murmured and then stood up, pulling his sweater over his head. "How sleepy are you?"

A smirk appeared on Draco's face. "On a scale from zero to ten? Zero."

Harry laughed. "Well then, mind joining me in bed?"

"Don't mind if I do," Draco muttered and pulled his shirt over his head, throwing it down on the floor. The house elves would take care of the clothes in the morning.

They hastily stripped until they only had their boxers on and climbed in bed, sliding underneath the cool sheets.

With a quick muttered spell, Draco locked the door and just in case put a Silence Bubble around the room as well. Normally none of the other occupants in the manor should be able to hear them, giving the location of the wings, but it was better to be safe than sorry.
"You've got to love magic," Harry whispered in his ear and swung his leg over Draco's hips.

Draco placed his wand on the nightstand and turned to face his lover, pulling his body tighter by gripping his hip.

Their lips found each other and they rubbed against each other, before Draco felt a tongue softly pushing against his closed mouth. He opened his mouth slightly and the tip of their tongues touched, before they curled around each other, each swallowing the other one's moan.

Feather like touches were placed on his arms and chest, before they turned firmer and gripped him tightly when Harry pulled back with a gasp. Draco's head fell back and his eyes closed involuntarily when teeth closed softly around a patch of his skin in his neck. The teeth bit down a bit harder, before a tongue swept over the swollen area in apology.

His own hands slowly caressed toned skin, briefly stopping at the stomach to touch it tenderly, before they swept across Harry's lower stomach, making his lover hiss in response.

Draco grinned and briefly dipped his fingers between Harry's stomach and boxers, before he removed them and instead swept his thumb over a raised nipple, making the body next to him squirm lightly.

A groan left their throats when they pressed their hips together completely and they fumbled around until they managed to get rid of their boxers, leaving them completely naked underneath the warmed up sheets.

Harry let out a soft gasp and squeaked when Draco touched him lightly on the back of his knee and squirmed away. "Ticklish," he muttered and the blond smirked.

"Don't even think about it," Harry said in a threatening tone when he noticed the mischievous glint in the grey eyes of his lover.

Draco raised his hands. "I don't know what you're talking about."

"Hm." Harry raised an eyebrow, a sceptical look on his face, but he shuffled closer again, until their bodies were pressed together, entangling their legs.

Draco trailed a line of kisses from Harry's collarbone, over his neck, chin, cheeks until he reached his mouth and pushed their lips together. A soft moan was his response and hands slid into his hair, mussing it up in the progress. Those hands tightened slightly when he rolled them over until he was laying on top of Harry, between his spread legs.

His breath hitched when Harry rolled his hips upwards and he bucked back, creating friction.

"Do you have lube here?" Harry whispered and he sounded slightly husky.

"Hm, I put it in the nightstand when I arrived home," Draco replied and pulled back, so that he could shuffle to his nightstand. He opened the second drawer and rifled through it, pushing back some quills and ink pots. He found the tube near the back of the drawer and withdrew his hand, taking it with him.

Quickly he moved back to his place between Harry's legs and slowly pushed them up.

Pressing his lips against Harry’s to distract him, he put a dollop of lube on his fingers and carefully pressed one finger against Harry’s entrance, feeling him tense up a bit when he slipped his finger inside. His other hand closed around Harry’s hard cock when he added a second finger and he
started stretching him slowly, keeping track of the way Harry reacted to the touches to know when he could add another finger.

Soft whimpers were slipping out half closed lips and they turned into a loud moan when Draco entered him with three fingers and managed to locate his sweet spot.

“Ah, Draco!”

Hands clenched around his shoulders and Draco felt inner muscles clenching around his fingers when he hit that spot a few more times.

When he next looked at Harry’s face, he noticed the flushed cheeks, the darkened emerald green eyes and reddened, swollen lips, making him swallow.

“I’m ready,” Harry breathed out and Draco had barely retracted his fingers, before he was suddenly flipped over so that he was the one laying down on the bed.

“Harry?” he asked confused and wanted to sit up again, but two hands on his shoulders prevented him from rising up.

Harry shook his head and grinned. Steadying himself on his hands, he swung his leg over Draco’s hip, so that he ended up straddling the blond.

“What are you …” Draco’s inquiry was cut off abruptly when he felt Harry grabbing hold of his hard cock and he made a choking sound when Harry sank down on his cock, enveloping it in a searing warmth and his hands shot out to grab Harry’s hips.

“Thought it was time for some change,” Harry muttered and breathed heavily through his nose; his hands clenched and unclenched in the sheets. His eyes fluttered close and he shifted a bit, trying to get used again to the feeling of Draco inside of him.

Draco forced himself to keep still so that he didn’t end up hurting Harry and quirked an eyebrow.

“Well, I can’t say I mind the view,” he smirked and caressed Harry’s side with one hand. His eyes glided over the heaving chest, the red coloured nipples and he bit back a moan when Harry shifted again, managing to sink down completely on him.

A short while later, Harry apparently decided he was comfortable enough and he started moving up and down; slowly at first, before he gradually sped up, the muscles in his legs tensing every time he rose up.

Draco sat up a bit, raising his legs so that Harry could find balance against his knees and pulled Harry down by his neck, so that he could kiss him properly. A whimper was torn from Harry’s throat when Draco bucked his hips on his next thrust downwards and the blond knew he had found Harry’s prostate when the dark haired boy groaned loudly and muttered a quiet “Fuck.”

Draco grinned and took advantage of Harry’s gasp to slip his tongue inside of his mouth, curling it around the tongue he found there.

The room was filled with broken moans, sighs, groans and the sound of their skin slapping against each other and Draco felt his climax building up slowly.

Wanting to come together, he forced himself to hold back and while still embracing Harry’s shoulders with one arm, he slipped his free hand between their bodies and firmly grabbed Harry’s leaking cock, hearing a soft whine escape from his lover. He started stroking him, his thumb rubbing over a vein and it didn’t take long for Harry to tense his muscles around him.
“DRACO!” Harry shouted when he reached his peak and Draco joined him seconds later, not minding that his stomach became slightly coated with Harry’s release.

Harry slumped forwards and Draco caught him, giving him a kiss on his temple.

“I’ve missed this,” Harry breathed out and his left hand started to play with Draco’s slightly sweaty, mussed up hair.

Draco tightened his grip around Harry; he had missed this as well. Sure, he and Harry usually spent at least two to three nights together in Hogwarts, but most of the time they were too tired to do anything. This was one of the few times when they were both relaxed and they revelled in being able to enjoy each other without having to worry about unfinished homework, threats of other students and a clock that seemed to enjoy making time they spent together fly by quickly.

Harry stirred after a while and when he looked Draco straight in his eyes, Draco bent his head and caught Harry’s lips in a soft kiss. He felt himself hardening again, and never having slipped out of his lover, he rolled them around so that he was on top this time.

Feeling Harry’s legs coming up around his hips, he pulled back a bit until only his tip was still inside and then pushed back in slowly, being content to just set a slow pace.

With the next thrust, his mouth slipped away from Harry’s and he sucked at a spot near Harry’s right shoulder; his mouth was filled with the faint taste of Harry’s sweat.

Nails raked across his back lightly, leaving a faint stinging sensation behind, when Draco shifted his hips and apparently pressed against Harry’s prostate with his next thrust.

“Hm, right there,” Harry moaned and Draco complied, doing his best to constantly hit that particular spot with each thrust.

Hands busied themselves with caressing stomachs that clenched and unclenched and thumbs flicked teasingly over hardened nipples. Tongues slid over heated and sweaty skin and teeth placed teasing bites.

This time when they climaxed, Harry’s whimper was swallowed by Draco’s mouth and Draco’s moan was quietened by Harry’s lips.

They rested for a while, laying down next to each other, waiting for their heart to calm down a bit.

The sheets made a rustling sound when Harry sat up and Draco could clearly see his legs and arms tremble a bit when he leant down on hands and knees.

One heated glance thrown his way and Draco was sitting on his knees behind Harry. Harry made a pleased sound and lowered his head when Draco grabbed his hips and slid inside him again. Draco bit his lip and closed his eyes when he felt himself being surrounded by the familiar heat and he leant forwards, one of his hands leaving Harry’s hips to grab Harry’s hand and he entangled their fingers while he started to move.

They rocked together: when Draco pushed forwards, Harry pushed backwards and they quickly set a satisfying rhythm for the both of them.

Their senses already overloaded thanks to the previous times, it didn’t take long for them to reach completion and they shuddered and trembled, before sinking down on the bed.

They did it a few more times, until they were too exhausted to move. They fell asleep, embracing
each other after giving each other one last kiss and whispering their love to the other one.

The two weeks that encompassed the winter holiday was spent at Malfoy Manor, filled with laughter and chatter. Narcissa was clearly enjoying having her son and son-in-law near her for the holidays and she had fun showing samples of how the nursery room would look like if they allowed her to decorate it. Both boys didn't really have a preference when it came to the nursery room and as long as it wasn't painted pink or another very bright colour, they gave her permission to decorate it how she wanted.

Snape stayed for the entire holiday and surprisingly he and Sirius managed to act relatively civil towards each other – as civil as those two would ever be. Occasionally one of them was a victim of a prank planned by the other one, but overall, their banter wasn't that vicious compared to how it once had been.

9th of January

Of course, like it was some unwritten rule, when one had fun, time flew by too quickly and before Harry realized it, it was Sunday evening and they would be leaving for Hogwarts the next morning.

It was a shame, he mused when he stepped out of the big shower, that he had to leave so soon again. He really had enjoyed staying at the manor and even though the thought of staying near Draco's parents had been daunting at first, they had quickly put him at ease and it was almost like he had known them his entire life.

To have to return back to a place where most people regarded him warily and where some of them even dared to attack him or his lover was not his idea of fun.

He was absently rubbing a towel over his head to get his hair mostly dry, when his eyes caught sight of the tall mirror. Slowly he removed the towel and cocked his head. His attention was caught by his stomach and he furrowed his eyebrows, stepping closer to the mirror as if that would make the image clearer. He turned sideways and studied his reflection thoughtfully.

He hadn't paid much attention to it, but now that he was concentrating on it … Was his stomach rounder than before?

Still focusing his attention on the mirror, he raised his hand and placed it on his stomach. He moved his hand back and forth, up and down and slowly a wide grin appeared on his face.

"Are you nearly done?" Draco called out and knocked on the door.

After throwing another glance at his stomach, he quickly changed into his pyjamas. "Yes! I'll be there in a minute!"

He had something to show to his lover – which he was certain would make the blond excited.
Author's note: Before I say anything else, I want to sincerely apologize for taking so long to finish this chapter. I was planning on finishing it during the Easter break, but I had underestimated my university workload and so I was only able to finish this chapter this week *sweatdrops* I'm really sorry for taking so long, especially because you are already so patient with this story!

I will try to have the second part out before the end of May, but I can't promise anything. My exams start at the beginning of June and they end around the end of the month, so yeah, I'm busy for a few more weeks / Good thing is that I have everything mostly planned out, so writer's block won't be an issue.

So once again, I'm really sorry for taking so long! That wasn't my intention - I hope I still have readers *wincses*

To make up for the delay, this chapter is around 10 000 words and the entire chapter will be - once again - split into two parts. (If you read all this, put your favourite character of this story in your comment or so)

Thank you for the comments :)

Warnings: MPreg; angst; drama; tiny speck of fluff. That's it for this chapter I think.

Disclaimer: I don't own Harry Potter - J.K. Rowling owns it.

I hope you'll enjoy this first part!

Chapter 17: Helpful Hufflepuff and Precarious Potions Part 1

11th of January

After two uneventful days, Harry woke up on a Wednesday morning with a chest between his legs, two arms wrapped around his stomach and lips kissing the small bulge that was visible when one looked closely enough.

He blinked and glanced sideways, noticing Mara and Ruby still sleeping soundly with Sapphire curled up between them. Garin had wrapped himself up on his chair and an occasional soft hiss escaped his throat.

When fingers joined the lips and touched his stomach lightly, he grabbed the edge of the sheets and lifted it up. At first he only saw ruffled blond hair until Draco lifted his head a bit to look at him with one raised eyebrow.

"What?"

"What are you doing?" Harry asked perplexed.
"Can't I say good morning to our baby?" Draco replied innocently and rose up, laying down next to Harry, making the latter drop the sheets again.

Harry looked at him slightly exasperated. "I've just begun to show a bit – it's not like my stomach has grown that much already."

"I wasn't aware I had to wait until your stomach had reached a certain state before I could say good morning to our baby," Draco answered and he sounded slightly amused.

Harry groaned and shook his head. "Seeing you acting like this already makes me happy that I didn't tell your mother about this. I don't even dare to imagine how she would have reacted." He shuddered lightly.

His bed partner chuckled. "She's just excited, because it's her first grandchild. Can you blame her?"

"Your father can restrain himself and this is his first grandchild as well," Harry couldn't help but point out. It was not like Narcissa's behaviour annoyed him; he actually thought it was sweet that she was so enthusiastic about the baby and he preferred this behaviour to one where she would act cold and generally ignore the baby. But that didn't mean that she did not overwhelm him at times with the amount of information she gave him and all the plans of the nursery room she showed him.

"My father acts restrained whenever you see him," Draco smirked and his hand slipped underneath Harry's shirt to trace meaningless patterns on his stomach. "That doesn't mean he actually is that restrained."

Green eyes narrowed. "What do you mean?"

"Exactly what I said. My father isn't as restrained about the baby as you think he is."

"You and your damned riddles," Harry huffed and gave the wandering hand a half-hearted swat.

"What kind of riddle could you possibly detect in my answer?" Draco wondered out loud. "I think I said clearly that my father doesn't act restrained when it's about the baby."

"Then how does he act? I've never seen him as enthusiastic as your mother," Harry answered and then furrowed his eyebrows. "Although I don't want him to act that enthusiastic – I don't think I would manage to survive that."

A surprised laugh made Draco's body lightly shake. "Ah, just trust me on this. Mother has chosen to show her happiness about the baby through buying stuff and creating decorating plans and Father has chosen another way to show his happiness." He pressed a kiss on slack lips.

"I sincerely hope acting obstinate is not a Malfoy trait that our baby is going to inherit," Harry muttered and slipped out of Draco's embrace before the blond could tighten his grip.

"Hey! Obstinacy is not a Malfoy trait!" Draco protested and sat up. "Why are you calling Malfoys obstinate?"

Harry threw him a grin and grabbed his bathrobe. "Not so fun when you don't understand the comments clearly, huh, Draco?"

"Seriously, are we going to act like that?" Draco groaned, but the faint smile on his face let Harry know that he wasn't really angry.

"Yes. Now get out of bed before you're late for class," Harry admonished him. He left a grumbling
bald behind and made his way to the shower.

Leaving the bathroom door open, he had to suppress a grin when he heard Draco stumbling out of bed and making his way to him. Apparently he wouldn't be taking his shower alone.

"I need to check the library for my Healing homework, so I'll join you later."

A quick kiss and Draco made his way upstairs while his lover descended the staircase to go to his room.

The students in the Healing class were studying the various spells designed to mend broken bones and their homework consisted out of explaining in five pages why some spells reacted well to certain type of breaks and others not.

Draco had already made a start on his essay, but he needed a specific book for further research and he wanted to borrow that book from the library before someone else snatched it away.

Madame Pince threw him a suspicious look, but the blond ignored her and checked the title he had hastily written down on a scrap of parchment.

He passed four rows and turned into the fifth one. The left side of the row contained books about Healing and he slowly walked past it; his eyes roving over the spines of the books. Nearing the middle of the row, he glanced idly upwards and clucked his tongue annoyed when he noticed the book he was searching for, placed on the top shelf.

Of course it would be on the top shelf.

Ignoring the small ladder at the end of the row, he whispered, "Wingardium Leviosa." He directed the book carefully to the round table in front of him and it landed with a soft 'thud'.

Quickly browsing through it, he nodded to himself and grabbed the book. It was still a relatively new book, so he didn't have to fear it falling apart.

"I want to borrow this one for two days," Draco announced and showed the librarian the book.

She narrowed her eyes. "For which class?" she asked and sounded suspicious.

Restraining the urge to roll his eyes, he replied tersely, "For Healing. We need to write an essay; you can ask the professor about it."

Giving him a sour look, Pince grabbed a sheet of paper and penned down the title almost aggressively. "The book needs to be back on the shelf this Friday at four p.m. and not a minute later."

Not deigning that worthy of a reply, Draco stuffed the book in his bag and left the library before Pince could scold him about his treatment of the book.

Deciding he would get more work done in the solitude of Harry's private quarters than in the rowdy common room, he turned around and passed by a bunch of giggling girls, belonging to Gryffindor, who were staring down at a magazine.

Right when his left foot landed on the first step of the staircase, he was halted by a familiar voice.

"Draco, wait!"
As if he was hit by the Body bind spell, he froze. He forced himself to turn around and face the girl he hadn't talked to in more than a year.

Pansy stood in the middle of the corridor and she straightened her back when he looked at her. Only her tightly pursed lips showed that she was aware of the students staring and whispering.

"What?" He raised an eyebrow and looked at her coolly.

"I'd like to talk to you. In private," she added and looked him boldly in the eyes.

Not wanting to cause a scene, Draco inclined his head. "Very well," he drawled. "Do you have a place in mind?"

"Yes; follow me," Pansy murmured and turned around, her hair almost hitting another girl's face with the force of her turn.

For a short moment, Draco wavered and wondered whether it would be a good idea to follow her. Father had warned him the Parkinsons would probably try something to convince him to marry their daughter and Mara had left with Harry, so he couldn't rely on her judgement.

He sighed inwardly and slowly followed the ex-Slytherin girl. If she tried to lift her wand against him or tried to dose him with a potion, he would be able to stop her on time; he was confident that his ability to react quickly was better than hers after training with his godfather, Black and Lupin.

So he would let her talk, would listen to what she had to say and then he would leave. He didn't own her anything. But for the sake of the comradeship they once had had, he would let her talk.

Pansy led him to a small, empty classroom that was practically hidden away in a dark corner. She halted in the middle of the room and leant back against a desk; her arms clasped around her as if she was cold.

Draco kept two feet between them and crossed his arms. "Talk."

Pansy glowered at his brusque tone, but said, "I know you don't want to be here, so I will keep it short."

Look at that; she actually can pick up the signs that she's not wanted, Draco thought rather viciously.

"I want to apologise for trying to create a rift between you and Potter," she continued stiffly and glared at the floor.

A blond eyebrow shot up in surprise.

"I should not have tried to convince Potter you were only using him to warm your bed."

His mind flashed back to their fight right before Valentine's Day last year. Harry had accused him of only wanting to get into his pants, throwing his knowledge about Draco's former bed partners in his face. Draco had wondered who had shown Harry the photos and he seemed to finally have received the answer.

"So you were the one who showed Harry the photos," he murmured.

Pansy flinched as if he had shouted at her and seemed to shrink a bit. "I know I should not have done that, but I was so … jealous," she gritted her teeth, "that he managed to capture your attention while you seemed to ignore me, that I wanted to hurt him."
"Why are you telling me this now?" Draco asked in a flat tone.

"I wanted to apologise. I have acted way out of line and you have the right to disregard my apology, but," she swallowed and finally looked him right in his eyes, sincerity shining in hers, "I hope we can eventually become friends again. I have missed talking to you, Draco, and I do not want us to remain enemies."

He eyed her warily. "Is this some kind of ploy to convince me to take you as my wife?" he asked bluntly, forgoing the tact his parents had instilled in him when he was a child. If his father had been present, he would surely have scolded him, but the blond couldn't be arsed to be tactful now.

She looked at him shocked. "What? No! I know you are together with Potter now and I know when I am defeated. I just want to be friends again."

When Draco still regarded here distrustfully, she sighed and rolled her eyes. "Look, I am being courted by a German Pureblood now; despite what you may think about me, I will not betray my future husband." She spread her arms and threw him an exasperated look. "If you want, you can look at the letters I have been exchanging with him. You cannot read the content, naturally, because you are not taking part in the courtship."

Draco sighed and shook his head. Pansy may have changed somewhat in the time they had stopped interacting with each other, but when it came down to Pureblood traditions, she would not dare to lie about them.

Her offering to show the letters was enough proof that she wasn't lying to him now.

However …

He studied her face; taking note of her blank face, but her eyes showed how tired she was.

She seemed sincere with her apology, but he was not a naïve Gryffindor. He was not about to trust her just yet. Maybe she meant her apology, maybe not; only time would tell.

"I do not trust you, but I accept your apology," he finally answered calmly.

Pansy bowed her head and her shoulders sagged a bit. "I understand. I am already glad you accepted my apology."

"Was there something else you needed to talk about?" he asked flatly.

She shook her head and he nodded before turning around and leaving the room silently.

The group of giggling girls had disappeared, so Draco walked through an empty corridor back to the dungeons, musing about the conversation he just had had with Pansy.

Distracted by his musing, he noticed too late that the door of Severus' classroom opened and he collided with a fifth year Gryffindor girl who was holding a vial.

He cringed when the uncorked vial, clenched in the girl's right hand, released its contents on his robes. Luckily it didn't touch his skin and he hastily threw off his soiled cloak, grimacing when the fumes of the potion entered his nostrils. The potion smelt nauseatingly sweet and he wrinkled his nose.

Severus didn't teach any sweet smelling potions, so the blond assumed it was a botched attempt at the potion that was taught now.
"Sorry, didn't see you there," the girl sneered and snatched her hands back that previously had been resting on Draco's shoulders to keep her from falling. Obviously this was one of the Gryffindors who kept hanging on to the irrational animosity between the Houses.

Draco snorted and turned to continue his trip to Harry's quarters; his cloak swung over his arm with the stains visible, so that his shirt would stay clean. "No surprise there. Walking and breathing at the same time probably takes up most of your concentration already, so paying attention to your surroundings is asking too much, given your brain capacity."

"WHAT?" the girl screeched and before she could do anything else, Severus appeared behind her and stared at her coldly.

Draco smirked when the girl cowered in fear.

"Miss Goodman, return to your desk at once."

The girl squeaked and hurried back into the classroom.

"See me after class," Severus ordered coolly.

Draco chuckled softly.

Severus turned his attention to his godson and raised an eyebrow. "What happened to your cloak?"

"That girl spilled some potion on it." Draco shrugged carelessly. "It didn't touch my skin."

His godfather frowned, but nodded. "Get it cleaned before it is completely absorbed."

"Will do."

The sound of the door closing accompanied him on his way to his lover and soon he mumbled the password to the dragon, who let him enter with a sleepy growl.

Harry greeted him with a kiss and they were soon emerged in their homework; the soiled cloak thrown over the arm of the couch. A house elf popped in to take the cloak and that was the only disturbance they had the entire afternoon and evening, save for Draco taking a shower to rid himself completely of the lingering potion fumes.

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14th of January

When Draco woke up on Saturday morning, he immediately realized something was wrong with him.

His skin felt as if it was on fire and he was sweating profusely; his hair stuck to his forehead. His stomach was churning and he hastily rolled over to the edge of the bed. His hands buried themselves in the matrass and he clenched his eyes shut when he started to dry heave. Even though there was food in his stomach, nothing came out; not even bile and his dry heaving became worse until he thought he would choke.

The matrass dipped behind him and hands rubbed over his back.

"Draco, what's wrong?" Harry asked concerned.

The touch seemed to help, because he could breathe again without dry heaving. The nausea however was not disappearing and he laid back down with a miserable groan.
A hand came up to touch his forehead and his lover hissed. "You're burning up," he muttered with a frown marring his face.

"I don't feel well," Draco rasped weakly and he groaned when he opened his eyes. The room was spinning and his eyes slid close again to prevent another possible bout of dry heaving.

"Are you becoming ill?" Harry wondered and rubbed his shoulder.

"I don't know," Draco whispered. "I have never felt his bad before."

"Do you think you're able to go to the Infirmary? If necessary, I can use a spell to transport you."

Draco tried to sit up, but had to give up when black spots started to appear before his eyes. "I don't think … I feel dizzy," he muttered dazed. He felt Harry climbing carefully over him, making sure not to jostle him.

"All right, I'll get Snape. Maybe he knows what's wrong with you."

The moment Harry stopped touching him, his temperature seemed to spike and he started dry heaving again.

"Draco!"

Immediately hands landed on his back and the dry heaving ceased. When he dared to open his eyes, he saw Harry kneeling on the floor next to the bed and green eyes staring at him alarmed.

"Don't leave," he said weakly. He didn't know how it was possible, but it appeared that Harry's touch alleviated some of his symptoms. At any other moment, he would feel baffled and worried, but now he was happy with anything that alleviated his symptoms.

What was happening?

"All right, I won't leave," Harry promised him and his thumb ran over the knuckles of Draco's right hand. "But you need help."

The sound of nails tapping on the floor neared them. "I can tell Lord Slytherin to warn the man who smells like herbs," Mara offered and the cold air exuding from her body felt good against his heated skin.

The warm gush of Harry's relieved sigh washed over his hair. "Yes, thank you, Mara."

Draco forced himself to concentrate and heard Mara muttering lowly to the portrait that Slytherin could use. His attention was dragged back from the conversation when Harry's thumb started to caress his cheek slowly. Through half lidded eyes he watched Harry, who stared back at him with troubled eyes.

Finally realising Harry's position, he grumbled and tugged on the blue pyjama sleeve.

"Get on the bed," he ordered drowsily.

"I'm fine," Harry retorted absentmindedly, but Draco tugged harder.

"But I'm not fine with it," Draco murmured. "Come on."

Harry bit his lip, but relented and slipped back on the bed, laying down on his side, facing the blond.
"That's better," Draco murmured and felt the other one wrapping an arm around his shoulder, bringing his head into contact with warm skin. The familiar scent of vanilla lingered in his nostrils and Draco nuzzled Harry's neck weakly. He closed his eyes; a wave of exhaustion attacked him and he was on the verge of falling asleep, lulled by the warm presence next to him, when the sound of familiar footsteps reached his ears.

It took some effort to open his eyes again; a headache was starting to form and the first tendrils of the nausea sneaked up on him again when Harry detangled their bodies in order to let Severus examine him.

"What's wrong?" Severus frowned and placed a cool, dry hand on his sweaty forehead.

"We don't know. When he woke up, he was dry heaving and he seems to have a fever," Harry replied helplessly. "Maybe he has the flu?"

"Did you have earlier symptoms?" Severus asked sharply and muttered a Quick scan spell, which brought up a list of his symptoms and possible illnesses immediately.

Draco slowly shook his head, feeling sour bile rising up in his throat. Merlin, he hoped he wouldn't throw up on his godfather. "When I woke up, I started to feel bad and it has only become worse," he answered in a rasping voice. "But Harry's touch seems to help a bit."

The frown on the older man's face deepened when he glanced at the list of symptoms the spell had discovered.

"How bad is it?" Harry asked nervously and Draco felt a clammy hand slipping into his own.

"According to the spell, he is not ill," Severus announced and pinched the bridge of his nose.

"What? That can't be; just look at him," Harry said bewildered.

"I know, Potter, but the spell states clearly that nothing is wrong with Draco. He is in perfect health according to the spell," Severus replied and with a sharp snap of his wrist, the list disappeared soundlessly.

"Maybe you casted the spell incorrectly," Harry argued and tightened the hold on his hand.

Even through his blurry sight, Draco could discern the sharp glare his godfather threw at Harry.

"I have never casted a spell incorrectly," he said coldly.

"Then what the hell is wrong with him?" Harry exclaimed frustrated.

Draco wanted to comfort his distressed lover, but his limbs felt heavy as if he was under water and wrestling against it.

"Language, Potter," Severus snapped. "I'll have to take a sample of his blood and research that. It could be that he's suffering from a mutated form of the flu."

"But you don't believe that," Harry retorted sharply.

"We won't know anything for certain until I have examined his blood," Severus murmured and tapped his wand briefly on Draco's bare arm. His blood rose through the thin layer of his skin and Severus swiftly collected it in a small vial.

"What do we do in the meantime?" Harry asked softly, biting his lip.
"Your presence seems to help somewhat, so try to stay near him," the older man instructed and briskly walked out of the room.

Harry sighed and stared forlornly at the blond boy.

"Hey, don't look like that," Draco chided him weakly. "Sev will figure out what's wrong with me. I probably ate something that disagreed with me."

Both didn't mention that despite eating the same meal, Harry wasn't ill.

Without saying anything, Harry climbed back in bed and wrapped his arms around his lover, cradling him against his warm body.

Soothed by the hand caressing his hair, Draco fell asleep, hoping that the extra rest would prove beneficial.

With a soft curse, Harry switched the warm, damp cloth for a fresh, cool one, placing it on Draco's forehead.

Instead of becoming better, Draco was becoming progressively worse. After an hour of dozing, Harry had noticed how Draco had started to feel very warm until it had developed into a fever. Harry had immediately ordered a house elf to bring a basin filled with cold water and some strips of cloth.

The water did nothing to cool off the blond; every ten minutes Harry found himself exchanging the clammy cloth for a new, fresh one and trying to convince the blond to drink water so that he would not become dehydrated.

Even his presence didn't seem to help anymore; Draco had started shivering as if he was cold, but in reality he was heating up. Every time he opened his eyes – which never lasted long – Harry was met with glazed over, grey eyes.

When morning went over in afternoon, the harsh coughing had started. He couldn't hold his lunch down either; barely a few bites later, Draco had started throwing up violently. He did seem able to hold down his water – a small reprieve.

Mara had joined them on the bed, sharing her cold body with her master, while Ruby was keeping watch in the doorway. Sapphire was sitting on the desk, as immobile as a statue and Garin was curled up on the chair, his eyes fixed on the pair on the bed.

"Can any of you feel what's wrong with him?" Harry asked, annoyance colouring his voice.


"Blocked?" he repeated with a frown.

"Yes, there seems to be an obstacle; something is fighting," Ruby added.

"What? What is fighting? His magic?" Harry asked confused and switched the cloth again.

"Not exactly," Garin hissed. "Something is blocked and is fighting."

"That's not very helpful," Harry muttered darkly. "Is it the fighting thing that is making him sick?"
"Yes and no," Mara muttered. "It seems to clash."

Harry resisted the urge to bash his head against the headboard. "Can you be a bit more specific?" he groaned.

Mara growled, glaring at him. "We can feel that something is wrong, but the waves of his magic are confusing. Something is fighting, but we don't know what yet!"

Harry closed his eyes and rubbed his forehead furiously. "I'm sorry," he said softly. "I just don't know what's wrong with him and I'm worried."

"Harry?"

He looked up quickly and saw Remus' concerned face. "Remus."

"What happened?" Remus entered the room and studied Draco's pale, sweaty face with furrowed eyebrows.

"When he woke up this morning, he felt nauseous," Harry answered and quickly filled the man in on what had been happening.

"Severus mentioned he was researching Draco's blood, but he didn't mention how bad it is," Remus murmured and looked sharply at the dark haired boy. "Have you eaten yet?"

Harry rubbed absentmindedly over his upper left arm. "No, I have been trying to get Draco to eat something and then his fever appeared, so I have been trying to get his temperature down."

"Go get some fresh air and eat something," Remus ordered and grabbed the cloth out of Harry's hands.

"I can eat later," Harry said dismissively and attempted to snatch the cloth back. "Draco needs me here."

"Harry, skipping meals is not good in your state," Remus scolded him.

"But …"

"Harry," Draco spoke suddenly with a scratchy, low voice. "Go eat now. I'll be fine," he added when Harry stared at him uncertainly.

"I can eat here," Harry tried to compromise; not willing to leave his ill lover behind.

Weakly Draco shook his head and brought his hand to rest on Harry's stomach. "Get some fresh air and eat something," he muttered exhausted.

"I'll stay here to take care of him," Remus added calmly.

Reluctantly Harry stood up. "Fine, but I'll be back soon," he warned them and left the room, Ruby following him. As soon as the painting closed behind him, Ruby turned invisible, but stayed close enough for Harry to feel his presence next to him.

Hastily he made his way to the kitchen; the sooner he had eaten something, the sooner he could return.

The house elves – with Dobby as the most enthusiastic one – were happy to make something for him and wouldn't let him go until he had finished a piece of treacle tart as his dessert. When he finally
managed to convince them he had enough and couldn't possibly eat more, they insisted on giving him a bag of small biscuits filled with fruit jam and Harry could have sworn he heard Ruby snort in amusement.

With a bag in his hand and his stomach filled with a delicious meal, Harry finally left the loud kitchen, which was buzzing with preparations for dinner.

He was almost at the entrance of the dungeons, when his name was suddenly called and he turned around, seeing Sirius approach him.

His godfather raised an eyebrow when he caught sight of the bag. "Cravings starting already?" he asked amused.

"What?" Momentarily confused, Harry stared puzzled at the man in front of him. When Sirius nodded to the bag, he realised what he meant and rolled his eyes. "No, of course not. I was ordered to eat and the house elves wouldn't let me go without these biscuits," he huffed.

"How's Blondie doing?" Sirius asked abruptly.

Harry sighed and raked a hand through his hair, messing it up further. "Not good," he replied and bit his lower lip. "He's having a fever now and can't hold anything down, except for some water."

"Snivellus will figure out what's wrong; he's one of the best when it comes to Potions," Sirius said gruffly and looked cross with himself for talking positively about Snape.

Harry shifted his feet and clenched one fist in his sweater. "But what if he can't find out what's wrong with Draco? The spell he used claimed nothing was wrong and even Ruby, Garin and Mara don't know what's wrong. What if …" he trailed off, not daring to finish his question.

A strong hand squeezed his shoulder and warm eyes filled with concern looked at him. "Harry, Blondie will pull through; he's stronger than he looks."

Harry nodded, trying to make himself believe Sirius.

"And otherwise he'll have a meeting with my wand," Sirius continued casually and that elicited a nervous, jittery laugh from his godson.

Before the dark haired boy could chide him, Ruby suddenly started to growl lowly.

"Your mate needs you," Ruby offered as explanation and tugged on the robe of his master.

The tugging wasn't necessary, however, because Harry was already hurrying back to his quarters, Sirius following closely behind.

The dragon opened the portrait before Harry could offer the password and he hastily climbed through it.

"What's wrong?" he asked and gasped when a flood of emotions waved over him.

Fear, panic and anger seemed to battle with each other, clashing with each other like a bunch of dominant animals trying to have the upper hand, snarling and biting. Overwhelmed, Harry sunk down on his knees and clasped his hands tightly over his ears in an attempt to drown out the sudden vicious screeching that seemed intent on drilling into his brain.
Vaguely he felt arms grabbing him tightly and lifting him up. The screeching died out as sudden as it had appeared when his knees touched the matrass.

Trembling he lowered his hands and opened his eyes – when had he closed them?

"What the hell happened?" Sirius snapped.

Harry was glad he was the one to question what had happened, because he didn't think he was able to speak now. His throat hurt as if he had screamed, but he had no memory of doing so.

His hand touched something cold that was shaking and without thinking he grabbed it tightly. It turned out to be Draco's hand; Draco, whose breath was laboured, who looked paler than before – how was that even possible? – whose face was etched with pain. One hand still clenched tightly around a cold one, he reached out with his other hand and carefully touched Draco's forehead. The frown marring his sweaty forehead seemed to lessen a bit.

"I'm not certain," Remus said and his voice was shaky. "But I think …" he trailed off and stared imploringly at Mara.

"It's the bond," she confirmed and sounded troubled. "Something happened which makes the bond act up. It's becoming defensive."

"What could have happened to make the bond act up?" Sirius questioned. "Is the bond making him sick?"

"Yes," Ruby answered slowly and padded closer. "The bond fighting is making the mate ill and it was calling out to the master."

"Do you know why the bond is acting up?" Remus asked.

The animals shared an uncomfortable look, as if they weren't certain whether to confess what they knew.

Sirius narrowed his eyes. "What do you know?"

Mara let out a rumbling sigh. "Usually a bond like this only reacts when it feels threatened by an outside force. Only then does a bond act up."

"Is someone attacking the bond?" Remus frowned.

"Not in the sense you're thinking about," Mara answered and the cold fire on her tail flared up in agitation.

"For Merlin's sake, this is not the time for your cryptic tripe," Sirius snapped annoyed.

"The bond is not under physical or magical attack, but under an emotional one," Ruby replied gruffly and his eyes were fixated on his master. "The bond is fighting against the emotional assault. The mate is targeted so his body and mind are suffering under the strain."

"What exactly do you mean with emotional …"

The real meaning of Ruby's reply felt like a blow to his stomach and Harry whipped his head around to face Mara and Ruby.

"Draco would never cheat on me!" he bit out, unknowingly tightening his hand. "I don't care what
the bond thinks; I know he isn't cheating on me!"

"Does the bond really think Draco is cheating on Harry?" Remus asked sharply.

"Whatever he did, the bond is under the impression that he is betraying the master on the emotional level and so it's punishing him."

"But he isn't cheating on me!" Harry snapped. "How can we make the bond stop punishing him?"

If this situation had happened months ago, Harry would have been more inclined to believe Draco was cheating on him (even though that admission made him feel ashamed). But they had been through a lot and Harry felt secure in the knowledge that Draco wouldn't cheat on him. No, something else was happening and they had to find out what exactly as soon as possible. He didn't dare to think of how far the bond would go if this problem wasn't solved soon.

"The cause of the bond's distress needs to be removed. In this case the cause can be something or someone," Mara answered and narrowed her eyes.

"In the meantime is there something we can do to help Draco?" Harry asked, looking down at the shivering form of his lover.

"Staying with him should help his symptoms," Garin hissed and slithered down the chair so that he could wrap his long body around Ruby's chest.

"We'll search through the heritance books to find out whether something like this has happened before and how they countered it," Remus announced with a frown. "Severus is researching the blood, but he can use all the help he can get."

Harry nodded and slid down so that he could lay down on his side, facing Draco. He wrapped one arm around the still shivering blond and pressed their bodies closely together, hoping his body warmth would help warm up Draco.

Sirius and Remus left, throwing the couple one last concerned look, and Ruby with Garin still wrapped around him padded after them. Even though they hadn't said anything to Harry, Mara's protective and alert stance in front of the bed let him know silently that their pets were doing whatever they could to help Draco in their own way.

Sapphire jumped on the bed and carefully padded over the sheets until she stopped right next to Draco's hip and curled up to sleep.

Harry closed his eyes and rested his head against Draco's neck, resigned to the helpless feeling brewing in him.

Fighting against the darkest wizard of history had made him afraid. Looking right at Dumbledore and realising he would be killed by the man his parents had trusted had made him feel despair and anger.

Seeing his lover weakening before his eyes, literally throwing up blood and not awaken for long periods of time was fucking terrifying.

It was Tuesday and Draco's condition had only worsened over the course of the weekend. While he still had been semi lucid during the weekend, he now barely woke up. If he did manage to crawl back from the dream world, he was coughing and throwing up blood while his magic danced around him in a jittery fashion.
Harry didn't know what to do and that fact terrified him. Even after all those adventures leading him in front of Voldemort, he had never been as afraid as now. He could do nothing to help Draco except stay close to him and help him clear the blood out of his mouth. Remus had used a spell that would make certain that Draco's body received the necessary nutrition, but that spell seemed to be in vain in light of how many times Draco had been throwing up already.

When he wasn't throwing up or coughing, he seemed to be murmuring something, but try as he might, Harry could never understand what exactly the blond was muttering in his feverish sleep.

It was nearly evening when Harry could hear the portrait opening and anticipating either Remus or Snape, he was therefore very surprised to see Narcissa and Lucius appearing in his bedroom.

"Draco," Narcissa murmured and her ice blue eyes glittered with a sheen of tears. She hurried towards the bed and laid her hand on Draco's cheek.

Lucius approached the bed as well, his face paler than it was before. "Severus Floo'd us," he answered Harry's unspoken question. "Said Draco was becoming more and more ill and asking whether we could visit him."

"I don't know what's wrong with him," Harry said helplessly. He was sitting cross legged on the bed with Draco's head carefully placed on his lap. "Mara mentioned that something or someone is interfering with the emotional level of the bond and that the bond is fighting against it. We thought he would get better if I stayed near him, because he did seem to feel better on Saturday when I touched him, but instead of getting better, he's just getting worse." His voice choked and he pressed his hands tightly against his eyes. "I don't know what to do."

"Calm down, Harry," Narcissa murmured and caressed his cheek. "We'll figure something out. My son is strong; he'll pull through this. You have to trust him."

Harry nodded, but inwardly he wondered whether Narcissa was trying to convince herself.

"You said that something is attacking the emotional level of the bond?" Lucius asked sharply and his cane was put down harshly on the ground.

Harry stared at him. "Yeah, at least that's what Mara and Ruby say. They said that the bond is under attack and that it's becoming defensive. But the way they said it made it seem as if Draco was cheating on me and I know he isn't!" His breath hitched and he roughly wiped his sleeves over his eyes. He couldn't break down in tears now; he had to be strong now. Draco was suffering more than he was; he had to be strong for him.

"Where are your pets now?" Lucius frowned.

"Garin should be in the living room and Ruby and Mara are somewhere in the school," Harry muttered, scratching absently behind Sapphire's ear. "They said they would be searching for the cause of the attack or something like that."

Narcissa narrowed her eyes and looked at Lucius. "Luc, assaulting the emotional level of the bond – do you think they …"

Lucius stiffened and his eyes grew colder, making a shiver run over Harry's spine. He really didn't want to be the cause of that particular expression on the older man's face.

"Do you really think they would be that simpleminded?" he murmured; his hand tightening around the cane.
Narcissa pursed her lips. "Obviously they are not aware of the bond's existence, but considering their pig-headedness … It wouldn't surprise me if they tried to do something to come between them."

"The fools," Lucius cursed softly. "I was a fool to assume their humiliation at the ball would be enough to put a stop to their plans."

"Who are you talking about?" Harry asked baffled. Did they know the person who had tried to interfere with the bond?

"Lucius, go get Severus. We'll need his help," Narcissa said and with a sharp nod, her ex-husband briskly left the room.

"Narcissa?" Harry looked at her wide-eyed.

She turned her attention to him and gave him a tight lipped smile. "We are going to attempt to use the bond to reveal who is tampering with it."

"How?"

"By letting you use Legilimency on Draco."

He froze; his hand, about to touch Draco's forehead, halted a few inches above the blond hair.

"What? No, I can't do that," he immediately protested. Him using Legilimency? He had barely been able to master Occlumency; how did Narcissa expect him to use Legilimency when he had no experience with it whatsoever? He didn't want to hurt Draco even more than he already was hurting and he knew that a clumsy attempt at Legilimency would prove disastrous for Draco's mental state. The books dealing with Occlumency and Legilimency clearly stated that if someone inexperienced tried to attempt to enter someone's mind, he could literally destroy the person's mental state, reducing him to a vegetable state.

He was not willing to risk Draco's health. He desperately wanted to help him, but not at the potential cost of Draco's mental health.

"I know you're not experienced, Harry; that's why Severus will be there to guide you through the process," Narcissa replied gently and covered his hand with her own cool one.

"But what if I screw up?" he asked and a hint of desperation dripped through his voice. "I can really hurt him if I slip up and I don't want to do that!"

"You're not going to slip up," she said sternly. "Severus will help you through it and he'll make certain you won't be able to hurt Draco. Now I need you to calm down, because panicking won't help. You want to help Draco, right?"

"Of course I want to help him!"

"Then trust me when I say that you won't hurt him," she retorted in an admonishing tone. "You need to be the one who uses Legilimency on Draco, because you are his Bonded Partner. The bond will reveal the attacker to you quicker than it would reveal it to Severus." She softly pressed her hands against his cheeks and pulled his head up until he had to look straight into her eyes. "I know you're scared, Harry, and you have a right to be that, but I need you to pull yourself together. Not only for Draco, but also for your baby. Stress is not good for you."

He nodded as much as he could with the restrictive hands on his cheeks and took a deep breath, letting it out slowly. He knew he should calm down and not stress too much, but it was difficult to remain calm when Draco was silently suffering.
Would the bond really be able to reveal who was tampering with it?

He guessed he had no choice but to trust Narcissa when she said he would not be able to slip up. At least he could trust the fact that Snape would rather drink one of the students' botched, dangerous potions than to let harm befall his godson.

"You have managed to become adept at using Occlumency and you will use Legilimency without causing any damage," Snape barked as soon as he entered the room.

Harry frowned when he took in Snape's haggard appearance: the man looked extremely tired; bags were already starting to appear under his eyes, his lips were tightly drawn – a thin line on his face – and his robes were splattered with various coloured potion stains - probably from potions that had exploded during the brewing process. His eyes still looked sharp, but it was obvious that he was on the verge of collapsing after working hours on potions that could help Draco.

"Are you … Are you certain you feel up to it, sir?" Harry asked uncertainly. He and Snape had a weird truce going on and he didn't want to overstep his boundaries. Not now with both of them tired and worried about the blond sleeping restlessly on the bed.

"You better ask yourself that question," Snape answered curtly and conjured a chair next to the bed so that he could take a seat. "I need you to follow the instructions correctly, understood?"

Harry nodded wordlessly.

Narcissa gave his cheeks one last caress and after giving him a reassuring smile, she stood up and backed away from the bed, joining her ex-husband who was standing next to the desk.

"You have your wand?" Snape sighed and tightened his grip around his own wand.

Harry carefully twisted around and snatched his wand off the nightstand.

"Close your eyes and relax. Make your mind empty," Snape instructed softly.

"Like during Occlumency?" Harry murmured and closed his eyes, focusing on his breathing so that he could calm down.

"Exactly. You are capable of remembering important instructions like that then."

Harry ignored the jab and concentrated on clearing his mind, which wasn't easy with how worried he was. Eventually he calmed down; every intruding thought drifted away like a leaf in the wind and his muscles were relaxed as if he was sleeping in a soft bed, surrounded by comfortably warm sheets.

He could hear the soft breathing of Draco's parents and Snape and the harsh, laboured breathing of his lover.

"I'm ready," he murmured, barely moving his lips.

"You need to connect your magic with mine, in order for me to guide you into Draco's mind," Snape murmured equally soft.

"How do I …"

"Open your eyes and give me your hand. Concentrate on bringing your magic to your hand like you would direct it through your wand." For once Snape didn't snap or sound annoyed at Harry's lack of knowledge when it concerned directing his magic somewhere.
Harry opened his eyes and after a moment of hesitation, he stretched out his hand and it was quickly enclosed in a large, rough, potion stained hand. Harry imagined his magic travelling from the middle of his chest through his arm and he felt his magic leaving behind a hot trail through his veins. When it concentrated in his hand, his magic sparked once it came into contact with Snape's magic, which felt cool, providing a sharp contrast to Harry's magic that felt hot as fire.

"After you open his eyes, you have to look straight in them and point your wand right between his eyes when you say the incantation," Snape ordered.

Harry took a deep breath, reminded himself that Snape would make sure he didn't screw up and then gently opened Draco's eyes. He looked straight into them and felt his magic surge downwards when he said in a clear voice, "Legilimens!"

He felt himself being sucked into Draco's mind and he landed right in front of a marble wall: a mental wall, the result of practicing Occlumency.

"What do I need to do now?" His voice seemed to bounce back as if he was standing in a large, empty room. He couldn't feel ground beneath his feet; he seemed to float in the darkness with only his body and the marble wall visible thanks to a soft hue being emitted from them both.

"If the theory of the bond's mechanics is correct, the wall should dissolve when you touch it." Snape's voice sounded distorted as if they were communicating through phones with static.

Harry suspected the distortion existed because Snape had only entered Draco's mind through Harry. Now however was not the time to wonder about that.

He thrust his arm forwards and placed his hand on the cold, marble wall that felt smooth to the touch. The wall quivered and trembled underneath his touch and then dissolved, falling apart until nothing remained. The barrier was gone and Harry was able to enter completely.

Silence had reigned when the wall was still present, but the moment Harry took a step forwards, a thin path appeared underneath his feet and suddenly he was assaulted by an explosion of sounds. Screeching, yelling, screaming and moaning, Draco's mind was drowning in sorrow, agony and fury and they all meshed together into one big pile, making it impossible to untangle them easily.

Jagged pieces of something that looked like ruby zoomed around Harry and crashed into boulders made out of onyx. Eerily green glowing turned out to be fires burning in one place. A small, dark pool was next to two dead, gnarly trees and the moment a ruby shard fell into the murky, smelly water, steam rose up from the pool and the smell of burning flesh slammed into Harry like a Bludger and he gagged, dropping down on his knees, feeling small pieces of pebbles and twigs sting his knees through his trousers.

"Ugh," he groaned and his eyes watered when a sharp, rancid smell invaded his nostrils. He slapped a hand for his mouth and forced the bile back that wanted to escape him.

The constant screeching was giving him a splitting headache; it felt like something was trying to crack open his skull. His magic was whirling around him, forming a thin barrier around him and the screaming seemed to take a physical form, colliding against the barrier, leaving dents in it.

"This is worse than I thought." Snape's voice rose up between the cacophony of screams.

"What can I do?" Harry asked helplessly and winced when another screech tore through his ears.

"Find the bond. The bond … needs to be … appeased." Snape sounded weaker, as if the distance
between them was growing.

"Sir?" Harry called out worriedly.

Only a howl like that of a ravenous wolf was his response. He could still feel Snape's presence, but something seemed to block his voice, keeping them from interacting.

He was on his own. Well, he had been on his own against Voldemort as well. He just needed to trust in his ability to help Draco.

"Find the bond," he muttered and looked around, peering at the chaos that was whirling and spinning madly around him.

Would the bond physically manifest itself? How was he supposed to find even a trace of it if he didn't know what to look for in this raging whirlwind of fury and sorrow that had taken over Draco's mind?

His nails bit and broke his skin, some blood welling up softly, when he realised that he didn't know what to do now. He couldn't feel the bond anywhere and nothing here seemed to resemble it.

"I don't know what to do. I'm here, but I'm stuck and I don't know how to help you." His thoughts poured out of his mouth and swirled around him like wispy smoke. "I-I'm so scared now. I'm supposed to help you, but I can't." Tears stung his eyes and he raised trembling hands to his face. "Snape said I have to appease the bond, but I can't even fucking find it! How am I supposed to appease it if I can't find it?"

His frustrated scream was met with another raging howl.

Taking another few steps further, Harry whipped his head from one side to the other, desperate to find even a thread of the bond. Where the hell was it hiding? It was intend on destroying Draco's mind on its quest to fight against the attacker, but didn't seem to want to help Harry. What kind of screwed up bond was this?

A deep frown marred his forehead when he realised that he couldn't even feel the comfortable presence of Draco around him. Even though he was in his mind, he couldn't feel him anywhere, couldn't even see memories flashing by, like it normally should happen.

Was the bond supressing Draco? If so, how could Harry help him? Using his magic here was too risky.

"Draco, I don't know what to do," he whispered and pressed a hand against his stomach. "You need to come back. I already told you I can't raise our baby on my own. I need you with me; our baby needs you. I love you, damn it! I can't do this alone, you bastard!"

Without him being aware of it, his stomach and chest started to softly glow. With every beat of his heart, the glow grew stronger until small droplets, coloured gold with red streaks, slowly and inaudibly fell down on the worn out path. The droplets formed a shallow puddle and Harry – who had finally noticed the glow being emitted from his upper body – stumbled back when the puddle started to quiver and it slowly rose into the air. A blue mist rising from the stones embraced the golden form and Harry covered his eyes hastily with his sleeves when the glow grew too strong.

Suddenly the screaming stopped.

No, that wasn't entirely correct, Harry corrected himself one heartbeat later. The screaming was muted as if it was covered by a Silence Bubble.
A soft tug at his trousers made him snap his head down and his eyes widened when he saw a small child looking up at him. It was dressed in a large nightshirt and its hair was slightly ruffled, reaching just a bit past its ears. A soft, white light was pulsing around its small, fragile looking body and it made its eyes shine so brightly that Harry couldn't guess which colour its eyes were.

Who was this child? Was it a boy or a girl? Where had it come from?

"Who are you?" Harry broke the silence between them with a wavering voice. However, even though he couldn't even figure out which gender it was, it didn't feel malicious. He felt safe and warm, like he felt when Sirius hugged him or when Draco embraced him.

The child blinked innocently at him and tugged again while bringing its thumb to its mouth.

"You want me to follow?" Harry wagered a guess, wondering why the child didn't speak. Was it mute?

The child nodded and turned around.

Not knowing what else to do, Harry warily followed the child, whose glow seemingly absorbed the darkness around it.

The path curved off and became slightly smaller. They passed various small fires and towering, jagged stones. The screams and screeches quietened with every step they took until it sounded like a soft buzzing.

Harry looked around and watched how the small fires and stones were swallowed by the darkness. The white glow pulsing around the child was now the only light source.

"Where are you taking me?" Harry asked curiously. The panic that had been overpowering him a while ago had disappeared, soothed by a sense of serenity.

The child glanced at him and then pointed at something next to it.

Harry blinked and looked. A thin, blue purple line was floating through the darkness, trembling with a sound like a cat's purr.

"What is …"

His question was cut off when the child grasped his hand and started swinging it around. The child started to skip happily and Harry could only follow it bemused.

His interest was piqued when he noticed the thread becoming broader and the cobble stones changing into smooth stone.

One moment Harry was surrounded by darkness with only the pulsing thread and the mysterious child as his companions, the next he was suddenly standing in front of a brightly glowing ball of energy that gave off a loud purring sound.

A twinge in his heart and a soft burning mark on his back made Harry realise what it was.

_The bond._

"You brought me to the bond," he whispered astonished and stared at the slow blinking child. "Thank you."

The child squeezed his hand and without any warning, Harry's mind was flooding with images of
him sticking his hand in the energy ball and the bond accepting his question and plea.

The flow of images was abruptly cut off, leaving him breathless.

"What *are* you?" he asked again, wide-eyed.

Predictably the child didn't respond verbally; instead it pointed to the energy ball and inclined its head.

"No choice, hm," he muttered and slowly stretched out his arm.

The child was still clinging to his hand when the bond extended large, glittering, spindly arms and closed them around Harry. Thunder roared in his ears for a short moment before it was quiet, with only a soft purring serving as background noise.

Harry looked around apprehensively. The child hadn't followed him and he wondered whether that was the child's decision or the bond's.

Expelling his breath with a loud whoosh sound, he hesitatingly took a step forwards. In front of him a large mirror hung suspended in the air, weakly bobbing up and down. The frame was golden and right in the middle of it, the crest of the Potter and Malfoy family was branded.

Casting another look around revealed that the mirror was the only object present in the otherwise light grey room.

"Are you going to show me who is attacking the bond?" Harry asked, feeling silly for questioning something that wasn't even human.

A ripple went through the mirror before it started to bubble and it let out a soft chirping sound. The mirror seemed to light up deep inside and it groaned lowly.

A picture of a potion vial appeared on the surface and a red hue rose up behind it.

"A potion?" Harry murmured bewildered. Had someone poisoned Draco? No, their pets would have caught on to that.

Next a flash of something pale framed by black hair flitted over the mirror, followed by a heavy door opening.

"The dungeon?" Now he was becoming very confused.

Again the potion vial was shown and a picture of two faceless people kissing followed immediately afterwards.

"What does two people kissing have to do with a … potion …" Harry trailed off, narrowing his eyes. He was starting to suspect what had happened.

As if the bond wanted to give him one last push, the mirror presented the picture of the dark hair again, but this time the face was clearly shown, although it looked rather ugly thanks to the anger and jealousy dripping through the calm mask.

Even wrung with jealousy, Harry would recognize that face anywhere.

The fragment of the conversation that accompanied the picture only confirmed his suspicion.

"That filthy Half Blood doesn't deserve him! He's nothing but a distraction and it's time he learnt
his place! Draco will be mine and I'll use anything to make him fall in love with me. This potion will give the necessary push."

As soon as the last word had died out, the mirror darkened and the rippling glass became smooth again.

"Thank you for showing me who attacked our bond," Harry spoke up after he was certain he would remain calm. "She won't get away with it."

The moment his reassurance left his mouth, he could practically feel the bond ceasing its fighting, surrendering Draco's mind back to him.

Invisible arms embraced him for one moment and he closed his eyes, relaxing in the warm hug.

When he opened his eyes again, he was back on the path; the mysterious child patiently waiting for him.

"Potter? Wherever you are, come back to the place of the mental wall," Snape suddenly spoke clearly. "Whatever you did, it seemed to help. Now get the hell out of here before Draco wakes up."

"I'll be right back!" Harry called out and started to walk back; the child once again clinging to him.

The fires, onyx stones and ruby shards had disappeared; Draco's memories were once again floating aimlessly around.

Harry ignored them and hurried back to the marble wall. As soon as he passed the invisible line, he felt the child releasing him.

He whirled around, ignoring Snape's consciousness tugging at his, and called out, "Wait, can I at least know where you come from?"

Emerald green eyes widened when he finally heard the child speak.

"I'm …"

And then he was back into his own mind, feeling Snape release his hand. He didn't pay any attention to the worried people around him; all his attention was directed at grey eyes that were once again staring at him clearly.

A pale hand – not a sickly pale anymore, but the familiar paleness of his skin – rose up and slipped into his hair, tugging softly at his head to bring him down.

Harry went willingly until he was leaning right above Draco's face.

Pale rose lips curled up in a weak smile. "Seems I need to thank you again for saving me," Draco murmured.

"You can thank me by staying out of trouble from now on," Harry muttered and then kissed him; relief coursing through his veins when those lips pressed back insistently.

He would make her pay – but Draco was his first priority now.

All the rest could wait for a few more hours.
Helpful Hufflepuff and Precarious Potions Part 2

Chapter Notes

Author's note: All right, first of all, I want to apologize for keeping you waiting so long. That wasn't my intention at all. I had assumed I would be able to work on this story during the evenings of my exam period, but as it turns out, by the time I stopped studying every day, I was so tired that only gibberish appeared on the page. After my exams were done, I still hadn't caught up on my sleep, so it was a slow start of getting back into the story.

I know this doesn't fully excuse my absence, but yeah, this is why it took me so long to update this fic.

Secondly, this will have a third part: just like with Gryffindor, the actual search for the portrait will take place in the third chapter. This one mainly deals with the attacker of the bond and the leading up to the quest.

Thirdly, I've tried my best for this chapter, but I'm not completely happy with it. It's not too bad, I think, but something about it bothers me. But I didn't want to keep you waiting even longer, so I tried my best and finished it. I promise to make the next one better.

Warnings for this chapter: a bit of drama; a slightly Dark Harry (as in he'll take some personal revenge); lime. I think that's it for this chapter

Disclaimer: I don't own Harry Potter - J.K. Rowling owns it.

I hope you'll like it!

Chapter 18: Helpful Hufflepuff and Precarious Potions Part 2

14th of January

"It was Parkinson," Harry announced a few hours later.

Draco had been urged to eat a decent meal – adjusted so that he wouldn't become sick and throw it up again after not eating anything decent for a few days – while Garin let Ruby and Mara know what had transpired during the time they were absent.

Lucius had ordered a house elf to prepare a meal for his son, while Narcissa had fussled both over Draco and Harry with Snape checking Draco's vitals.

Remus and Sirius had arrived together with Mara and Ruby and they were quickly informed about what Harry had done.

Now that Draco had eaten, it was time for Harry to divulge more information.

"Parkinson?" Snape frowned. "Why are you certain about that?"
"The bond showed me what happened in some sort of mirror," Harry explained and shifted his leg. He was seated next to Draco on the bed; initially he had wanted to sit on a chair, but the blond had refused to let him go. "I recognized her face and voice."

"You mentioned a potion was shown in the mirror," Lucius murmured, his eyes darkening a bit. "Did you perhaps recognize the potion?"

He nodded. "It was a love potion – she clearly intended Draco to fall in love with her by using a love potion, but it backfired obviously. That's probably why the bond was acting up."

"But she didn't have a potion when I talked to her," Draco objected. His voice was still a bit rough, but Snape was confident his health would restore soon.

"When did you talk to her?" Narcissa looked at him sharply, her lips pinched together.

"Last week after I went to the library," Draco replied. "She said she wanted to talk privately, so we went to a classroom. She wanted to apologize for trying to create a rift between Harry and I last year and asked whether we could still be friends."

"And you believed her apology?" Sirius snorted and shook his head warily.

Grey eyes narrowed. "Of course not, but she told me she was being courted by a German wizard, so I didn't think she would present a threat. She even offered to show me the letters and she may be a lot of things, but she knows a Courting Process is not something to be taken lightly. I figured she had to be genuine if she offered to show the letters." Draco looked thoughtful. "But she didn't have any potion on her – I made sure to pay attention to her wand and she didn't come close enough to touch me."

"The mirror showed one of the doors, here in the dungeon," Harry spoke up, remembering the brief image of a door opening. "I don't know what that has to do with the love potion or Parkinson, though."

Draco inhaled sharply. "I think I know how I got dosed with the love potion."

"Care to enlighten us?" Snape asked and raised an eyebrow.

"That Gryffindor girl last week during your class – she had a vial in her hand and we walked into each other when she left the room. I got hit by the potion on my clothes, but I thought it was just a botched attempt of one of the assigned potions."

"Goodman," Snape murmured and his eyes flashed up briefly. "I'll be having a word with her."

The ominous tone in his voice made Harry repress a shiver. He really didn't want to be in the girl's shoes now.

"So, Parkinson apparently worked together with Goodman to dose you with a love potion, but the bond acted up instead and rebelled against the effects," Remus summed up and his eyes glowed golden for a few seconds.

"Those two girls need to be punished," Narcissa spoke coldly. "Thanks to that idiot girl's disillusioned mind, Draco could have died."

"We'll bring them to McGonagall and explain everything. They'll wish they had never done it by the time she's finished with them," Sirius said grimly.
"Can Parkinson be put on a trial?" Harry's question made a sudden silence fall in the room.

"A trial, Harry?" Lucius broke the silence and stepped forwards, his eyes conveying his interest in the strange question.

Harry clenched his hands in the fabric of his trousers, wrinkling them. His eyes flared up dangerously when he replied, "Yeah, she tried to screw around with a bond and used an illegal potion. Isn't that grounds for a trial?"

"Not to mention," Snape murmured. "Parkinson also committed fraud by betraying the Courting Process. I imagine the German wizard won't be pleased if he knows that his Courting Partner was trying to seduce another man."

"So isn't there a law that defends bonds?" Harry asked and tried to contain his anger. He wanted Parkinson to suffer for what she had done. Draco had almost died thanks to her interference and he didn't want to give her another chance to try something. She had gone far enough. "I mean, bonds are taking pretty seriously, aren't they?"

"Yes, they are," Narcissa replied and cocked her head a bit, studying him. "But not many people are aware of the bond between you two. If she is put on trial, the people in the court room will know about the bond. Are you ready to deal with that?"

Harry lifted his head to look her straight in her eyes. "Of course I am. I'd rather not spread around that we have a bond, but if this means she will be trialled, I don't care. She can be put on a private trial, right? That way, the people in the court room will be forced to keep quiet about it and the press won't know about it either."

"And what about Goodman?" Remus asked curiously. "Do you want her to be put on trial as well?"

Harry hesitated for a bit, but shook his head. "No, McGonagall can deal with her. I just want to be certain Parkinson can't try anything else."

"Draco, do you agree with putting Parkinson on trial?" Lucius inquired and twirled his cane in his hand.

"I agree; she went too far this time," Draco murmured darkly.

"That's settled then. You two will have to talk to an Auror to give your testimony, but that can be done tomorrow," Narcissa said firmly.

"I'll bring Parkinson to Minerva," Snape muttered and left the room.

Remus sighed and pinched his nose. "I'll bring Miss Goodman to Minerva as well – we'll discuss her punishment then."

"Sounds like a plan to me," Sirius muttered darkly and together with Remus he left the room, so that they could guide the girl to the Headmistress.

"We'll contact our lawyer and an Auror as soon as we're home," Narcissa murmured and approached the bed to give them each a kiss on their forehead. "Take care of yourselves, my boys."

"I'll notify you as soon as your testimony is needed," Lucius said calmly and after giving them a squeeze on their shoulder, he departed together with his ex-wife.

"I'm surprised you want to put her on trial," Draco murmured and turned his head around to look at
Harry shrugged half-heartedly. "I'm tired of people targeting us. She could have caused you to die, Draco. This is not something I can forgive her for. I want her to be punished for what she did."

"And she will be. The judge won't punish her lightly with the offenses she has," Draco replied and reached out with his arm to tug Harry against his chest.

"Is it really considered fraud to mess with a – what did you call it? A Courting Process?" Harry asked curiously and twisted around so that he could face Draco. One hand was tucked underneath his chin and the other was trailing circles around Draco's hipbone.

"Yes, it's probably one of the worst offenses a Pureblood can commit," Draco replied and his eyes narrowed a bit. "It's basically a breach in trust and a blow to the pride of the other party. As soon as that wizard hears what she was planning to do, he'll probably want to prosecute her as well in Germany. She can call herself lucky if she can get out of prison before she turns fifty."

Harry hummed, but didn't comment. He honestly couldn't care that she would be locked up for a long time. Call him vindictive, but he thought she deserved a long imprisonment for what she did to Draco.

"How are you feeling?" Draco asked softly and dropped a kiss on Harry's forehead.

"A bit tired." Harry shrugged. "I was mostly worried about you, though."

Draco sighed and smiled a little self-depreciatively. "It seems as if this year you've been doing nothing but saving me."

"Don't make a habit of it," Harry smiled faintly.

"Do you think they'll finally stop attacking us?" Draco sounded forlorn.

"We can only hope," Harry murmured after a brief silence.

Still feeling fatigued from the bond rampaging around in his mind, it didn't take long for the blond to fall asleep again. His hand that had been rubbing circles on Harry's back slowed down and eventually fell limply on his back while his breathing evened out.

Wanting to find out the hour, Harry used a nonverbal Tempus spell and was surprised to notice that it was already half past seven. No wonder he was feeling hungry.

Carefully he extracted himself from Draco's hold, making sure that he didn't wake up the other one. Slipping out of bed, he fussed a bit with his clothes and then pulled the sheets back over Draco, so that he wouldn't become chilled.

When he walked into the part serving as a living room, he noticed to his surprise that a warm meal, consisting out of mashed potatoes, grilled salmon and cooked cauliflower, was waiting for him on the table.

"One of the house elves just brought it up for you," Salazar spoke up and Harry looked at him startled. "I assume someone of your family told them you still needed to eat."

"Yeah, I didn't know it was this late already," Harry muttered and sank down on the couch, dragging the plate towards him.
"How is young Draco faring?"

"He's doing a bit better. Snape said it should take a few days before he's completely healthy again," Harry replied and took a sip of his water.

Salazar nodded thoughtfully. "That is good news." Then he cocked his head slightly, as if he was listening to something. "If you'll excuse me, it seems Godric needs to talk to me."

Harry nodded absentmindedly and was soon left alone with his dinner. Not being a fan of salmon in general, he just ate a few bites before he pushed it to the side of the plate.

"Shouldn't you eat everything on the plate?" Ruby slinked into the room and threw a meaningful glance at Harry's midsection.

"I don't like salmon," Harry grumbled and mixed some cooked cauliflower together with the mashed potatoes.

"Do you want me to hunt a deer so you can have meat?" Ruby offered innocently, his red eyes glittering.

Harry almost choked on his piece of cauliflower. "No, thanks," he rasped out after coughing. "I'll just keep to the potatoes and the cauliflower."

Harry suddenly noticed the absence of Mara and Garin. "Where are Mara and Garin?" he asked confused.

Ruby's tail thumped softly against the floor and his claws shone sharply in the fire when he extracted them for a few seconds. "They are searching."

"Searching for what?" he asked slowly, not certain whether he really wanted to know the answer.

"Where they keep the attacker of the bond."

He placed his knife and fork back on the plate and looked at the lion perplexed. "Why are they searching her?"

The lion padded closer, looking like the predator he was. "So that you can take revenge on her," he purred.

He knew he would regret continuing this particular turn of the conversation, but he couldn't hold himself back and pointed out, "I'm already taking revenge on her: she'll be placed on trial for trying to dose Draco with a love potion."

"That's the official revenge," Ruby replied dryly, as if that couldn't be considered as real revenge. "You are allowed to extract your personal revenge on her. She tried to hurt your mate, Master. The bond won't tolerate such a serious transgression."

"Cursing her would be illegal," Harry replied flatly. "I'm not going to prison for cursing her. She's not worth that."

"Some curses are not illegal," Ruby pointed out almost gleefully.

"Curses are by definition illegal," Harry retorted in a deadpan manner.

"There are some curses that aren't considered illegal, because the effects only take place if a
“certain condition is met,” Ruby stated and made a low purring sound. "You can give the attacker a fair warning and then she can decide whether she wants to risk it or not." His eyes shone impishly; it was as clear as crystal that the lion was looking forward to punishing Parkinson even more.

Harry knew he should just stop this conversation; tell Ruby he wasn't interested and leave it at that. The lion wouldn't keep talking about it if Harry made it clear he had no interest in it. But the problem was that he was interested in extracting more revenge. Realising that it had been Parkinson who had brought Draco to that state – even though it had not been her intention – had made him furious and seeing almost red from rage. Draco had almost lost his life, because a girl couldn't accept the fact that he didn't want her. Out of pure jealousy, she had tried to manipulate Draco into loving her by forcing a love potion on him. For someone claiming to love Draco, she clearly had no regard for his feelings.

He supposed that being put on trial would be enough punishment for her, but the question was whether that would keep her from pursuing Draco. Even stuck in prison, she could find ways to try and trick Draco into falling in love with her. She had already enlisted the help of an innocent bystander – who knew whether she could do that again?

Would it be awful of him if he took one last revenge? Just to make sure she wouldn't try to come between them again. Ruby said there were curses that weren't considered illegal and that would only start to effect the victim if certain conditions were met. He could use a curse like that as revenge and if he warned her about the consequences, well then, it wouldn't be his fault if she went through with her plans, right?

He knew he shouldn't agree to getting revenge; he wasn't a vindictive person, but remembering how sickly pale Draco had looked, how close he had come to losing him completely … Remembering how the bond had rampaged around in Draco's mind, convinced it had to punish him …

Harry swallowed and turned to look at Ruby, who regarded him with knowing eyes.

"Do you have a curse in mind?"

If lions could grin, Ruby would surely have done so. "I think the Intentus curse is perfect, master."

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Four hours later, in the pitch dark, a portrait was opened, yet nobody could be seen leaving the room. Only the slight rustle of light fabric swishing against the wall was heard and if one concentrated deeply, one could decipher the sound of light breathing and soft footsteps.

None of the three ghosts roaming on the first three floors seemed to notice something was amiss; they continued drifting through the corridors, occasionally stopping to chat with one of the portraits while the invisible entity passed them.

The sixth floor was completely empty; all the portraits were deeply asleep and not even Peeves was setting up one of his numerous mischievous plans.

One door – the last room in the corridor – shimmered softly thanks to the presence of a ward placed on it. The ward kept everyone in the room inside and kept out unwanted guests; a specific type of ward that only the Headmistress could place.

The air in front of the closed door shimmered for a few seconds and then a body seemingly appeared out of thin air.
"She's here?" Harry hissed softly and folded up his Invisibility Cloak; stuffing it in his pocket.

Garin rose up until his head was at the level of Harry's shoulder. "Yes, I can smell her."

Harry furrowed his eyebrows and bit his lip while he studied the ward. He shook his head once. "I don't know how to break through this ward without alerting anyone. Besides, the ward still needs to be in place to keep her locked inside." Frustration shone clearly through his voice.

The snake made a strange clicking sound and a hiss rattled deep inside his throat. The ward started to tremble and shiver until it sunk down and ended up like a small puddle of water.

"What did you do?" Harry asked warily and strained his ears to hear whether somebody was alerted by the ward collapsing. If McGonagall had been warned about the ward, she would have been brought to the room immediately, thanks to the various secret corridors.

"I asked the castle to bring the ward down for a moment," Garin replied flatly.

"Of course you asked Hogwarts," Harry muttered bemused. He hadn't known his pets could communicate with the castle. But really, should he still be surprised after everything his pets had done so far? Communicating with a centuries old castle probably wasn't a big matter to them.

The door gave away easily when he turned the door knob and he entered a small room – big enough to contain a trunk and a bed. As soon as the door fell shut, the girl on the bed turned around and glared once she caught sight of him.

Parkinson had her hands bound by a thin iron string – not too tight that it would cut off her circulation or cut in her skin and not too loose that she would manage to slip her hands out of it. Even if she had been able to do that, it wouldn't have done much. At most she could have attacked someone by punching or scratching them; her wand had been confiscated as soon as Snape had picked her up.

"What are you doing here, Potter?" she sneered, though her eyes showed her wariness about his presence.

Instead of replying immediately, he studied her in silence. Her hair was tangled from sleeping on it and her skin seemed to be paler than he could remember. Her eyes were narrowed in distrust and apprehension; her hands were clenched together and it was obvious she felt frustrated that she couldn't curse him.

"You know, I honestly couldn't care that you tried to break my relationship with Draco last year," he started light heartedly, as if he was talking about their classes. "You didn't succeed, so I didn't pay much attention to you later on. Guess that was a big mistake of mine, huh?"

She sniffed and curled her lip. "I don't know what you're talking about."

"Of course not," Harry sighed. He looked at her coldly and at the way she tensed suddenly, she seemed to have realised that she was in trouble. "I was even willing to forget the fact that you tried to steal him again – although it's pretty pathetic that you would only be able to steal him by using a potion. What I can't forgive, however, is anyone hurting people I love." He took a step closer to her. Parkinson looked too transfixed by the look in his eyes to do anything but staring wide eyed at him.

"So, I'm going to make sure you're never going to be able to do something to Draco again. Have you heard of the Intentus curse?"

"You wouldn't," she whispered, as realisation dawned. "That's a curse and you wouldn't curse
"You really should take note that people don't always follow the characteristics of their House," Harry pointed out mildly. "I'm unwilling to attack an opponent who can't fight back – but I consider this curse merely as a warning. You know how it works, right? As soon as you even think about trying to steal Draco, your body will rebel against you and will start attacking your own body. But as long as you give up on trying to get him, you'll be able to live a normal life. It's fair in my opinion."

"I'm already being put on trial!" she hissed and rose up on her knees. "That's punishment enough!"

"But I consider this a warning," he replied coolly. "Obviously you aren't able to accept the fact that Draco will never choose you – this curse will make sure you think twice before attempting to do something again."

Parkinson opened her mouth to protest, but was interrupted by a soft whisper "Veto Intentionem."

A dark red light focused around her head and sunk into her skin, making her whimper when the light heated up her skin.

"That ought to do it," Harry muttered and turned around.

"You won't get away with this!" Parkinson hissed furiously. "McGonagall will hear about this."

"That's what you think," Harry answered flatly. "A side effect of this curse is that you can't reveal who the caster is – no matter what you try."

He left the room and the ward sprung back in place – but not before an agonized and furious shriek tore through the closed room.

Feeling tiredness creeping up, Harry hid himself underneath his Invisibility Cloak and returned back to his room, Garin trailing behind him.

As quietly as possible, he slipped into his bedroom and changed into his pyjamas. Earlier on in the evening, he had showered and brushed his teeth, so all he had to do was change clothes so that he could go to sleep.

Right when he was settling in bed, a hand suddenly grabbed his wrist and he nearly shrieked in surprise.

"What the hell, Draco! Don't scare me like that!" he hissed and turned to face Draco, who blinked at him drowsily.

"Where were you?"

Harry huffed and laid down, bringing the sheets up to this shoulder. "I went to the bathroom."

"For nearly an hour?" Draco asked, managing to sound sceptical despite the late hour.

Harry kept quiet, feeling uncertain whether it would be a smart idea to tell the blond what he really had been up to before he returned. After all, while Draco had agreed to put Parkinson on trial, that didn't mean he would agree with putting a curse on her.

His decision was taken away by Mara, who was curled up on the floor in front of the bed.

"He took his own revenge," she replied idly; her tail flicking softly back and forth.
"What do you mean?" Draco asked slowly. "Harry, what did you do?"

Harry sighed and threw Mara a foul look. She, in response, just gazed back, as if she was bored.

"I ... I used the Intentus curse on her," he muttered and bit his lip.

"Oh." Draco blinked and seemed a bit lost.

"I just wanted to make sure she couldn't hurt you again," Harry explained, feeling guilt creeping up again. But he couldn't take it back; as soon as the curse was placed, it stayed there for a long time.

"I ... understand it," Draco murmured and glanced at him. "I'm just surprised that you used that particular curse."

"I didn't want to use a real dark curse; this way, it won't hurt her as long as she gives up on you," Harry muttered, absentmindedly scratching his wrist.

"Hey, I'm not angry; just surprised," Draco replied and intertwined their fingers.

Harry peered at him through his fringe. "You're not angry?"

A hand stroked his hair back. "No; I understand why you did that. I'm just surprised you went through with it, I guess."

"That's not surprising at all," Mara piped up.

Both young men stared at her puzzled.

"What do you mean?" Draco asked and reached out with his arm to tug Harry against his body.

Mara scoffed and gave them a look that clearly stated she thought they were stupid. "The bond between you makes sure that the protective feelings you have for each other are amplified tenfold every time something bad happens. It's a way to make certain that you will always defend each other. Expecting a cub makes the feelings even worse." She snorted and shook her head. "Actually I'm surprised that the attacker wasn't killed; you would have been in your right to do that."

She threw Harry a scathing look, as if he had done a bad thing by not attacking Parkinson worse than he did.

"Well, excuse me for having a conscience," Harry muttered defensively.

Mara yawned, showing off her huge, sharp fangs. "At least you did something," she replied reluctantly. "Either way, you were completely in your right to do that. Otherwise the bond would have taken over and that would have made things interesting."

Harry and Draco looked at each other and soundlessly agreed that asking what the bond would have done wasn't worth it.

"Next time – though let's hope there won't be a next time – just tell me what you're planning to do, all right?" Draco whispered and brushed a kiss against his forehead. "I was worried when I woke up and didn't see you here. Mara just told me to wait until you came back."

"Sorry, I didn't want to wake you up," Harry replied. "I figured I would be back before you woke up."

With a flick of his wand Draco put out the candle, cloaking them in darkness. "What's done is done
now," he muttered. "Good night."

Lips touched each other softly.

"Good night."

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16th of January

On Thursday, Draco felt well enough to attend the Defence against the Dark Arts class in the afternoon.

When he walked with Harry to the classroom, people stirred and started to whisper, staring at them warily. On Wednesday morning, everybody in the Great Hall had witnessed two Aurors arriving and taking a struggling Parkinson with them. All McGonagall had been willing to say as explanation when the students became rowdy, was that Parkinson had attacked another student and that the offense had been severe enough to warrant an arrest.

Most students had taken notice of the fact that Draco had been absent for the first half of the week and it didn't take long for them to make the connection between Draco's absence and Parkinson's arrest. Rumours started up and students who hadn't been in the Great Hall during that time were informed by others.

"How long, do you think, will it take for someone to open his mouth?" Draco asked dryly. He was still a bit fatigued, but luckily he didn't have that many classes today, so he could rest up a bit after dinner, before he had to attend Astronomy.

Harry snorted and shook his head. "Depends on how horrible the rumours are," he commented offhandedly.

As soon as everyone was seated – Harry and Draco had taken the last two seats in the back – Lupin continued their lesson on forming a defence against the Succubus curse. This was a particular curse that Lupin couldn't allow to be demonstrated – for obvious reasons – so the class was busy taking notes the entire lesson, leaving only Lupin's voice and the scratching of their pens on paper to disturb the silence.

When the bell announced the end of the lesson, Draco stretched his hand with a wince, hearing a few bones crack. Stifling a yawn, he stuffed his notes and quill back into his bag.

Before he and Harry could leave the room, they were halted by Lupin, who was patiently waiting for the rest of the students to leave the room.

As soon as the last student had shuffled out of the classroom, Lupin spelled the door shut and looked at them solemnly.

"How are you feeling, Draco?"

Draco shrugged and leant against a desk. "Still a bit tired, but that's it."

"You have Astronomy after dinner, right?"

Harry raised an eyebrow at the sudden question. "Yeah, starting at eleven. Why?"

"You have permission to skip that lesson," Lupin informed them while he started to clean his desk. "The Headmistress wants to talk to you two about Parkinson and your statements."
"When does she expect us?" Draco asked curiously. His father hadn't contacted them yet, but maybe all information would be given by McGonagall.

"At nine," Lupin replied and then looked slightly troubled. "Do you have time tomorrow evening to come to my quarters?"

Harry furrowed his eyebrows. "I guess. Is there a reason?"

"Slytherin and Gryffindor have been talking about finding the other two, apparently, and they want to talk to us," Lupin clarified. "Severus will be there as well and your father said he should be there too if he managed to leave the Ministry on time."

"Oh, eh, how late should we be there?" Harry asked, pushing his bag behind his back.

"Around nine thirty."

They agreed and left Lupin behind to finish tidying up his desk.

"Do you think they have figured out where to find the other two?" Harry asked softly when they made their way to his quarters. They still had a few hours before dinner started, so they would be working on their homework until then.

Draco rolled his shoulder and released a soft sigh. "It would be great if they did, but something tells me that won't be the case."

The dragon snorted when Harry told him the password and with a loud yawn, it opened the portrait, revealing the entrance. They dumped their bags on the floor and took out their homework, nestling together on the couch.

When Harry was still staring at the same page after half an hour, Draco closed his book of Healing with a loud 'thump', startling the other one.

"All right, what's on your mind?" Draco asked, leaning back against the arm of the couch.

Ruby and Mara were lying in front of the fire, their eyes trained on the flickering flames while Garin was hiding in Harry's bedroom. Sapphire was curled up next to Harry, enjoying the soft caresses he was giving her.

Troubled, green eyes stared at him. "Nothing really … Just wondering whether we'll really be able to find all the portraits."

Draco blinked. "Why wouldn't we? We managed to find Gryffindor. We'll manage to find the other two as well."

"But what if we don't find them?" Harry persisted. He stopped caressing Sapphire, making her give a sleep growl in protest, and leaned forwards. "What if we don't find the other two, what are we going to do then?"

"Then we'll find another way to defeat Dumbledore," Draco replied firmly. "He won't win, Harry."

Harry bit his lip and one of his hands came to rest on his stomach.

The particular place of his hand was not lost on the blond and he placed his book on the table, before leaning towards Harry, grabbing him by his waist and urging him wordlessly to sit on his lap.

Harry's arms came to rest on Draco's shoulders and he bent his head, looking straight into clear grey
"Aren't Gryffindors supposed to be the optimistic ones?" Draco chided softly.

A wry smile was his reply. "I'm not a Gryffindor anymore, so I'm not obligated to be optimistic."

"We handled Voldemort," Draco told him softly and one of his hands caressed Harry's stomach over his clothes, before the hand dipped underneath the sweater and touched bare skin. "We handled the guy attacking you and we handled Pansy. We can handle the old coot as well. We're not alone in this, Harry. We'll be ready by the time we meet him again."

He placed a kiss on Harry's forehead. "And I promise you we'll be the ones walking away from that fight; not him."

Harry's smile was weak, but he seemed slightly more confident. "I'll hold you to that promise," he murmured and their eyes closed when their lips met in a deep kiss.

"Your father contacted your family lawyer and he's willing to represent you as well, Mister Potter," McGonagall informed them later that evening.

They were seated in front of her, each one having a cup with steaming tea between their hands.

"That's, eh, nice," Harry replied awkwardly and Draco concealed a chuckle.

"That said, he'll need both your testimonies," she continued and gestured towards the pile of paper and two quills on her desk. "With regards to your state, the Court has agreed that they will judge Miss Parkinson without you two present during the hearing. All they need are your testimonies about her misdeeds."

*Misdeeds was a nice way of stating what she had done*, Draco thought idly. He asked, "Does the Court know that Harry is pregnant?"

She raised an eyebrow. "No, they do not. It would have caused too much of a ruckus if the Court knew of the pregnancy. As far as they know, you two can't attend the trial, because it would attract too much attention. The jury of that Court are not fond of being ambushed by journalists, so they agreed to hold the trial without your presence."

"Why would the Court care that I'm pregnant?" Harry asked confused, placing his half empty cup carefully on the desk.

"Aside from your fame, you are still in school. Your guardians could lose their custody over you if the Court heard of your pregnancy, because you're still attending classes," she answered stiffly and sighed, adjusting her glasses. "In this society, guardians are deemed unfit if the child in their care ends up pregnant while still attending school. It does not matter whether the child achieved the age of maturity or not. It's a rule that has been in place for a long time. Your pregnancy is not that obvious yet, but it's better if we don't take any risks."

"Oh," Harry muttered. "That's a rather stupid rule."

"Regardless, it's still a rule." She nodded to the parchment. "The trial will start next Thursday. Unless you have further questions, you may now write down your testimony and then you can go back to your dormitories."

They nodded and grabbed a piece of paper, writing down everything that had happened – excluding
some details like how exactly Draco had been healed. That would raise too many questions.

After rereading it a couple of times and signing it, they handed over the papers. McGonagall accepted them and her eyes quickly scanned both papers. She nodded and put them in front of her.

"You may leave now."

"Good night, professor," Harry murmured and after slightly adjusting Garin around his waist, they exited the office and let the staircase bring them down.

Harry looked pensively. "Would Sirius and Remus really lose custody over me if the Ministry heard about the baby?" he asked softly after a minute.

"Yes, they would," Draco sighed. When they had informed their family about the baby, Draco hadn't been thinking about that old rule. He had only been worried about his parents' reaction and hadn't thought about other rules that could make their lives difficult. "That rule was written down several centuries ago, because they believed that the guardians must have failed in the upbringing of their children if those children ended up pregnant before they finished their school. It was considered a loss of respect."

He grabbed Harry's slightly cold hand. "That's one of the reasons why it's better to hide the pregnancy from the public. As soon as we have graduated, they can't do anything, but until then we're better off being careful."

"I wasn't planning to announce it to the whole world," Harry replied dryly. "Unlike what some seem to think, I do not thrive on attention."

Draco smiled faintly.

The gargoyle jumped sideways to let them through and they leisurely walked towards Harry's quarters. On their way they encountered some students who were hurrying towards their own dormitories – curfew was nearing and none of the students wanted to encounter either a teacher or a ghost that could rat them out to the teachers.

"Wouldn't it be easier if you just dumped all your stuff here instead of going back and forth?" Harry asked amused when Draco followed him into the bathroom to brush his teeth.

"Have to keep up the pretence," Draco mumbled and shrugged.

Harry shook his head, but didn't say anything.

While Draco was brushing his teeth, Harry had started the shower and started to undress himself. Emerald green eyes caught silver grey ones in the mirror.

"What?"

Draco's gaze was fixated on the very small bump that showed when Harry removed his sweater.

"You need another check-up soon," he muttered and rinsed his mouth.

Harry casted a glance at his stomach and shrugged. "I guess so." He stepped into the shower and glanced at the blond still standing in front of the sink. "You coming?"

Draco smirked. "Don't mind if I do." He quickly chucked off his sweater and trousers and pulled down his boxers.
The shower door closed with a soft click sound and Draco sighed in pleasure when the warm water spray hit his back. A washcloth covered with soap suds suddenly started washing his shoulders and Draco blinked the water out of his eyes, looking right in glittering emerald green ones.

"Why don't you let me take care of you, hm?" Harry whispered, bringing the soft cloth to Draco's chest.

He placed his hands on Harry's hips, caressing the hipbones with two fingers. "Shouldn't I be the one taking care of you?" he murmured and hummed pleased when Harry stepped closer so that their hips pressed together. The washcloth was now making slow circles on his stomach, covering it with dark purple suds.

"You're the one who looks more tired," Harry pointed out and placed a kiss on his shoulder, while he slipped his arm around Draco, so that he could wash his back.

Draco arched his back when the soft cloth made contact with his skin, which brought him even closer to Harry. He relished in the soft gasp that escaped pink lips and slid his hands to Harry's lower back. He kneaded the muscles slowly, before his hands dipped down and came to rest on Harry's buttocks.

An impish smile graced Harry's mouth and he suddenly pushed Draco backwards, until his back hit the wet, cold tiles of the shower. He hissed softly at the feeling of cold stone against his warm skin, but the slight annoyance was quickly forgotten when he felt hands gliding over his chest, brushing against his lower stomach, before settling on his hips.

"Harry?" His voice was barely audible above the noise of the running water.

Harry was kneeling in front of him, his wet hair plastered against his forehead and the pupils in his eyes had grown bigger. The water spray hit his back with the way he was slightly leaning forwards, but it didn't hit his face, so he could look up at the blond without having to blink water out of his eyes.

"Like I said," he hummed and slowly started to rub the washcloth over Draco's right thigh. "I'll take care of you now."

While his one hand lowered the washcloth to his knee and the rest of his leg, the other hand started to caress his thigh almost lazily.

Once the right leg was completely washed, Harry quickly switched over to the other leg, while Draco leant against the wall, shivering lightly whenever the cloth touched a sensitive part of his skin.

The wet 'smack' sound of the cloth being dropped on the wet shower bottom made him look down again. Harry was using his hands to form a makeshift bowel so that he could transfer the water over to Draco's legs, rinsing off all the soap suds.

Draco expected him to get up again after doing that, but instead hands were placed on his hips again and Harry leant forwards until his lips were just an inch away from Draco's stomach.

"What are you doing?" he asked, feeling a shiver running down his spine when warm breath hit his skin.

Green eyes looked up at him half lidded, making him bite his lip and pale red lips curled up in a mischievous smile.

"What do you think I'm doing?" Harry retorted playfully and the tip of his tongue peeked out from
between his lips, licking a long stripe that started from Draco's left hip to his right. The tongue was exchanged for a mouth that left fleeting kisses behind on his hips and thighs, getting dangerously close to his groin that had started to stir in interest.

His breathing quickened in response and warmth started to pool in his stomach. It would be easy to give in and let Harry do what he wanted – because there was no way he was protesting against this – but the nagging thought that Harry couldn't be comfortable on his knees in the shower didn't leave him.

"Are you sure you want to do it here? Wouldn't it be more comfortable for you to do this in bed?"

A loud yelp tore through his throat when teeth nipped his thigh warningly.

Harry looked at him with narrowed eyes. "For Merlin's sake, Draco," he huffed and his hand tightened his grip on Draco's waist. "Just shut up and enjoy this."

“But are you sure you don’t want to – oh fuck, Harry!” His concerned question was abruptly cut off when he felt a hot, wet mouth closing around his hard cock, taking him almost completely in. The part that Harry couldn’t fit in his mouth without risking choking himself was encircled by a wet hand that started to move up and down, squeezing every few seconds.

Draco’s head fell back against the tiles and his eyes closed almost involuntarily. While one hand was braced against the wall to make sure he didn’t topple over, the other hand buried itself into dark, wet hair, gripping it almost roughly while his hips bucked forwards.

Harry made a strange hum sound around his member, which made him clench his teeth, trying to not be that loud. His lover seemed displeased about that, because he pulled back, leaving only the tip of his cock to rest against slightly parted lips and waited to make sure Draco looked at him through his hazy sight, before he suddenly dipped down with his mouth and swallowed around Draco’s cock.

“FUCK!” Various other explicative words left his mouth and when shiny emerald green eyes looked up at him, coupled with the red sheen dusting his cheeks; his lips reddened from being stretched around his hard girth, Draco almost lost it.

“Fuck, fuck, you’re so good, so good, Harry,” he chanted breathlessly. His legs almost buckled when he felt a tongue twisting around his cock, massaging it and teasing his slit, and his whole body started to tremble. He could barely keep his eyes open from the pleasure coursing through his body and he tried to keep his grip on Harry’s head light, not willing to hurt him even with the almost blinding pleasure making it difficult for him to think straight.

Vaguely he became aware of the fact that only one hand was still holding on to his waist and the soft moans pouring from his lover’s mouth.

Looking down, he caught sight of Harry’s hand wrapped around his own hard, leaking member and that together with Harry’s eyes looking at him with wide blown pupils was all that was needed for him to come with a loud shout that contained Harry’s name somewhere in it. He felt Harry swallowing around him, trying to not let anything spill and not long after he was coming down from his high, Harry came as well, moaning loudly.

His legs, that felt like jelly, couldn't hold his weight anymore and he practically collapsed on the floor, Harry's hands guiding him to make sure he didn't land too hard.

"Fuck, that was amazing," Draco sighed and opened his eyes.

Harry licked his lips and grinned. "I'm glad to hear I'm getting better at it," he joked.
Draco chuckled and bent forwards to give him a soft kiss.

The water washed away the last evidence of their tryst and Draco nudged Harry's hips.

"Time for bed?" he asked softly, feeling drowsiness creeping up on him.

Harry smiled sleepily back. "Yeah, let's go."

They shut off the water and hurried with drying off, feeling the cold air hitting their skin after the warm shower.

A shirt and pyjama pants were quickly pulled on and they slipped underneath the covers, ignoring the amused huff of their feline pets.

"Good night," Draco whispered and pulled Harry in his arms, positioning his head against his shoulder.

"Sweet dreams," Harry murmured, only half awake.

The last candle light was put out and with the darkness falling over them, they embraced the sleep taking over their bodies.

Harry hadn't known what to expect of the unexpected meeting at Remus' and Sirius' quarters, but he was definitely certain that he hadn't expected to find Luna Lovegood standing in front of the portrait with a serene smile on her face.

Draco stiffened next to him and Harry could feel Ruby's body becoming tense as well.

"Luna, what are you doing here?" he asked curiously. He hadn't had the chance to talk with her since they were back in school, though he did meet her eyes occasionally in the Great Hall and between lessons.

Blond hair was twirled around a slender finger and her necklace of Butterbeer bottle caps made a soft 'ting' sound when she craned her neck to look at him.

"I was told you needed my help today, Harry," she hummed and smiled dreamily.

"By whom?" Draco asked sharply.

Large blue eyes blinked at him. "The raven told me," she stated frankly.

*Well, at least the animal exists for sure,* Harry thought and his lips twitched. "With what would I need your help?" he asked out loud and approached the girl.

"With your quest of course," she smiled, ignoring Draco's shocked sputtering. "Shall we go inside?"

Harry and Draco shared a look. Obviously, Luna knew more than expected and Harry suspected it was in their best interests if they accepted her help. At least he knew she would never harm him.

"All right, let's go inside."

After muttering the password, they entered the room and found Remus, Sirius and Snape waiting for them on the couch with steaming tea cups in front of them.

Snape narrowed his eyes the moment he caught sight of Luna. "What is Miss Lovegood doing
here?" he asked sharply.

Harry shrugged helplessly, sitting on the opposite couch. Draco sat down on his left and Luna on his right.

"She said she could help us," he answered and rubbed his neck.

"And how can you help us, Miss Lovegood?" Remus asked calmly, though his eyes were wary.

"Rowena Ravenclaw is my ancestor," she declared promptly with a dreamy look on her face. "I've always wanted to talk with her – mum said she was one of the smartest witches in history. Wouldn't it be fascinating to know how many creatures she discovered? Maybe she can help me protecting the Nargels."

"Rowena Ravenclaw is your ancestor," Sirius repeated slowly and shook his head warily. "Are you certain of that?"

"Of course," she hummed. "The raven told me I should help Harry, because he was having problems with his quest. I'm not allowed to help with the quest itself, but I can offer some help."

"So you can help us with identifying the place where Ravenclaw's portrait is?" Harry asked and his heart started to beat quicker in anticipation. If this was true, then they would be one step closer to completing their plan.

It shouldn't have surprised him to hear that the other Founders had family walking around here in Hogwarts. He just hadn't expected to stumble upon someone else sharing the blood of a Founder.

"Well then, let the girl donate some blood so that we can discover the damn location," Gryffindor snapped and walked around in the garden that had been painted in the portrait. "I'm sick of staring at Salazar's face – seeing her again would at least provide me the opportunity to talk with someone who is not a complete arrogant arse."

Slytherin smirked from his place underneath a tree. "It seems my arrogance has been rubbing off on you, dear Godric."

"Why you …"

"Oh, just shut up," Snape barked and Gryffindor looked offended. He threw a map down on the table – the same map they had used to locate Gryffindor's painting. "I trust you know what to do, girl?"

Luna simply smiled and pointed her wand at her finger. A few seconds later, blood welled up from the small cut and three drops fell on the map. Just like when Harry did it, the drops trilled and moved across the map. Unlike before though, Snape barked out a spell that Harry didn't recognize, though he did recognize the name of Ravenclaw at the end of it.

"What does that spell do?" he asked warily.

"It concentrates on the blood ties Lovegood shares with Ravenclaw. It will point out the place where her portrait is located, seeing as we don't need to know where Lovegood's house is located," Snape answered stiffly.

The drops of blood suddenly stopped at one particular place, spelling out the coordinates clearly.

Underneath the coordinates, Harry caught a glimpse of the town the ritual had decided on to be the
correct place.

"Godric's Hollow? Why would her portrait be in Godric's Hollow?" He furrowed his eyebrows. Godric's Hollow was his birthplace – did it have ties with Ravenclaw?

Snape's sudden intake of breath made everyone stare at him.

"What's wrong?" Remus asked with a sharp voice.

"I recognize those coordinates."

"Which place is it then?" Draco asked confused.

Black eyes locked on green ones.

"That is Albus' house."
Chapter Notes

Author's note: Well, at least this time it didn't take an entire month to update? *coughs* Sorry, during the day I'm busy studying for my exams, so I only have the nights to work on the fic.

IMPORTANT INFORMATION: So, next week I have to start retaking the exams I failed. My last exam is on the first of September. You probably are bracing yourselves for a long period of no updates. Well, this time it'll be different! You see, normally the quest would be put in one chapter. BUT! The chapter grew quite long, so I decided to cut it into two parts (which explains why this chapter is rather shorter than the previous one). Anyway, the next chapter is almost finished, so in two weeks (the end of August, so right before my last exam), you'll be getting the next chapter! This means you'll only have to wait two weeks for the next chapter :)

Thanks for the kudos!

Warnings: A bit of drama; spell and curse violence; a rather flirty Lucius (*coughs*
Don't look at me, the chapter wrote itself like that)

Disclaimer: I don't own Harry Potter - J.K. Rowling owns it.

I hope you'll like this chapter!

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Chapter 19: Helpful Hufflepuff and Precarious Potions Part 3

"Dumbledore's house?" Harry repeated weakly and felt his heart starting to beat quicker, while his hands became clammy.

Snape nodded slowly. "He hasn't been there in years as far as I can remember. Said something about the place having bad memories. I only know the coordinates, because I once had to go there to report on the Dark Lord's whereabouts." A faint grimace tainted his mouth at the mention of Voldemort.

"It does make sense why he chose that place," Remus murmured thoughtfully. "If he hasn't been there in years, he probably thought people wouldn't think of searching there for a portrait."

"Is it a manor?" Draco furrowed his eyebrows and sneaked his hand over Harry's, gripping it softly.

"No, just a regular house. It's a Muggle neighbourhood and it doesn't contain a lot of wards either," Snape replied and his eyes were trained on the map. "Then again, he could have changed those since the last time I visited him. Especially because he would need to protect something as important as a Founder's portrait."

"So Rowena is hidden away in the house of the person you want to Bind?" Gryffindor remarked and clucked his tongue. "He certainly knows how to pick the places, the bastard."

"Makes one wonder where he has hidden our dear Helga," Slytherin murmured and his eyes had a distant sheen over them.
"Let's concentrate on finding Ravenclaw first," Sirius said brusquely and glanced at his godson. "Harry, are you okay?"

Harry looked up startled. "Yeah, yeah, I'm okay," he muttered and rubbed his arm.

To be honest, he didn't know what to feel about the fact that he would need to enter Dumbledore's house in order to find Ravenclaw. Would it be safe to enter? How many traps would Dumbledore have put up? What would happen once they were there? His own family manor had given him trouble to enter and he had been largely helped by the fact that house elves were still present and the manor recognized him as the heir.

How much trouble would they land in by entering Dumbledore's house?

"You'll be okay, Harry, you'll see," Luna murmured next to him and she gave him a big, almost blinding smile.

He returned her smile with a weak one of his own.

The meeting was soon wrapped up. Remus mentioned he would talk to McGonagall and ask her when they would be able to leave and the three students left the room together with Snape.

The Potions Master gave them a short nod and silently walked away.

Luna surprised Harry by giving him a firm, but careful hug. "I'll see you next week, Harry," she smiled and then skipped away.

"Have I mentioned before how much she creeps me out at times?" Draco murmured and regarded her retreating figure warily.

Harry sighed and ran his hands through his hair. "Yeah, you might have mentioned it before, but you know she wouldn't harm me, Draco," he reminded the blond.

Draco sniffed. "Doesn't mean she can't be creepy at times."

Harry just rolled his eyes and started to walk away.

"She smells harmless," Ruby remarked casually.

"See, Draco, even Ruby thinks she's okay," Harry couldn't help but point out, making his lover roll his eyes this time.

"Only harmless to you two, though," Ruby continued dryly. "She smells dangerous when she's looking at some other people."

Harry didn't need to look at Draco to know that he was looking rather pointedly at him. "Oh, shut up," he groused and quickened his steps, while Draco followed him with a soft chuckle.

25th of January

Apparently McGonagall was very eager to have all the portraits gathered, because she gave them permission to leave the school a week later, again with the warning that they would have to be careful about sneaking out and sneaking back in.

"Are you feeling all right?" Draco asked worriedly and gazed at Harry from his spot on the bed.
Harry wriggled himself in a shirt, his fingers gliding over the buttons to slip them in the buttonholes. "We're planning to enter Dumbledore's house and encounter Merlin knows what, but apart from that, yeah, I'm feeling fine," he huffed and stared speculatively at his stomach. He had just entered his fifth month and his stomach had grown to be a noticeably rounded bulge. He still hadn't felt the baby moving, but he figured it wouldn't be long now. "I probably should start using that belt your mother purchased during the holidays," he muttered absentmindedly and touched his stomach for a few seconds.

"Yeah, you should," Draco agreed and stood up. He came to a stop behind Harry and slipped his arms around him, placing his chin on Harry's shoulder, while looking at their reflection in the mirror. "I'd rather you didn't join us today," he admitted and caressed his stomach. "I can't imagine it will be easy to walk into that house and to have you there in this condition …"

Harry sighed and patted the hand that was caressing him. "Do you think I haven't thought about that? I'd rather we didn't have to search through that house, but we don't have a choice."

"Mara and I will join you," Ruby informed them and rose up from his place on the floor, stretching his massive front paws during the progress. "Garin and Rowen will stay in the castle."

Draco raised an eyebrow. "Will you two be able to Apparate with someone?"

Mara yawned and let out a soft snort. "We have our own manner of travelling," she replied haughtily.

"Why do I still ask?" Draco muttered and shook his head.

Harry caught a glimpse of the clock. "Let's go; it's nearly time to leave."

After patting Sapphire's head, making her growl sleepily, they left Harry's quarters and made their way to the Great Hall.

It was still relatively early – only seven o'clock; the sun had barely risen. They had chosen this hour, because they were less likely to be caught by students. During the weekends, the students who woke up early usually went to eat around eight, so this way nobody would see them leaving the castle. Both Draco and Harry had asked a house elf to bring breakfast to Harry's room and the house elf had been happy to comply.

Only Snape was already waiting near the alcove where they had agreed to meet.

"Your father is waiting outside the gates," he informed his godson curtly. Then he glanced at Harry and the small bag that hung over his shoulder. "What does that contain?"

"My Invisibility Cloak and the device that Narcissa lent to me," Harry answered, grabbing the bag tighter. "I figured that my Cloak could be useful today." He shrugged.

Snape merely nodded with a sigh.

"Harry!"

The small group tensed when they heard the familiar voice calling out and Harry turned around quickly.

"Luna, what are you doing here?" he asked confused.

Her bracelet with charms in the form of golden pyramids made a high bell like sound when she came
to an abrupt stop in front of him.

"The air spirit came to talk to me yesterday," she smiled excitedly and dug into her large bag, pushing aside various little trinkets that were on the verge of spilling out. "Said I had to give you these."

Harry received a small, round vial filled with a thick, orange red potion and a larger, thin vial filled with a deep midnight purple coloured potion that seemed to be half liquid form, half gas form. He stared at them bewildered.

"Eh, thank you, Luna," he murmured, wondering why she would give him two potions and what their purpose was.

Instead of explaining their use, she merely smiled happily and then bent forwards so that Draco nor Snape could hear her say something.

"Remember, Harry, while your mind may be in doubt, your heart knows the best," she said solemnly, her clear blue eyes gazing at him intently. "Don't ever stray from the answer your heart gives you." She placed a hand on his chest for a few seconds, then fleetingly touched his stomach – hidden away by a thick jumper and his robes – and then twirled around and walked away without looking back.

"Potter, what was that about?" Snape asked sharply and Harry faced him.

"Eh, she gave me these potions, but she didn't really say what they are supposed to do," he muttered confused and held up the vials in the light.

Snape narrowed his eyes and studied the potions. "Why would Miss Lovegood give you a healing potion meant for deep wounds and the Aconitum Mentis?"

"The Aconitum Mentis?" Harry repeated blankly. He thought he could recognize the Latin word for poison in the name, but that didn't help him with the purpose of the potion.

"It's a complicated potion that is meant to heal the mind of people. The mind usually is attacked by a curse or in rare cases infected with a potion and that potion," Draco nodded towards the thin vial, "will pull all the 'poisonous' elements out of the mind and heal it."

"Huh," Harry muttered and stared at the two vials. Why would Luna give him these specific potions? Did she know something?

If he didn't have a bad feeling about this trip before, he certainly had it now.

After hesitating for a short moment, he opened his bag and carefully slipped the vials inside. He didn't know why Luna had given him those potions specifically, but he trusted her. Besides, carrying two potions wouldn't hurt.

Not long after the small exchange with Luna, Sirius and Remus arrived with grim faces.

After a quick greeting, they silently left the castle and joined Lucius at the gates where they Apparated – or in Harry's case, used the device to transport him.

They appeared in a small alley; a cat rummaging through some garbage cans hissed at them and scuttled away.

When the small group slowly left the alley, they found themselves on a silent street. The street was
on the outskirts of the town and the houses looked near the point of crumbling down. The sidewalk contained several cracks and chipped, dirty stones; weed was growing through the cracks. The gutter was littered with empty beer cans, small candy wrappers, half eaten food ... It was obvious that the people living here weren't too keen on keeping their street clean.

The sky was overcast and it was raining softly while a sharp wind whistled, making the dented beer cans softly roll back and forth.

"Lovely street," Sirius commented dryly.

They passed three cars: one with chipped paint and a dented roof; another one didn't have wheels and the third one had a smashed window shield.

The former childhood home of Dumbledore was situated at the end of the street, hidden partly from view by a gnarly, dead tree. The iron mailbox in front of the house contained discoloured leaflets with commercials and something that looked like an old bill.

The house itself was in badly need of repair. The once lovely white painted front door was nearly rotten and several chips of white paint laid on the small doorstep; the window next to the front door had a small hole in it and small pieces of glass littered the sidewalk – as if something had been thrown out of the house (or as if a spell had been aimed at it, Harry thought). The house seemed to contain three floors; one round window was placed the highest and Harry assumed that floor was the attic. The two windows beneath the round one had some small cracks, but were covered by dark curtains.

"All right, everyone ready?" Lucius asked and he casted the house a wary look.

They nodded and – having learnt from their mishap at Potter Manor – Sirius conjured a small stone and threw it on the small doorstep.

Nothing happened.

Keeping their senses on high alert and their wands firmly in their hands, they walked closer to the door. Remus pointed his wand at the door and one muttered spell later, the door silently flew open, revealing a rather large hallway filled with cobwebs and dust.

Remus and Sirius entered the hallway first and once they confirmed that no immediate traps would activate, they waved the others inside.

They looked around, taking in their surroundings. A narrow, wooden staircase was on the right side of the hallway and a small, ratty, dark red carpet was nailed into the wood. There were three rooms on the ground floor; two of them were closed and one didn't have a door. The open one seemed to have served as the living room, because Harry could see the shape of a large couch and what seemed to be a chipped coffee table. A huge mirror was hung up next to the front door (which was closed again by Snape as to not attract the attention of outsiders), but Harry could barely see their reflections in it, because the glass had become very dirty and smudged throughout the years.

Ruby and Mara were sniffing the air and the hair on their back rose up while the fire on their tails started to glow brighter.

"It stinks here," Mara spat and her tail swished agitatedly back and forth.

Ruby agreed. "It smells dark and oppressing."

"Well, that answers the question whether there are traps in the house," Draco murmured and
grimaced.

"How are we going to do this?" Harry asked and looked warily at the open room. "The inside looks a lot bigger than I expected."

"Wizard space," Sirius answered. "That's the only explanation. It makes things slightly more difficult."

"Why don't we split up in groups and search through the house for Ravenclaw?" Lucius suggested. "If we stay together, it will take us longer to go through the house and find her. I do not want to waste more time than needed in this place."

Remus grimaced. "I'd rather we don't split up, but it probably will make the search easier."

"Draco and I will search upstairs," Harry offered and eyed the staircase, wondering whether it would hold their weight. Merlin, he hoped so. He had no desire whatsoever to fall through rotten wood.

"We will search this floor first and we'll meet up upstairs if we don't find her here," Snape said; his dark eyes glancing around suspiciously.

Harry and Draco turned around and after casting a spell to check for traps on the staircase – the first step carried a Jelly-Legs Jinx and they avoided that particular step – they slowly made their way upstairs, looking around them in case there was a trap waiting for them. Ruby and Mara were following behind them, their paws making no sound on the creaking steps.

When they arrived on the first floor, Harry noticed a second staircase – which was even smaller than the one they just had ascended – and assumed this one led to the attic.

"What do you think of first checking out the attic?" he asked and eyed the floor warily.

In front of them was a closed room and a small dark blue vase stood next to it on the floor; some dead flower petals strewn around it. The door was hidden partly in the shadows and if they turned the corner they would step into another corridor.

A dusty, golden chandelier hung above their heads, almost completely covered in cobwebs.

"Probably the best," Draco agreed and a spell revealed nothing out of the ordinary on the staircase.

It only took them fifteen steps before they arrived in front of a half closed door. Stale air drifted through the gap and Harry wrinkled his nose.

After confirming that there were no wards around the door or spells attached to the wood, Harry pushed it open with his foot and entered together with Draco and their two pets.

The attic was fairly empty: there were a couple of boxes stacked to the furthest wall and underneath the small window a plastic table was stored with some garden tools thrown on it. A pile of children's toys were lying in the left corner, gathering dust: a couple of dolls with tangled, blonde hair; some colour books; a play mat and even a toy wand.

The floor creaked when they walked further into the room, dodging the cobwebs and some dead rats lying on the floor.

Ruby and Mara were investigating the side near the window while Draco and Harry searched the rest of the attic.
Of course it would have been too easy if they had found the portrait already. Harry stifled a disappointed sigh and turned to Draco.

"I've found nothing. I don't think she's here," he said and took a step towards the door. "Let's go back to the first floor."

Ruby and Mara turned their heads and grunted their acknowledgement.

Draco and Harry were right in front of the open door way when a sudden sound of wind whirling made them turn around.

Ruby and Mara were right in the middle of the floor when a dark yellow shield rose up around them and their growls tore through the barrier before they disappeared in a flash.

"Ruby? Mara!" Harry exclaimed in shock and wanted to rush forwards when his arm was grabbed tightly and he was pulled back.

"Don't go there," Draco snapped and pulled him out of the room.

Harry tried to resist, struggling so that he could go back and try to find out what had happened to their pets. "Let me go! I need to …"

"I know what that spell does," Draco raised his voice and that was enough to make Harry stop struggling.

"What does it do then?"

"That's a Transportation spell," the blond replied grimly and then casted the Colloportus spell on the door, which had swung close. "It doesn't do them any harm; it brings them to another location either in the house or just outside of it."

"But they will be all right?" Harry asked worriedly, glancing back at the closed door.

Draco nodded. "Yes, they will. You know I wouldn't lie about something like that."

Harry calmed down somewhat, though he didn't like the thought of his pets being transported to a place where he couldn't find them immediately.

"Let's go check out the first floor now," he sighed. "Maybe they are there."

With one last look at the closed off attic, they descended the staircase again and started to explore the first floor.

"Let's split up," Lupin suggested and glanced around. "Sirius and I will search the kitchen."

"Severus and I will look in the living room and the room on the other side of the kitchen then," Lucius replied and the group broke apart.

Severus casted a spell on the doorway of the living room. An open doorway did not necessarily mean there were no spells that would activate once they passed through it. The spell couldn't find anything and they entered the room, coming to a standstill.

It was a rather bare room. On their left there stood a large, black couch, big enough to fit three people at least. Some pillows were haphazardly thrown on it and the cloth had darkened due to the dust and grime that had been building up throughout the years. On the opposite of the couch, two armchairs of
the same colour stood and the stuffing of the couches was peeling through the seams. Between the
couch and the armchairs a chipped coffee table could be found, leaning partly to the ground thanks to
a missing leg. A ratty yellowish carpet covered the wooden boards that served as the floor.

Behind the couch there was a window which was partly covered by dark green curtains. A
bookcase, still stuffed with books, stood next to the window. The spines of some of the books were
broken and none of them appeared to be magical ones. Some trinkets like a porcelain doll stood in
front of the books, covered in dust.

When Severus looked ahead, he stiffened and heard Lucius hissing softly through his teeth. Right in
front of them was a fireplace; it was grey thanks to the ashes that wasn't swept out of it and a small
pile of logs was stacked next to the fireplace.

What caught their attention the most was the portrait hanging above the fireplace.

It was a family portrait – a Muggle created one, as the people in it didn't move or speak. Two boys
with large grins on their faces stood in the front with a small girl, who was smiling shyly, next to
them. Their parents were standing right behind them; the man's hands were placed on the shoulder of
each boy and the woman had placed a hand on the girl's shoulder.

The smile on the man's face was barely visible, but the woman was smiling tenderly.

Looking at the owners of the house, this could only be one family: the Dumbledores.

"Is that …"

Severus nodded. "Yes, that's Albus, together with his brother Aberforth; his sister Ariana and their
parents."

Lucius frowned. "Why isn't it a Wizard portrait? Was the mother a Muggle?"

Severus stared contemplatively at the portrait. "No, I believe she was a Muggleborn. I'm surprised
this portrait hangs here, though."

"Why?"

"Because Albus told me that they moved here after his father went to Azkaban."

The Potions Master stepped forwards. "I doubt we'll find Ravenclaw's portrait here, but let's search.
Knowing the old fool, he could have easily hidden her portrait behind that of his family," he sneered
and rolled his eyes.

They went about casting spells on each furniture and slowly covered the entire room. Some minor
curses like the Hair Loss curse were dealt with before they went further.

Severus frowned and stared at one of the armchairs thoughtfully. This didn't make sense. The
magical wards and curses on the furniture suggested that Dumbledore had returned to the house after
Severus had visited him years ago. He knew they hadn't been there when he visited the old man
when he was still serving under the Dark Lord. He would have sensed them.

Yet, the man had barely left the school once the Dark Lord had temporarily disappeared. When had
he returned here and why had he decided to place all these curses? The presence of them suggested
that he had been trying to hide something important or dangerous and this meant that this place was
indeed where Ravenclaw was hidden. Had he known somehow that someone would start searching
for the Founders? Had he therefore placed as many curses and wards as he could?
Had he expected to have to flee one day?

Severus sighed irritated. He had never tried to understand the way Albus' thought process went – the times he had tried, it had always ended up with him getting a headache from it – but this time it didn't make sense at all.

Had he maybe been planning to …

It was barely audible, but Severus had trained senses, thanks to years of being a spy and his ears picked up the soft whisper and the clicking sound.

He whirled around and snapped, "Lucius, stay back!"

Lucius was standing right in front of the fireplace and without questioning his lover, he jumped back – but not before a dozen sharp knives appeared, rising up from the ashes and shot forwards. They flew at high speed past Severus and he could hear the dull 'thud' sound they made when they landed right into the wall in the hallway.

"Severus …"

The dark haired man turned around quickly and his eyes widened when he caught sight of his lover. Lucius had sunk down on the ground, his jaw clenched while his eyes were closed. His hand was gripping his leg; one of the knives had found its target and had buried itself to the hilt in his thigh. Blood was starting to drip from the wound, colouring his trousers, but ironically the knife was the same thing that was keeping most of the blood still in his body. As soon as the knife was pulled out, blood would start flowing quicker and judging at the place the knife was buried in, Severus feared that it had hit a large vein.

Fuck, this was not what he had thought would happen when he had set foot in this house.

With a loud curse, Severus went towards the blond, but took a detour around the coffee table in case there were more knives waiting to fly towards him if he triggered the trap again.

Lucius had propped himself up against the couch, his leg bent at an awkward angle while his hands were clenched around his thigh. His breathing escaped through his clenched teeth and his breath was quickening in response to the adrenaline that was no doubt flowing through his veins now.

"Did it hit a major vein?" Lucius asked and his eyes glittered while he grimaced from the pain.

Severus bent over the wound and studied it with critical eyes. He had no Healing degree and he briefly considered searching for the wolf, because he recalled him having a Healer's degree. Lupin would probably know best what had to be done, but he wasn't certain whether it would be a good idea to leave Lucius on his own for the time it would take him to search the man. Already the blood was flowing more thickly and Lucius was starting to look even paler than he usually was – whether that was from shock settling in or the blood loss, Severus didn't know.

He had no other choice than to try to heal the other man. Fortunately, during his school years he had been busy creating spells and curses and one of them he had created as response to one of his more severe curses, that being the Sectumsempra spell. He was certain this particular Healing spell would work on this wound, because he had seen it used before on similar wounds.

"All right, I know a spell which will heal this wound," he said and conjured a strip of leather. "I have to pull the knife out, so bite on this, because it's going to hurt more."

Lucius nodded grimly and accepted the leather strip, putting it between his teeth. His hands dropped
to the floor and he closed his eyes.

"All right, I'm going to pull out the knife now," Severus warned him and tightly grabbed the hilt of the knife while keeping his wand trained at the wound. In one fluent motion, he pulled out the knife, threw it hastily away and covered the gaping wound with his now free hand while the blood started pouring out of it. "Vulnera Sanentur," he chanted and put his wand on the wound, ignoring the loud hiss that his action evoked.

He repeated the spell three times: the first time made the blood flow slow down so that his lover wouldn't die of blood loss. Only a slight trickle seeped from the open wound now. The second time took care of removing any residue that could have been left behind by the knife and the healing progress started. When he finished chanting for the third time, the wound was knitting close until nothing else remained but an angry red scar.

Severus lowered his wound and took a deep breath, forcing his trembling hands to still.

Almost mechanically, he conjured up a cloth and wiped his hands with it, removing the sticky blood.

"We still need to put some dittany on it to prevent scarring for the rest of your life, but that's something I don't have now," Severus muttered and looked up. "Your leg will feel a bit stiff for at least the upcoming hour, but at least you won't be bleeding to death."

Lucius removed the leather strip and dropped it on the floor. "Thank you," he murmured and in one fluent motion – one that a man whose leg was stabbed and who nearly died of blood loss shouldn't have been able to pull off so smoothly – he leant forwards and kissed the surprised Potions Master.

Severus kissed him back until he couldn't ignore the faint taste of leather anymore and he pulled back with a grimace. "You'll be brushing your mouth before you kiss me again," he sneered and stood up. "I'm not particularly fond of the taste of leather."

"Oh?" Lucius smirked and with some slight difficulty rose up. "Leather is an acquired taste, I give you that. But maybe depending on what the leather is meant for, you could become used to the taste?" he suggested and vanished the leather strip with a quick snap of his wand.

Black eyes stared at him incredulously. "Only you would be able to suggest something as vulgar as that after nearly bleeding to death."

"Nearly," the blond reminded him almost cheekily. "Thanks to you, I didn't and I feel like I should properly repay you for saving my life."

Severus raised an eyebrow and took a step closer to the slightly taller man. "You want to repay me?"

"Of course; a Malfoy always repays his debt after all," Lucius whispered and one of his hands reached out to touch Severus' waist.

"Well then," Severus murmured and leant closer until their lips nearly touched and he could see the pupils in those grey eyes widening. "Keep your blood in this part of your body," he sneered and lightly slapped Lucius' head, making the man rear back in surprise.

"You tease," he said amused.

The other man ignored the comment and motioned towards the hallway. "It's clear we're not going to find Ravenclaw here. Let's check out the room next to the kitchen."

"Let's hope the traps there won't be as severe as the one in here," Lucius muttered and followed the
dark haired man into the hallway.

This room was closed off by one magical barrier and a regular lock. It took them some time to bring down the barrier, but once that one was down, the lock was easily blasted out of the door (Severus might have put a bit more power behind the Reductor Curse than was strictly necessary) and they entered the room.

The purpose of the room wasn't clear. It seemed to have been used as some sort of storage room. There were some wooden chairs piled up against the wall and there was a small children's desk present on which some parchment and several broken quills were placed. Some orange coloured boxes were thrown haphazardly underneath the cracked window and they carried some burn marks. One of them was open and it appeared to contain some canned food – Severus had no desire to know the expiration date on those small containers.

Some spiders scuttled away from them when they walked further and Severus had to resist the urge to sneeze when the dust started flying.

"It doesn't look like her portrait is present here," Lucius remarked and casted a spell on the desk. The desk rattled a bit, but nothing else happened.

"Looks can be deceiving," Severus snorted, but inwardly he agreed with the blond.

The room was quite bare – unless the old man had used a Disillusion charm, it wasn't likely that they would find her here.

Still, they searched through the entire room: shoving the chairs aside, looking through the desk, casting charms that would eradicate any Disillusion charm …

While Lucius was still busy on the side with the desk, Severus made his way towards the window … and promptly halted when he glanced at the floor right before the boxes.

The spiders, which had been running away from them, were all lying dead on the floor. One of them was still twitching slightly, before it stilled as well.

That could only mean one thing.

Narrowing his eyes, he casted a Detection spell and a small hiss escaped him when the entire window glowed a bright green. The bright green colour signalled that there was a dark curse put on the window and when he casted a more complicated Detection spell, it revealed what kind of curse was placed on it.

It was the Poisonous Barb curse. This particular curse could only be put on objects or in rare cases on certain parts of a house and it would lay dormant until a living being came too close to it. Then it would reach out like tendrils, wrap itself around the victim and when the poison was absorbed through the skin in the bloodstream, it would feel like barbs were stabbing through the skin until breathing became too difficult and the victim died.

"Did you find something?" Lucius asked curiously.

He turned around to face him and gestured towards the window. "Only a Poisonous Barb curse," he replied with a slight grimace. "You?"

Lucius shook his head. "Nothing, except for some children's drawings and some multi-coloured ink."

"Let's go then. Normally the wolf and the mutt should be done inspecting the kitchen by now,"
Severus sighed and threw one last look at the window, before shaking his head.

They were nearly out of the door when their ears picked up a peculiar sound. It sounded muffled and it was as if someone was slamming against a door.

Severus and Lucius frowned and shared a look before turning their attention back to the room where the mysterious sound was emanating from, seemingly from underneath the ground.

"What on earth …" Lucius started to say, but was cut off when the sound grew louder until suddenly a part of the floor blasted apart.

Dust and smoke swirled through the air and they hastily covered their noses while keeping their wand and eyes trained on the hole in the ground, wondering whether this was a trap of Albus.

But no, instead of a trap unfolding, two very familiar shapes climbed out of the hole, shaking their enormous bodies to get rid of the dust.

"Mara, Ruby, how the hell did you get there?" Severus snapped and took a step closer to the lion and snow leopard – only to freeze when he took notice of the object glinting between Ruby’s big, sharp teeth. "That can't be possible!"
Helpful Hufflepuff and Precarious Potions Part 4

Chapter Notes

Author's note: First time in more than a year that I manage to update this story according to the original schedule ... I don't know whether to feel proud of that *clears throat*

Anyway, like promised, here is chapter 20 :) It turned out quite a bit longer than I expected, but well, that's just how it went *shrugs*

Thanks for the kudos!

Warnings: a lot of drama, angst, violence, description of wounds and blood; just prepare for a rather heavy chapter

Disclaimer: I don't own Harry Potter - J.K. Rowling owns it.

Please enjoy this chapter! (Despite the heaviness of it)

Chapter 20: Helpful Hufflepuff and Precarious Potions Part 4

"All right, where should we start first?" Harry asked.

They were back on the first floor. They were standing in front of the room with the vase in front of it, but when they looked at their right, they could see three more rooms in the small hallway. The room next to the one they were standing in front of had a door painted in pink and Harry suspected that it had belonged to a girl at some point. A bit past that room, on the opposite of the corridor, was another closed off room – this room had a dark blue coloured door. At the end of the corridor was another room, but this one had a smaller door than the other rooms; the paint of the door was badly chipped and there were some burn marks on it as well.

"Let's go through this room first and then continue like that through the hallway," Draco suggested and after checking the door for hidden traps or barriers, they opened it with an 'Alohomora' and entered the room.

The entire room was done in shades of blue: the walls were painted a sky blue, the rug on the floor was cerulean blue and the dusty, ratty bed sheets were a midnight blue, streaked with white lines. The desk – unbalanced because it missed two legs, making it lean to the left – was a milky white and an old newspaper was placed on it, accompanied with some parchment and used quills. A rickety chair was shoved against it. The desk was right next to the entrance, while the bed was placed underneath the window. Some posters, frayed at the edges, hung on the walls, but the pictures were too faded by time to see what they had portrayed.

A dark red bin was placed next to the bed and it seemed to contain some balled up parchment and cobwebs. A small bookcase stood behind the bed and was filled with a couple of books - the covers of it faded - on the first shelf while the second shelf was stuffed with a wooden box, which had flowers carved into the wood. A large spider seemed to have made its nest next to it. Next to the bookcase was a closet and Harry assumed it had been used as a wardrobe.

"You take the right side, I'll take the left," Draco murmured and they spread out to their assigned
area: Harry going to the bed first while Draco inspected the bookcase and the small box in it.

The bin just showed – as Harry had expected – some balled up parchments which had familiar writing on it.

*This was Dumbledore's room,* Harry thought and bit his lip. He felt somewhat uneasy being in the room where Dumbledore had spent a lot of time in and made his way over to the desk. Some of the paper sheets seemed to be scribbled full with mathematical questions while some others seemed to contain some sort of mini essay on a spell. The newspaper was dated in the year 1890 and the first page was dictated to a scandal that the Prime Minister of the Wizarding world was involved in during that time.

Harry ignored the newspaper and the parchments, dismissing them as not important and focused his attention on the two drawers. After casting a spell to check for possible traps, he opened the first drawer. It contained a wizard photo of the Dumbledore family and Harry glanced at it, noting the happy smiles on their faces, before throwing it back in the drawer and looking at the other stuff. He picked up a little notebook and opened it; this one contained a list of spells that pertained to jinxing someone. Riffling further through the drawer produced nothing interesting; only a small ring and a broken practice wand.

Before he could open the second drawer, he was startled when he heard Draco cursing vehemently. He turned around quickly and saw the blond standing in front of the open closet, grimacing while he rubbed at his face.

"Are you all right?" Harry asked concerned.

Some dust coated Draco's face and he spat, rubbing his hand over his lips. "Eugh, disgusting! Yeah, I'm all right. Just some stupid dust that hit me when I opened this fucking closet."

Shaking his head, Harry returned his attention to the second drawer. This one contained some specific newspaper clippings and Harry picked them up, his interest piqued when he noticed the title on the first one: 'Percival Dumbledore sentenced to fifteen years for attacking Muggles!'. A clipping from 1890 showed the announcement that Percival had died in Azkaban.

Percival must have been Dumbledore's father. Although Harry was curious as to why Dumbledore's father had landed in Azkaban, he stuffed them back in the drawer. He wanted to close it again, as it didn't contain anything else bar some newspaper articles about Percival, when he suddenly noticed how the bottom of the drawer seemed rather loose.

Furrowing his eyebrows, he reached into the drawer and tugged at the bottom. It gave away and when he raised it up a bit, a dark blue notebook greeted him. He grabbed it and browsed through hit; his eyebrows shot up when he realised what the notebook was; Dumbledore's private diary. The entries in the beginning seemed to be mostly about the lessons his mother gave him; the middle talked about his father and how he had been right in attacking those 'vile Muggles' who had dared to attack his sister; the end only consisted out of short entries, focusing on the pranks he and his brother pulled on the neighbourhood.

Harry didn't know what to think of the diary; the pranks Dumbledore had pulled on the neighbourhood children had been rather vindictive and Harry wondered whether that had been some sort of misplaced revenge, because his sister had been attacked.

The person who had written this diary and the person who had taught students for years were practically as different as day and night.
"Hey Draco, look what I found," he called out and turned around while still looking at the notebook. "This is Dumbledore's … Hey, is something the matter?" he asked when he noticed how still Draco stood. It looked like he had barely moved after he had been attacked by the dust.

Harry threw the diary on the desk and approached Draco carefully. "Seriously, is something wrong? Did you get hurt or so?" He placed his hand on Draco's shoulder, giving it a quick squeeze.

"Don't touch me!" Draco snapped and smacked Harry's hand away, whirling around so that he could face him.

Harry stumbled back and stared at the blond wide-eyed, before he grew annoyed. "What the hell is your problem? You don't have to be so rude about …"

"Filthy Halfbloods like you shouldn't touch me," Draco said coldly.

"Excuse me?" Harry brought out with difficulty. What the hell was going on here? Why the hell was Draco saying things like that?

Draco sneered. "Are you deaf as well, scarhead? I said that filthy Halfbloods like you shouldn't touch me. Do you need me to repeat that a third time or did your brain – small as it is – finally manage to comprehend it?"

"Fuck you, Draco," Harry whispered angrily and clenched his hands. "Is this some kind of sick joke? Because I really don't think it's funny, you asshole!"

"A sick joke?" Draco repeated and looked thoughtfully, tapping the tip of his wand to his chin. "No, it's not a joke. This is just me finally getting sick of all the crap I have to put up with thanks to you. Seriously, I'm in this fucking hellhole, just because you can't fight your own battles and need other people to win. What do I get out of this? Nothing! I'm risking my life here and I get nothing in return."

"What the fuck are you …"

"I guess you could say that screwing you is my reward, but honestly, you're not that great in the sack," Draco continued, laughing coldly. "I thought fucking you would be better than fucking some girl, because guys can't get pregnant unless they take a potion, but of course once again you had to defy the fucking odds and you had to get knocked up. My life is getting ruined thanks to you and a baby I don't want and you honestly expect me to put up with it? Fuck, if only you were good in bed, then it wouldn't have been that bad, but you really suck. Not to mention that …"

SMACK!

Draco's head flew to the side when Harry's fist met his cheek and he blinked, looking a bit dazed while he stumbled back until he hit the closet.

"Go to hell, Malfoy," Harry whispered and furiously blinked his tears away. He couldn't believe everything he had just heard now. His lover seemed to have undergone a complete personality switch until he resembled the sneering git he had been during their first five years. He really didn't know what was happening now. Was this how Draco really felt? Had their entire relationship been a lie? Had Parkinson been right and did Draco indeed only have a fetish for dark haired, bright eyed men? Was he sick of him now, now that he had had his fill? Did he really hate their baby; had his reassurance that everything would be okay just been a big lie?

Was Harry the pathetic one for believing that Draco Malfoy could love him?
Was the Draco Malfoy in front of him, the one who was glaring darkly at him, the real one?

His head spinning with all these questions, his heart heavy, Harry turned around. "You won't have to put up with me for any longer. You can go to hell for all I care!" he snapped and prayed that his voice didn't hitch.

He had barely taken two steps when a body slammed against him and he landed on the bed with a choked yell.

"What the hell do you …" His furious question was cut off by a scream of pain when something stabbed through his right hand, heat travelling up his arm while pain, as hot as fire, bloomed up in his hand. Gasping for air, he looked through the haze of tears and was shocked to discover a knife impaling his hand.

Grey eyes shone in fury above him. "You won't get away with laying a hand on me!" His hand slammed down on the knife, driving it even further through Harry's hand, making him scream again.

Blood started trickling from the wound and Harry felt his magic rising through the surface. Before Draco could touch him again, his magic slammed against the blond and he was thrown off of him, collapsing against the wall.

Realising he wouldn't have long before the other one would be back up on his feet, Harry clenched his teeth together, closed his eyes and pulled the knife out of his hand; a choked scream escaped him and he moaned, wanting to curl up around his throbbing hand. Blindly searching the bed, he grabbed his wand with his left hand and forced himself to stand up. The searing pain made his head throb and his vision blurry, but he knew he had to get out of here while he still could.

He stumbled out of the room and leant against the wall, gasping for air. He needed to hide from Draco, needed to escape. Suddenly remembering the things he had packed, he dug up the Invisibility Cloak out of his bag and threw it on him. Assured that he was invisible, he stumbled through the hallway. He would have gone downstairs, but he didn't know whether the blond would attack the others as well. Maybe he could spell him unconscious and let one of others pick him up when they were done in this house.

On trembling legs, he stumbled forwards until he stopped in front of the room with the dark blue coloured door. Praying that the door wasn't jinxed, he grabbed the door knob and nearly sobbed in relief when the door opened. He quickly slipped inside when he heard Draco moaning in the other room and closed the door behind him. The entire room was bare except for a large bed, an open closet that contained some clothes and two nightstands. The window was half covered by a dark curtain and he sunk underneath it, leaning against the wall while his body trembled and shivered.

He pressed his forehead against his raised legs and tried to stifle his choked sobs. Gasping for air, he stared at his wounded hand. The knife didn't seem to have hit any major vein, but the blood was still dripping out of it and the pain was flaring up every time he so much as moved his hand an inch.

His mind reeled with what had just happened. He didn't want to believe what just had happened, but the proof was staring him right in the face in the form of a bleeding hand.

*Draco had attacked him.*

He had conjured a knife and had driven it through his hand without any remorse. What the fuck was going on? What had happened to make Draco snap like that? Was he telling the truth when he said he had grown fed up with Harry?
A shiver ran over his spine and he pressed his arm (the one with the wounded hand) against his rounded stomach. At least he hadn't fallen on the floor – that fall would have been bad for the baby.

His other hand gripped his hair tightly and he stared blankly at the floor, vaguely aware of the way his heart was beating loudly.

He just couldn't comprehend what was going on. The Draco he knew wouldn't have said those hurtful things; the Draco he loved wouldn't hurt him like this.

And yet he had done those things.

Was he missing something? Merlin, he desperately wanted that to be true; maybe he was missing something, something vital, something that would explain Draco's sudden change of personality. He didn't want to believe that the Draco he had seen in that room was the real one. Because if he had to believe that, he didn't know how he would …

"Don't ever stray from the answer your heart gives you."

His breath hitched when Luna's voice resounded through his head. She had said that to him right before they left the school. Had she known something like this would happen? Did she know that Draco would do something like this? What did her comment mean then? He didn't think she would want him to stay with someone who hated him, who had hurt him. Yet, her comment probably referred to the fact that he shouldn't give up on Draco.

But after hearing those hateful words, after having a knife driven through his hand, how could he stay with Draco if the man hated him?

But Luna had never been wrong before. Never. He had said he trusted her with his life. Should he trust her about this as well? How did she expect him to when …

The vials in his bag bumped against each other when he moved his leg and he froze.

That was right – Luna had given him two potions before she left.

His hand trembling slightly, he opened his bag and stared at the two vials. His eyes stayed on the thin vial in which the potion was softly bubbling. What had Snape called it? Aconitum Mentis? Draco had said it would cure the mind if it had been poisoned. Why would Luna give him something like that, unless …

He inhaled sharply and grabbed the thin vial carefully. Could this be the answer? Or was he meant to use it later on? She had never said he had to use it now. After all, she had sent the baby blanket last summer before he had become pregnant. Was the potion meant to be used later, or had she meant for him to use it now?

He nearly dropped the vial on the floor when the door was slammed open and a furious Draco appeared in the doorway.

"Hey, darling, if you want to hide, make sure you don't leave a trail behind," he sneered and his eyes glinted madly when he closed the door behind him. "Playing hide and seek is hardly any fun if you dirty the floor and walls with your blood."

Slowly Harry looked down at the floor and thin, red droplets shining in the weak light, leading straight to the place where he was hiding beneath the Cloak, seemed to taunt him.

Fuck.
The casting of a Silence bubble and his Invisibility Cloak snatched away from him thanks to the Summoning charm made him stare at Draco like a petrified animal in front of the headlights of a car.

"Let's see how long it takes before you're reduced to a sobbing mess," Draco smiled dangerously and advanced on him.

"There is less stuff here than I thought there would be," Sirius remarked when they disabled the trap on the door and entered the kitchen.

The walls were painted a butter yellow, but the space above the old cooker was splattered with old grease, darkening the wall to a dirty brown grey colour. The cooker itself had either always been black or it had become so dirty that no other colour could be distinguished. Two cabinets hung on the wall next to the cooker and the small doors on those were hanging half off of the cabinets, revealing dusty, chipped plates and the top of dusty, dark coloured glasses. A set of three frying pans and two cooking pots hung on the other side of the cooker; the metal had since long dulled until it only reflected the daylight shining through the windows in a bleakly manner.

The kitchen table and four chairs were reduced to nothing but a pile of rubble in the middle of the room. A sink was placed in the left corner and was empty save for a large cobweb and a green bucket underneath it. Next to the sink was a small door which was closed off.

"This doesn't look like a place to hide a Founder's portrait," he continued and looked disdainfully around him, tapping his wand against his thigh.

"Looks can be deceiving," Remus reminded his lover with a sigh, but his own gaze was sceptical. "At least this will make the search easier."

"There's that," Sirius muttered with a snort.

They had barely taken five steps to the middle of the room when the cooker suddenly burst into flames; the flames crackled loudly and were a white blue colour.

"What the hell?!" Sirius exclaimed and casted the Aguamenti Charm.

"Wait, no, Sirius, don't do …"

Too late. The water jet was absorbed by the magical fire and it grew smaller, seemingly on the verge of being put out, until the cooker exploded into tiny fragments of metal, flying around in the kitchen.

The two men barely had time to raise a strong shield before they heard the impact of the fragments against it and saw the actual indents the tiny pieces left in the walls around them and on the ruined kitchen table in front of them.

"You don't cast the Aguamenti Charm on something with a Heat Blast curse, Sirius!" Remus scolded the other man as soon as he deemed it safe to lower their shields. "You know how that curse just absorbs it and turns it into fuel to create the lethal explosion!"

Sirius huffed and glared at the smoking remnants of the cooker. "Excuse me for not immediately recognizing the flames of that particular curse!" he snapped.

Remus sighed and rubbed his forehead. "Just be careful, all right? I don't want to explain to Harry how his godfather survived prison and Death Eaters, only to succumb to some stupid traps Albus left behind."
Sirius threw him a foul look, but was more cautious when he ventured further. They slowly covered the entire kitchen, but had to stop several times when wards sprung up and launched curses at them that covered their arms with boiling wounds or caused a high fever or even tried to cut their faces off with the Scalping curse. By the time they had covered the entire kitchen and were standing in front of the closed door, they were panting slightly and wiping off their sweat.

"Merlin, I hope that ritual is going to make him suffer for the rest of his bloody life," Sirius murmured darkly and glared at the raffled edges of his left sleeve that was still slightly smoking thanks to a Fierce Fire spell.

Remus just shook his head, not deigning it worthy of a reply. Instead he studied the door in front of them with a critical eye. He could hear a soft buzzing sound, which indicated the presence of a magical barrier. The question now was whether it was just meant to keep people out of the room, acting as a shield, or whether it was meant to actively harm people trying to tamper with it.

After going through a list of spells, he finally decided on one that would determine the nature of the barrier and would whisper the counter curse once it knew what was needed.

He brought his wand down in a sharp slash motion and muttered the spell. Dark blue sparks appeared in the air and clumped together, forming a fairy like creature that purred and flew towards the door, zooming from one corner to the next one.

Once it completed its round across the barrier, it chirped and flew down until it hovered right above the ground. Two white lines extended from its body and flew upwards, attaching to the upper corners of the door. The barrier started buzzing louder and the barrier started to glow faintly.

Sirius and Remus covered their eyes when the light became almost blinding and a tortured scream resounded through the kitchen before the sound of glass shattering reached them and made them lower their arms again.

The buzzing had stopped and Remus couldn't smell any kind of barrier. It was just a plain door now.

"Let's search this room and then go back if we don't find her here," he said and opened the door.

They entered in what once had served as some sort of washroom; one large tub was standing near the wall, with a small wooden chair next to it. Three small closest were set up against the other wall and a pile of towels covered the top of one closet. There was another door right in front of them, half opened; Remus thought he could glimpse a sink in that room.

"Why don't you search through that room, while I look here?" Sirius suggest and was already casting Detection spells on the tub and area around it.

Remus nodded in agreement and made his way to the next room. There seemed no barrier in front of this room, but he still casted a spell to be certain. Once he was assured that there were no immediate traps or barriers, he opened the door and warily entered it.

He was standing in the bathroom. It had enough space for a dirty grey sink, a half demolished toilet and a square bathtub which was covered in some kind of greenish slime. Above the sink hung an oval shaped mirror which was cracked in two. A small cabinet – resembling a medicine's cabinet – stood next to the tub.

He very much doubted Albus had hidden the portrait in this dreary room, but nevertheless stepped forwards to start inspecting the cabinet.

The sound of a door slamming shut made him whirl around with his wand raised in front of him.
"Sirius?" he called out, not daring to move. It suddenly occurred to him that they had been fools to not consider the fact that there could be a ghost present in the house. He didn't know much about Albus' family; he had heard that his brother was still alive and working as a barman, but his sister was dead and his parents had died when he was still young.

His senses started screaming at him in warning when dark smoke curled around the edges of the door, caressing the walls.

Then the whispers started.

He's a freak, sweetie; don't go near him.

I don't know what happened to him, but something is seriously wrong with that boy. Don't go near him, son.

Stay away from him, darling – I don't want you to catch whatever that filthy brat has!

Should we try to appeal to Professor Dumbledore, Lyall? He's said to accept everyone – maybe he won't mind accepting our son, even in – in his condition.

Can we really put that burden on that man, Hope? I know that man is said to be open minded, but how will he hide Remus' condition every month from the rest of the school? We can't let the truth come out – if anyone hears about it, our son will be shunned for the rest of his school years, possibly even expelled! We already had to move once, because the villagers didn't want him there. We're barely making enough money as it is; I don't think we can handle a second moving with our income.

You filthy monster! Things like you shouldn't be allowed to live!

His parents should have put him down when they had the chance. No good will come from a dirty monster like him. What if he attacks our children?

Should we be punished, because Lyall was stupid enough to provoke Greyback? I'd say throw that monster out; if we're lucky, he'll die.

Albus, are you really certain? He's a threat to the students. What if he forgets to take the Wolfsbane and attacks one of them?

Should we really trust him around Harry, Arthur? It's bad enough that Black didn't have to undergo a mental check-up; I don't know if we can trust him to keep himself controlled. You've seen how he looked like last month! We can't risk Harry or our children around him.

We apologize, but your … illness … makes it rather difficult for us to hire you. We cannot afford to lose an employee every month. Our patients would not feel safe around you either and we have to think of their wellbeing.

Do you really think I would hire a dirty wolf like you? Get the fuck out of my pub!

Stones being thrown at him. Spells hitting him, creating boiling wounds on his back and legs that made him cry out in pain, which only egged them on more. His precious books ripped from his hands and thrown in the river. Mocking laughter. Sneering.

You dirty monster!

Get the hell away from me, you freak!
Did you seriously think someone can love a monster like you? Let me tell you the truth, Lupin: at the most you'll just be good to warm someone's bed for the night. Monsters like you don't deserve love!

"…mus!"

"…emus!"

"Moony!"

His eyes shot up and for a few seconds he wondered what went wrong with his sight, until he realised it was blurry thanks to the tears streaming out of his eyes. He was vaguely aware of a low, keening sound, coming from an animal that was in pain, and his breath choked when he realised it was him making that awful, keening sound.

Two familiar arms were wrapped around him tightly, pulling him against a strong chest and his nose caught the familiar scent of his lover. Without being fully conscious about it, he buried his face deeper against the skin; comfort flowing through him when the scent drifted lazily around him.

"I've got you," Sirius was muttering in his hair, rubbing a hand over his back. "I've got you; you're safe."

It took an embarrassing long time for Remus to gather his wits to calm down. His chest hurt with each inhale, his eyes felt uncomfortably dry and his skin felt too tight around his eyes.

His back ached a bit from the weird position he was in, but he didn't want to relinquish this hold; not when he felt so safe, so warm.

A hand brushing through his hair made him look up, right into worried, grey blue eyes.

"Are you okay?" Sirius asked him softly.

"Wha-what happened?" he asked and swallowed, feeling like shards of glass were stuck in his throat.

Sirius stared grimly over his head at the bathroom. "You were screaming your lungs out. You triggered the Memoria Atra curse and it took me a while before I managed to disable the wards and could drag you out of the room."

Remus closed his eyes and let out a soft sigh.

The Memoria Atra curse was designed in such a way that it fed off the darkest memories a person had. Once it had located the darkest memories, it brought them back to the surface and it made the victim relive every moment of them. Most people became insane after a short while of being subjected to it.

"Thanks for helping me," he murmured and looked up.

Sirius smiled wryly. "No need to thank me." He looked around and sighed. "I haven't found anything here aside from some traps. The bathroom didn't contain anything either."

Gratitude filled Remus for a few seconds. He really didn't want to discuss what had happened in that room and Sirius was giving him that space. From the way Sirius' hands tightened around his waist, he knew they would have to talk about it eventually, but for now he was willing to keep quiet about it.
"I guess it is on the first floor then," Remus sighed. "Let's go there. Maybe Harry and Draco need our help in retrieving it."

Draco walked towards him with his wand twirling and the bloodied knife in his other hand. He seemed to want to take his time; his eyes were trained on Harry, but he didn't hurry or rush forward or even throw the knife at him.

Harry swallowed and scrambled backwards, casting a shield around him. It shone blue around him and distorted his vision of Draco, as if he had blurry sight.

Draco snickered and came to a stop a few feet away from the shield. "A shield? Let's see how long that will hold up against my spells."

Harry couldn't suppress the gasp when one of Draco's spell landed against his shield and made it rattle heavily. He didn't have much time and he stared down at his wand and the bottle in front of him. His right hand was practically useless; he could use the other potion to heal it as he remembered Snape mentioning it was used to heal wounds, but that would be wasting precious time he didn't have.

Already the shield was thinning with each blow it had to endure and he knew he had at most a minute left before it would completely break down.

"Fuck," he swore silently and snatched the bottle off the floor. He could only hope that Luna knew what she was doing. He clenched the bottle between his thighs and tried to remove the cork with his left hand. His sweaty palm made it nearly impossible to get a good grip on the bottle and his hand slipped off the bottle several times, making him curse again.

In a last desperate attempt, he used a Cutting hex on the bottle and the cork exploded, at the same time the shield protecting him shattered.

He had barely time to scramble up right before Draco threw himself against him and Harry thrusted his hand forwards, throwing the potion in Draco's face. Draco stumbled back, screaming loudly while frantically brushing his hands over his face, trying to wipe off the potion clinging to his skin.

Harry blocked out his screaming and stared at the knife that was stabbed through his left shoulder. He sunk down on the bed when his trembling legs couldn't hold his weight any longer and clench his teeth together to hold back the scream that was begging to be unleashed.

It stung like hell, burned and his breathing came out in raspy gasps. He didn't think the knife had hit anything important, but he could feel and see his blood trickling out, darkening his shirt. The knife needed to be removed, but he couldn't use his left hand and his right hand wasn't in a state to properly grasp the hilt of the knife and pull it away.

He only had one option left.

The pain – dulled because his shoulder was hurting more – in his hand flared up again when he grabbed his wand. The blood made it slick and difficult to hold on to, so he quickly gasped an "Accio knife!" and this time he couldn't hold back the pained scream when the knife was ripped out of his shoulder with great force.

He hunched forwards, not caring where the knife landed, and tried to keep his breathing under control. He would need to grab that other potion, but he wasn't sure how he could open that bottle when his hands were slick with his blood.

"Harry?"
He whipped his head around and stared in wide, anxious grey eyes.

Eyes that no longer were cold and furious.

Yet instead of feeling happy and relieved that Luna had known what she was doing when she gave him that potion, he felt numb. Or not really numb, but his feelings were so tightly tangled together that he no longer could discern which was which feeling.

He didn't think that bode well for them both.

It felt as if he had broken through the surface of too hot water – it stung his skin, made it feel like his eyes were on fire and his brain overheated. But the hazy screen in front of his eyes had disappeared and he felt like he was released from a tiny cell.

When he looked around, he was confused; this was not Dumbledore's bedroom. When on earth had he entered this room? And why couldn't he remember leaving the other room and entering this one?

His head pounded, as if he had his head smacked against something – or something had smacked him.

When his eyes caught sight of Harry, however, he couldn't hold back the shocked gasp or his worried exclaim of Harry's name. Harry was sitting on the bed, hunched over, breathing too harshly for Draco's liking. Draco brought his hand up to cover his mouth when he saw the bleeding wound in Harry's right hand – a gash that looked too deep to have come from simply cutting himself against a sharp edge – and the sluggishly bleeding wound in his left shoulder.

What the fuck had happened to his lover?

He took a step forwards, reaching out with his hand to touch Harry's unharmed shoulder. "Harry, what the hell happened? Did …"

"STAY BACK!"

The shout seemed to vibrate the entire room and Draco froze. Green eyes stared at him in fury, some horror and deep inside those eyes he saw intense fear. He had experienced Harry looking at him in fury, heatedly whenever they were arguing, staring at him in disgust whenever he had insulted his friends, but never, never had he looked at him in fear. Nothing Draco had ever done had made Harry afraid of him.

And yet here he was now, fear lurking inside those lovely green eyes; his entire body trembling and shivering while his breathing came out in loud, harsh gasps.

What had happened?

Harry closed his eyes and turned away from him with a soft curse. "I'm sorry, it's just … Fuck," he muttered and shook his head.

"Harry, what happened?" Draco asked softly, not daring to move an inch.

A bitter chuckle escaped from Harry. "I don't know for certain. Guess some kind of curse got a hold of you before I managed to use Luna's potion."

Well, him being cursed would explain the hole in his memories; it would explain why he was suddenly standing in a different room with no knowledge of ever leaving the other room.
What it didn't explain, was why Harry was bloodied, hurt and afraid of him.

Involuntarily, his eyes slid from Harry's wounds to a bloodied knife laying against the wall. A knife that was very familiar – because it carried the Malfoy's insignia.

Only he or another member of his family could conjure that particular knife. A suspicion started to rise up in his mind, but he didn't dare to confront it. He didn't want to think it was true.

Because if it turned out to be true, then …

He tried to swallow, but his mouth and throat felt too dry, as if he was trying to swallow sand. "What did I do? Did I …" He jerked his head towards the wounds, his hands clenching and unclenching.

"Like I said, you were cursed." Harry shrugged, but stopped immediately and hissed softly. "It's not like you … You can't be responsible for the things you did while cursed."

Draco resisted the urge to close his eyes and sink down on the floor. He had hurt Harry. He had conjured the knife and had attacked his own lover. It didn't matter that he had been cursed – he shouldn't have succeeded in hurting Harry, should have managed to fight against the curse …

He shook his head; blaming himself wouldn't do either of them any good at the moment. They were still stuck in the house and Harry was losing blood. He needed to be Healed now.

"Lovegood gave you a potion for deep wounds, right?" he asked and took a deep breath.

Harry nodded slowly and waved at his bag, lying in front of him. "Can't really grab it without dropping it, though," he muttered half-heartedly.

"That's okay; I'll help you," Draco offered quickly and crossed the remaining space between them. He grabbed the round vial and uncorked it. "Will you let me put the potion on those wounds?"

Harry's eyes darkened and his frame slightly trembled, as if he wanted to curl up – or run away as soon as possible, Draco thought, when he noticed how tense Harry's legs had become.

"Yeah, you can put the potion on them," Harry finally muttered, but it didn't escape Draco's attention how reluctant he sounded.

If the fear in his eyes hadn't been enough to make it feel like he was stabbed through the heart, then his reluctance definitely succeeded in it. Just yesterday, Harry wouldn't have had any qualms about Draco helping him with potions. Now, he didn't seem able to look him in the eyes or even handle him near him.

Draco put the vial on the nightstand and slowly reached out with his hands. "I'm going to treat your shoulder first, but your sweater needs to be removed," he said, trying to keep his voice even. "How attached are you to this sweater?"

"Why?" Harry asked with a distrustful note in his voice.

"I think it's best if we cut the sweater off, because I don't want to aggravate the wound by pulling it off," Draco explained. "You can use my sweater afterwards; I'm wearing a T-shirt underneath it, so it doesn't really matter."

Harry nodded once, but still flinched when Draco aimed his wand at the sweater. One quick spell and the bloodied sweater fell in several pieces on the bed, leaving the dark haired wizard in nothing but a sleeveless shirt.
"All right, this will probably sting a bit," Draco warned him and used a clean piece of the sweater to soak in the potion. He then pressed it against the large gash and heard Harry's sharp intake of breath. "Sorry," Draco murmured, focusing his attention on the tense shoulder underneath his hand.

While he carefully dabbed the potion soaked cloth against the wound, his eyes slid down until they landed on Harry's rounded stomach; his shirt stretched tightly around it.

"Is – is everything all right with the baby?" he asked softly.

Harry's breath hitched. "I think so. I didn't fall down and nothing hit my stomach, so …"

Draco nodded, but resolved to ask Lupin to do a check-up once they were back in Hogwarts. It wouldn't hurt to be cautious.

Carefully he removed the cloth and studied the wound. The potion had disinfected the skin and the wound and it had closed it up until a deep red line remained as a memory. Grabbing a new piece of cloth, he poured the rest of the potion on it and started dabbing the gash in Harry's hand.

The silence that surrounded them was suffocating and it only made Draco more miserable.

His eyes still trained on the bloodied wound, he murmured, "I would never intentionally hurt you. I wish I could go back in time to prevent myself from getting cursed; I would never want to hurt you."

It was important that Harry knew this, even though it seemed stupid to say this right after attacking him.

"I know," Harry replied almost inaudibly, but still refused to look at him.

Draco bit his lip and pulled the cloth away to look at the wound while disgust for himself swirled around lazily in his stomach. This wound as well seemed to have healed well, save for a jagged, red line.

"Once we're back, you'll need to get that looked over again. Maybe we'll find a potion that will reduce the scars as well," Draco said and shuffled back to give Harry some space. After a short moment of hesitation, he roughly pulled off his sweater and handed it over to Harry, who eyed it warily before accepting it and pulling it on.

When he stood up, the blood loss he suffered seemed to hit him and he stumbled. Without thinking about it, Draco rushed forwards to grab Harry's arms so that he could steady him. Immediately he felt Harry tense and his magic started to rise, feeling rather oppressive, vibrating against him; ready to lash out immediately.

"Harry, please," he whispered and green eyes met his own, whirling with too many emotions for Draco to understand them.

Harry stilled and his magic calmed down. He stepped back and looked away.

He cleared his throat and grabbed his wand and bag. "Let's go take a look in the next room. Maybe we'll find Ravenclaw there."

Draco opened his mouth, but closed it again in resignation. They needed to talk about this, but it was clear that Harry wasn't ready to talk about it here.

Well, he could understand that. He just hoped that this weird impasse between them wouldn't last.

Still …
"Harry …"

Harry barely turned his head to look at him. "I know, just … Not now, please."

Draco sighed, but nodded and silently followed Harry to the next room.

A heavy ward was placed in front of the room with the pink door and Draco grimaced when he felt the magic buzzing around him, pushing against his own. His nerves were screaming at him to go away, to leave this place as soon as possible and a sour taste was present in his mouth.

"There are runes placed on the floor and door," Harry murmured; his eyes and wand fixated on the mentioned runes.

Draco frowned and studied them. He had taken Ancient Runes and he thought he could decipher the meaning of some of them.

"This is a heavy ward," he muttered and bent down to touch one of the runes which was edged into the wooden floor. "I don't think we'll be able to disable this ward on our own. We'll need help from the others."

"Maybe that's a good sign," Harry sighed and eyed the door warily.

A rune at the upper corner of the door caught Draco's attention and he furrowed his eyebrows, trying to recall where he had seen that rune before. It had been in an obscure book he had found in the Malfoy library. He had felt bored during the summer and because he had finished all his homework, he had taken to wandering through the library, looking for something interesting to read. He had come across an old book that had nearly fallen apart in his hands when he took it off the shelf. It had been an encyclopaedia of runes: a detailed history of each one combined with the meaning and powers attributed to them. Near the back of the book, the runes had turned Dark in nature and the information about them had diminished to only a couple of small paragraphs.

This one etched in the corner was one that belonged to the Dark part in the book. He remembered staring at it in disgust, because it meant …

His eyes – previously contemplating the rune in silence – widened and shot towards Harry, who glanced at him apprehensively.

"What?"

"The ward won't be the only problem," Draco replied flatly and tried to ignore the fact that Harry seemed to keep him at a certain distance. He pointed towards the rune. "See that one? That one is meant to call up a Dark Beast as soon as someone enters the room."

"Shit." Harry glared at the door. "Do you know what kind of beast it calls up?"

Grey eyes slid over the other runes surrounding the rune in the corner. "Something associated with darkness and incredibly strong," Draco murmured. "And something with the number hundred, though I have no idea what exactly that means."

Harry retreated a few steps and tapped his wand against his leg. "Well, he probably wouldn't take that many precautions if the portrait was elsewhere, right? So at least we found the right room," he muttered and frowned.

Footsteps and soft murmurs interrupted Draco and both turned around to see Severus, Draco's father, Lupin and Black coming towards them.
Draco furrowed his eyebrows when he noticed the slight limp that affected his father's leg. "Father, did something happen?"

"Nothing Severus couldn't heal," Father murmured lightly and his godfather rolled his eyes in annoyance.

"Harry, what happened to you?" Black asked worriedly and Lupin frowned.

Harry stiffened and then shrugged while Draco forced himself to breathe calmly. How would Black react if he heard that Draco was the cause of Harry's injuries? Granted, he had been under a curse when he attacked Harry, but that probably wouldn't matter much to Black.

And honestly, in this case Draco didn't think he would hold it against Black if he tried to hex him.

"We encountered some nasty traps, but Draco helped me heal the wounds," Harry replied softly and then briskly turned around to face the door again. "We think we've found the room where the portrait is hidden. This one has the strongest ward we've encountered so far and Draco said that there are runes which will call up a Dark Beast if we enter the room."

"The stench is the worst here," Mara piped up suddenly and they slipped past Black and Lupin.

"Mara, Ruby, you're okay!" Harry exclaimed relieved and reached out to rub over Ruby's head.

Mara made a soft snort sound. "Of course we are. What? You thought a spell like that could get rid of us? Give us some credit."

Draco sighed and wondered once again why he was stuck with such an arrogant pet.

Meanwhile Lupin had approached the door and studied the runes intently.

"I've never seen these runes placed in this particular pattern," he murmured and traced a rune (which was edged into the doorframe at shoulder height) with his wand.

"What's so special about the pattern?" Black asked curiously and cocked his head.

"The pattern consists out of the number hundred, strong and it refers to a mass of land," Lupin replied almost absentmindedly. "They are in the correct pattern to call up a Dark Beast, but I do not know which specific Beast they are referring …" he trailed off and retreated a few steps.

"What, wolf?" Severus snapped and scowled. "You've got an idea as to what it calls when triggered?"

"I think so, but …" Lupin shook his head and looked troubled. "It can't be possible. Unless …" He narrowed his eyes and directed his next question to Mara and Ruby. "Can you smell anything related to the Beast?"

They both raised their nose in the air and sniffed; their eyes glowing eerily.

"Sand," Ruby remarked after a bout of tense silence. "But not sand from this country. It smells drier."

"A faint scent of rain," Mara murmured and shook her head. "And some traces of lions and leopards. I think an elephant as well."

"I have no idea what to make out of that," Father remarked dryly.
Lupin, however, looked more worried than before. "This is worse than I thought."

"What?" Harry stared at him. "What's wrong?"

"If my assumption is correct, then as soon as we enter that room, a Nundu will appear," Lupin answered flatly.

"A Nundu," Black repeated blankly. "You mean, that beast that needs at least a hundred wizards to subdue it? The one that is forbidden to keep, because it murders everything it lays its eyes on?"

"Well, this is quite problematic," Father murmured and frowned.

"He wouldn't use an animal like that if it wasn't guarding something, right?" Harry asked uncertainly and stared at the door apprehensively.

"How are we going to retrieve the portrait then?" Draco asked and his hand clenched around his wand. The Nundu was one of the most dangerous creatures that existed; its breath was toxic and it could wipe out entire villages if it attacked. All the reports made about it were clear about one thing: a lot of wizards were needed to even attempt to subdue the animal. Their little group wouldn't stand a chance if there really was a Nundu waiting to be unleashed as soon as they opened the door.

Mara growled in annoyance. "No need to worry about that; Ruby and I will be enough to deal with that stupid animal."

"I don't know, Mara," Harry spoke slowly and shot her a wary look. "The Nundu is one of the most dangerous animals out there; I don't want to risk …"

"Who are the other dangerous animals, do you think?" Mara yawned and rubbed her ear with her paw.

Ruby butted his head against Harry's hip. "All animals exist in a hierarchy and our species occupy the top of it," he informed them calmly. "We will take care of it."

Lupin opened his mouth – presumably to protest – but was cut off by Mara.

"We may have masters, but that does not mean that we cannot act on our own," she said and sounded bored. "Whether you give permission or not, we will take care of that thing."

Severus sighed and pinched the bridge of his nose. "Look, I don't want to spend any minute longer in this house than necessary – if they are certain they'll be able to defeat it, then by all means, let them do it."

"And you're really certain you'll be able to defeat the Nundu?" Draco asked for confirmation.

"Yes, do not worry about it," Ruby answered calmly. "All you have to do is bring down the barrier and stay out of the way while we deal with it."

Harry grimaced, but stepped away from the door. He threw the two large cats a resigned look. "Fine, if you're sure you can take it on, then you can do it."

Lupin and Severus were the ones to work on taking down the barrier. Draco and Harry made sure to keep out of the way and lingered near Black. If the Nundu would appear the moment that the door opened, it wouldn't be smart of them to keep standing in front of it.

"All right," Lupin breathed out and stepped back, lowering his wand.
Severus regarded the door coolly, but retreated as well.

The barrier was now completely gone; only three runes on the top were still faintly glowing.

Ruby and Mara crowded in front of the door while the two men slipped back to the small group waiting for them, further down the hallway.

Harry and Draco were pressed slightly against the wall, hidden behind Draco's father and Black. They had their wands trained on the door and Draco barely dared to shift his foot. Once Lupin and Severus had taken their place next to their partners, Black aimed his wand at the door and murmured a sharp 'Reducto!'!

The door blasted apart and a hastily erected Shield prevented the wooden chips from hitting either of them.

An ice cold shiver danced over Draco's spine when he heard a murderous roar and a big, light brown paw appeared in the doorway, followed by the head of the Nundu. Its eyes immediately shot towards them, but before it could leap over, Ruby and Mara slammed it back inside the room with resounding growls.

Draco's heart seemed intent on beating straight through his chest and when he glanced sideways, he saw how pale Harry had become and his hand trembled a bit. Draco reached out with his free hand, wanting to grab Harry's to comfort him, but before he could touch him, he retreated again when a flash of terrified green eyes tore through his mind.

Would Harry accept comfort of him now?

Harry seemingly hadn't noticed his hesitation; his eyes were fixed on the broken door and his body vibrated lightly with tension.

Heavy snarls and growls caused the floor to vibrate and they felt, rather than heard, bodies slamming against the walls.

It felt like they had been waiting for hours – but was only mere minutes – when the sounds finally died out and silence grew. A thick, rusty smell filled the air and Draco wrinkled his nose, resisting the urge to wipe his face.

Mara was the first one to appear and she shook her head; her white fur was covered in red brown spots and the flame on her tail was still glowing brightly. Her ice blue eyes shone in vicious satisfaction. Ruby joined her a few seconds later; his paws were matted with sticky blood and he was still growling softly.

"It's dead," Mara announced satisfied.

"You two managed to kill a Nundu?" Black answered incredulously.

Mara regarded him haughtily. "We said we would, didn't we?"

"Be careful of the blood," Ruby added calmly. "The floor is a bit slippery."

Before anyone could react, Harry was already striding over to the room, his wand trained in front of him.

"Harry!" Draco immediately followed him, his own wand held at hip level.
Blood decorated the entire room: puddles of the red liquid shone in the weak light; the walls showed bloody prints of paws and even the ceiling had specks of blood on it. The Nundu itself was ripped into various pieces: the head had rolled underneath a pink desk; two of its legs were lying in front of the door and its large, mutilated body was covering a broken bed, its entrails spread out over the grey bed sheets.

Harry gagged softly and covered his nose with his sleeve. Draco grimaced and breathed out through his mouth.

"Well, that's disgusting," Black remarked blankly.

"I was ready to warn you as soon as the ward was taken down, but it appears that that was futile." A soft, female voice – tinted with a Scottish accent - made their heads whip around. "I would like to do some research on these extraordinary creatures – they must be the first to ever defeat a Nundu in only ten minutes."

The portrait was standing on top of a small, dusty closet; a woman with long, black hair and stern, dark eyes, clad in beautiful, dark blue robes, was seated on a large, light blue arm chair with a book on her lap.

"Lady Ravenclaw," Draco's father murmured and inclined his head.

She smiled serenely, as if she hadn't spent years locked up in a tiny room with no way to communicate. "I am ready to return to Hogwarts."

The portrait was carefully picked up by Lupin and Black and they carried it downstairs; Draco's father and Severus took the lead and casted spells to make certain no other traps would activate.

They reached the front door without any other trap activated; the buzzing of magic that had been their constant companion during their time in this house had died out, as if the removal of Ravenclaw meant that no magic was necessary anymore.

"Ugh, finally, we can go back to Hogwarts," Black mumbled and squinted at the rain still pouring out of the sky.

Lupin covered the portrait with a charm to protect it against the rain and another one to keep it hidden from the Muggles' sight.

Harry nodded silently and rolled his shoulders with a sigh.

Draco glanced at him – only he seemed to notice the distance that Harry kept between them both.

He swallowed and turned his gaze to the street. He still didn't know what exactly had happened during the time he had been locked up in his own mind, but he was determined to find out. He wouldn't allow this to tear them apart.

He wouldn't and couldn't allow it.
Chapter Notes

Author's note: Yes, you've noticed it correctly; once again this chapter is divided into two parts *sweatdrops* That really wasn't my intention, but I figured it would otherwise grow too long and well, you probably would end up waiting even longer. Anyway, so yes, here's the first part of Mending the pieces.

Warnings: some drama, some angst, flashback to the previous chapter, unresolved problem. Slightly less heavier than the previous one, but still angsty

Thank you for the comments and kudos!

Disclaimer: I don't own Harry Potter - J.K. Rowling owns it

I hope you'll enjoy this chapter!

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**Chapter 21: Mending the pieces Part 1**

25th of January

They arrived in Hogwarts without any further problems. Harry had brought Ravenclaw’s portrait with him in the device Narcissa had lent him, because none of the others wanted to risk Splinching her.

They had been in Dumbledore's house longer than Harry had assumed, because the sun was already setting, bathing the castle in a soft orange red glow. His stomach cramped in hunger, but he wasn't certain whether he would be able to eat something. The events in Dumbledore's house laid heavily on his mind and he still couldn't bear himself to look at Draco, let alone walk near him, despite rationally knowing that Draco was a victim as well.

They managed to sneak undetected into the castle and fortunately encountered no students or ghosts while hurrying to the dungeons.

"Ah, it has been such a long time since I last laid eye upon my home," Ravenclaw murmured and she took in her surroundings, looking pleased. "Are the others here as well?"

"Lord Gryffindor and Lord Slytherin are waiting for you, but unfortunately we still have to find Lady Hufflepuff," Lucius replied, ignoring the interested gaze of a young witch in a portrait.

"Hm, and they are still alive, not trying to maim each other? Perhaps growing older does indeed mean maturing in their case," Ravenclaw mused and a faint smile graced her lips.

"Potter, Draco, you go to your quarters to rest," Snape said brusquely once they entered the dungeons. "We'll handle the rest."

Normally Harry would have protested, but this time he was too tired to do anything but nod.

Draco, however, turned towards Remus and looked at him expectantly. "Could you spare a moment
to give Harry a check-up? I used a potion to heal some wounds, but we want to make sure it worked." He hesitated a bit, but continued, "Could you also do a check-up for the baby? Just to make sure everything is okay with it?"

Remus seemed not surprised at the request and after glancing at Harry, he nodded. "Sure, let's go."

They left Lucius and Snape behind while they trudged in silence to Harry's quarters. The dragon regarded them lazily and snorted when Harry murmured the password. Nevertheless, with a flick of his pointy tail, the portrait swung open; allowing the small group to enter.

"Did anything hit your stomach? Did you fall?" Remus asked and grabbed his wand.

Harry sunk down on the couch, nearly groaning in relief; the soft couch was like heaven for his sore muscles. "No, nothing hit my stomach," he replied and raked a hand through his hair. "I didn't fall either."

Draco sat down on the couch as well and the dark haired wizard tensed momentarily before forcing himself to relax. The blond didn't attempt to sit closer to him or touch him in any manner and Harry focused on keeping his breathing regular.

Sirius leant against the wall and studied him with a frown; his arms crossed in front of his chest. "How did you receive those wounds?"

Green eyes glanced down, catching sight of the red scar on his hand and the edge of the scar on his shoulder, visible thanks to the sweater being slightly too big on him. "Dumbledore had set some traps in his room and I couldn't block them on time," he mumbled, before Draco could have the chance to open his mouth. He felt grey eyes staring at him, but he ignored them; focusing instead on the spells that Remus was muttering.

Sirius didn't seem entirely convinced, but he didn't ask further.

"Well, it looks like everything is all right with the baby," Remus announced and stepped back. "Your blood pressure is low, but once you've eaten dinner, that should go back to normal. The scars will disappear as well. The potion just needs a bit more time to work on the scar tissue."

"Thank you," Harry said and closed his eyes in relief. At least their baby was fine. He didn't know what he would have done if Remus had told him otherwise.

"I'll tell the house elves to send you your dinner here," Remus said and rubbed over his eyes. "Come, Sirius, we need to inform Minerva about Ravenclaw."

Sirius threw an unreadable glance at Harry and Draco, but followed his lover out of the room.

"Harry, can we …"

"Would you mind going back to the dormitories tonight?" Harry interrupted him abruptly, but didn't dare to look at him. "I want to be alone now."

"Don't you think we need to talk about this?" Draco asked softly and Harry heard him shifting around.

He took a deep breath and stood up, still not looking at the blond. "Yes, but not now. Please, I'm tired and want to be alone tonight."

"Fine," Draco said after a moment of tense silence. "I'll leave for tonight. But tomorrow we need to
Harry nodded tersely and only turned around again when he heard the portrait closing. A plate with dinner (consisting out of cooked rice covered with sour sweet sauce) was placed on the table by a small house elf and with a sigh, he sat back down again and started eating.

Mara had left with Draco, so that only left Ruby with him; Garin slithered out of his bedroom when he was nearly done with eating and Sapphire was curled up next to him on the couch.

"Is it a good idea to not have your mate with you tonight?" Ruby asked uncertainly; his tail thumped heavily against the floor.

Harry stared at the reddish scar on his hand; it still lightly throbbed with pain despite the potion. "Maybe not, but I want to be on my own for tonight," he replied softly.

Garin and Ruby looked like they didn't agree with him – which they most likely didn't – but didn't protest when he stood up to take a shower and didn't say anything to change his mind when he went to bed alone.

When Draco entered Harry's quarters the next morning, his lover had disappeared already.

31st of January

Draco had no clue what he should do. It was Friday evening and dinner had just ended. Every day since they had returned from Dumbledore's house he had tried to talk with Harry, knowing that this particular conversation was really needed. However, on Sunday, Harry had disappeared for the entire day and only had shown up briefly for dinner before disappearing again. The rest of the week had followed a similar pattern: Harry was present during the classes, still sat next to Draco (though he kept a small distance between their bodies), attended all meals, but somehow always managed to avoid talking with Draco about the one thing that really mattered. Draco had hoped to talk to him in his quarters, as that would be private enough, but Harry either visited the library until it closed or visited the half giant Hagrid.

Harry was avoiding him and that hurt.

He still didn't know what exactly had happened; he only knew that somehow he had attacked Harry at least twice with a knife. He wanted to know what exactly had happened, what he had done, what he had said, but the only one who could provide him with answers avoided him and was almost scared to be near him.

He could understand why Harry wasn't eager to talk about it – but how were they supposed to put this behind them if his lover didn't want to talk about it? Didn't even want to be near him when they were on their own?

Dull grey eyes gazed at the dark haired wizard in front of him (in front of him, not next to him) who was talking rather animatedly with Daphne. Despite his serene smile and enthusiastic replies, Draco took note of how pale his lover looked and the dark bags that were slowly collecting underneath his eyes.

Before Draco could even open his mouth to say something, Harry was whisked away by Longbottom and Finnegan, leaving the blond alone at the table.

Grinding his teeth, Draco stood up and walked briskly out of the Great Hall, ignoring the students he
He had enough. Enough of this tense impasse between him and Harry; enough of not knowing what he had done to Harry; enough of not knowing what the hell he had to do to make everything right again.

He decided to talk to the one person who had always been there to help him whenever he needed.

Dark eyes studied him after the door was opened.

"Draco, what are you doing here?" Severus asked, narrowing his eyes a bit. If he was surprised to not see Harry next to his godson, he didn't show it.

Draco cleared his throat and resisted the urge to rub the back of his neck. "Can I talk to you about something?"

Wordlessly, his godfather stepped aside to let him enter.

Once they were seated in Severus' small living room with a cup of tea waiting for them on the small table, the older man asked, "What do you want to talk about?"

"I …" Draco trailed off, staring at his hands which were twisting together. He tried to collect his thoughts; where should he begin? How should he start? What would his godfather think when he heard that he had attacked Harry?

Severus didn't say anything; he only sipped his tea and gazed calmly at him.

"All right, it's … Something happened in Dumbledore's house. Something between Harry and I," he finally started and hoped his voice wouldn't waver.

"What happened?"

"I don't know exactly. There is … some sort of hole in my memories. One minute, I'm searching through a closet in Dumbledore's bedroom and the next minute, I'm standing in a completely different room and Harry … Harry had stab wounds in his hand and shoulder," he replied and swallowed, before continuing in a small voice, "I don't know what happened, but I attacked him. I can't remember doing it, but Harry didn't want me to touch him and he was afraid of me. He's never been afraid of me, not even when we were still school rivals." His throat felt like it was closing up, but he forced himself to keep talking while his hands clenched around his knees. "I want to talk to him about it, to hear what happened, but he's been avoiding me the entire week and I don't know what to do! I don't want to lose him, but if this keeps going on, I don't know how we'll fix it. I – I just … I don't know what to do."

He looked down at his lap and tried to resist the urge to fidget. Only he and Harry had known what had really caused Harry's wounds and if Draco had had any choice, he would have liked to kept that particular truth to themselves. He didn't expect Severus to act in a violent manner – not like Black would have done or maybe even Lupin if they knew the truth – but there were worse ways for his godfather to react.

Like being disappointed. Or distrustful of anything Draco would do.

Would he be willing to help him? Would he want to help someone who had unknowingly cursed his own lover?
"Can you remember anything peculiar that happened right before you blanked out?" Severus asked calmly and placed his cup back on the table.

Draco shot him a quick glance to gauge his reaction, but all he saw was a blank face gazing back at him.

His eyebrows furrowed while he dug through his memories of that day. The minutes before his memory loss were fuzzy, unclear. As if someone had tried to wipe out those minutes furiously, but hadn't completely succeeded.

"I was looking through the closet." Draco answered slowly, concentrating on the small fidgets that he could catch. "Trying to find a ward or so that would keep the portrait behind it. I remember getting dust in my face when I opened the closet." He shook his head. "Can't remember much. One moment I'm looking in the closet, shoving some boxes aside and then the next I'm in another room and Harry is sitting on the bed, bleeding."

Severus leant forwards and narrowed his eyes. "You said you got dust in your face," he spoke slowly. "Can you recall the colour of that dust?"

Draco stared at him blankly. "You think the dust has something to do with it? It looked like normal dust to me."

"Concentrate on the memory, Draco," Severus retorted sharply.

Slightly cowed, Draco closed his eyes and tried to recall the texture and the colour of the dust. No matter how hard he tried, all he could remember was a lot of dust hitting him in his face and his first reaction had been to shield his face and try to wipe it off with his sleeve. Studying the colour of the dust had not been a priority at that time.

Trying to ignore the feeling of being a failure, he opened his eyes and looked up. "I'm sorry, I can't remember anything specific about the dust. My first reaction was to wipe it away," he replied uncomfortably.

The other man looked contemplatively. "There is something else we could try, but I do not know whether you would agree to it."

"What is it?" Draco asked, not able to mask the eagerness in his voice. If Severus knew something that could bring out the memory of what had really happened, then he didn't care what he had to do. By now he would agree to anything that could offer him help.

Severus raised an eyebrow, but answered, "With your permission, I could use Legilimency on you to try to draw out the memory. However, it will most likely be more painful than you are used to as I will need to use more power. Are you certain you are ready for it?"

Draco swallowed, but nodded slowly. He wasn't looking forward to the pain that he would have to endure, but with Harry not willing to talk to him, this was the only chance he had at discovering what exactly had happened.

Severus regarded him with hooded eyes, but nodded and grasped his wand. "Clear your mind and lower your Occlumency shields."

Troubled, grey eyes regarded him nervously when he raised his wand. Despite being nervous, his godson kept his eyes locked onto his, giving him direct access to his mind.
"Legilimens," Severus whispered and was almost immediately dropped into Draco's mind. Like he was instructed, there were no shields present that could have thrown him out and he carefully stepped forwards, looking around.

Memories were lazily drifting around; floating above, next and under him. Unlike last time, Draco's mind was not in turmoil and there were no random fires burning or muddy pools covering the memories.

Still, even with his mind healthy, it was not an easy task to find the correct memory. Considering Draco had mentioned memory loss, it would be difficult to view the memory as the mind would be covering it up. Suffering from memory loss did not automatically mean that the memory was entirely gone; more often than not, it was simply deeply buried into the mind, hidden behind others.

Sometimes people could gain their memories back if the memory loss was not severe, but if Severus' suspicions were correct, then his godson would not manage to regain the memory; no matter how hard he tried.

He practically glided forwards on the path that had appeared beneath his feet while his eyes roved across the various screens displaying the memories.

On his right, the memory showed a young Draco chasing a couple of peacocks while Lucius told him exasperatedly to stop running around.

The one floating above him displayed a frowning Draco, focused on reading in a large, dusty tome.

Ten steps further and the Potions Master halted when a memory sprung up in front of him. It was the Last Battle with the Dark Lord; black eyes gazed as a bloodied Harry Potter pushed a panicking and furious Draco back while barking a Sleeping charm before he turned around to lead the Dark Lord away from the castle.

Dismissing the memory, he walked further, but had to stop abruptly when a new memory popped up in front of him and nearly made him topple over. This memory seemed more recent; judging from the lack of natural light, Severus assumed the memory took place somewhere in the dungeons.

He received his answer when a blond head popped up from underneath the rumpled sheets and half lidded eyes blearily looked around until they spotted the body resting next to him. Curiosity bloomed up in silver grey eyes and Draco suddenly disappeared underneath the blankets, shifting around until he was laying down between two slender legs.

Severus cleared his throat and hastily stepped around the memory when it showed Draco showering Potter's stomach with tender kisses.

There was a limit to what he wanted to know about his godson. Him frolicking around with Potter went past his limits.

Several other memories popped up – ranging from Draco's childhood to the present – but Severus ignored them all once it became clear it was not the one he was searching.

When the path changed from smooth stone to chipped ones, he narrowed his eyes. Darkness started to surround him and the air became thick, as if he was breathing in syrup. His senses heightened by the unusual atmosphere, it didn't take long for him to notice the pulsing threads a bit further ahead.

He approached it cautiously and stopped two feet away from it. The memory was slightly decompressed and thick veins were curled around it, pulsating with a strange, dark purple light. Black gold dust covered the screen and Severus inhaled sharply.
It was as he had suspected: the Incubus Victimae curse.

Even though it was called a curse, a wand was not needed nor an incantation. The dust was said to originate from the dead skin of an Incubus. The curse required two people to be in each other’s vicinity. When it was absorbed by the first person, it would warp his or her mind until he or she acted like the worst nightmare of the other person. In a sense it made both people a victim: the first one – hit by the dust – would never know what he or she had done while influenced by it and the other person would experience his or her worst nightmare.

In the case of his godson and Potter, Draco had behaved according to Potter's worst fear. Had Potter feared Draco attacking him? Or had something else happened? The curse preyed on the deepest fear of the second person and more often than not, this person was not aware of his or her own fear.

He wasn't certain whether he really wanted to watch the memory unfold, but he had no choice if he wanted to help Draco. He couldn't use his magic here as it would be too dangerous, so he had to manually untangle the veins, ignoring the way they throbbed against his skin.

It took a while to remove the veins; sometimes he could feel a flicker of pain thrumming through Draco's brain and while his first instinct was to get out of his mind, he just clenched his teeth and kept removing the thick veins. He had warned Draco that it would be painful and if he left now, they would have to do it all over again.

Finally, the veins let out a soft 'puff' sound and they dissolved, leaving a slightly battered memory behind.

Steeling himself for whatever he would see, he reached out with his hand and touched the memory, which unfolded itself like the wings of a bird and wrapped around him, drawing him in.

He landed right next to a bed; Draco was standing in front of an open closet, rubbing his face with a grimace tainting his mouth. Potter was on the opposite of the room, his one hand resting on a closed drawer.

"Are you all right?" Potter asked concerned and seemed to contemplate whether he needed to cross the room to help the blond.

Some dust coated Draco's face and he spat, rubbing his hand over his lips. "Eugh, disgusting! Yeah, I'm all right. Just some stupid dust that hit me when I opened this fucking closet."

Severus raised an eyebrow; if either of his parents had been present, he doubted Draco would have worded his answer like that.

Potter shook his head and turned his attention back to the desk. While the dark haired wizard was riffling through some papers, Severus focused his attention on Draco.

At first Draco didn't seem affected; he continued to rummage through the closet, pushing aside some objects and clothes. After a couple of minutes, however, he slowed down until he stood motionless in front of the closet. Severus walked a bit closer and looked at the grey eyes; they were staring blankly at the back of the closet.

The rustle of clothes made Severus turn around.

"Hey Draco, look what I found," Potter called out and turned around while still looking at the notebook. "This is Dumbledore's … Hey, is something the matter?" he asked when he noticed how still Draco stood. Potter threw the notebook on the desk and approached Draco carefully. "Seriously, is something wrong? Did you get hurt or so?" He placed his hand on Draco's shoulder, giving it a
Severus took a few steps back – even though they wouldn't feel his presence at all – and watched how the blank look in Draco's eyes was replaced by something dark.

"Don't touch me!" Draco snapped and smacked Potter's hand away, whirling around so that he could face him.

Potter stumbled back and stared at the blond wide-eyed, before he grew visibly annoyed. "What the hell is your problem? You don't have to be so rude about …"

"Filthy Halfbloods like you shouldn't touch me," Draco said coldly.

"Excuse me?" Potter stared incredulously at the blond and Severus concealed a wince.

Draco sneered. "Are you deaf as well, scarhead? I said that filthy Halfbloods like you shouldn't touch me. Do you need me to repeat that a third time or did your brain – small as it is – finally manage to comprehend it?"

It was as if Severus was staring at a younger version of Draco who spitefully tried to capture Potter's attention. How many times had he heard Draco insulting Potter when they were younger? How many times had he ignored the verbal fight until it became impossible to ignore?

"Fuck you, Draco," Potter whispered angrily and clenched his hands. "Is this some kind of sick joke? Because I really don't think it's funny, you asshole!"

"A sick joke?" Draco repeated and looked thoughtfully, tapping the tip of his wand to his chin. "No, it's not a joke. This is just me finally getting sick of all the crap I have to put up with thanks to you. Seriously, I'm in this fucking hellhole, just because you can't fight your own battles and need other people to win. What do I get out of this? Nothing! I'm risking my life here and I get nothing in return."

"What the fuck are you …"

"I guess you could say that screwing you is my reward, but honestly, you're not that great in the sack," Draco continued, laughing coldly. "I thought fucking you would be better than fucking some girl, because guys can't get pregnant unless they take a potion, but of course once again you had to defy the fucking odds and you had to get knocked up. My life is getting ruined thanks to you and a baby I don't want and you honestly expect me to put up with it? Fuck, if only you were good in bed, then it wouldn't have been that bad, but you really suck. Not to mention that …"

SMACK!

Draco's head flew to the side when Potter's fist met his cheek and he blinked, looking a bit dazed while he stumbled back until he hit the closet.

"Go to hell, Malfoy," Potter whispered and looked like he was furiously blinking his tears away.

Severus became aware of the fact that he was holding his breath and slowly exhaled. He took in the dark glare on Draco's face and a sense of foreboding rose up in him. Draco had always been more likely to lash out in a violent manner when he was glaring like that.

Potter either didn't take notice of the dark glare or simply chose to ignore it; he turned around and snapped, "You won't have to put up with me for any longer. You can go to hell for all I care!"
Potter had barely taken two steps when Draco charged forwards and slammed against him. Potter was thrown on the bed with a choked yell.

"What the hell do you …" Potter's furious question was cut off by his scream of pain when a knife stabbed through his right hand.

Draco glared furiously at him. "You won't get away with laying a hand on me!" His hand slammed down on the knife, driving it even further through Potter's hand, making him scream again.

Blood started trickling from the wound; before Draco could touch him again, Potter's magic acted up and slammed against the blond. Draco was thrown off of him, collapsing against the wall.

While Severus watched the scene unfolding with an aghast face, Potter managed to pull the knife out of his hand; a choked scream escaped him and he moaned, curling up around his wounded hand. Blindly groping around the bed, he grabbed his wand with his left hand and stood up, looking like he would faint.

Potter stumbled out of the room without casting another glance at the wizard crumpled against the wall.

The memory had not ended yet. Severus watched how Draco pulled himself up, his teeth bared in a snarl. His wild eyes roved around the room and Severus couldn't suppress the light shiver that danced across his spine when animalistic, grey eyes briefly met his. Hissing something between his teeth, Draco stormed over to the bed and snatched the bloodied knife off of the bed, staring at it with a strange, thoughtful face. His eyes focused on the floor and a large, crooked smile appeared on his face.

Unwillingly, Severus followed his gaze and noticed the small, ruby red droplets scattered across the floor. In his haste to leave the room, Potter had neglected to notice that he was leaving a trail behind in the form of his own blood.

Dread rising up in his chest, Severus followed his godson out of the room. The droplets of blood led to a closed door and Draco blasted it open with a snarled 'Alohomora'.

"Hey, darling, if you want to hide, make sure you don't leave a trail behind," Draco sneered and his eyes glinted madly when he closed the door behind him, Severus already having slipped inside. "Playing hide and seek is hardly any fun if you dirty the floor and walls with your blood."

At first Severus thought Draco had become delirious and was just talking to something his brain had imagined. There was nobody in the room.

Until he looked down and saw the trail of blood ending abruptly near the wall, while a choked gasp tore through the sharp silence.

Of course, Potter had been carrying his Invisibility Cloak in his bag. Severus could have smacked his forehead for not realising that fact sooner. To his utter surprise, Draco managed to snatch the Cloak off of Potter with a simple Summoning charm, leaving Severus to stare at the blond. It should have been impossible for him to use a Summoning charm on an Invisibility Cloak; they were designed in such a manner that those particular charms bounced off of them. Had the curse made it possible? Or perhaps the bond?

"Let's see how long it takes before you're reduced to a sobbing mess," Draco smiled dangerously and advanced on Potter, who was staring at him like a petrified animal in front of a dangerous predator.

Potter had the foresight to cast a strong shield around him, but Draco was unimpressed by that,
judging from the scoff he uttered.

Draco snickered and came to a stop a few feet away from the shield. "A shield? Let's see how long that will hold up against my spells."

Severus could hear Potter gasp when one of Draco's spells landed against the shield; it rattled heavily.

The spells continued to hit the shield and it didn't take the blond long before the shield was thinning and weakening. Through the shield, Severus could see Potter fumbling around in his bag, looking at a vial he had procured.

Right at the moment Draco managed to break through the shield and storm forwards, Potter opened the vial with a spell and thrust it forwards. The liquid hit Draco right in his face and Snape nearly covered his ears when Draco screamed in pain, his hands frantically trying to wipe off the liquid.

Meanwhile Potter had sunk down on the bed, staring wide eyed at the knife which was firmly impaled in his shoulder.

Well, that explained how Potter had ended up with those wounds. It was a miracle that the knife hadn't hit any major artery or any of his organs.

Deciding he had seen enough, he pulled back out of the memory. His heart beat fast in his chest, but he ignored that in favour of concentrating on the memory. He could remove the dust completely, but the shock of the revealed memory could harm Draco more than was healthy. It would probably be best to give him the potion meant to counteract this particular curse and let the potion work on restoring his memory slowly.

Nodding slowly, he abruptly turned back and stepped onto the path again. He had learnt what he needed. Now it was time to inform Draco of what had happened.

For once, Severus couldn't entirely blame Potter for not wanting to face this particular situation. That didn't mean Potter could keep avoiding his godson.

Silence fell over the two wizards once the older one was done conveying what he had seen. Grey eyes dropped to the floor and hands clenched around his cup; the tea had grown cold.

So that was what had occurred during the time he had been unaware of his actions. He tried to swallow; needles seemed to be stuck in his throat. No wonder his lover wasn't keen on discussing what had happened; he had not only endured physical violence, but also verbal and emotional violence. It didn't matter that it hadn't lasted long; it had been long enough to leave an impression behind – and he was not talking about the physical scars.

How on earth was he supposed to fix this?

"So Harry is afraid I'm just using him?" Draco finally broke the silence. He knew Harry had doubted his real intentions in the beginning once he heard of his former flings, but he had thought Harry had realised that his feelings were truthful. He wasn't using Harry for sex or money or fame or anything. He loved him and he loved their unborn baby.

Severus looked at him sharply. "Draco, Potter is not aware of this particular fear. He probably won't even know what you're talking about if you confront him."

"But you just said that the curse fed on the fears of the second person," Draco pointed out and
frowned.

"On the deepest fear, yes, but that does not mean that Potter was aware of it. Many people have fears that they don't know about until they are confronted by them," Severus explained and glanced at the door that hid his private potion inventory. "I'll give you a potion that is specifically developed to deal with this sort of memory loss."

"But what am I supposed to do now?" Draco asked helplessly. "I know now what really happened, but that still doesn't give me a clue as to what I should do now."

Black eyes glanced at him exasperatingly, making him scowl slightly in return. "Draco, you cannot do anything else but talk to Potter about this. There is no magical cure for this situation; all you can do is talk to him and explain what the curse did." He let out a soft scoff. "Potter may be dense at times, but he probably has realised by now that a curse had taken control over you."

"But Harry doesn't want to talk with me," Draco muttered and glanced away; he felt like they were going in circles. No matter what he said, it all came down to the fact that Harry utterly refused to talk to him.

Severus stood up and strode over to his private inventory. "Then make him talk," he snapped and opened the door with an inaudible spell incantation. "You know him the best; figure out a way to get him to stay put and talk."

_I wish it was this easy_, Draco thought sourly and accepted the small vial.

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Two days later, Draco still hadn't managed to catch Harry on his own. If he wasn't becoming so frustrated at Harry's avoidance, he would have been impressed with the way Harry managed to keep out of his way. It didn't matter at which time he entered Harry's private quarters; his lover was never present. Only Ruby and Sapphire were present to see his pained grimace every time he came upon an empty room.

His mood darkening even more, he made his way back to the Slytherin's common room; silently wondering whether it would be worth the humiliation to ask either Black or Lupin whether they knew Harry's whereabouts. Or even better yet: whether they could get him and Harry alone in a room to finally talk.

Mara looked up when he entered the dormitory. Blaise was downstairs; he had opened his mouth, but once he noticed Draco's foul mood, he had wisely turned away to engage a younger Slytherin in some conversation about Charms. The rest of his roommates were either in the common room or in the library, frantically trying to finish their homework on time.

He let himself fall down on his bed and crossed his arms underneath his head. Would it be over the top if he casted a Sticky Floor charm on Harry's feet?

Mara's ear twitched and she turned her head to stare at him. "You did not manage to talk with your mate?"

Draco's scowl turned worse. "No, I didn't. He wasn't in his quarters and the library is hardly the right place for this particular discussion."

A sigh left her body. "Ruby says his master is trying to distract himself with homework or his family."
Silver grey eyes narrowed and turned to look at her suspiciously. "You've been talking to Ruby?" he asked and sat up to lean against his pillow. "Couldn't he just bring Harry to me?" he muttered darkly. For beings so obsessed about their bond, their pets didn't seem eager to help him out.

"Of course I talk with him." Her eyes clearly conveyed how stupid she thought his question had been. "We have to keep each other updated. As for your second question: this is between you and him. We cannot interfere in the matters of the heart."

"Funny how you keep interfering in other matters," he mumbled underneath his breath and Mara huffed.

"Apparently your mate has been talking with the wolf like man about your cub," Mara continued and her eyes gained an apprehensive glint.

His muscles tensed in response and he warily asked, "What did he and Lupin talk about?"

By now he should have expected to not like the answer he would receive.

"He asked how long parents can be apart before it affects the unborn cub."

His breath escaped him with a pained 'whoosh'.
Mending the Pieces Part 2

Chapter Notes

Author's note: I'm aware that this chapter is rather short compared to some previous ones (although this length was actually the intended one for this particular story), but I have two reasons for that. The main reason: I decided to end it at that particular ending, because it fit more than if I had continued the chapter. The entire atmosphere and all that. Second reason: at least this way, you didn't have to wait longer than two weeks :) 

Fair warning: university started again two weeks ago, so less writing time for me. However, I'll try to keep the updates as regular as possible. If it takes longer than two weeks for a new chapter, then you know the reason: university kicking my arse.

Thank you for the kudos and comments!

Warnings: drama, angst, Helpful Luna, short talk about previous violence; I think those are the most important warnings.

Disclaimer: I don't own Harry Potter - J.K. Rowling owns it.

Additional note: I urge you to read the ending carefully as it will explain more in depth what happens overall in this chapter (and that didn't sound mysterious at all ...)

Without further ado, please enjoy this second part!

Chapter 22: Mending the pieces Part 2

31st of January

Harry realised he was acting as a coward. All the bravery that had made him suitable for Gryffindor seemed to have left him in the face of having to speak with Draco about the attack. For the past week he had done everything to avoid being alone with Draco. He still attended his classes and spoke to Draco during them and talked with him during dinner, but as soon as an opportunity arose in which Draco could pull him aside to have a private conversation, he bailed on him with a flimsy excuse.

Shame burned in him as a bright fire, but he couldn't bring himself to invite Draco in his quarters. He knew he should; they really needed to talk about what had happened if they ever wanted to get past this. But every time he looked at the blond wizard, his mind flashed back to the spiteful words Draco had hurled at him and the knife being impaled in him.

There were no visible scars left; Remus had been right when he told him to let the potion do its job. Three days after applying the potion, the redness had receded and the rough ridges of the scares had smoothed over until only the memory of the pain was left.

Harry knew that Draco had been under the influence of a curse and therefore hadn't meant anything he had done; despite that knowledge, he still woke up during the night, heart beating madly in his chest, from nightmares in which the scene in the bedrooms was repeated over and over again. Sometimes the scene slightly changed and instead of stabbing his shoulder, Draco ended up driving the knife in his stomach, killing their unborn child; all the while smiling madly.
These nightmares only served to make him avoid Draco even more and he wanted to rage out of frustration. Why couldn't he let go of his irrational fear? Why couldn't he put that event behind him and take up his relationship with the Malfoy heir? It wasn't as if this was the first traumatic event he had experienced.

*It is the first time that you experienced your own lover betraying you,* a voice piped up in the back of his head every time he tried to convince himself to speak with Draco.

But it wasn't really betrayal, was it? Draco was as much as a victim as he was. He was suffering as well, yet he was still trying to make everything right again.

What did that make of Harry?

Evidently a coward who couldn't even talk to his own lover.

When Friday evening arrived, Harry decided he had enough. He had enough of suffering through nightmares; was done with feeling this irrational fear.

If he wasn't able to put the past behind him, he would seek out the one person who would be able to help him with the memory.

Convincing his pets to stay behind in his quarters had been difficult. They were apprehensive; earlier in the week, a student from Ravenclaw had tried to hex Harry. Harry had managed to deflect the hex back to the caster, but it had cemented his pets' belief that he wasn't safe without them around.

For this particular conversation, however, he'd rather he was on his own. It would already be difficult enough to explain to him why he wanted this particular solution and he could do without his pets' input.

After promising Garin and Ruby that he would only visit him and then return, he was able to leave on his own.

Snape gazed at him with unreadable eyes when he opened the door.

"Potter. To what do I own this surprise visit?" he asked curtly.

Harry glanced around; there was nobody wandering around in the dungeons. He had made certain of that on his way here, but he still didn't want to risk it.

"I … need to ask you something," he replied in a low voice.

A black eyebrow rose up, but the man stepped aside to let him enter; muttering something underneath his breath. He motioned for Harry to sit down, but the latter remained standing, feeling rather nervous.

"Ask," Snape said abruptly.

"I – I have a question," Harry started and licked his lips, wondering how he would word his question as to receive a positive answer. "I was wondering … Can you use Legilimency to remove memories?"

Dark eyes narrowed and pale lips pursed together in a tight line. "Removing memories? Why do you want to know?"
"I was just wondering about it, you know," Harry replied weakly. "Considering I've used both Occlumency and Legilimency now, it made me think about the possibilities."

"Potter, you are not talking to the Headmistress. I would appreciate it if you stopped lying and told me the truth behind this peculiar question," Snape barked and crossed his legs.

Even though he was seated and Harry was the one with the height advantage, Harry felt like he was smaller underneath the sharp gaze.

"It's …" He looked away and took a deep breath. "Something happened in Dumbledore's house and I would like to get rid of the memory as it only causes me trouble."

There. That was enough information without giving away what really had happened.

Snape intertwined his fingers and looked at him calmly. "Does this have to do with the fact that Draco attacked you?"

Harry turned his head so sharply his muscles sang in protest. "What do you know about that?" he asked shocked.

Had Snape managed to use Legilimency on him? No, that was impossible. While Harry would never be a master in Occlumency, he would have felt it if his Occlumency shields had been breached.

"Draco was here earlier," Snape answered, breaking through Harry's muddled thoughts. "He wanted to know what exactly had occurred in that house and as a certain someone, Harry felt his cheeks flush with shame as dark eyes looked at him knowingly, "wouldn't talk to him, he asked me to help him. I used Legilimency and discovered what had happened."

Harry opened his mouth and closed it again once he realised that he didn't know what to say. If he had arrived earlier, he would have bumped into Draco. Draco had been here, desperate enough to know what really had happened to ask an outsider for help.

"Draco was under the influence of a curse. To be precise: the Incubus Victimae curse," Snape continued calmly as if he was just talking about a potion's recipe. "Have you heard of this curse?"

Numbly Harry shook his head.

"The name itself is quite deceiving as you do not use an incantation or even a wand," Snape answered idly. "It is dust, originating from the dead skin of an Incubus. You can compare the dust to a Boggart. The Boggart transforms into what you fear the most; this particular curse works in a similar manner. Draco was hit by the dust when he was searching through the closet and it made him act according to your worst fear."

"So the curse discovered my worst fear and used Draco to act it out?" Harry murmured confused.

"Yes; in this case, you could say that Draco assumed the role of the Boggart under the curse's influence," Snape replied. "He was not aware of his actions and I assume you were not aware of the nature of your deepest fear."

So those insults, those sneers about their baby and him lashing out with the knife – that had happened because Harry had been afraid of that? His first reaction was to deny that particular fear; while he had been uncertain of Draco's motives for dating him in the beginning, he was now completely certain that Draco wouldn't hurt him intentionally. Draco wouldn't throw him away and he definitely wanted this baby, despite the problems that could arise.
But …

When the first defensive reaction sunk back, he was forced to acknowledge that deep inside, *maybe* he had feared being used by Draco. He knew that with his ability to attract danger, he wasn't exactly perfect boyfriend material. That Draco still was willing to stay with him, despite the danger he was now in, spoke volumes about his feelings and had made Harry realise on multiple occasions how lucky he was to have found someone who wouldn't bail on him at the first sign of trouble.

Yet, he couldn't deny that Draco's life would be a lot easier if Harry wasn't in it.

So now he knew exactly what had made Draco act like that. He was relieved to hear that it had indeed been a curse – but unfortunately that didn't mean he was suddenly ready to confront Draco.

Why could it never be easy for him? Why was there still this lingering fear; why was he still remembering the mad look in Draco's eyes? Why couldn't he just shrug it off and seek out the blond?

After all, he had trusted Luna and he had trusted his heart; he had chosen to believe that there was a reason for Draco's sudden change in personality.

So why …

His hands clenched tightly; his nails biting softly in the palm of his hands. He wanted to be with Draco, wanted to look at him again without remembering the sharp sting of a knife piercing through his skin, without seeing the furious glare in those grey eyes he loved so much.

"Can you remove the memory?" Harry asked and raised his head.

Snape sighed. "I can, yes."

"So how do you do it? Obviously with Legilimency, but I mean …"

Harry's rambling was cut off short by Snape's next remark. "But I'm not going to remove it."

"What? Why not?" Harry snapped and took a step forwards.

"Because, Potter, you need to talk with Draco. Removing the memory will do nothing but give you the momentary relief of safety. As I mentioned to Draco: this is not something that can be solved through magical means." The older wizard stood up and walked to the door. "You two can only get past this if you talk about it. Now, return to your quarters before I give you detention for breaking curfew."

Harry wanted to continue arguing; try to find some way of convincing Snape to just pull out the memory, but one look at his face made him realise that their discussion was closed. Snape was not willing to comply with his request and would most likely start handing out detentions if he did not leave now.

"Good night, sir," he said stiffly and walked past Snape who simply nodded back.

The following day Harry found himself in the private quarters of his godfather and Remus. At the moment, Sirius was not present; he had been asked by McGonagall to oversee the detention of a couple of fourth year Ravenclaws.

Which was a good thing, because for the conversation Harry planned to have with Remus, it would be best if his godfather was not there to hear it.
"How are you feeling, Harry?" Remus asked softly, once they were seated with a cup of warm chocolate milk.

Ruby fussed a bit before he curled up as much as he could in front of the fireplace; his eyes were closed, but Harry knew he was listening to everything they were saying.

"I … Well, I suppose," Harry replied and grimaced lightly.

Remus studied him and cleared his throat. "I have noticed that you and Draco have not spent much time together this past week."

Unwillingly, a flinch went through Harry's body and he clenched his teeth. He hadn't thought that his avoidance had been that obvious.

"We've been busy with homework," he replied vaguely.

Remus hummed lowly and took a sip from his chocolate milk.

After a short bout of hesitation, Harry leant forwards to put his mug on the table. When he leant back against the couch, his hand came to rest on the swell of his stomach; it wasn't visible yet, but that had more to do with the fact that he was wearing a rather thick sweater. He could still feel the slight bump through the material and reminding himself that he couldn't keep putting this off, he took a deep breath and said, "Draco mentioned a couple of months ago that if parents stayed away from each other, it could affect the unborn baby."

"Yes, that's true," Remus replied slowly and raised an eyebrow.

"It made me wonder …" Harry trailed off, but forced himself to continue, "How long can parents stay apart before it starts affecting the baby?"

"Depending on the magical strength of the person carrying the baby, it can take as long as five months being apart before it starts having a negative effect to even one month," Remus answered and gazed at him contemplatively. "The stronger the carrier, the longer the parents can stay apart."

"Oh," Harry muttered and glanced away.

"Harry, why did you ask that?" the older man asked in a low voice.

"No real reason; I was just wondering about that," Harry retorted, hoping that the hitch in his voice went unnoticed. "I mean, I never heard of distance affecting an unborn baby, so I was curious."

"Have you forgotten that I have sharp senses?"

Green eyes shot back and looked at the man in front of him warily. "What? No, of course I haven't forgotten!"

"Would you mind telling me what is really going on then?" Remus asked calmly and shifted around, placing one leg over the other.

"I … nothing is going on," Harry muttered; the familiar feeling of shame and discomfort spreading throughout his entire body.

"Harry, you know you can tell me everything," Remus murmured gently. He hesitated. "Do you want to talk with Sirius?"

"No!" His answer came out sharper than he intended, but he knew he couldn't talk about this to
Sirius. Sirius would hex first and then ask questions later, and Draco didn't deserve to be cursed, just because Harry was incapable of putting the past behind him.

Remus didn't say anything else; merely looked at him calmly.

Harry could easily leave now; even though Remus had expressed his wish to know more, he wouldn't press further if Harry refused to talk about it. He would let him leave without holding it against him.

Oddly, it was that realisation that made him start talking. Before he could think about whether it was prudent to talk about this to Remus – Snape knowing about it was one thing –, before he could stop himself, words started pouring out of his mouth and together they formed the explanation of his wounds and what exactly had taken place in Dumbledore's house; he didn't neglect to mention the information he had received from Snape.

When he was finished talking, he felt strangely empty and exhausted and he couldn't look at Remus; afraid he would see disappointment in how he had handled the whole situation.

When Remus opened his mouth, it was not to scold him for his immature behaviour or even mutter something as nonsensical as that it would all be okay. No, he told Harry something completely different.

"You remember two years ago after the tournament here? You were in the Infirmary when Dumbledore ordered Sirius to call up the members of the Order," Remus murmured and his eyes gained a distant look.

Harry blinked confused, but nodded. How could he forget that awful evening?

"I was the first one he found," Remus continued and his fingers tightened around his mug. "While we were searching for the rest of the members, we had to stay low and naturally, he couldn't visit you or send you many letters. He missed you every day and there was one day where he had attempted to form a plan to visit you. Dumbledore had warned me about visiting you; said it would likely attract the attention of Death Eaters if they sensed multiple wizards near you. Anyway," he met Harry's gaze, "once I found out that he was planning on disobeying Dumbledore and that he was intent on visiting you before the month was over, I made the mistake of mentioning that you were safer at your relatives' house."

"What happened?" Harry asked softly.

A small grimace tainted his mouth. "He became angry at me and lashed out with his magic."

Harry stared at him shocked. "He hurt you?"

Sirius had always been rather impulsive and Harry knew the Dursleys had been a sensitive topic for him – but to hear he had gone as far as attacking his remaining best friend, because he was forbidden to visit his godson?

Harry just couldn't imagine Sirius lashing out like that towards his best friend.

"A bit, yes." Remus touched his arm almost absentmindedly and Harry wondered whether he had been wounded there. "He was horrified, of course, once he realised what he had done. I don't think I've ever seen him apologizing so much," he laughed weakly.

"What … what did you do?"
A faint smile lingered on his lips. "I forgave him. Mind, it took me a bit before I didn't jump anymore every time he raised his wand, but I don't hold it against him. I know he missed you; I just made the mistake of reminding him of the dangers." He looked thoughtfully at his arm. "It took a long time before Sirius forgave himself, though, no matter what I said."

Harry looked away and bit his lip. He wasn't oblivious; he understood the parallels between Remus' story and his own. Forgiving Draco wasn't exactly the problem; there wasn't really anything to be forgiven. Forgive him for attacking him? That was stupid, because Draco hadn't meant to attack him. Forgive him for insulting him? Again, Draco hadn't been himself.

The main problem remained that Harry had trouble with putting the memory behind him. It wasn't as if he enjoyed holding on to it; he would like nothing more than to be able to look at Draco again without experiencing a flashback.

"Listen, Harry, nobody can force you to move on," Remus spoke softly. "I understand why you would want to ignore the memory. But ignoring it and avoiding Draco won't help either one of you. You need to talk with him."

"I know," Harry muttered.

He knew he needed to talk to Draco; he knew he couldn't keep dragging this out. It was all easier said than done, though.

On Sunday, the Astronomy tower had one lonely visitor. Harry was sitting on the large windowsill, absentmindedly looking down at the Forbidden Forest. Around him, the air was filled with the soft hooting of owls and the occasional chatter of other birds. February had started and while the snow had melted, it was still rather cold and even with his thick winter coat, Harry had to recast a Warming charm every thirty minutes.

Exceptionally he was completely alone today. None of his pets had followed him once he made it very clear to them that he wanted to be on his own for a few hours. He appreciated their concern, but their constant presence could be overbearing at times.

Even if someone was stupid enough to track him down to the Astronomy tower to pick a fight, he had his wand with him and the knowledge of a lot of defensive spells he hadn't had the chance to try out yet.

Being alone in the tower gave him a chance to put his thoughts in order. He had heard from Garin that Draco had tried to visit him several times this weekend; lately Harry returned to his quarters late at night, pushing it close to curfew, so he always missed meeting the blond.

He couldn't keep hiding from his boyfriend; that would only worsen the problem. But what should he do? How could he prevent the memory from resurfacing every time he so much as looked at Draco? He loved Draco and trusted him – that hadn't changed – but the memory kept him captive.

This wasn't a physical barrier he could fight his way through; this was not a curse he could mentally fight or dispel with the counter curse.

No magical means would be able to help him now.

"Luna, what are you doing here?" he asked when he became aware of the gentle presence behind him.

A soft laughter was his answer. "They told me you were here," Luna replied easily.
He didn't bother asking who she meant by 'they'. More than likely, even if she told him who she meant, he wouldn't understand her. He heaved a sigh.

Slender arms, clad in a thin sleeved shirt, appeared next to him and she swung her legs over the edge, letting them dangle against the cold wall.

Her bright blue eyes met his own green ones when he looked at her.

"Your heart is suffering," she remarked idly.

He smiled bitterly. "I guess that's one way of putting it," he agreed and glanced away, catching sight of a brown owl flying over the forest. "I assume you know what happened between Draco and I?"

She hummed. "You followed your heart," she retorted, which for her was as good as admitting she knew what had happened.

He wasn't even disturbed anymore by her ability to seemingly predict the future.

"I guess you can't offer me some advice?" he mumbled and returned his eyes to the girl sitting comfortably next to him.

This time she was the one looking away, gazing softly at the setting sun. "Faith tests people," she murmured serenely. "You have to fight to get past her hurdles. But," she looked back at him and smiled sweetly, "your string is shining brightly. It has never been as bright as now. You just need to let go of the darkness and embrace the light again."

"I wish it was that easy," Harry muttered darkly and rubbed his forehead wearily.

When he opened his eyes, he noticed the look of hesitance on Luna's face and he furrowed his eyebrows. It was such an odd look for her to have; not once since he knew her had he seen her with that look. It just didn't fit; Luna wasn't meant to be hesitant. She was meant to have dreamy smiles, serene looks and a comforting presence. Even with her cryptic comments, she still managed to sound confident.

A hesitant look on her face was akin to a bright smile on Snape's face: it was out of character and didn't fit.

"Luna?" he asked concerned.

She remained silent, but leaned forwards, putting her arms around him. The sudden extra weight against him made him lose his balance and his hand shot out to grab the windowsill, steadying himself. His heart started beating wildly in his chest from the sudden scare and he looked down at long, blonde hair.

"Luna, what are you doing?" he asked perplexed, but embraced her with one arm.

Wide, blue eyes caught his gaze and slender hands came up to touch his temples, pressing down softly. A soft sigh escaped her and smiled. "We are partly formed by our memories, but we shouldn't lead our lives in accordance to them."

Her hands seemed to become very warm and he let out a sound of surprise. As if ordered, his eyes closed and he could feel his tense muscles relax slowly as if he was emerging himself in warm water.

Long fingers swept across his forehead and eyelids, feeling as light as the wind caressing his face.
The difference wasn't clear at first. The warmth gradually decreased until cool skin was pressed against his own warm cheeks; when he slowly opened his eyes, he had to blink. Not because of the sudden difference in light – as the sun was nearly completely down and darkness was starting to fall – but because his head felt oddly light suddenly. It was as if his head had been weighing down with something heavy and now that had disappeared, the pressure completely absent.

"What did you …"

Luna interrupted him. "Imagine him. Bring his image up. What do you feel?"

There was only one 'him' she could be talking about and after casting her a wary look, he took a deep breath and visualized Draco, giving the mental image all the small details he had noticed so far: the way a certain glitter appeared in his eyes when he looked at Harry; the dimple that appeared in his left cheek whenever he smiled that soft smile; the excitement shining on his face whenever he touched Harry's stomach; the softness of his lips when he pressed them against Harry's …

Belatedly he realised that his nasty sneer didn't take over his smile; the warm, loving look in those grey eyes wasn't replaced anymore by cold silver.

When he imagined Draco, the fear wasn't there to take over anymore.

Well, there was still apprehension and slight worry, Harry admitted, but the overwhelming dread and fear he had been experiencing the past week seemed to have evaporated, as if they never had been present.

"Luna, how …" he trailed off and stared at her with wide eyes.

The smile she gave him was tender and she patted his hand. "You helped yourself, Harry. You just needed a slight push." She jumped off the ledge and let out a tinkling laugh. "Go find him, Harry."

He didn't need to be told twice. As soon as his feet touched the solid ground, he took off, hurrying down the stairs. He needed to see Draco right now; he needed to apologize for being such a cowardly idiot and he needed to reassure himself that Draco was still there.

He didn't understand what Luna had done; whether she had used her magic on him, used his own magic against him or even used the bond … That didn't matter. What mattered was that for the first time in more than a week, the thought of seeing Draco and talking to him didn't fill him with a sinking fear. The tendrils of his fear weren't wrapped around him anymore; he could breathe again.

He could deal with the worry and the apprehension – those weren't as bad as the oppressing fear had been. He wouldn't let himself be stopped again by a stupid, irrational fear.

Harry had almost reached his quarters when he heard footsteps coming at a high speed towards him and he turned around.

Only to come face to face with Draco.

Draco, whose face was oddly flushed; whose eyes glittered with suppressed panic; whose forehead was marred by worry lines.

"Harry!" he exclaimed shocked and looked surprised to have finally caught him.

Before Draco could say anything else, Harry shot forwards to embrace him; his arms slipped around Draco's waist and he buried his face in his neck, inhaling the scent he had been missing for more than a week.
"I'm sorry for being such an idiot," Harry said in a trembling voice; his hands grappled over Draco's thick sweater until they found purchase and grabbed the clothing tightly, pressing his own body closer. "I shouldn't have taken so long to talk to you and I shouldn't have avoided you. I'm so sorry!"

At first Draco's body had tensed up, uncertain, but now his own arms came around Harry, hugging him back. He buried his face in Harry's hair and a shiver danced over Harry's spine when Draco's breath caressed his skin.

"You really made me worried," Draco murmured; a slight rasp tainting his voice. "Mara told me you had asked Lupin how long parents could be apart and I …"

"I did; I was stupid." Harry shook his head and pulled back slightly. He took a deep breath and looked up, right in deep grey eyes. No flashback. No memory of pain and betrayal coming back. "I should have talked to you sooner; I shouldn't have avoided you. Can you forgive me?"

Draco smiled wryly. "Shouldn't I be the one asking you for forgiveness?" Pained regret flashed up in his eyes. "I didn't mean to attack you; if I could turn …"

"I know you didn't mean it," Harry spoke softly. "I already knew it back then and Snape just confirmed my assumption that it was a curse."

"Severus? You talked to him?" Draco cocked his head slightly.

Harry's cheeks flushed and he cleared his throat. "Yeah, I wanted to ask him something and he told me that he used Legilimency on you." He brought his hands up to caress Draco's cheeks, feeling relieved when the slightly taller boy didn't pull back. "So can you forgive me for acting so stupid?"

"Of course I forgive you," Draco breathed out. "Just swear to me that you won't ever shut me out again. I can't don't think I'll be able to handle that a second time."

"I swear," Harry murmured. He meant it. No matter how crippling a fear could become, he would never shut Draco out again, would never attempt to avoid him. This past week had been one of the worst he experienced so far – and he knew that was mostly his own fault.

Draco's hands suddenly slipped towards his hips and Harry couldn't suppress the tiny flinch passing through him. He was aware of piercing grey eyes and he sighed softly. Yes, it probably would take some time before he wouldn't flinch back at any sudden movements that Draco made, but he wouldn't let that hold himself back.

He wouldn't let Dumbledore tear them apart. Not again.

Determination shining in his eyes, he looked up again. "Let's take this conversation to my quarters," he stated and linked his hand with Draco's, intertwining their fingers.

He received a squeeze back. "Yes, let's go."

Leaving behind the two bickering men, she slowly made her way through the long hallway. She had felt a change in the magic hanging around in the castle. As if the castle had to take in a sudden surge of Dark magic and had to battle it, turning it safe again.

"What could have possibly happened?" she murmured thoughtfully and her gown trailed over the ground. She did not want to worry the Potions Master nor the Headmistress. If something or someone was attacking the castle, the ancient building would have reacted differently. It would have immediately raised all its wards and closed off all the windows and doors. That this hadn't happened,
was proof that the small surge of Dark magic had happened in the castle itself and that it was not likely to happen again.

Still, it would be better if she found out what exactly had occurred, in case something serious was brewing.

She turned her head when she felt the familiar magical aura approaching her.

"My dear granddaughter," Rowena spoke gently and stood still in a portrait which depicted a forest in late evening.

The blond girl halted in front of her and smiled sweetly. "Grandmother Rowena," she greeted back, looking slightly winded.

Dark eyes studied the girl and Rowena reached out with her magic, asking the castle silently to inform her what had happened. When the stream of mental images stopped, she opened her eyes slowly and rose an eyebrow.

"Luna, you took a great risk just now," she murmured and her studying look turned critical. "What if Hogwarts had not helped you? What if the bond between those two boys turned against you?"

"I trust Harry," Luna smiled brightly and twirled a lock of her hair around her finger. "I know he would never hurt me. Hogwarts wanted to help him too, grandmother."

"Still," Rowena hummed and pressed her hands against her gown. "How did you know that Mister Potter was suffering from the Fester Fear curse? Nobody else seemed to have noticed."

Her granddaughter smiled mysteriously. "The fire spirit pointed out to me that his magical aura had changed," she replied calmly. "And I know Harry – he would never shut out the people he loves." Her eyes gained a distant look. "I know I shouldn't have asked Hogwarts to help him, but he doesn't deserve to be captive like that."

"You could have made it worse for him," Rowena pointed out mildly. "He could have gone in shock from the sudden influx of strange magic messing around with his memories."

Luna regarded her oddly. "No, he wouldn't have. Harry is strong," she retorted mildly. "He has the spirit of a fighter. If Hogwarts hadn't helped him, he would have managed it on his own."

"You have a lot of trust in him," Rowena murmured contemplatively, her mind going back to the pale, dark haired young man bursting into the room as soon as his Bonded Creatures had killed the Nundu.

"He's my friend," her granddaughter answered with a bright, sunny smile.

"Are you going to tell him you helped him removing the Fester Fear curse?"

"I just gave him the necessary push. He did most of the work," Luna said calmly, for once not using cryptic comments.

"Won't he think it is strange that he is not afraid anymore?"

"He was already there; he just needed to accept the light."

Rowena shook her head, but a small smile graced her lips. "Go on, then. Dinner will start soon."

The Founder watched how Luna skipped away, her golden blonde hair swishing back and forth.
across her shoulders while she hummed a soft tune.

Rowena rubbed slow circles in her temples; she needed to return to her portrait. By now those two idiots, who dared to call themselves adults, should be done bickering.

It was high time she and the others spoke to the Potions Master about the object he had locked away in his desk. For now it remained quiet, but it would need an order soon – otherwise it could start trouble on its own.

A shudder went through her slim frame. The last thing Hogwarts needed was to deal with that.
Chapter 23: Building Storm

5th of February

On Wednesday morning, Draco woke up before Harry; they were wrapped up in each other's arms, their legs tangled together with Harry's protruding stomach pressing against his. What a sharp contrast with last week, when Harry had actively avoided him.

Harry's mouth was slightly open and a few strands of his black hair fluttered with every exhale; his face was relaxed in his sleep and one hand was curled up next to him on the pillow. The blankets were shoved down to their waists and Harry's shirt had ridden up a bit, showing smooth skin.

Draco moved his head back a bit to avoid being tickled by his boyfriend's hair and slowly breathed out, letting his eyes rank over the sleeping body next to him. Drowning out the soft snores from Mara and Ruby, he slipped an arm around Harry's waist and languidly caressed the naked, warm skin.

Their conversation last Sunday had taken up most of their evening and they had only taken a break to eat their dinner. It hadn't gone smoothly. Despite initiating the conversation, Harry had been uncomfortable at first, not willing to explain why he had taken to avoiding Draco. Therefore, Draco had told his part of the story first: everything he could remember from the time in Dumbledore's house to Severus filling in the blanks in his memory and giving him the potion that would slowly bring it back. Throughout it, he kept reassuring his lover that he hadn't meant to attack him and he would rather hurt himself than even think of hurting the other one.

In return, Harry talked about the fear he had felt and the memory returning every time he looked at Draco to asking Severus to remove his memory. When he told him about Lovegood helping him
with his fear, Draco had become weary.

It wasn't as if he didn't trust Lovegood around Harry – she had proven that she had good intentions when it came to his lover – but he thought it odd that she was able to appease his fear and take it away by simply using her magic. It made him suspect that something more had happened than Harry knew. After all, there was no way that such a strong fear could be removed by simply hugging and using some magic to comfort him.

If anything, it sounded as if magic had taken away the fear – and hadn't his godfather told him that only talking would help in this case?

But after thinking about it, Draco decided that in the end it didn't matter what Lovegood had done. She had made certain that Harry was willing to talk to him and for that he was grateful. When Mara had informed him that Harry had inquired about the duration parents could stay apart, he had been afraid that Harry would ignore him for at least the rest of his pregnancy. After all, there was no point in asking such a question if he hadn't been planning on continuing his avoidance.

After some prodding, Harry had told him that even if the fear had made him avoid Draco, he still hadn't wanted to hurt their unborn baby. So he had asked Lupin to make certain he wouldn't end up hurting the development of their baby.

The longer they talked, the more at ease Harry became until he finally ended up curled up against Draco's side. Harry still flinched whenever he moved too fast, but they were becoming closer again, slowly slipping back into their relationship as if nothing had happened.

It had been a close call, but they had survived this particular hurdle as well. And while it was a testimony to the strength of their feelings for each other that they hadn't ended up breaking apart, Draco dearly hoped they wouldn't experience something like this again.

The change in his breathing pattern warned Draco that Harry was close to waking up and he turned his head to look at him.

Emerald green peeked through half closed eyes and a yawn escaped the smaller wizard's mouth.

"What time is it?" Harry asked sleepily and carefully rubbed in his eyes.

"A quarter to seven," Draco murmured. "We have to get up soon."

"Hm." Harry stretched out like a cat and his shirt went up a bit further.

"How late does McGonagall expect you?"

"After defence," Harry replied and his eyes grew clear as his brain became fully awake. "You coming with me?"

Draco regretfully shook his head. "Can't. Sev said I needed to visit him so he can do a check up on my memory. See if the potion is working properly and all that."

For a few seconds, Harry's eyes darkened and shuttered close; then he shook his head and sighed softly. "Guess we better get up."

"You feeling okay?" Draco couldn't help but ask and his arms tightened briefly around Harry.

A small smile was his reply. "Yeah, I am."
Classes passed by in a blur. Now that he didn't need to worry about Harry avoiding him, Draco managed to pay more attention to the professors and his notes were significantly longer than they had been last week.

Defence ended and they parted at the staircase: Harry needed to go up to the Headmistress' office and he needed to go to the dungeons to visit his godfather.

"I'll see you in a bit," Harry murmured and gave his hand a quick squeeze.

Draco nodded and followed the stream of students downstairs, feeling Mara following him – and obviously not giving a damn if she bumped against a student, judging by the confused mutters that followed her.

Severus had just closed the door of his classroom when Draco approached him and the older man turned his head to look at him.

"Not joined at the hip anymore?" he drawled out after noticing Harry's absence.

Draco scowled. "We are not joined at the hip," he muttered petulantly. They had however stayed very close to each other the last couple of days to make up for their lack of proximity the week before. Their new closeness had apparently not escaped his godfather's attention.

A scoff was his reply; his godfather beckoned him to follow and they made their way further down the hallway, entering Severus' quarters.

"Have you been feeling any discomfort?"

"No, I feel fine." Draco shrugged and dropped his schoolbag on the floor. He paused and continued in a strangled voice, "The potion worked."

Severus regarded him calmly. "You remember everything?"

Draco nodded; a faint grimace visible on his face. The memory of that time in Dumbledore's house had slipped back in small fragments during the last few days. Hearing his godfather talk about it had been awful, but actually remembering it had been horrifying. Once the last fragment had fallen into place yesterday afternoon, he had spent some time staring at his hands – hands that had hurt Harry.

Only slender hands covering his own and a whispered "It's over," in his ear had managed to pull him back from his dark thoughts.

He didn't think either one of them would forget that day soon, but they were determined to not let that day rule their lives.

"Your memories are all present again," Severus broke the silence and lowered his wand. "I sensed no other obstructions, so a second potion is not necessary."

A delicate cough had both men turning their heads.

Ravenclaw – whose portrait was hanging next to Gryffindor's – looked at Draco with a peculiar glint in her dark eyes. "Is everything all right with your companion?"


"No particular reason," she answered smoothly. "When I last saw him, he looked under the weather."
Considering Harry had been pale and bloodied when she saw him, her comment was quite an understatement.

Gryffindor piped up nonchalantly, "So that magical tremor a few days ago, can that be attributed to …"

"Godric!" Ravenclaw interrupted him sharply. "Do not bother them with insignificant questions."

Gryffindor glared at her, but didn't retort.

"Did something happen that we should be aware of, Lady Ravenclaw?" Severus raised an eyebrow.

"It is not a matter of concern," she smiled thinly.

"More importantly, Severus, we have a pressing matter to discuss," Slytherin took over.

His godfather narrowed his eyes, but gave a slow nod. "Draco, you can leave."

Draco wanted to know what the 'pressing matter' was about, but knew from past experience that pester ing the older wizard would gain him nothing but a few nasty hexes that took days to remove.

Feeling slightly miffed, Draco nodded stiffly, picked up his bag and slipped out of the room; unaware of Mara sharing a look with the three Founders.

He had just arrived in the entrance hall when a familiar owl swept through the open doors and landed on his shoulder; her strong claws carefully taking a hold of his robes.

"Selene, you have something for me?" he murmured curiously and untied the letter from her outstretched paw.

The familiar signature – belonging to his father – greeted him and he furrowed his eyebrows. He couldn't recall a reason why his father would write him now.

"I don't have any snacks with me, but the Owelry will have some for you," he said absentmindedly, still wondering about his father's reason.

Selene nipped his ear gently and then took off, her wings sailing on the breeze sneaking past the open doors.

"Draco?"

His lover was standing at the bottom step of the staircase; a sheet of paper clenched in his right hand.

"Father sent me a letter." He held up his letter and made his way to the other one. He jerked his head towards the paper in Harry's hand. "What's that?"

"A list of spells, charms, curses and potions I need to know for my exams." Harry lowered his voice and casted a wary look around him. "McGonagall told me my exams will take place during the first week of the Easter holidays. My magic is more likely to act up if I take my exams with you." His eyes flicked down meaningfully towards his stomach.

"Of course, that makes sense," Draco muttered. He frowned; remembering one particular issue with this plan. "Will it be all right: the exam supervisors knowing about your condition?"

"She said that she, Snape, Remus and either Shacklebolt or Tonks would supervise my exams," Harry replied and shrugged. "Want to accompany me to the library? I need to look up some things of
this list."

"Yeah sure. I can read the letter there."

There weren't many students present in the library. Madame Pince looked at them with narrowed, beady eyes and a pinched mouth, as if she had tasted a particularly sour lemon. She didn't say anything, though, and they passed her in silence.

Some students looked up when they walked by; to prevent annoying gawking or insulting remarks, the couple searched out a remote, small table which was half hidden in the shadows.

Mara curled up behind Draco's chair; her yawn faintly audible. Draco nearly jumped up when he felt something brushing past his ankles; something very long and familiar.

"Ruby stayed in your quarters?" he asked in a low voice.

Harry nodded and dumped his bag on the table. "I'm going to search these books," he announced and left silently.

The whispers of the other students in the library filled the otherwise quiet room and Draco opened his father's letter. His eyes roved over the page and his eyebrows steadily rose up with each line he read.

"Bad news or good news?" Harry asked softly, placing a short stack of books on the table.

Draco folded the letter and placed it in front of him when he was finished reading. "Depends on how you look at it," he murmured contemplatively.

"Okay," Harry said slowly and sat down. "Want to tell me about it?"

"He talked about the trials of Pansy and that Ravenclaw guy who tried to attack you during Curses," Draco replied, his attention fixated on Harry and his reaction. He wasn't certain whether he should tell everything that his father had written. Harry probably wouldn't mind Pansy's punishment, but the one of the Ravenclaw student …

Harry froze momentarily; his hands tightened on the first book on the pile. "Did they end?"

"Yes." Draco nodded. "As expected, Pansy is magically forbidden to ever contact or approach us again. Additionally, she's under a Mouth Binding curse that prevents her from talking about us and has to serve thirty years in Azkaban. Now she's handed over to Germany where she'll be put on trial as well, because her ex suitor is prosecuting her. She'll probably get an extra thirty years on top of her punishment here."

"At least she won't be able to retaliate," Harry answered grimly.

Draco inclined his head. One less person to worry about.

"How did the other trial end?"

"Do you really want to know?"

"Of course. Why? Did he get acquitted?" Harry asked warily.

The blond sighed and after a short moment of hesitation, he answered, "He was found guilty of using an illegal curse."
"What's his punishment?" Harry demanded to know, leaning slightly forwards; a lock of his hair fell across his cheek, casting a light shadow.

"I'm not certain you want to know."

"Draco, I'm not a delicate flower," Harry snapped irritated. "Just tell me!"

Deciding that beating around the bus wouldn't help, Draco replied, "He received the Kiss three days ago."

Harry fell back in his chair; green eyes wide with shock. "He's dead?" he brought out in a small voice.

Draco nodded silently; personally he wasn't very bothered with this particular punishment. When they had studied the curse, their professor had stated clearly that use of it in non-lethal situations and without justifiable cause would result in being punished with the Kiss. The Ravenclaw student had known what would happen if he would be caught and yet decided to take the risk. Draco couldn't say that he really mourned his passing. He had been about to kill Harry and their unborn baby and hurting his loved ones was one of the few things he could never forgive.

Harry however …

Even though it was easy at times to forget that Harry had never had a proper Pureblood upbringing – times when he used his magic to properly punish his enemies – the fact remained that Harry had been Muggle raised for almost half his life. Draco wasn't certain whether Harry would understand why this particular curse required the offer of the caster's life. It followed a simple concept: a life for a life. Aside from the Unforgivables, this curse was one of the few ones which would be punishment with a death sentence.

A simple imprisonment sentence would not suffice in this case. That was just one of the rules in the Wizarding World.

"I didn't think he would be given the Kiss," Harry said eventually, looking perturbed.

Draco cocked his head slightly. "Moondagger warned us that that curse would result in receiving the death sentence," he reminded the other wizard.

Faint annoyance coloured Harry's voice when he answered, "I know that. I just thought he wouldn't receive it, because he's still a student."

"He was already seventeen when he casted that curse, so legally he was an adult and would be tried like one," Draco pointed out. "But even if he hadn't turned seventeen yet, there is only one punishment for this curse. That guy knew that and yet still tried to curse you."

"I know," Harry groaned and raked a hand through his hair, looking slightly frazzled. "I just … It's … I don't know. The war took a lot of lives already and it seems … rather severe, I guess, to meet a crime like that with that particular punishment."

"Maybe it is," Draco conceded and let out a small sigh. "But that's just how the justice system works in this world."

"I guess," Harry muttered and stared down at the table, tracing some light groove in the wood with his finger. "Doesn't mean I have to like it."

"It doesn't," Draco agreed and then shook his head, stuffing the letter in his bag. He hadn't intended
their visit to the library to be this morbid. "Anyway, you said you wanted to look up some things from your list. Can I help?"

Harry threw him an indescribable look, but then faintly smiled and nodded. "Yeah, can you look up this potion and this charm for me?"

She couldn't tear her eyes away from the scene taking place right behind the bookcase she was currently hiding behind. It had been by pure chance that she had stumbled upon the two studying in this remote corner of the library. The only reason she had discovered them was because she had been searching a particular book that was supposed to be on one of these shelves. She had intended to ignore the two students at first, intent on finding her book and hurrying back to finish her essay for Ancient Runes, but once she recognized the voices, her hand had stilled in its search and she had remained in place, listening to the voices that up until a year ago had been very familiar for her.

Nowadays she didn't know what exactly her place was in the small world they had built around them.

Once she had been the best friend of Harry Potter, but now …

Hermione bit her lip, lowering her arm that had become numb by now from holding it into the air for a suspended period of time.

Since her short, awkward conversation with Harry during the Ministry Ball, she hadn't talked to him again. She hadn't sought him out and he hadn't reached out to her either. She couldn't feel offended by that; her chance of deep friendship had been warped and lost once she and Ron had basically made Harry choose between them and Malfoy. That didn't mean she didn't mourn the end of their friendship however.

She understood that she probably would never be as close to Harry as she had been before, but she couldn't help but wish to at least be able to talk to Harry without the strained atmosphere pressing down upon them. Just a casual friendship would be enough already. Anything was better than this non-existing bond between them.

Multiple times she had thought of going up to Harry after classes, catch him in the hallway and ask whether they could talk, but every time she had had the chance, her courage left her; disappeared like the wind when she thought of the possible rejection she risked to face.

It didn't particularly help either that Malfoy was constantly near Harry; the two of them shared their own private little world and only a few people like Zabini and surprisingly enough Neville were able to breach that world and make themselves a part of it.

Her eyes widened and a faint blush coloured her cheeks when she caught sight of the tender kiss Harry and Malfoy shared and she hastily looked down; a soft chuckle reaching her ear. That would teach her to eavesdrop she supposed.

She should just go back, clean up her table and go back to Gryffindor Tower. The essay could wait.

Yet …

She didn't want to go back yet. Going back would mean being confronted by Ron, who had been acting strange ever since the Ministry Ball. Some days he walked around in a constant angry mood, quick to snap at her, while other days he was almost back to his old self: the way he used to be when they were still the Golden Trio.
The good days seemed to be getting rather sparse lately. Ron seemed more on edge, more prone to lashing out at whoever annoyed him. Even Ginny had felt the brunt of his anger more than once, but she was always quick to retaliate until the common room resembled a mini war zone between the two of them.

He wasn't the man she had fallen in love with anymore and at this point she honestly didn't know how their relationship was supposed to go. She fled in her homework, staying in the library until closing time just to avoid being near Ron.

Not that Ron really noticed her absence; he still talked to her, but he sounded as if his thoughts were somewhere else and that made her uneasy. Especially when she considered who those thoughts could be about. It was no secret in the Gryffindor common room that Ron hated Harry. He blamed him for Percy's death and sought ways to get revenge. So far he hadn't really tried anything, but Hermione feared it wouldn't be long anymore before he would try something stupid. And she wouldn't be able to stop him. One year ago, he would have listened to her and stopped doing whatever stupid thing he attempted to accomplish, but she had lost that ability months ago.

Another soft chuckle made her look up involuntarily and she swallowed when she noticed the fondness in Harry's eye when he looked at Malfoy. He was murmuring something to the blond and in response, Malfoy grabbed his hand and intertwined their fingers, dropping a soft kiss on his knuckles, making Harry blush faintly.

How long had it been since Ron had looked at her like that? When was the last time they had just stayed up in the common room to cuddle and kiss and murmur sweet things to each other? When had fondness turned into indifference?

"They are beautiful together, aren't they?" a dreamy voice suddenly piped up behind her.

Hermione jumped nearly three feet in the air and she hastily turned around; her heart speeding up in fright.

Crystal blue eyes shimmered and a friendly smile was aimed at her.

"Luna, you scared me!" she said in a scolding voice and she placed a hand on her chest.

Luna blinked and cocked her hand; a finger tapped thoughtfully against her lips. "He wouldn't mind it, you know," she said abruptly.

Hermione brushed a stray lock of her curly hair out of her face. "Who and what are you talking about?" she inquired irritated.

"Harry, of course. He wouldn't mind talking to you," the blond girl specified.

She stiffened. "I'm not certain whether he really wouldn't mind talking to me," she muttered almost silently and looked away, feeling uncomfortable under the sharp glance Luna favoured her with at her admission.

"You won't know until you try, right?" Luna hummed and gazed at her serenely.

"I don't want to disturb him; he'll probably has enough on his plate already," Hermione murmured and clasped her arms around her waist. She had read the articles about Professor Dumbledore and the search for him. Her initial reaction had been to disregard the articles, because surely, the Headmaster would never attempt to actually kill one of his own students? But she had to face the truth when she had spoken to Kingsley and he had urged her to inform him as soon as she heard even the slightest rumour about the ex-Headmaster.
The Prophet might twist the truth whenever it wanted, but Kingsley would never lie about something as serious as that.

Having noticed the increased protection consisting of Aurors around Harry last summer whenever he was in public, it hadn't taken her long to figure out just exactly who had been nearly killed by the ex-Headmaster.

Hermione didn't think Harry was looking forward to dealing with one of his former best friends when he had to deal with a dangerous enemy out to get him.

"You think he wouldn't welcome some normalcy?" Luna asked friendly and took a step closer.

Hermione shrugged half-heartedly. "It's just that …" She didn't know how to finish and trailed off.

Why couldn't she keep a normal conversation going without losing the thread of it? It was Luna for Merlin's sake!

"Maybe it's best to wait," Luna murmured and looked at her with a strange glint in her eyes as if she had figured something out. "It's best if you shed the darkness first."

"Darkness?" Hermione looked at her bewildered, letting her arms fall down. "What darkness?"

"The one who is hurting you now," Luna replied soberly. "Fate has other plans for you and they don't include him."

She could only be referring to one person: Ron.

"I – I'm planning on … I've thought about …" she stammered and to her utter humiliation she felt hot tears building up behind her eyes, threatening to spill over while her chest hurt, as if something heavy was pressing down on it.

Her hands shot up to hide her face behind them and she desperately tried to will back the tears, not wanting to break down in the library.

A milky white shield enveloped the two girls, blocking out all sounds and hiding them from potential eavesdroppers.

A pair of slender, warm arms wrapped around her slowly and her head was softly pushed down against a soft shoulder.

"Even the strongest lion needs someone to lean on," Luna murmured in her hair and her hand started to caress her hair. "Let me be your pillar."

There, hidden in one of the most remote corners of the library, shielded from sight by a bubble, Hermione finally let go of her tears and broke down – wrapped up in the protective embrace of the person she had least expected to lend her the much needed support.

Harry tapped his quill against the parchment, his eyes gliding bored over the open book in front of him. He was looking up the ingredients of the Oculus Potion: one of the three potions he would have to brew in order to pass his exam. Not that he wasn't grateful to have received the list – it made studying for the exams a lot easier – but that didn't take away the fact that researching potions was boring.

He couldn't complain, though; Draco had taken care of the other two potions and was now looking
up a particular Transfiguration spell.

"Trouble with looking up the ingredients?" Draco's question broke through his thoughts and he quickly shook his head, dispelling the light drowsiness that had been sneaking up on him.

"No, I found it in this book," Harry replied and hid his yawn behind his hand.

Draco pulled the book slightly towards him and studied the potion. "Seems he's taken into account your state," he murmured, pushing the book back to the dark haired wizard.

"What?"

The blond nodded towards his own written list of ingredients. "The potions he decided on are all safe for someone with your condition," he explained. He smirked. "Not to mention that I think he slightly adjusted the exam for you."

Harry narrowed his eyes, not liking the smirk on his lover's face, nor his comment. "What do you mean with that?"

"Let's keep it at the fact that the regular exams will be vastly different," Draco chuckled amused and dodged the fist that was aimed for his arm.

"Bastard," Harry huffed and convinced himself he wasn't pouting. Even though he and Snape got along better than the previous years, he strongly doubted that the stern Potions Master would adjust the difficulty level of his exams for just one student. Especially when that student was the son of someone he had loathed for a long time.

He turned his attention back to the potions book; he wanted to look up everything before dinner started. Shifting slightly on his chair – the wooden chairs were taxing on his back – he picked up his quill again and dipped it into the ink. Right when the sharp tip of the quill was about to touch the paper, Harry froze.

What had just happened?

Not realising it, he held his breath and waited.

There.

It was a weird feeling in his stomach; some kind of fluttery feeling, as if he had swallowed something with wings and those wings were now beating softly against his stomach. It stopped and Harry slowly released his breath. Maybe he was hungry; it had been a while since he had eaten something after all. He probably should go to the …

It started again. This time the fluttery feeling was stronger, feeling more like something weakly pressing against his skin.

He hunched forwards slightly, focusing all his attention on his stomach. Hesitantly, he lowered his right hand – dropping the quill on the paper, which made the ink spread out slowly over the parchment – and placed it on his stomach. His sweater proved to be a barrier and he slipped his hand underneath it, placing it firmly on his rounded stomach – now easily visible if he didn't wear his belt; tension building in his body as he waited.

It was softly pushing against his thumb and a gasp tore through his throat when he realised what the feeling was.
"Harry? What's wrong?" Draco asked alarmed and leant towards him, worry clearly visible in his eyes.

Harry looked up wide eyed; his hand still firmly pressed against his belly. "I think the baby's kicking!" he whispered and excitement rung through his voice. Only the realisation that they were in the library and would attract unwanted attention kept him from laughing excitedly. He couldn't believe he was finally feeling his baby kick!

"What?" Draco's mouth dropped open from shock, until he realised it and closed it again hastily. "Are you serious?"

"Yeah, here, feel. The kicking isn't strong yet, but I can feel it," Harry said smiling and grabbed Draco's hand to push it firmly against his stomach.

Draco was leaning half over the table; the edge of it was digging against his hips, which must have hurt, but he didn't seem to care about that. A concentrated frown was etched into his forehead while he waited for their baby to make its presence known again.

"The baby was kicking here," Harry said slowly while he guided Draco's hand over his stomach, trying to predict the next kick – if there would be one. One of the books Narcissa had sent him told him that the kicking wouldn't be frequent at first, so it was possible that he wouldn't be able to feel it kick for a while.

Ah, but there it was. It was a bit lower than before, but the baby was definitely kicking again.

When he looked up again, his breath hitched when he was faced with a look of fascinated wonder on Draco's face.

"That's our baby, moving around in you," Draco murmured dazed and his astonished eyes met glittering green ones.

"Yeah, it is," Harry smiled and nearly trembled in his seat from happiness. Ever since he had decided to keep the baby, he had been wondering how it would be to feel the baby kick and he had tried to imagine it. His imagination didn't even come close to the real thing; it was as if he now finally realised that there was an actual human being inside of him, depending on him. Had his mother felt the same way when she felt him kicking for the first time?

This feeling of excitement, happiness, elation?

A hand was placed on his cheek and lips met his in a slow, tender kiss.

"I love you," Draco whispered against his mouth.

"I love you too," Harry murmured and felt another vague flutter in his stomach, making him smile brightly.

One person hidden underneath a Cloaked Visibility spell – a spell which strongly resembled an Invisibility Cloak – regarded the scene in front of him with macabre interest. Who would have thought that something like this would happen to the Saviour of the Wizarding World? He was surprised none of the papers had made this particular discovery – then again, Potter could be using one of those belts to hide his stomach. That was most likely the case as he couldn't see any rounding of his stomach when Potter's shirt slipped up.

He didn't care how it had happened – that wasn't important. What was important was the fact that
Potter was currently carrying a child.

A child which would leave him vulnerable.

A smirk grew on the eavesdropper's face. Male pregnancies were always monitored closely; the risk of something happening to either the unborn child or the man carrying it was noticeably bigger than during a normal pregnancy. Not only that, but the man was also more vulnerable during the entire pregnancy as most of his magic was used to support the baby's growth.

He couldn't wait to inform the other man of this particular news; he was certain he would be glad to hear this particular titbit. The other one would know how to use this information in the best way.

Quickly he turned around and marched away, before either Potter's or Malfoy's beast could detect his presence; it wouldn't do to be caught before he could send his letter. Not after all the trouble the other had went through to teach him these useful spells.

"So there you have it," Gryffindor stated nonchalantly.

Severus stared at the object on the table. He had suspected it, but to hear his suspicions confirmed – it didn't make him feel relieved. If anything, it made him more wary, more tense. This was not exactly an object they could easily trifle with; this was the object that had been the cause of various, long lasting clan disputes and multiple Wizarding families had gone extinct by battling over it and losing.

And now it had landed in his hands.

What had Albus been thinking to hide such a dangerous object? Or the most important issue was: why hadn't he taken it with him? That would certainly have given him an advantage.

"So it really is the Elder Wand," Lucius murmured and studied the white wand with critical eyes. "Well, this certainly makes things interesting."

"Only you would call a dangerous object 'interesting'," Severus snorted harshly and crossed his arms.

Grey eyes looked at him amused. "Well, what else would I call it? You have to admit, Severus, that it is rather satisfying to know that the Deathly Hallows really exist. Many years people have thought it to be a fairy tale and now we have one of the three objects in possession."

"You actually have two of the three," Slytherin piped up with a faint smile. "Although, it is more accurate to state that two of the three are in the castle, but the other object belongs to someone else."

"The other two are supposedly an Invisibility Cloak and the Resurrection Stone," Severus muttered, recalling the short tale he had read about them years ago. "Which one of them would be …" His next breath intake was sharp as realisation sunk in. He narrowed his eyes and scowled at Slytherin. "Don't tell me Potter's Invisibility Cloak is the second Deathly Hallow!"

"Harry's Cloak?" Lucius repeated surprised. "You mean the Potters were in possession of a Deathly Hallow?"

"Well, the Potters are descendants of the Peverell family," Gryffindor remarked bored. "That family was rumoured to be the first one to be in possession of the Deathly Hallows. It would not surprise me if that blasted Cloak was passed down from father to son."

"I wonder if we'll be able to find the third Hallow," Lucius mused thoughtfully.
Severus threw him a sharp look. "Why on earth would you want to bring those three objects together? They were separated for a reason."

"You will be in need of the Deathly Hallows if you want to complete the ritual to seal Dumbledore's magic," Ravenclaw stated calmly and swung her leg over the other one. "They were not named like that to strike fear in the Wizarding population. When used in the right ritual, they will completely seal a wizard's or witch's magic, absorbing it and giving it back to the universe. We all know what happens to wizards and witches who are deprived of their magic."

Yes, they all knew what happened.

Severus grimaced and looked away from the Elder Wand, which seemed to taunt him. "Can the ritual be completed without their aid?"

If it was possible, he would like to avoid using the Deathly Hallows. It wasn't even the issue about finding the third one – bringing the three in close contact to each other was just asking for trouble. Ever since he had brought the wand to Hogwarts, it had been buzzing lightly, almost sounding like a satisfied cat purring. He didn't dare to guess whether it was the general magic infused in Hogwarts that made it act like that or the proximity to Potter's Cloak.

Ravenclaw's eyes were unreadable. "It is possible – but you would be risking your own lives in the progress."

"And we wouldn't risk them when using those cursed objects?" Severus couldn't help but snap.

She sighed and shook her head. "I am not going to lie to you. Yes, it will be risky to use them in a ritual – especially this particular one – but it will definitely be safer than not using them. They will be too busy absorbing Dumbledore's magic to be interested in any of you."

"So either way, it will be risky for us to complete the ritual," Lucius commented dryly. He let out a soft sigh and glanced at his dark haired lover. "Have you told Black and Lupin about this?"

"If I had, don't you think they would be here now?" Severus replied coolly. "You should know by now how Black is. That idiot would try to use the wand as soon as he knew what it was."

Lucius chuckled softly. "I think you aren't giving him enough credit, Severus."

"You only say that, because you aren't forced to see him every day," the Potions Master muttered darkly.

Slytherin clapped his hands. "For now, this information can remain between us, but I advise you to inform them soon, Severus. The sooner they know about this, the better."

"Should we tell Harry about the Deathly Hallows?" Lucius asked pensively.

"Let Draco talk to him about it," Severus answered shortly. "I wouldn't mention anything about the real purpose of the ritual to Potter, though."

"Why not? Do you think he would be opposed to it if he knows the result?" Lucius inquired interested. "I don't think he is still fond of the old coot."

"I very much doubt he cares for Albus," Severus replied and took a sip of his tea. "That does not mean however that he will agree with the result of the ritual. He may be a Slytherin now, but he acts too much like a Gryffindor in situations like this one."
"I presume you are talking about honour," Gryffindor spoke up gruffly. "I'll have you know that nothing is wrong with being in possession of that. It is far better than this so called cunningness Salazar prefers."

Slytherin chuckled; an amused glint in his eyes. "In the end, it is preferable to have both."

Gryffindor just scoffed and looked away.

"Let's first focus on finding Hufflepuff," Severus said harshly, throwing the Elder Wand a suspicious glare. "We'll worry about the last Hallow after that."

Lucius inclined his head. "Seems like the best course of action for now." He threw the three Founders an inquiring look. "Would any of you have an idea as to where she is hidden?"

"Not a clue," Gryffindor muttered gruffly. "It's not like the bastard was nice enough to let us know where the others were located."

"There are ways to find her," Ravenclaw said soothingly, placing a finger against her lips. "As soon as we have found the best way, we will inform you."

Severus sighed and rose up; this particular conversation was finished as far as he was concerned and so there was no need for the wand to remain in the open.

While Lucius continued conversing with the three Founders, Severus picked up the Elder Wand and brought it back to his storage room. In his private storage room he had a box which was warded heavy and would make sure nobody could touch the object locked up inside of it – and prevented the object from escaping.

The perfect place for this particular object.

Carefully the wand was placed in the box and the Potions Master wasted no time in locking the box, raising the various, complex wards around it. Ravenclaw had warned them that the wand would need an order soon, lest it would grow impatient and start its own rampage.

He stared down at the box contemplatively for a while, before he turned around abruptly and left.

9th of February

On Sunday, the sun had started battling with the clouds and had won. It wasn't exactly spring weather, but people had gone outside, eager to soak up the small rays of sunlight. Who knew when the weather would turn ugly again? Best to enjoy it while they could.

Draco and Harry had also gone outside with Mara trailing behind them while she silently grumbled over the puddles of rain left on the ground. Ruby had decided to stay indoors, accompanying Sapphire, leaving the guarding of his master up to Mara. Garin had disappeared soon after Harry was done with his breakfast, stating he would hunt for his own food.

In unspoken agreement, Draco and Harry walked away from the small groups of mingling students, who were occupying the space in front of the castle, and made their way to the right of the castle. They weren't planning on entering the Forbidden Forest, but lingering close to the edge had the advantage of the other students leaving them alone as they had no desire to get close to the forest.

Mara huffed softly and walked further, investigating some of the bushes nearby.
"Did you sleep well?" Draco asked, slipping his hand free from Harry so that he could pull Harry closer to him by his hips; one hand sneaking underneath his coat to rest on his back.

"Yeah, you?" Harry murmured, shivering slightly when a chilly breeze passed over them.

Draco grimaced lightly. "Spending so many nights in your quarters made me forget how badly Blaise can snore," he replied dryly and smiled when Harry's light laughter rang in the air.

"Poor you," Harry grinned and patted Draco's cheek with his gloved hand.

"Yeah, yeah, you know how annoying his snoring can be?" Draco muttered and pursed his lips.

"You forgot I shared a dorm with other people for six years," Harry retorted. "Trust me, I've had my fair share of other people snoring. I resorted to using Silencing charms."

"I had to use them last night. Think Daphne knows how much her boyfriend snores?" the blond smirked, tightening his grip on Harry's hips.

Harry chuckled. "Oh, probably not. Otherwise he would have stopped by now."

The soft hoot of an owl made them look up and to Harry's surprise, the brown owl flew towards him. It was carrying a rather large, square package and it beat its wings rapidly to stay up in the air in front of Harry.

"You're expecting something?" Draco asked curiously, eyeing the brown owl warily.

Harry shook his head, his eyes narrowing. "No, didn't order anything. It isn't an owl I recognize either."

"Could be from those Weasley twins?" Draco suggested uncertainly.

Harry grabbed his wand. "No, I know what kind of owl they use and it's not this one," he muttered and started casting the various spells he knew which would detect any trace of dark magic on the package.

Nothing happened, except for the owl hooting impatiently, thrusting his paw out.

"Looks like there are no Dark spells on this package," Harry mumbled and lowered his wand.

Draco looked at the owl contemplatively and picked up his own wand. "Well, let's see what's inside."

Mara slunk closer to them and her eyes were fixated on the package.

The owl flew away immediately once it was relieved from its baggage and Harry held the package carefully between his hands. It looked rather normal: it was simply wrapped in brown paper, tied together by a string. There was no note attached to it.

Sharing a wary look with Draco, Harry carefully untied the string, pushing away the paper. Inside was a brown box and after a moment of hesitation, Harry removed the lid; highly aware of Draco's presence next to him.

And instantly dropped the box with a horrified gasp once his brain understood the image that his eyes were taking in.

He felt Draco hastily pushing him back, exclaiming something in disgust, Mara growling loudly, but
all he could focus on was the content of the box.

Inside the box was the bloodied body of a dead, unborn baby; it was a baby boy and its fine, dark hair was matted with blood and something slime like. His small eyes were open; light blue staring up at the sky.

The note, which had been placed on top of the baby's belly, ruffled and flew upwards. It hovered in front of the two wizards and a very familiar voice spoke warmly, "It seems congratulations are in order, dear boy. It is rather difficult to find an appropriate gift, but I hope this one conveys my feelings appropriately. Do take care of yourself and the little one, Harry. It wouldn't do for either one of you to get hurt."

As soon as the last words died out, the letter was engulfed by a white blue fire, until nothing remained but ashes that were taken away by the wind.

Trembling knees giving out, Harry sunk to the ground, both of his hands covering his stomach while his wide eyes stared at the box in front of him.

Bile rose up in his throat and he barely turned around on time to avoid splattering either Draco or Mara; his breakfast came up in a rush, burning his throat while he dry heaved. Tendrils of panic slipped around him, slowly tightening their hold. He was only vaguely aware of Draco dropping down next to him after having hastily covered the box, talking to him, trying to snap him out of his panic, while the fluttering in his stomach increased; his baby’s reaction to his distress.

They had been found out.

Dumbledore knew about the baby he was carrying.

His baby was no longer safe.
Author's note: Wow, okay, this is later than the previous ones, but I had to finish this chapter today as I've been busy the past few weeks. At least I still managed to keep my schedule, right? It also turned out quite long (around 10 000 words).

Warnings: implied lemon; some drama; some fluff; Valentine's day. I think that's it. After all those angsty, heavy chapters, I figured we were due for some fluff.

Additional note: in the near future (normally) there will be two side oneshots posted for this story: the Valentine's day between Severus and Lucius and Remus' talk with Sirius after the ordeal in Dumbledore's house. Once they are posted, I'll announce it in this story.

Also apologies if there are mistakes left behind.

Disclaimer: I don't own Harry Potter - J.K. Rowling owns it.

I hope you'll enjoy this chapter and a happy Halloween (for the ones interested, I posted two Halloween oneshots as well)

Chapter 24: Trust in us

9th of February

One moment Harry had been mumbling something inaudibly while Draco tried his best to snap him out of his shock and the next, Harry slumped forwards and the blond barely managed to grab him on time.

"Harry?" Draco said sharply and cursed when he saw how pale Harry had become. Apparently the shock had made him faint.

He threw a hate filled glare at the cause of Harry's distress; if only he could find that son of a bitch! He didn't know how the old man had discovered their baby's existence, but that was the least of his concerns at the moment. He needed to get Harry back inside and call Lupin so he could examine Harry.

A spell tied up the package messily; tight enough so that the content wouldn't spill. He'd rather destroy the box, but he knew either Lupin or Severus would want to take a look. At the very least they should be alerted.

"Mara, can you bring that package with us? I'll take Harry," Draco instructed and the snow leopard released a confirming growl.

Before Draco picked up his lover, he sent a Patronus to both Lupin and Severus, so that they would be there when he arrived. He'd rather not waste too much time waiting for either one of them.

After pocketing his wand, Draco rearranged the limp body of his lover; he slipped one arm around
Harry's shoulders and one arm underneath his legs. Once he was certain that he had a firm grip on Harry, he stood up, making certain that Harry's head rested against his shoulder and he wouldn't be jostled too much.

Setting a brisk pace to the castle, Draco didn't spare the curious bystanders a single look. Trying to ignore the disgust and fear swirling around in his stomach, he focused on getting Harry in his quarters as soon as possible. He didn't know how bad the sudden shock had been, but he wasn't taking any chances.

He gave the portrait the password in a terse voice and upon entering, he was met by the concerned face of Lupin and the unreadable one of his godfather.

"Sirius is on his way. What happened?" Lupin asked worriedly and his eyes sharpened when they caught sight of Harry.

Draco lowered Harry on the couch, busying himself with removing both their robes and the rest of their winter gear.

Without prompting, Mara dropped the box on the table and stepped back with an angry snarl.

"Draco," Severus said sharply.

Draco stilled and stared down at Harry, unconsciously gripping his shoulder firmly.

"Dumbledore sent Harry that package," he murmured and tightened his jaw. "I think Harry fainted from shock; can you examine him?"

Lupin nodded tersely and after shooting the box a distrustful look, he crossed the room and started chanting spells; some of which Draco recognized from his Healing lessons.

Now that Harry was receiving proper help, Draco forced himself to relax a bit and calm down his muddled thoughts. He needed a clear head if he wanted to explain what exactly had occurred outside.

"Didn't you use spells to check for Dark magic?" Severus scowled and before Draco could reply, his godfather used various spells to check the box for any lingering magic.

"Yes, we checked. Do you really think we would open a package without checking first?" Draco answered flatly. He didn't need to look at the older man to know whether he had opened the box; his low hiss of disgust was clear enough.

"Nothing seems wrong with either Harry or the baby," Lupin announced and took a step back. "The shock made his body shut down, but he'll wake up soon."

"Thank Merlin," Draco sighed and his shoulders slumped in relief.

Lupin caught sight of the open box and he inhaled sharply. "Is that …"

"All right, what the hell is going on?" Black burst in the room, coming to an abrupt halt when he saw his godson on the couch.

Draco took a deep breath to steady himself and then relayed everything that had happened to the three older men, including the letter which had burned up.

The silence that had fallen over them after Draco stopped talking was broken by Black.
"How the fuck did that son of a bitch discover the pregnancy?" he snapped, smacking his hand against the wall.

"I don't know. Harry wears a belt every time he leaves this room and we don't talk about the baby where others can hear us," Draco replied and sunk down on the couch; his face hidden behind his hands. Fatigue was sneaking up on him; just how much would they have to endure still before they could live their lives without constantly having to guard themselves?

"Maybe the person who cursed Harry's broom is the same one who discovered the baby?" Lupin suggested with a faint grimace; lines of worry marred his forehead.

"It wouldn't be the first time Albus made use of a spy," Severus murmured contemplatively.

"We need to inform Minerva and Kingsley," Lupin said firmly. "If Albus can send a package like that through all the wards, we need to adjust them."

"Should we send Harry elsewhere?" Black asked in a strange subdued voice.

Draco's head shot up; sending Harry away?

"Like where?" Lupin inquired, tilting his head.

Black shrugged. "Maybe Potter or Malfoy Manor? Those are fairly well protected. My cousin can look after him; I doubt that bastard will be able to get past those wards."

"You can't send Harry away!" Draco protested, his hands forming fists.

Black scowled at him. "What, you don't care about Harry's safety?"

"Of course I care about his safety!" Draco snapped and rose up. "But do you think Harry would want to be send away for Merlin knows how long?"

"If we explain why …" Black began, frustration slipping in his voice.

"You really think Harry will be willing to leave the school?" Draco lowered his voice, glaring at his cousin. "Besides, have you considered his luck throughout all these years? He probably has the worst luck of everyone. He always manages to get in trouble. At least here we can keep an eye on him at all times."

"I would appreciate it very much if you stopped talking about me as if I was a child," an annoyed voice piped up.

"Harry!" Draco turned around quickly, helping his lover sit up.

Harry pushed his fussing hands away and scowled at him. "I fainted, but I'm not an invalid. I can sit up on my own, thank you very much."

Draco couldn't help but roll his eyes. "I just wanted to help."

"How are you feeling, Harry?" Lupin asked and peered at him.

The dark haired wizard sighed, rubbing his forehead. "I'm fine. Don't really know why I fainted, though," he muttered.

"Can you remember what happened before you lost consciousness?" Lupin inquired.
A shudder went through Harry and Draco reached out to grab his hand, giving it a comforting squeeze.

"Yeah, I remember what happened," he mumbled and swallowed. "I just don't understand what he was aiming at by sending me that … that package."

"He probably hoped that the shock would cause a miscarriage," Black spoke bluntly, crossing his arms.

Harry looked stricken; his free hand pressing down on his stomach.

"Subtle as always, mutt," Severus murmured.

Lupin threw his lover a scathing glare.

"What is going to happen now?" Harry asked uncertainly and he seemed to do his best to avoid looking at the box.

"We will warn Minerva about this," Lupin answered; his mouth a thin line. "The wards around the school need to be strengthened."

"Do I need to leave?" Harry asked softly; the hand on his stomach balled into a fist.

"Do you want to?" Black asked and raised an eyebrow.

Soundlessly Harry shook his head, biting his lip.

"You're playing with fire, Potter," Severus muttered darkly.

"I'm not letting him drive me away," Harry retorted stubbornly.

"We'll let you rest now," Lupin announced calmly and then his face hardened when he picked up the box. "We need to alert Kingsley too. Maybe this will speed up the search."

Severus left the room without another word; Black and Lupin following closely behind. Lupin offered them a strained smile and Black gave them both a rough squeeze in their shoulder.

Harry relaxed somewhat once the box was gone; his fist curling open until it laid flat on his stomach.

"How are you feeling?" Draco asked softly.

Mara and Ruby had temporarily retreated to Harry's bedroom, leaving Sapphire and Garin to keep the two wizards company.

"Still a bit shaken, but I'll be all right," Harry answered after a short bout of silence. "I can't believe he knows about the baby now. We've been so careful about it!"

"I know," Draco murmured and crept closer to his lover. He made certain that Harry could see his arms reaching for him – too quick movements still startled him – and embraced him as tightly as he dared. His face was hidden in soft, dark hair while Harry's face was pressed against his shoulder. He felt trembling arms coming around his shoulders and Harry let out a shuddering sigh.

"He won't be able to harm our baby, I swear," Draco whispered. "I won't allow it."

Harry merely nodded and tightened his grip.
Draco felt helpless; he had assumed they would be able to keep the child a secret from Dumbledore, but somehow their cover was blown. Somewhere in the school a spy was keeping an eye on them and probably reporting everything he or she saw. Did this person know about their outings? Draco didn't think that was the case. If the spy knew about them, they would have encountered Dumbledore at either Potter Manor or his own house.

They would need to hurry up with their search. The sooner they could perform the ritual the better. The longer this whole ordeal was dragged out, the more dangerous it would become for Harry.

Draco tightened his jaw when he remembered a particular conversation he had had with his father during the Christmas holidays.

It was Boxing Day and Lucius had requested Draco's presence in his office after he had finished eating his breakfast.

Leaving his pregnant boyfriend in his mother's care – who was more than delighted to talk with him – Draco made his way to his father's office; curiosity blooming up in him.

He knocked on the closed door and upon hearing his father's voice granting him permission to enter, he slipped inside; the door closing with a soft 'click'.

"Draco, take a seat," Lucius murmured and finished signing a letter.

Draco sunk down in the chair in front of the desk, vividly remembering the last time he had been here.

"Thank you for the present, Father," Draco spoke as soon as he had the complete attention of the older man.

"You are an adult now. You will be receiving more duties from now on," Lucius replied. "That file is just the beginning."

"I won't disappoint you," Draco promised solemnly, thinking back at the file safely tucked away in his desk for the time being.

"I know you won't," Lucius retorted calmly. He leant slightly forwards, placing a thin file in front of him, while his son basked in the glow of his father's acknowledgement. "I called you here, because we need to discuss an important matter."

"Which matter?" Draco inquired curiously. Would it be about one of his father's investments?

"It is about the pregnancy," Lucius answered, opening the file.

Draco's back was ramrod straight at the mention of his child. "What about it?" he asked tersely.

"I finished my research regarding the baby yesterday," Lucius continued, looking down at the gathered papers with a slight frown on his face.

"Did something come up?" Draco asked apprehensively. His father's frown wasn't exactly comforting him. Was there something wrong with the baby?

"There was a lot of interesting information left behind by our ancestor," Lucius started slowly, tapping the paper on top of the pile with a finger. "I looked at the practical information first and this is something that Harry needs to hear as well. He'll need to take a potion a month before his estimated due date, which will help accommodate his body during the birth. I'll talk to Severus about
it, so that he can brew it. I'm not going to risk the health of my grandchild and my son-in-law, because of an incompetent brewer. According to the information left behind by Lucian Harry won't be in labour for long."

"What exactly is 'not long'?'" Draco interrupted him puzzled.

"Lucian mentioned that it wouldn't take more than six hours for the baby to be born if there are no complications," Lucius replied; his eyes flitting over the papers absentmindedly.

"Was there other information present?" Draco pressed further, having heard the faint hesitant tone in his father's voice.

The older man sighed suddenly and looked up from his contemplation of the documents. He clasped his hands together and said soberly, "I'm certain you have heard before that male pregnancies are rather delicate."

Draco nodded warily, already not liking the way this conversation was going.

"It seems that the bond between you and Harry is both a curse and a blessing," Lucius continued slowly; his eyes hooded. "Blessing in that it makes protecting each other easier, as it will give your magical power a boost should you need it, but it also makes the pregnancy more difficult than it already is."

"How so?" Draco managed to bring out, despite the sudden dryness of his mouth.

"Harry will need your presence near him the further his pregnancy progresses. In his current state, it doesn't matter much yet if you stay away from him for a few weeks. However, once he is past the seventh month mark, leaving him alone for a longer period of time can be dangerous." Lucius took a deep breath. "As you are aware of, the baby saps his energy, both physical and magical, but the bond between you two uses both your magic as well. So in reality, Harry's magic is currently being shared between him, the baby and the bond. Your magic – and therefore your presence – is needed to make sure the balance is maintained. Without your presence, his magic won't be able to ground itself and will end up giving too much to either the bond or the baby."

His father didn't need to tell him what would happen if Harry's magic couldn't ground itself: Draco clenched his hands in his trousers and gritted his teeth. Certainly he had known that Harry would be more vulnerable the further the pregnancy progressed, but he hadn't expected him to be that vulnerable. If Harry would be attacked in the last trimester of his pregnancy, chances were that he wouldn't be able to defend himself properly with his magic being distributed between the bond and the baby.

"Listen, Draco, I did not tell you this to make you afraid," Lucius spoke softly and his grey eyes gazed at his son concerned. "I simply wanted to warn you of the potential danger Harry can face if you are not by his side."

Draco licked his lips, trying to order his thoughts. "So as long as Harry and I stay near each other, there shouldn't be any problems?" If so, that wouldn't exactly be a problem; he had never been planning on leaving Harry and having the other man carrying his baby had only solidified his feelings even more. If there had been any doubt about his feelings for Harry – not that there ever was – then this pregnancy had made him realise just how much he loved the other wizard.

Lucius inclined his head. "Exactly. This does not mean you can never leave him alone, but there shouldn't be too much time passing either."
"Thank you for letting me know, father," Draco murmured, feeling slightly overwhelmed.

"It was the least I could do."

"Draco?"

Draco shook his head when Harry's voice broke through his thoughts; dark green eyes were regarding him worriedly.

Mara padded over, pressing her nose against his back in a silent offer of support.

"Sorry, I was a bit lost in thought," Draco apologized, absentmindedly patting Mara's head.

Harry's eyes slid away from him; a peculiar look crossing over his face. "Can you help me with the Potions' homework? I have trouble finding the answer to the fifth question," he asked out of the blue, pulling himself out of Draco's one armed hug, though he kept a hand on Draco's knee.

Draco floundered a bit at the unexpected, random question until he realised Harry's real intention and his face softened; Harry was trying to regain some normalcy after Dumbledore's unwanted 'present'. Harry would have preferred to go flying now, Draco knew, eager to try out his new broom, but his condition forbade him from flying now. Pregnant people past the four month mark were cautioned not to fly after all.

Still feeling somewhat shaky, Draco accepted the offer. "Yeah, I'll help you."

Anything that would distract him from his dark thoughts was good.

The next day, both Draco and Harry were called to the Headmistress' office, where Shacklebolt was waiting for them. They were requested to give their memories of Sunday afternoon. The Head Auror suggested the presence of a couple of his most trusted and highest ranked Aurors near the school, but Harry vehemently denied the offer, stating he had enough protection. He noticed how Draco opened his mouth to argue about it, but seemed to consider it and he closed his mouth with a look of resignation on his face.

Shacklebolt didn't agree with Harry's decision, but ultimately he couldn't do anything without Harry's permission – knowing by now that the young man would find a way around his guards – and so he left, cautioning both wizards to stay on their guard.

There were students who pestered Harry and Draco about Harry's sudden fainting spell on Sunday, but they backed off once they were faced with either a wand or the large, glinting teeth of either Ruby or Mara.

The rest of the week went by without much trouble; the students became too jittery with excitement for Valentine's day to pay attention to either Harry or Draco and the couple was left alone.

14th of February

Despite the previous couple of weeks, Harry woke up with a smile on Valentine's day; anticipation thrumming through his body.

He snuggled deeper in his bed, pulling the blanket to his shoulders, enjoying the warmth that surrounded him. He had fallen asleep with Draco last night, but the latter wasn't there anymore. The faint sound of a shower running alerted him about Draco's whereabouts.
Suddenly he wasn't certain anymore whether the gift was appropriate for Valentine's day; it was certainly unique and something Draco wouldn't have received before, but maybe the meaning behind it would be too heavy for this particular holiday.

Harry let out a sigh, which made some of the black strands flutter weakly. Well, there was no use in doubting it. He wanted to convey his feelings and this gift seemed the best way to do it. It had taken some time to look it up, but he had found it with Draco none the wiser. He could only hope that Draco would accept it.

Biting his lip, he rolled over to his side; eyes staring blankly at the opposite wall while his mind was miles away, mulling over the gift, wondering whether it would have been smarter to get another present as some sort of back up, in case the first one went completely wrong.

His thought process was interrupted by a pair of warm lips.

He blinked and focused on the blond in front of him. Draco was kneeling on the ground; his arms crossed, pressing into the mattress; his eyes glittering softly while some droplets of water fell down from his wet hair on his shoulders. He was still naked, save for the towel wrapped around his hips.

"Happy Valentine's day," Draco murmured, sticking out a hand to caress Harry's cheek, while he dropped another kiss on Harry's lips, clearly not minding the morning breath.

"Happy Valentine's day to you as well," Harry replied softly, returning the kiss. "You're up early," he continued when his eyes caught sight of the clock, which showed that it was not even seven o'clock.

Draco shrugged; rising up so that he could sit down on the bed, next to Harry. "Woke up early and couldn't go back to sleep, so I decided to take a shower already. Sorry if I woke you up."

"You didn't," Harry murmured, rubbing a hand over his cheek; blinking drowsily.

Sapphire jumped on the bed and made her way to Harry, bending her head to but it against his hand – a silent demand to be petted. With a soft chuckle, her owner acquiesced and rubbed with two fingers behind her ear, making the cat purr loudly while she started kneading the blanket softly.

Fingers tucking a stray lock of his hair out of his face made him blink and look up, right in amused, grey eyes.

"What do you say of skipping dinner in the Great Hall tonight and staying here instead. We can have a house elf bring us food," Draco suggested in a soft voice.

A smile tugged at Harry's lips and he grabbed the hand, pulling it away from his hair to press a kiss on the knuckles. "I'd love that," he murmured and they shared another tender kiss before they were interrupted by Garin slithering into the room.

"The whole castle smells too sweet," the snake complained, twisting around one of the bedposts until his whole body – which by now was quite an impressive length – was wrapped around the wood.

Harry muffled a chuckle, ignoring Draco's inquisitive look. "It is Valentine's day after all. The smell should be gone by tomorrow."

Garin hissed annoyed, twisting himself even tighter around the bedpost. "I will get a headache if I have to stay outside for too long," he hissed darkly; his eyes glowing softly.
"You can stay in my quarters," Harry retorted, sitting up. Sapphire looked at him with narrowed eyes when he stopped petting her, but laid down and curled up, closing her eyes with a sigh. "I doubt anyone will try something today."

"It is better to be safe than sorry." Ruby padded into the room, his tail swishing softly back and forth. "Mara and I will accompany you."

"Although we will stay away once you retire to your rooms again," Mara added cheekily. "I have never been interested in the human mating rituals."

Harry spluttered in embarrassment while Draco let out an exasperated groan.

Not waiting to hear whether Mara would say something else, Harry nearly jumped out of his bed, pulling his shirt down which had been riding up. "I'm going to take a shower," he mumbled and fled the room. The last thing he heard before he closed the bathroom door was Draco asking Mara whether it had been really necessary to say that.

Like Harry had predicted, none of the students were interested in taunting him today. They were all too busy flirting with their crushes or handing over their presents if they were in a relationship. Everywhere in the castle, couples were softly giggling, whispering sweet nothings in each other's ears while their hands never strayed far from the other person's body.

When Draco and Harry had arrived in the Great Hall for breakfast, they had seen Blaise handing over a large bouquet of red and white roses to Daphne, who had blushed and averted her gaze, but had accepted the bouquet with a small smile. Later that day, Harry spotted Blaise with a vivid red mark in his neck, his tie crooked, a satisfied smirk on his face and his wrist adorned with an expensive looking watch.

Throughout the entire day, butterflies were kicking up a storm in Harry's stomach whenever he was reminded of what would happen once he and Draco returned to his quarters. None of the lessons managed to capture his attention for long; after a few minutes his mind would start drifting, trying to predict Draco's reaction when he would receive his present.

Draco noticed his absentmindedness and during lunch, he softly asked whether something was wrong. Harry simply shook his head and resolved to not think about his present anymore for the rest of the afternoon. He couldn't change it anymore, so he would just have to live with whatever Draco's reaction would be.

Finally, after an afternoon that seemed to drag on, seemingly intent on making Harry's nerves even worse than this morning, his classes were done and the entire evening would be dedicated to him and Draco only.

Once Hagrid announced the end of the class, Harry stuffed his quill and notes back in his bag and hurried back to the castle, after waving goodbye to the half giant.

Draco was already at their designated meeting spot, having just finished his Healing class. A smile bloomed up on his face when he looked up and saw Harry approaching him.

"Hey," he breathed out and placed his hands on Harry's hips, pulling him forwards until they were closely pressed together. "You're cold," he muttered in Harry's neck when Harry's cold nose touched his cheek.

"Being outside for an hour will do that to you," Harry replied dryly. "The warming charms didn't
really help much."

"Well then, let's go warm you up," Draco smirked and with a wink, he straightened his back and grabbed Harry's hand, tugging him along.

Ignoring the loud chatter of the other students filling the hallway, they slipped between them and disappeared into the dungeons where they encountered nobody as there were no Potion classes taking place during the afternoon.

Mara was already curled up in front of the fire with Sapphire sleeping on her back. Ruby shook out his fur and joined the two cats while Garin made himself at home on the lion's broad shoulders.

"I thought we could start with dinner first," Draco suggested and as soon as those words had left his mouth, the table in front of the couch was filled with several plates of steaming food and bowls of fruit covered with a thin coat of chocolate.

"How did you manage to convince the house elves to prepare a separate meal for us?" Harry inquired curiously, staring at the various dishes while the delicious smell was tempting him to dig in.

Draco smirked and placed both their bags against the wall before helping Harry removing his cloak, gloves and scarf.

"As soon as they heard who would be eating it, they practically fell over each other to be the one preparing the dishes," Draco explained amused and led his lover to the couch.

"I don't think I can eat everything," Harry mumbled, sinking down on the couch while he eyed the various dishes.

Draco joined him; sitting down next to him, their thighs touching each other; the warmth of their skin seeping through the cloth of their trousers.

"Eat as much as you want," Draco said and filled a wineglass with a red liquid which looked like wine.

When Draco offered the glass to Harry, the latter raised his hand to ward it off.

"I can't drink wine, remember," Harry reminded the blond.

"I know," Draco retorted dryly. "That's why I asked for grape juice. I figured that would be slightly fancier than water or apple juice."

"Oh, thank you," Harry said surprised and accepted the glass. He took a tentative sip from the juice and was pleasantly surprised to note that it tasted sweet – though not in an overpowering sense – and not slightly sour as he had expected.

"Here." Draco offered him a small toasted piece of bread, covered with some kind of white meat with a droplet of some red sauce on it, holding it in front of Harry's mouth.

Harry raised an eyebrow. "I can feed myself," he remarked amused and felt slightly embarrassed.

Draco shrugged. "I know, but I want to do this. Lately we haven't really had any time for us alone …" he trailed off; his eyebrows slightly furrowed.

Not wanting the memory of the last couple of weeks to loom of them, not now they were slowly becoming at ease again with each other, Harry opened his mouth and was greeted by a dazzling
smile when Draco placed the toasted bread on his tongue; his fingers sweeping quickly over Harry's lips.

Before Draco could pick something else to feed him, Harry reached over and picked out a piece of apple; one side of it covered with chocolate and held it up in front of Draco's mouth, tapping the chocolate covered bit softly against his upper lip.

Without complaining, Draco opened his mouth and let Harry slip the piece of fruit inside. Right when Harry wanted to retract his hand, Draco gripped his wrist and his tongue licked Harry's thumb, removing the small speck of chocolate that had been left behind.

Harry shuddered slightly; his fingers seemed strangely sensitive tonight. Before Draco could do anything else, Harry pulled his hand back and selected a strawberry.

Grey eyes seemed to smoulder and they spent some time feeding each other, letting their lips teasingly meet each other between every few bites.

Harry made sure not to let it progress too far yet – he wanted to give his present before they would do anything more than some light kisses.

Eventually he pulled back and studied Draco carefully. His cheeks were dusted a very light pink; his lips reddish and his eyes glittered softly like diamonds.

Grey eyes lowered and Draco grabbed Harry's hand, intertwining their fingers.

"I have a present for you," he murmured with a faint smile.

"So have I," Harry replied and he felt himself becoming nervous again.

"Would you mind if we moved this to your bedroom? The couch isn't exactly comfortable," Draco asked and his faint smile seemed to tremble slightly.

Harry took a deep breath, reminding himself to remain calm. "Yeah, yeah, let's go," he mumbled and stood up.

Their pets regarded them through half lidded eyes when they walked past them, but they didn't say or do anything.

As soon as both men were in the bedroom, Harry closed the door behind him; his heart thudding quite loudly. He wondered whether Draco could hear his heart beating from where he stood.

Draco climbed on the bed after kicking off his shoes and held out his hand in a silent invitation for Harry to join him.

After removing his own shoes, Harry sunk down on the bed as well, shuffling backwards until he was sitting against his pillows.

The silence hanging between them was tense, both waiting to see who would move first. Strange how they hadn't been this nervous last year.

Draco abruptly turned around and leant over the edge of the bed, riffling through his bag. He came back up with a round vial clutched in his hand.

He didn't look at Harry when he said, "I … This is your Valentine's gift. I decided to brew it myself, because otherwise it wouldn't have arrived on time." He relaxed his hold on the vial and allowed
Harry to take it.

It was a rather plain vial, Harry mused when he stared at it, turning it back and forth. There was no label telling him what kind of potion it was – and there wouldn't be one, considering Draco had brewed it himself. The vial was a dark green and the liquid inside was even darker; it sloshed gently against the glass when Harry turned it around in his hand.

"What does it do?" he asked softly and looked up again.

Draco bit his lip and rubbed the back of his neck – an uncharacteristic gesture that made Harry raise an eyebrow.

"You know how memories in a Pensive work?" Draco started slowly, bringing his hand down again. He didn't wait for Harry's affirmative nod and continued, "Well, this one works a bit like a Pensive, except that it's capable of bringing up memories that people don't even remember, because too much time has passed between the events and the age they are now."

Harry furrowed his eyebrows; he had never heard of such a potion before and the purpose still eluded him. "I don't really understand," he said hesitatingly.

Draco took a deep breath and seemed to steel himself, finally looking Harry right in his eyes. "If you take one sip of his potion, you can visit a memory of an event that took place when you were still a baby."

Harry stared blankly at the vial, which suddenly felt a lot heavier. "You mean I can …"

A hand touched his knee, squeezing it gently. "You can relive your first birthday with your parents. It will be like you are right there. I mean, obviously you were right there, but you don't remember it anymore. This vial will be able to bring that memory to the surface so you can relive it again. It can bring back all the memories you have of them," Draco replied and he sounded nervous.

Harry's throat constricted and he swallowed with some difficulty. "I can see my parents again?" he managed to bring out; his voice slightly strangled.

"Yeah," Draco murmured. "I know you have pictures of them, but that isn't the same as actually remembering them. So I thought that with this you can remember them more clearly and … that way you'll remember how much they loved you. Being told that they loved you isn't the same as actually experiencing it after all."

Carefully Harry placed the vial on his nightstand and then leant forwards to hug Draco tightly, ignoring how his back protested at the strange posture.

"Thank you," he murmured thickly, pressing his face in Draco's neck. "You don't know how happy that makes me."

Arms encircled him slowly and Draco pressed a soft kiss against his temple. "I'm glad you like the present," he murmured. "I wasn't certain whether I was overstepping some boundary."

Harry pulled back a bit and shook his head. "You didn't. This gift is perfect," he reassured the other one with a trembling smile. He took a deep breath and pressed his hands against his eyes, willing the few tears to disappear. He wouldn't ruin their evening by crying – even if his tears would be from happiness.

When he felt composed enough, he lowered his hands again and looked at Draco, who returned the look with a soft smile.
"My turn to give you your present," Harry muttered and hesitated. Then he shook his head; he couldn't back out now. He had read the chapters dealing with it thoroughly and he had made sure to practice the spell until there was no chance he would accidentally screw up.

Yes, he would be taking a risk with this gift, but hadn't Draco taken a risk as well?

The next breath he took was a measured one and once he felt like he had enough control of himself, he opened his eyes again – when had he closed them? – and grabbed his wand.

"Your present isn’t a material one," he murmured and shifted around until he was sitting more comfortably against the pillows. He crossed his legs and tapped his wand softly against the bed.

"All right," Draco said slowly and he shuffled closer; he rearranged himself until he was facing Harry completely and his knees touched Harry’s.

"It’s … I’ve been looking through some books about bonds and they mentioned a spell that people sharing a bond like ours could perform," Harry started to explain; a touch of uncertainty affecting his voice.

"What does this spell do?" Draco asked curiously; his bright grey eyes fixated on Harry.

The blond's calm demeanour caused Harry to relax more and he continued, "It's called the Heart of the Soul spell." Despite Draco’s sharp intake of breath – signalling that he knew what the spell did, he went on, "This spell would bind our souls for a while and allow us to see each other's past for lack of a better word. Everything in our soul would be shown without an possibility of holding back." He fumbled with his wand, gripping it tightly. "I understand if you'd rather we don't use this spell, but I … I wanted to show you how much I trust you," he ended in a whisper; not trusting his voice to remain even if he spoke any louder.

He could feel his cheeks burning from embarrassment and he looked away, while a voice in the back of his mind mocked him, questioning why he thought the spell would be accepted by Draco.

Draco’s silence tugged at his nerves and he swallowed rather loudly. Still refusing to look up, he mumbled apologetically, "I'm sorry; I know it's a weird gift, but …"

A hand cupping his chin made him shut up and though unwillingly, he allowed the other wizard to raise his head. Fingers brushed against his cheek and a thumb stroked the fragile skin underneath his right eye gently.

"Don't apologize," Draco ordered vehemently and Harry stared at him startled. "I'm honoured that you're willing to share yourself with me. I know how much you value your privacy, so you can't imagine what an amazing present you're giving me."

Harry sat speechlessly while grey eyes shone with excitement and something that seemed to resemble … awe?

"The spell won't allow us to keep secrets," Harry brought out once he was fairly certain his voice wouldn't crack and his thundering heart had calmed down. Even though this was his present, he didn't want Draco to feel obligated to undergo the spell.

This spell was incredibly invasive: everything they had experienced – every memory, thought and emotion – would be bared to the other one. There would be no hiding or shielding possible; Occlumency wouldn't work as long as the spell was active.

There were memories that Harry preferred to keep private: memories containing his life with the
Dursleys for example. He preferred not thinking about them; they belonged to his past and they would stay there. Mentioning them would probably upset Draco and Harry didn't want to do that. He didn't want his past with the Dursleys to taint his relationship with Draco. Talking about them to Snape had been bad enough; Harry was all too happy to never mention them again.

But this spell would be the best way to show that he trusted Draco completely. Stating it out loud didn't seem enough. He had decided months ago that he wanted to spend the rest of his life with Draco and he needed Draco to know how much he loved and trusted him, as words and even actions didn't seem adequate enough.

"I know," Draco replied softly and transferred his hand from Harry's chin to his rounded stomach, where he was met by a soft, but determined kick. He smiled. "I don't need to hide myself from you. Are you certain about this?" His eyes softened. "You don't need to prove anything to me."

Harry shook his head; a smile tugging at the corners of his mouth as he relaxed again. "I want to do this," he stated firmly and raised his wand. "Are you ready?"

Draco ceased caressing his face and instead gripped Harry's free hand; their hands slipping into the hold naturally – two halves of a whole.

"Ready." He nodded and held Harry's gaze.

Feeling his baby giving another soft kick, Harry took that as encouragement and started chanting the Heart of the Soul spell.

The time of hiding was over.

Draco felt as if he was tumbling down, surrounded by a deep green that beckoned him. Harry's voice filled the space between them, dancing around them; acting like a rope which bound them together.

Anticipation, gratitude and awe were waging war inside him and he had to remind himself to keep breathing. It wouldn't do to faint while Harry was chanting the spell that would link their minds together.

Harry.

Harry, who had given him one of the most intimate presents a person could receive. Harry, who was now allowing him to see him without any barrier. Harry, who loved him so much, who trusted him so much that he didn't mind baring his all to Draco.

With this spell, there would be no going back. Strangely, that thought didn't bother Draco at all.

One moment he was still drowning in green and now he suddenly became aware of the sudden lack of Harry's voice.

His surroundings existed out of a dim, lime green light which pulsed. He was standing on in a grass field and around him, several sparks of golden light were emitted by the ground. As soon as they reached the level of Draco's eyes, they sprung apart with a high sound, as if someone tapped a knife against a wine glass.

There seemed no end to the grass and the golden sparks. Curiously, Draco took a step forwards and paused when the lap of ground underneath him trembled. Another step forwards and the trembling grew worse until he thought he was experiencing a mini earthquake.
Right when he started to worry, the ground stilled again and then purple mist rose up in front of him, twisting and turning slowly.

Fascinated, he kept standing there until the mist was done twisting itself and he was facing a thin screen, not unlike the ones he saw when he used Legilimency on someone.

Would this spell work like Legilimency? Only one way to find out.

Bracing himself, Draco reached out and quickly brushed his fingers across the screen; something cold touched his hand and he pulled back hastily with a muffled shout of surprise.

A low ticking sound reached his ears and he watched wide eyed how an image slowly filled the screen, as if it was floating upwards like a berry greeting the surface of a potion when it was thrown in the cauldron.

Once the last ripples faded away, he was staring at Harry, who was hunched over something; only his profile visible from where Draco stood.

Without realising it, Draco leant forwards until his nose touched the screen. Before he could pull back, tiny, cold hands grabbed him and pulled.

Opening his eyes – his arms still flailing around trying to steady himself – he could see Harry sitting on a toilet in a familiar bathroom with an even more familiar vial clenched between his hands.

Then Draco gasped and fell on his knees; his arms wrapped around his waist when a wave of despair and fear hit him like a sledgehammer.

He trembled when panic struck through him and for a few moments he was floundering, not knowing why he was feeling panicked and in despair when nothing had happened.

Until he realised that he was feeling what Harry felt in this particular memory.

Taking a deep breath, he forced his muscles to stop trembling. Trying to ignore the fear and despair lurking in him, trying to drag him down, was difficult, but he managed to push them down long enough to concentrate on Harry again.

And now he could hear his voice even when his lips didn't move.

**Should I do this? If I take it, there's no going back. But that would be better, right? I'm still in school, Dumbledore is hunting me ... How can I put the baby in danger? Nobody would blame me ... right? Can I do this? I need to do this. It's too dangerous now; I can have children later. Yeah, once Dumbledore is gone and I've graduated, there'll be plenty of time to have children. This wouldn't make me a bad father.**

**But should I? It's not the baby's fault that my life is fucked up.**

On and on the thoughts went until Harry opened the vial with trembling hands. As soon as the vial was uncorked, his thoughts abruptly stopped as if the sight of the potion paralyzed him.

Numbly Draco watched how Harry raised the vial in the air; watched how tears started to roll over his cheeks.

I'm sorry.

He nearly jumped when the vial fell down on the ground, shattering on impact. Harry had wrapped
both his arms around his waist and he was rocking back and forth, muttering, "I can't do it. I'm so god damned stupid, but I can't do it." His voice was choked and the fear was sneaking back again, threatening to overwhelm Draco.

Before he could see the scene further unfold – but really, did he need to when he had been there? – he was pushed out of the screen and he fell on the grass with a grunt.

Instead of brushing off the grass blades and standing up, Draco sat immobile for a while; trying to come to terms with what he had witnessed. He remembered how scared Harry had looked when he had entered the bathroom upon hearing the glass shattering, but he hadn't quite realised just how scared Harry had been, how terrified while trying to make the decision about the baby.

Guilt stirred inside him; how could he not have noticed how much his lover had been suffering? But there was not much he could do about it now. There was no use in wasting energy with 'what ifs'.

Resolutely he stood up. Yes, it hurt to realise how Harry had been suffering silently, but there was nothing he could do to change the past.

He had known that the spell would show both the good and the bad memories; he could whine and curse himself every time he thought he could have handled something better, but that would be a waste of time and energy. What he could do, was look at the memories and be there for Harry when he needed him.

The second memory he encountered showed a younger Harry, standing in front of a haggard and dirty looking Black, who was clasping his godson's shoulders. This had to be a memory of third year then, when Black had been on the run.

It was a short memory – Black telling Harry how much he looked like his parents – but the cocktail of emotions that had brewed in Harry left a lasting impression on Draco. A deep longing welled up in him, mixed with frustration and apprehension. Draco wondered what Black had told Harry to leave behind such a confusing mixture of feelings. Simply informing him of their bond and even his innocence shouldn't have brought out such a deep longing.

He was pushed out of the memory before he could try to find out the reason.

There seemed to be no clear reason behind the sequence of the memories: a memory of a toddler Harry petting a stray cat was followed by a twelve year old Harry who argued with Granger about the Polyjuice Potion they were brewing. Draco felt the joy when Harry flew on a broom for the first time; the burning jealousy the dark haired wizard felt when he was forced to watch how many presents his fat cousin had received; his irritation flashing up whenever Draco taunted him.

The deep, slumbering fury when Draco had suffered underneath the curse of the Ravenclaw student made the blond wizard swallow and flex his fingers.

Memories popped up every time Draco took a few steps forwards, pulling him inside; making certain that he knew every thought flashing through Harry's head; felt every subtle shift in his emotions. He shared the excitement of Harry when Black was declared innocent; the wonder when he finally heard who his parents really were; the shimmering shame when Harry had fainted thanks to the Dementors' presence. He experienced the awed elation when their baby kicked for the first time; the happiness when he made his first friends; the terror when Voldemort had returned.

The attraction Harry felt for him made him blush fiercely; the deep, overwhelming love left him speechless and he had to shut his eyes tightly to prevent some tears from leaking out, while his heart sped up in response.
Harry had told him he loved him a couple of times before, but actually feeling it was quite different. The words 'I love you' just weren't enough to encompass the range of Harry's love for him, didn't seem sufficient enough.

When he opened his eyes again, he was back in his own mind and Harry was looking at him with flushed cheeks and shining, deep green eyes.

"I …" Draco started and then stopped, not knowing how to word his thoughts out loud.

"Yeah," Harry muttered, sounding overwhelmed.

"This was … Thank you." Those words of gratitude seemed too inane to properly express his gratitude and admiration, but they would have to do for now.

Harry smiled shyly in response, ducking his head, while his hand rubbed self-consciously over his arm.

"Don't hide your face," Draco murmured and shuffled closer to Harry. His hands cupped Harry's cheeks and he tilted his head so that his lover faced him. As soon as Harry's eyes fell on him, he bent his head and captured Harry's mouth; smiling faintly when he heard the other's muffled gasp. It didn't take long for Harry to respond enthusiastically to the kiss and slender arms slipped around Draco's shoulders, pulling him closer while their kiss increased in intensity. Tongues peeked from between bruised lips and they jolted as if stung by electricity when their tongues met.

Mouths opened wider; their kiss growing wetter and hotter while their bodies shifted and moved around until Harry ended up on his back with Draco leaning over him. Despite his brain becoming foggy with arousal, he was mindful of Harry's stomach, making certain he wasn't putting too much weight on it.

A whispered spell rid them of their clothes until the only barrier between them was their underwear.

Harry turned his head to the left when Draco made a trail of kisses, starting from the corner of his eye, ghosting over his cheek until he ended up with his mouth in Harry's neck, sucking harshly on a patch of skin. A soft keen escaped Harry's mouth at the sensation and their panting resounded through the room when Draco pulled back, eyeing the vivid red purple mark adorning Harry's neck.

"Don't look so smug," Harry admonished him, but the scolding tone was weak thanks to his breathless voice.

"Just admiring the way you look," Draco replied smoothly, touching the necklace – his previous Valentine's gift to Harry – lightly, the metal chain warm thanks to Harry's body heat.

The gemstone set on the ring gleamed in the candle light when Harry removed his hands from Draco's shoulders; only to place them on Draco's chest, tracing invisible patterns on his skin that left goose bumps in their wake.

"Admiring me or your marks on me?" Harry inquired amused and raised an eyebrow sceptically.

Draco grinned; one of his hands trailed over Harry's side to his hip, making him shiver, and gripped his leg. He pushed Harry's leg in the air, so that he could turn his head and place a kiss on Harry's knee.

He lowered the leg again and answered, "Both. Is that a crime?"

"Are you going to do anything else?" Harry smiled, dropping his hands on the bed.
"Do you want me to do anything else?" Draco retorted teasingly, his hands resting on narrow hips while his thumbs rubbed slow circles on the jutting hipbones.

"You can do whatever you want," Harry responded and Draco froze, staring at his lover with wide eyes. Harry looked back; his eyes glowing in the candle light.

"Saying things like that can be dangerous," Draco whispered; his fingers slid between warm skin and cloth, lingering.

Harry hummed and rose up so that he could kiss Draco again. "I trust you," he stated simply.

Draco smiled and returned the kiss with more force, pushing the other one back into the pillows. Their moans were covered by their mouths when their hips pressed together and their hands caressed each other with more urgency, sliding over arms, caressing shoulder blades, touching stomachs. Draco arched his back when he felt nails ranking teasingly over his skin; the slight sting only adding to his arousal.

Somehow they managed to get rid of their underwear and their naked skin felt quite warm and became faintly slick. Removing his mouth, leaving Harry panting and with red, swollen lips, Draco lowered himself until he was placing kisses on Harry's chest; pausing to swirl his tongue around a nipple which hardened in response. A low groan rumbled through Harry's chest and his hand clamped down on Draco's shoulder, while the other one covered his mouth to attempt to muffle the sounds pouring through – which turned out to be in vain.

"Sensitive, huh?" Draco mumbled thoughtfully and before Harry could say anything, he closed his mouth around the hard nub again while his hand came up to caress its twin.

A violent shudder ran through Harry and Draco swore he could hear the faintest whine escape from his lover.

"Draco, more please," Harry pleaded and he squirmed underneath him, letting the blond know how pent up he was becoming.

Draco shivered with pleasure at hearing Harry's pleading – it wasn't often that he got to hear that – and licked his lips. He retreated slightly, though he still kept his body between Harry's raised legs. His hand hovered above Harry's crotch.

"More what?" he whispered; his grey eyes half lidded.

Harry threw him a frustrated glare, which only made his desire flare up almost painfully when he noticed how enlarged Harry's pupils had become. The brilliant green was almost completely swallowed up by black.

"You know what I want!" Harry snapped and wriggled his hips impatiently; his hand shot out to grasp Draco's wrist with the intend on pushing it down.

Draco wriggled out of his grasp and ignored Harry's annoyed hiss.

"I can't read your mind, Harry," he teased. "You'll have to tell me what you want."

The dark haired wizard – by now a squirming mess with flushed skin – let out a frustrated groan. "I need you." He licked his lips and looked away; his next words almost inaudible. "In me."

There was a time for teasing Harry and there was a time when he was just making them both frustrated by holding back. Clearly they were approaching the second situation, because Draco's
mind suddenly became blank; all his teasing remarks disappearing like smoke in the wind.

"I can do that," he managed to bring out and he was rather proud of himself for not doing something as undignified as squeaking.

He fumbled a bit while trying to extract the bottle of lubrication from Harry's nightstand – pointedly ignoring the soft chuckle his actions drew from his bed partner. When he turned back to Harry, he saw that Harry was leisurely touching himself and he nearly dropped the bottle in surprise.

"Draco?"

Harry's breathy tone danced across his spine and Draco gulped; yes, they definitely needed to proceed before the fun ended too early.

Their mouths found each other again when Draco laid down next to Harry and he slipped his slightly sticky fingers between Harry's legs until he found his entrance. The first finger made Harry frown slightly and squirm a bit, while he muttered something against Draco's lips. As he wasn't pushed away or stopped in any other way, Draco assumed he could go on and added a second finger as soon as he thought Harry was relaxed enough. He spread the two fingers, taking care to stretch Harry gently while he distracted the other wizard with his mouth. A third finger joined the other two soon and this time he deliberately started to search for the one spot that would drive Harry crazy if he touched it in just the right manner.

Harry's loud, surprised moan alerted him to the fact that he had found the spot and he kept pressing against it, rotating his wrist slightly until he thought that Harry was prepared enough.

"You ready?" he whispered against sweaty, damp skin and when he received the nod of confirmation, his fingers slipped out of Harry, making the dark haired man hiss softly in protest.

For a moment Draco pondered how exactly they would do this. Harry's stomach wasn't that big yet that it would be a hindrance if Draco laid on top of him, but he didn't want to make him uncomfortable and kissing him would be a bit more difficult. The thought of Harry riding him flashed through his mind, but he disregarded that one as soon as it appeared. Harry riding him would be an incredibly amazing sight, but that wasn't what he wanted now.

What he wanted was …

"Harry, lay down on your side," Draco instructed him and despite the confusion swirling around in the depths of those green eyes, Harry nodded and rolled over; wriggling around until he lay comfortably.

As soon as Harry stilled, Draco slipped behind him; his chest pressing against Harry's back. He wriggled one arm underneath Harry's waist and he used the other arm to guide Harry in spreading his legs a bit.

"Draco?" Harry sounded curious, not apprehensive and he inhaled sharply when he felt Draco's arousal pressing against his entrance.

"Ready?"

"Yeah."

Harry's hand grabbed the one Draco had slid underneath him and squeezed firmly when Draco pressed forwards. Draco's own eyes nearly rolled upwards and he couldn't hold back the moan when he felt himself being surrounded by tight heat, muscles that slowly relaxed and accepted him.
Both their breaths came out laboured when Draco finally halted and he focused his attention on Harry's neck, pressing kisses on it while he waited for Harry to give him the go ahead.

Harry sighed and let his head fall back against Draco's shoulder. His eyes were slits when he stared up at the blond.

"You can move," he whispered and Draco nodded, not trusting his voice to stay steady.

They fell into a slow rhythm; Harry pressing back every time Draco pushed back in. The muscles in their legs started to groan in protest after a while, but both ignored them, more focused on exchanging quick, soft kisses – a drawback of this position was that they couldn't kiss each other properly.

Draco made up for that regrettable fact by showering Harry's skin with kisses, sucking marks on his shoulders and neck, while his one free hand caressed every patch of skin it came across.

Sweet moans and deep groans filled the room and Harry was the first one to fall over the edge; his breath halting while his body shook, his inner muscles clenching tightly around Draco; Draco's name escaping in a long, drawn out hiss while his eyes were shut tightly.

Draco followed him soon, his face buried in Harry's neck while his hips stuttered through the waves of his climax.

Draco's body felt boneless when he pulled back after a while and Harry used his wand to clean them both.

"That was …" Harry began and seemed lost for words.

"Amazing?" Draco suggested with a tired laugh.

"Yeah," Harry agreed with a satisfied sigh and they wriggled around until they were cuddling each other underneath the covers; Harry's leg thrown over Draco's hips while Draco's arm laid across Harry's chest.

"I love you," Harry whispered, turning his head so that he could look at the blond – though judging at his eyes that kept falling shut, he was losing the battle of trying to fight off the sleep.

Draco wasn't exactly faring better. "I love you too."

They shared one last tender kiss before both their eyes closed and they surrounded themselves to the sweet embrace of sleep.

The last class of that day – Transfiguration – had just ended and Harry and Draco were discussing the assignment Sirius had assigned the class as homework for next week while they made their way to the staircase that would take them down to the dungeons.

"I'm just saying it's rather hypocritical of him to give that particular assignment, considering he wasn't exactly a stickler of the rules," Draco argued and shook his head.

Harry rolled his eyes good-naturedly. "Trust me; he's aware of that. That doesn't take away the fact that this assignment needs to be done."

"When did I ever say that …"

"Harry, can I talk to you?"
Both wizards froze and after casting each other a wary glance, they turned around.

Pale faced, with slightly red rimmed eyes and hair even frizzier than normal, Hermione Granger stood behind them; a mixture of weariness and apprehension dancing in her brown eyes.
Chapter 25: Under the surface

18th of February

"What do you want, Granger?" Draco asked brusquely and his hand twitched as if he wanted to grab his wand.

Harry put a hand on his wrist and gave it a soft squeeze, throwing him a warning look.

Hermione audibly swallowed, but she kept her eyes locked on them. "I just want to talk to Harry for a few minutes."

"Why?" Harry asked warily.

She hesitated for a moment, until Draco made an impatient sound and she shook her head. "To apologise. I know you don't want to talk to me, but would you be willing to listen to me? After this I won't bother you again, I promise," she replied softly, stepping aside to let a few students pass.

Harry hesitated; should he comply or not? Hermione seemed sincere in her offer to apologize, but why now? She had already apologized last year. Granted, it had been hurried and almost inaudible, but she had said she was sorry.

So why now again?

"Why should we trust you?" Draco demanded; his grey eyes narrowed in distrust.

Hermione flinched, but nodded as if she had anticipated this question. Without any warning, she
threw her wand at Draco and his hand automatically reached out to pluck it out of the air.

Both Harry and Draco stared at the wand dumbfounded.

"There. I can't do anything without my wand," Hermione said quietly and her lower lip trembled faintly. "You can even check me for potions."

Harry recognized the conflicted look in Draco's eyes; it was the same feeling he was currently experiencing. Handing over your wand to someone else was the ultimate sign of vulnerability. Without a wand, most wizards and witches were fairly defenceless. When another person had a hold of the wand, that person was essentially controlling the faith of the original owner.

Draco could easily decide to break the wand and Hermione wouldn't be able to do anything to stop him. Hermione had to be aware of this fact and yet she still had offered her wand without any fuss. Even more, she had taken a huge risk by giving it to Draco. Despite not being friends anymore, Harry would have never even contemplated the thought of breaking her wand; Draco, on the other hand, had a bad history with her and would have no reason to not harm the wand.

It was this fact – the risk she had chosen to take – that made Harry decide to hear her out.

"Okay, let's talk in the room at the end of the hallway," he proposed and her brown eyes widened in surprise. "That should be empty now and we won't be disturbed."

"Thank you for giving me this chance," Hermione said sincerely and he nodded uncomfortably.

"Are you certain about this?" Draco whispered while they followed Hermione.

Harry shrugged. "I don't think she'll try anything. Besides, we have her wand, so we have the upper hand if she does try something," he added.

"She doesn't smell threatening," Ruby murmured and his flank brushed against Harry's hip.

Draco frowned, but didn't offer any objections.

Harry closed the door once they were all inside and leant against a desk on the first row, Draco joining him. Hermione chose to stand against the blackboard, her arms crossed in front of her stomach. Her eyes flickered warily when Ruby turned visible again, but otherwise she gave no indication that Ruby's presence bothered her.

"Start talking," Draco ordered brusquely. Apparently him complying to listen to Hermione did not mean he was fine with any possibility of the conversation being prolonged.

Hermione's cheeks flushed a bit, but she held her head up and without any stammer, she said, "I want to apologize for my behaviour of last year. I should have trusted you and I had no right to force you to choose me over Malfoy. I didn't act like a friend and for that I'm sorry." She took a deep breath and casted her eyes downwards while her hands started to fiddle with the edges of her sleeves.

"I understand that you would rather not have anything to do with me, but I miss you," she continued softly.

"Hermione … You and I both made mistakes," Harry murmured and felt Draco's hand coming to rest on his lower back. "I honestly don't know if we could be friends again. I'm sorry, but I can't promise that we can go back to being friends. A lot has happened and I just don't know ..." he trailed off, biting his lip. He had no desire to hurt Hermione, but it would be awful of him to promise her his friendship when he wasn't sure he would ever regard her like that again. That thought hurt,
but it was the painful truth.

She gave him a watery smile and blinked rapidly, leaving Harry to wonder guiltily whether he was making her cry. "I know, I understand." She hesitated and plunged on, "Would it be possible to just talk with each other occasionally? I just … I miss talking with you."

He studied her, saw the sincerity lurking on her face and then nodded, deciding that an occasional talk wouldn't do any harm. "I'd like that."

Her next smile was bright and grateful and she hurriedly wiped the sleeves of her robe over her face – Harry felt Draco shuddering in disgust – and she stammered, "Th-thank you, Harry!"

"Can we expect Weasley to approach Harry as well?" Draco asked coolly.

To Harry's confusion, Hermione's face hardened and she looked away. "I don't think he would want to talk to Harry," she replied in a strangled voice.

"What happened?" Harry asked bewildered. Not that he had a desire to talk with Ron after the things he had done and said, but Hermione's reply left him curious.

"Ron has been acting quite distant since last summer. I broke up with him last week," she answered flatly. "I have no clue what he's thinking or planning to do." She bit her lip. "Just be careful, Harry. He still thinks Percy's death is your fault."

Harry nodded and held back the exhausted sigh that wanted to escape.

"Can I have my wand back?" Hermione asked and Draco threw it at her wordlessly. She inclined her head to Harry and made her way to the door. "I'll talk to you later, Harry." She sounded painfully uncertain and shy; it was clear she expected to be rebuffed.

Harry nodded silently his acquiescence and she left after a brief, faint smile.

"Well, this was interesting." Draco remarked dryly.

Harry didn't answer, but stared thoughtfully at the blackboard. Had Hermione's warning about Ron been general or did she have reason to think Ron was planning something?

Arms slipped around his waist, hands clasped together over his hidden stomach and lips pressed softly against his neck. "Do you think it was wise to forgive her?" Draco asked softly.

Harry sighed and gave a one shouldered shrug. "Hermione has been less nasty to me than Ron and like I said, we both made mistakes. It's not like she's the bad guy here. Talking to her won't do much harm."

"Are you planning on becoming friends again?" Draco's voice was neutral, not hostile and that made Harry think carefully about his answer.

"I'm not certain," he answered slowly; his gaze fixed on the door. "I don't think we'll ever be close friends again. At least not like we were a few years ago." He turned around to face Draco. "But the less people I have against me, the better. Hermione and I might never be close friends again, but at least we can be civil towards each other."

"I suppose so," Draco mumbled and closed his eyes for a few seconds. He abruptly changed the subject. "Do you think Lupin would have time to give you a check-up? You're due for one."
Harry blinked surprised and then smiled faintly. "Sure; I don't think he'll mind if we visit him now."

"Let's go then. Mother has been asking for pictures."

Chuckling fondly, Harry followed Draco out of the room; Ruby trailing behind them.

Remus invited them inside and assured the two boys that he had time to do a check-up.

"If you hadn't decided to come now, I would have suggested a check-up at the end of this week," Remus explained and gestured Harry to lay down on the couch. "It's best to have a check-up every month now, so in a couple of weeks, you'll need to be examined again."

Draco sunk down at the other end of the couch, making certain to stay out of Remus' way. One of his hands came to rest on Harry's thigh; the warmth of it seeping through the dark trousers.

"Where's Sirius?" Harry asked curiously, when he didn't hear his godfather anywhere in the room.

"He had to oversee a detention. Two students got into a row with each other and nearly destroyed an entire classroom with their spells," Remus answered and shook his head. "I'm not certain whether Sirius is a good choice for this kind of task, but I guess McGonagall wants to pay him back for all the times he and your father landed in detention."

Harry chuckled. "She still hasn't forgiven him?"

"Oh, I'm certain she forgave him the minute his detentions were finished," the older man smiled. "It's merely principle that makes her pick out Sirius for these kind of situations." His eyes studied the floating parchment in front of him.

"All right, it seems like your vitals and that of the baby are both as they should be," he announced satisfied and dissolved the parchment by waving his hand through it.

"That's good to hear," Harry said relieved. Not that he had thought anything was wrong with either him or the baby, but hearing confirmation was always a good thing.

Remus threw them a speculating look. "Do you want to know the gender of the baby?" he asked suddenly with a smile.

Draco blinked. "You can already see that?" he asked curiously.

The older man shrugged. "I can try. It will depend on how the baby is positioned, but since you're almost six months far, we should be able to see whether you're expecting a girl or a boy."

"What do you think, Harry?" Draco inquired, turning his attention to Harry.

Harry pondered about the question, looking down at his stomach. On the one hand, it would make for a nice surprise if they didn't know the gender of the baby before the birth, but on the other hand, it would make things like deciding on a name easier if they knew whether he was expecting a boy or a girl.

"If you don't mind, I'd like to hear the gender," he answered and was met with an excited smile and a hand which gripped his own.

"I don't mind either," Draco told him and they turned their questioning glances to Remus, who chuckled and nodded.
"All right, I'll try and see whether I can see it already."

"How are you going to do that?" Harry asked curiously. Would this particular spell work the same as the ones Remus used to check his vitals?

"The spell is going to create a screen, which will show the baby," Remus explained and pointed his wand at Harry's stomach. "If the baby is in a good position, I'll be able to see which gender it is."

A screen unfolded itself above Harry's stomach and one murmured spell later, a thin, rose coloured thread connected the screen with Harry's stomach. Harry's fingers twitched a bit in response when he felt the magic reaching out towards his own, seeking a connection with it. As soon as the connection was made, the thread vibrated and released a soft, tingling sound, resembling a bell dangling in the wind.

Grey smoke in the screen slowly cleared up until a small, light grey mass filled up the middle of the screen, leaving the rest of the screen black.

Unlike last time – when the baby resembled nothing more than a tiny spot – it was now clear that Harry was expecting a baby: the baby was curled up, its tiny arms curled up against its small chest while its legs were slowly moving back and forth. While not full grown yet, nobody could mistake the small baby for a blob or a white spot anymore.

Harry brought his hand up to his mouth to hide his smile when his baby shifted slightly, seemingly raising its hand to suck on its thumb. He hadn't known the baby was already capable of sucking its thumb.

"And, can you see what it is?" Draco asked and he sounded rather impatient; his grey eyes glued to the screen, seemingly enraptured by their baby fussing around.

Remus bent towards the screen, focusing on the midsection of the baby. "I don't think I'll be able to – wait," he interrupted himself and he looked closer. A small smile appeared on his lips. "If I'm not mistaken – and mind, I could still be wrong – then you're expecting a boy, Harry."

Harry blinked, his hand dropping to the couch from shock. "I'm having a boy?" he repeated dazed.

Draco squeezed his hand and when Harry looked at him, he was caught off guard by the sheer amount of excitement shining in his grey eyes.

"We're having a son, Harry!" Draco exclaimed happily.

Harry laughed. "I'm willing to bet your mum will go crazy when we tell her."

"I wouldn't be surprised," the blond smirked and then turned to Remus again, addressing him, "Can you take pictures of the baby again?"

"Of course."

Two minutes later, they were handed five identical photos; Harry's attention was firmly fixated on the picture, watching fascinated how his son was fussily kicking his legs, one of his small hands patting his cheek.

When the thread between his stomach and the screen was broken, he felt a soft kick near his left side, as if the baby wanted to show his displeasure at having his flow of magic disturbed.

"Thanks for doing the check-up," Harry said gratefully once he finally managed to tear his gaze
away from the photo.

"It was no problem," Remus reassured him.

They were startled by a sharp smack against the window, making it rattle a bit. Narcissa's owl – a beautiful, grey coloured one with an oval, white spot on her chest – was patiently waiting on the windowsill; her head slightly cocked to the right.

Draco stood up and opened the window; the owl soared through it, landing carefully on the table. She held out her paw expectantly, showing off the letter tied to it.

"Her letter seems thicker than usual," Harry commented casually.

"How many times does Narcissa send letters?" Remus asked bewildered.

"Usually one every week," Draco replied dryly and relieved the owl from her burden. "She likes to stay updated."

While Remus went to grab some owl treats from his private kitchen, Draco opened the letter; a small, rectangular package fell out from the folds of the paper and landed on the floor.

Eyebrows slightly furrowed, Draco snatched the thin package off of the floor and placed it on his lap; he held out the letter in the middle so that Harry could read it at the same time.

The package was quickly opened once the letter was completely read and the couple was surprised by the pictures. Narcissa had taken pictures – or more likely had a house elf take them – of the finished nursery in the manor Draco and Harry would live in once they finished school. The walls were a mixture of stone and wood. Wooden panels – painted a soft blue – covered the walls from the middle to the floor. A broad, silver coloured line was used as a separation line between the wooden panels and the stone and various magical creatures were painted on the broad line.

The floor was completely covered by a green, soft looking carpet; the corners of the room were hidden behind a large pile of brightly coloured cushions and a few large plush toys like a white teddy bear and a dragon whose mouth was slightly open. Two large windows provided light; dark blue curtains, reaching the floor, could be used to block out the light.

The white crib Harry had received as a Christmas present was already assembled and stood proudly on the right side of the room with a small teddy bear (adorning a red tie) waiting on the pillow, which was trimmed with lace. The crest of the Potter family – bearing both the lion and the Malfoys' dragon – was stitched in the middle of the dark green baby blanket.

The left side of the room contained a play pen, filled with a variety of wizard toys, and a small, pale yellow wardrobe.

"Has your mum ever considered taking up home decoration as a job?" Harry asked awed.

"She'll be pleased to hear you like the result," Draco chuckled amused, but his eyes betrayed his wonder. He gathered the photos together and put them in the folded letter. A smirk sprung up on his face. "Why don't we surprise her with our pictures?"

"Sure," Harry agreed with a grin.

After thanking Remus once again and insisting he kept one picture to show to Sirius, they left to compose the next letter to Narcissa, including a new picture of her grandson.
More than a week – and a lot of homework, which made a lot of students wonder whether they would be swallowed up by the huge pile of assignments they had to write – had passed by after Hermione's apology when Harry and Draco received the message that the three Founders had finally managed to locate Hufflepuff's portrait. Snape had delivered the note during breakfast on Friday and it informed them to be in his quarters at a quarter past eight – with a clear message that they had to make certain nobody followed them.

Harry was relieved to read that the Founders had finally found Hufflepuff. After retrieving her portrait, they would finally be finished and they would only need to set up the ritual. No more entering dangerous buildings, filled with hostile magical creatures and curses intend on either killing them or impairing them in other ways. No more sneaking around and hoping none of the students would discover what they were doing. No more returning to his quarters completely exhausted and his magic thrumming violently underneath his skin while he tended to his wounds.

The dark haired wizard didn't want to admit it, but lately it had become slightly more difficult for him to use regular spells. His magic protested nearly every time he had to practice a spell during class and it cost him a lot of energy to keep it under control, as it seemed to want to lash out. There had also been a few times already when his magic refused for a few minutes to do anything, instead lying dormant as if he wasn't trying to cast a spell. Having Draco near him seemed to keep it stabilized somewhat, but the blond couldn't be around him the entire time. They didn't share all classes, so Draco wasn't always there to keep his magic stabilized.

He would have been worried about the way his magic had started behaving, but the books about male pregnancy he had been reading had warned him that this sort of thing was normal once he had entered the fifth month. Apparently, his magic was more prone to act on its own, because it had to share some with the baby growing inside him. Spells becoming too powerful suddenly or his magic refusing to do anything were apparently normal occurrences, but that didn't mean that he liked it.

Hunting for the last portrait with his magic in this state was probably not a smart idea, but Harry refused to stay behind; as long as he stayed near Draco, he should be fine, he reasoned, while he slipped the small note in his pocket – he would destroy it once nobody was around.

Plus he had his pets to help him, so even if his magic decided to protest during their search, he could count on either Ruby or Garin to help him.

The day passed by without any notable incidents – most students seemed to have given up on trying to antagonize either Draco or Harry. Some still threw them a foul look, but the couple had become quite adapt at ignoring those – as long as none of the students reached for their wands, they didn't bother paying attention to them, as it would only add fuel to the fire.

After they had finished dinner, Harry and Draco made their way to the library again, followed by Garin and Mara. Draco had an essay for Healing that needed to be finished before next Wednesday and had decided that it would be easier to work on it now, instead of delaying it for a few days. Harry had received an assignment for Care of Magical Creatures; Hagrid had asked his students to write the differences between the various breeds of the Winged horses.

By the time the clock announced it was eight o'clock, Harry had managed to finish his assignment – luckily for him Hagrid wasn't fond of long assignments – and Draco was nearly done with his own essay.

Under the watchful eye of Madam Pinch, they returned the books to the appropriate bookshelves and
gathered the rest of their stuff.

They had just left the library when Harry was struck by an unpleasant side effect of being pregnant: the baby was using his bladder as a punching ball again.

He grimaced. "Eugh, I need to go to the bathroom," he muttered. "You can go on. Tell Snape and the others I'll be there soon."

Draco hesitated. "Are you sure? I can go with you and wait in the hallway," he offered.

Harry shook his head and turned around, feeling Garin climbing around his legs until his body was curled around his hips and chest and his head was resting on Harry's shoulder. "No need; I'll be quick," he reassured the other one and then walked further down the hallway, hearing Draco descending the staircase. Harry would have gone to his own bathroom, but he didn't think he could hold it that long. There was a hidden staircase at the end of this hallway which would lead him directly to the fifth floor where the boys' lavatory was located.

He made Garin wait outside the lavatory with a strict reminder not to bite anyone – his snake took protecting him a notch too far at times and he had no desire to explain to the nurse why a student was suffering from a snake bite.

After he was done relieving himself, he quickly washed his hands and made certain that his belt was still in place. This late in the evening, he doubted he would encounter anyone, but it was better to be safe than sorry.

As soon as he left the lavatory, Garin hissed and wrapped himself around his waist again.

"Someone is coming," Garin hissed softly in his ear and sounded agitated. "It's the one who smells badly."

"Smells badly?" Harry repeated confused, but before he could take a step, footsteps halted behind him abruptly.

"I thought it reeked here of evil. I guess I was right," Ron sneered; his eyes narrowed.

Harry wanted to curse – how bad was his luck that he would stumble across Ron now?

"Weasley," Harry said coolly, keeping his eyes trained on Ron's wand, which was clenched in his hand. He wondered how he would be able to leave this situation without making it escalate. He very much doubted that the other one would let him escape.

"So now I've become 'Weasley', huh?" Ron's face gained an ugly flush.

"I didn't think we were still on first name basis," Harry quipped and slowly edged backwards; Garin's body coiled tighter around him.

"Where do you think you're going?" Ron spat and raised his wand.

"I'm leaving. I have better things to do than to stand here and listen to you," Harry replied annoyed.

Ron's curse bounced off of the shield Harry had managed to call up on time. His mind flashed back to the similar fight he had had with Ron last year and he gnashed his teeth together. Were they really going to repeat that scene?

"Weasley, would you stop being an idiot for once?" Harry snapped and the next curse – which made
tentacles sprout from whatever surface the curse hit – made him stumble backwards against the wall.

Harry replied with a curse which would glue Ron's legs together, but Ron deflected it and threw another curse at Harry. He didn't recognize the brown spirals of the curse and he quickly evaded it. The wall took the hit and the stones melted with a loud, obnoxious guttural sound.

"Are you insane?" Harry exclaimed shocked.

Ron had a fierce, determined look on his face and the next curse he casted tore through Harry's shield as if it was wet paper, making the wizard stagger. His son was moving around frantically and Harry tried to hide his wincing when his insides felt like they were being battered by a Beater's bat.

Harry decided to use Expelliarmus while he dodged another curse, but his magic suddenly refused to cooperate.

"Fuck," he breathed out and the first tendrils of panic began to embrace him. Without his magic, he couldn't keep up his shield and he couldn't defend himself. Why, of all times, why did his magic have to act up now?

Ron smirked when Harry didn't retaliate. "Cru-"

He didn't get the chance to finish – Garin shot forwards like a flash of lightning and before Ron could block him, Garin's large fangs buried themselves deeply in his neck.

Harry watched speechlessly how Ron first froze, his eyes large with incredulity, until Garin dislodged himself violently, ripping away more skin in the process. Blood started gushing out of the gaping holes and Ron started screaming, his hands trying to cover his neck while he sunk down on his knees.

One of the portraits – a surly, old man with his face hidden by a large hood – clucked his tongue. "The Headmistress won't be happy."

"Harry! Are you okay?"

Suddenly Draco was next to him, hands gripping his arms tightly while silver grey eyes flashed up in panicked worry.

"What on earth happened here?" Remus appeared next and he breathed in sharply when he caught sight of Ron, whose wailing had died down to a soft whimpering; his strength leaving him the more his blood kept pouring out of the wounds.

Without wasting another second, Remus used a spell which covered the large holes in Ron's neck and used a stretcher to move his body around.

"Come on, Harry; we'll go to the Infirmary," Remus spoke grimly.

"Why 'we'? No need to help him," Garin hissed idly and wrapped himself around Harry's still frozen body. "Let him die, I'd say. He deserves no less for daring to attack you."

"Harry," Draco repeated anxiously when he didn't receive any response.

"Draco, pick him up. He's probably in shock," Remus instructed him.

"No need to go the Infirmary with the young lad," the man in the portrait spoke up calmly. "Just bring him to his quarters and give him a Calming Draught. The other lad does need the nurse's aide,
though. The bite of an enraged Akeyra is not a nice experience. Although he did have it coming. That boy seems to have inherited the idiocy in his family." The man sighed exasperatedly. "I'll explain this to the Headmistress."

Harry felt himself being coaxed to the staircase and he shook his head, escaping from the daze he had fallen in after seeing Ron screaming in pain.

Remus hurried upstairs to the Infirmary with an unconscious Ron floating next to him, while Harry and Draco walked downstairs.

"What happened?" Draco whispered and his arm tightened around Harry's shoulders.

The dark haired wizard shook his head. "Ron attacked me again," he answered flatly.

"Why did Garin attack him?" Draco asked and added darkly, "Not that I mind that he did that."

Harry hesitated and debated whether he should confess the real reason why Garin took it upon him to defend him. Draco was already quite protective over him – how bad would he become if he told him what had happened?

"Master needs to tell the truth," Garin murmured and he raised his head; he had been pressed against Harry's stomach, hissing soothingly against it. "Master's mate needs to defend Master."

Bracing himself, Harry answered sourly, "Lately, my magic has been acting up sometimes and this time it refused to let me cast a spell. That's why Garin defended me."

Even without looking at Draco, he could feel his gaze burning in his head.

"Why the hell didn't you tell me that your magic has started acting up?" Draco was doing a remarkable impression of an enraged snake. He stopped on the first floor and grabbed Harry's shoulders so he could turn him around to face him. "You know you need to rely on my magic, Harry!"

"Do you think I like relying on your magic, like some helpless idiot?" Harry snapped angrily and shoved Draco's hands away. "I'm not weak! I shouldn't …"

"I know you're not weak, Harry!" Draco spoke louder and Harry closed his mouth, startled. "Relying on me during the next few months doesn't make you weak or helpless or an idiot," he continued in a softer voice. "It's just for a couple of months and then your magic will stop going haywire."

Harry sighed and nodded. He still didn't like relying on Draco like this, as if he was some kind of leech, but he didn't have much choice.

"You're still feeling up for the meeting in Sev's quarters?" Draco asked; his hands relaxed their grip and instead rubbed soothingly over Harry's arms.

"Yeah, I want to know what the Founders discovered," Harry replied and then gazed down worryingly at Garin, whose head was resting on top of his belly. "How much trouble do you think we will be in, because Garin attacked Ron? Do you think they'll lock him up?"

"They can try," Garin replied lazily and the thin end of his tail curled around Harry's wrist.

Draco looked contemplatively. "I doubt it. Even if Weasel tries to take you to court, he won't win. Not only did he attack you first, Garin is your Bonded Animal and bonds like those are taken very
seriously. They'll automatically assume it was self-defence."

Harry spotted a flaw in that argument – what if someone ordered their familiar to attack first? – but didn't bother countering it. As long as Garin wouldn't be taken away or punished, it didn't matter that the rules regarding Bonded Animals were faulty.

"We can ask Sev for a Calming Draught for you," Draco mentioned offhandedly while they continued their way to the dungeons.

Harry rolled his eyes. "No need for that. I'm not going into shock," he protested.

Draco sent him a wary glance. "Are you sure? You didn't look so well when I found you."

"Sorry for not looking chipper after being attacked and witness Garin practically tearing out someone's throat," Harry retorted sarcastically.

"Are you mad? I only did it to protect you and the hatchling, Master," Garin explained worriedly.

"I'm not … mad," Harry answered slowly in Parseltongue. "I was just surprised."

"Took you long enough." Mara appeared in the entrance of the dungeons, regarding them annoyed. "You should have called me. Or Ruby. We could have finished the job," she added and bared her teeth. Obviously she had been informed by Garin what had happened through whatever communication channel the animals used.

Harry suppressed a shudder and walked past her. "There is no need for that," he replied brusquely.

"What a shame," she nearly purred and trotted behind them.

Harry thought he could hear Draco mumbling something along the lines of "Why did I get freaky animals like that?" and smiled faintly. Compared to Ruby, Mara did seem a bit more bloodthirsty.

When Snape opened the door after Draco had knocked once, Harry saw Sirius pacing back and forth in front of the fireplace, muttering something underneath his breath while Lucius was regarding him bemused.

"Harry!" Sirius' head shot towards him once he had taken a few steps inside the room and the man rushed over to hug him. "Are you all right? What the hell happened? Where's Remus?"

"He's bringing Weasley to the nurse," Draco replied coolly and his eyes were stormy.

"To the nurse?" Snape repeated sharply and turned around to face them. "What on earth did you do?"

Harry grimaced. "He attacked me and Garin defended me. He bit him in his neck and he was bleeding pretty badly. So Remus took him to the Infirmary to heal him," he explained and let Sirius steer him to the couch while Draco followed closely behind.

"The Headmistress is not going to be happy," Lucius murmured and sighed.

"One of the portraits who saw the fight, said he would tell McGonagall what happened," Harry mentioned.

"Who was it?" Slytherin asked suddenly, looking intrigued. "The one who said he would inform the Headmistress."
"Oh, eh, I don't know. His face was hidden by a hood, but his hands were rather wrinkly, so I don't think he's very young," Harry answered confused.

"Long, grey robes?" Slytherin inquired further and a strange glint danced in his eyes.

"Yes; the background was that of a lake," Draco answered.

Slytherin smiled satisfied. "Don't worry about it – he'll make sure you won't carry the blame."

"You sound so certain about it." Lucius raised an eyebrow.

"Because I know that man," the Founder chuckled mirthfully. "Let's keep it at that he had a feud with an ancestor of this Weasley boy and he will revel in every chance he gets to take his revenge – no matter how small that revenge can be."

"Was he by any chance a Slytherin?" Sirius asked dryly.

"Why yes, he was."

"Figures."

"Says the man who spent twelve years thinking about getting his revenge on a rat," Snape deadpanned.

"You would want to take revenge too if a son of a bitch had taken your best friends from you," Sirius snapped heatedly.

Before the conversation could turn into a rude argument or even worse a fight, Remus entered the quarters. He blinked when he noticed how tense both Sirius and Snape looked.

"Did something happen?"

"Nothing special," Lucius replied dryly. "What did the Headmistress say when she heard about the fight?"

"Well, somehow that portrait managed to convince her that it was entirely Mister Weasley's fault and that he baited Garin. When I left, she was actually contemplating which punishment she would give him when he wakes up," Remus answered and sunk down next to Sirius. "She decided that she didn't need to hear Harry's version of the story, as the portrait provided a neutral view." He snorted and shook his head.

"So I'm not in trouble?" Harry asked uncertainly; one of his hands coming up to caress Garin's smooth head.

"No, not as far as I know." Remus shook his head. "That portrait told her that Mister Weasley attacked you, didn't give you the chance to defend yourself properly and taunted Garin, so that he eventually attacked."

That wasn't exactly how it had happened, but Harry was too tired to argue about it, so he kept silent. He felt Draco's arm coming around his waist and a discreet squeeze was giving to his hip.

"All right," Snape said abruptly. "Now that we are all gathered here, let's hear what the Founders have to say."

"As we have told you, we have finally managed to locate Helga's portrait," Gryffindor started gruffly and his fingers rapped impatiently against the wooden arm of his chair.
"How did you do that?" Harry asked curiously.

"We combined our magic to perform a ritual," Ravenclaw took over and smiled thinly. "This particular ritual allows us to trace the aura of wizards and witches we are familiar with and it will give us the exact location. Unfortunately we had to wait until it was new moon as the ritual required that."

"A few days ago it was finally new moon and we performed the ritual," Slytherin continued, looking thoughtfully. "It took a bit longer as we no longer have our corporal bodies, but we finally managed to locate her."

"So you have the exact location?" Sirius verified, leaning forwards a bit.

"Yes."

"And this location is …?" Lucius asked with a slight frown.

Gryffindor grimaced. "The old man hid her portrait in a graveyard."

"A graveyard," Draco repeated blankly.

Harry tensed up before he could control himself – he didn't have exactly nice experiences with graveyards. Why the hell was Hufflepuff hidden in a graveyard?

Slytherin nodded and then threw a peculiar glance at Sirius. "Yes, more specifically: the graveyard of the Black family."
Author's note: I'm tired as hell and this week seemed intent on sapping all my energy. But I decided to finish this chapter tonight, so that I could give you guys something.

Fair warning: in a couple of weeks I need to study for my upcoming exams (which take place during January), so updates may be slower. I still try to work on this fic as much as I can, but if you don't see a chapter appearing in two weeks or so, then you know why.

Also, I posted the Valentine's day oneshot for Severus and Lucius, in case anyone is interested. It's called Remember the promise we made. Some information pertaining Harry's pregnancy is mentioned in that oneshot, which won't be mentioned in this story. It doesn't really affect this story, but if you want to know a bit more about Harry's pregnancy, then you can check out that oneshot.

Thank you for the comments and kudos!

Warnings: angst, drama (yeah, we're back to those tags; we all know you were missing those, right? *coughs*); a bit of offscreen violence

Disclaimer: I don't own Harry Potter - J.K. Rowling owns it.

I apologize in advance if there are mistakes left behind - I'm tired and mistakes tend to slip through when I'm sleep deprived. I'll probably go back to this chapter later to see if I missed something.

So, I hope you enjoy this chapter, despite all the drama happening in it (damn, I don't think I've ever written a story with so much drama and angst before)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 26: Buried

28th of February

"My family's graveyard?" Sirius repeated blankly, his whole body still.

Ravenclaw gave a slow nod. "Yes – at least that is what we received through the ritual. However, we did not receive the exact location you will need to Apparate there, which is strange. The ritual has never failed before." Her voice gained a frustrated lilt at the end.

Sirius snorted harshly and shook his head impatiently. "That is not strange at all. That graveyard is warded off completely; only blood relatives are able to access that graveyard and anyone else wanting to visit it needs to be accompanied by a Black."

"If that is the case, how did Dumbledore manage to hide her portrait there?" Lucius asked, raising an eyebrow perplexed.
"Hell if I know," Sirius retorted broodingly. His eyes had turned dark and seemed to close off. "I'd say my dear mother told him, but I highly doubt that – she never was fond of him." A bitter chuckle escaped him. "Guess that was one thing I should have listened to when she was still alive."

Disregarding the issue about Dumbledore for the moment – it wasn't like they would get far trying to wonder who had taken him there – Harry asked, "So does that mean you can take us there?"

His godfather threw him an unreadable look and sighed. "Sorry, pup. Can't do that. I was never told about the location."

"One starts wondering whether you are capable of ever doing something useful," Snape muttered; his dark eyes piercing.

"What's your fucking problem, Snivellus?!" Sirius bared his teeth and shot up, his hand going straight to his wand.

"Sirius, calm down!" Remus snapped and bore down with his hand on Sirius' dominant hand, preventing him from extracting his wand. He then threw a warning look at Snape. "Severus, you keep quiet as well."

Snape snorted softly, but didn't retort.

"Well, we have quite a situation now," Slytherin hummed, clasping his hands together.

Draco stirred. "Does mother know the location?" he asked Lucius.

His father nodded slowly. "She probably does; she is a full Black and I believe Sirius' mother was quite fond of her. Even if her own mother didn't confide the location in her, her aunt most likely did."

"How many people can one Black take to the graveyard?" Harry asked curiously. If the graveyard was that specifically warded, would there be a limit to the amount of people travelling with a member of the Black family?

"The only time I heard my mother mentioning the graveyard was when she was talking to her sister, discussing how many people they each would take along," Sirius answered flatly. "I believe she mentioned that only two people could travel along with a member of the family."

"Well, that's at least better than only one person able to accompany a Black," Lucius sighed. "I'll ask Narcissa about it when I return home."

"Sounds good," Remus murmured. "I'll talk to Minerva and ask her when she can cover for us again."

"In the meantime we will be looking up the ritual," Slytherin announced and the other two Founders murmured their agreement.

With that, the meeting in Snape's quarters was done and the man urged them to leave, reminding Harry and Draco about their curfew.

Before they left, Lucius placed a hand on Draco's shoulders. "Your mother was ecstatic when she received your letter," he told his son softly and his eyes gleamed.

Draco smiled and curled an arm around Harry's waist, so that his hand came to rest on top of his stomach. "I thought she would be."
They said their goodbyes and left the room; Draco accompanying Harry to his quarters.

"Why would Dumbledore hide Hufflepuff on the Blacks' graveyard?" Harry mumbled; his nose wrinkled.

Their footsteps were the only sound in the cold dungeon.

Draco shrugged half-heartedly. "I have no idea. Hiding Gryffindor in the Potter Manor made sense and putting Ravenclaw in his house makes somewhat sense as well, because he had a connection to both these locations, but the Blacks' graveyard ..." he trailed off and grimaced. "The Blacks have never been portrayed as a Light family and aside from your godfather, I doubt the old coot spoke to anyone of that family. Maybe he thought nobody would ever think of searching there?"

"Well, if that's the case, then he's right," Harry muttered. "I doubt anyone would suspect that Hufflepuff is hidden in a graveyard of a dark family."

They arrived at the portrait that hid the entrance to Harry's quarters and Draco bent his head slightly to drop a kiss on his mouth.

"I can't stay tonight," he murmured against his lips, giving another peck. "Some of the Slytherins are wondering where I'm going every night."

Harry nodded. "Good night."

"Good night."

A couple of days after the meeting with the Founders, Lucius sent Draco a letter. The blond student waited until he and Harry were huddled together on the couch in Harry's quarters to read it.

His father had talked to his mother about the information the Founders had given them and his mother had confirmed that she knew the location. Unfortunately, due to some rule in the Black family, members of the family could only reveal the location to other members, so she couldn't tell Lucius about it. That meant that instead of Lucius, Narcissa would most likely join them on their search for Hufflepuff and Draco tried to imagine how that would go. He knew his mother wasn't weak – one had to be brainless to think that – but he had a hard time imagining her in a situation like the ones they had encountered before: where they had to dodge traps, dangerous spells and even more dangerous animals.

He would have to wait to see her, however, as McGonagall had informed them that she could only give them the green light for leaving on their search in two weeks. Draco didn't really mind that – he wasn't particularly keen on visiting that graveyard, even if it contained the graves of his family.

That and he was worried about Harry. Of course he had known that his lover would need his presence more than before once the pregnancy progressed further – both the books his mother had sent them and his father had informed him of this fact. He had foolishly thought they would only need to worry about Harry's magic acting out once he entered his seventh month. Harry had just entered his sixth month and already his magic was behaving erratically. Now that Draco was aware of this, he had started paying even closer attention to the dark haired male and he noticed how sometimes his spells would be a bit too powerful – this was often the case during Curses and Defence against the Dark Arts – or he wouldn't be able to do anything for at least a few minutes. He had experienced this a couple of times before during Transfiguration, but luckily nobody really paid any attention to someone else, busy as they were trying to perfect their own work.

Harry tried to pretend that nothing was wrong, but Draco could practically sense his frustration.
whenever his magic didn't act like he wanted it to do. The blond knew Harry wasn't fond of relying on someone else – he supposed it was because Harry had become too used to protecting someone else and having that person rely on him, but it wasn't like he had much choice now. Draco tried to not be too overbearing; the last thing they needed was a fight, because Harry became annoyed. It was difficult however to keep himself in check. During the few classes they didn't have together, his mind often drifted towards what Harry could be doing and how he was feeling; whether he was having trouble with his magic or not.

Whether Weasley had found Harry and taken revenge.

The nurse had released Weasley a week after he had been attacked by Garin. Both Harry and Draco had become tense when they saw him sitting in the Great Hall, poking in his breakfast and they had expected the brute to come charging at them and trying to fight with Harry again. Only, so far, nothing of the sort had happened. It was as if Weasley had decided to lay low; he seemed to ignore Harry, save for the few foul looks he threw him during classes and in the hallway.

Draco had the feeling, however, that Weasley was simply biding his time and this made him restless. That was why every time they had separate classes, he made certain to wait for his lover, so that they could walk together. His mother had sent two pins with the Malfoy crest etched into the metal plate; she had woven a net of strong protective charms around the pins and had added an extra layer of offensive spells on top of the net. Her instructions had been clear: both young men had to wear the pins on their robes, so that they were extra protected.

Draco trusted his mother's spell work and was grateful for the added level of protection – something Harry really was in need of, despite his pets' presence – but he preferred being near Harry in case of danger, instead of entrusting Harry's safety to a pin.

After the fight with Weasley, Harry seemed to finally grasp the fact that he needed to rely more on Draco and to stay clear of dangerous situations – granted, it wasn't like Harry actively searched for danger; it seemed to find him to Draco's great concern.

But before the fight with that insane idiot and his momentary loss of magic, Harry had been more prone to keep acting on his own, not willing to let Draco protect him. Now Harry made an effort to rely more on Draco and he seemed to have accepted the fact that for the next couple of months, he had no choice but to rely heavily on Draco's magic, as his own had become very erratic at times.

While Draco sympathised with Harry's plight – he would be prone to moods of irritation too if his magic acted out – he was relieved that Harry finally accepted his protectiveness without making too much fuss about it.

Perhaps they could live through the last stage of Harry's pregnancy without fighting over the whole protectiveness issue again. They already had too much to worry about without arguing about a senseless issue.

"Thanks for waiting." Harry's voice broke through his musing and he blinked.

Draco offered a quick smile and reached out to grasp Harry's hand. "You hungry?"

"Starving," Harry admitted sheepishly.

"It's still a few hours until dinner starts, but I'm sure the house elves won't mind us visiting the kitchen," Draco chuckled and they made their way to the large kitchen, where they were welcomed with great enthusiasm.
15 th of March

There were times when Draco thought he would never understand the way Harry's mind worked.

Today was one of those times.

"You are joking, right?" Draco asked deadpanned from his place in Harry's bed.

Harry turned around to face him, continuing to button up his shirt. He looked faintly bemused. "No, I'm not," he answered calmly and stepped out of his pyjama pants.

Despite the gesture being considered uncouth, the blond couldn't help but gape in shock while his lover continued getting dressed. Discreetly, Draco pinched his arm; the sharp sting assured him he wasn't sleeping and that he unfortunately had heard Harry correctly.

Two days ago McGonagall had informed them that she could cover their absence on Sunday. Severus had contacted Narcissa immediately and she had agreed to join their search on Sunday.

They had decided on leaving early in the morning, like they had done the previous two times.

Draco had naturally assumed that Harry would stay behind. Being six months pregnant and having unstable magic, it would be dangerous for him to join the search.

Draco had thought Harry realised it would be better for him to stay in the school, but when the alarm spell had woken him up, he was met by Harry dressing himself and dryly informing the Malfoy heir he wouldn't be left behind.

"You can't come with us!" Draco exclaimed when he recovered from the shock.

"Why not? I went with you to search for Gryffindor and Ravenclaw," Harry pointed out impatiently.

"Seriously, Harry?" Draco stared at him incredulously. "You're six months pregnant! You can't join us in your state!"

Green eyes narrowed. "I'm not an invalid!" he snapped. "And I'm not a child either, who you can lock up in a room!"

"Who said anything about locking you up?" Draco answered exasperatedly and dropped his hand heavily on the mattress. "It's just safer for you to remain here behind the wards."

"So you can skip into danger? I can help you find the portrait," Harry insisted.

"Use your fucking brain, Harry," Draco bit out. "I'm not letting you risk your life or that of our son's."

Harry's cheeks flushed. "I'm not risking our son's life! Why do you always think that?" he cried out angrily.

Draco shot out of bed and gestured wildly at Harry. "Because you keep throwing yourself in danger!" he snapped.

"I'm not …"

"Do you seriously think going to that graveyard is safe?" Draco hissed, cutting off Harry's protest. "You know what happened the last two times! Why do you keep being stubborn?"
"I know that the graveyard won't be safe – that's why I want to help! We can …"

"Your magic is unstable! Sure, most of the time you still have control over it, but you have seen what happens when it grows out of control! What do you think will happen if your magic acts out on the graveyard? You're playing with your own life, Harry!"

"Weren't you the one who said I needed your magic to support my own? Who knows how long you'll be gone – what happens if I stay here and my magic grows out of control here? Do you remember how many times other people have tried to attack us? It's not like it's that safe here!" Harry snapped angrily. "My magic is most stable when I'm near you and you think that keeping me here would be better?"

Anger was burning slowly in his stomach and Draco clenched his hands. He wanted to argue further, but he couldn't exactly continue without contradicting himself. It was true that he had said Harry needed his magic to stabilise his own – and to do that, they needed to stay near each other. Normally a few hours apart shouldn't really matter – but when had things ever be normal when it came to Harry Potter? Those few hours could easily be long enough for Harry to find himself in trouble or even worse.

What was he supposed to do?

If he took Harry with him, then he could protect him and be there to act as an anchor for his magic – but he would be taking his lover and their unborn son into dangerous territory; for there was no doubt in his mind that the graveyard would be full of peril.

The smartest thing would be to keep Harry here in the school – but that also had a drawback, because people could try to attack him and if his magic refused to cooperate, it could end very badly.

Fuck, was there no way in which he could keep Harry completely safe?

Harry broke the tense, heavy silence by stepping forwards, halting in front of Draco. Hesitantly, he reached out and slipped his hands around Draco's wrists, holding them loosely. "Look, contrary to what you seem to think, I'm not keen on going to a dangerous place," he said softly. "But just like you don't want me in danger, I don't want to see you in danger. How can you expect me to stay behind and wait here where I won't know if something happens to you? I don't want to wait hours for you to come back and wonder whether you're coming back safe or not. I don't think I'll be able to handle that." His voice hitched a bit at the end.

Draco bit his lip and his own arms stretched out to envelope Harry in a loose hug. "I'm coming back, you know that," he murmured, feeling the anger draining out of him. Instead exhaustion started to creep up. "Nothing bad is going to happen to me, I promise."

Harry's eyes gleamed strongly. "Either you're right and nothing bad is going to happen to you – in which case, your argument about danger is void and I can come with you. Or it is dangerous and there is a possibility that something will happen to you – in that case, I definitely need to come with you, so that I can help you." He wore a deviant look. "I agreed that I need to let you protect me more – but that doesn't mean I stop wanting to protect you."

"You are a fucking bastard, Potter," Draco said flatly and he pressed his lips together. He had been driven into a corner and he very much disliked that. No matter what he said or did, he knew there was no way he could keep Harry here.

If he used a spell to keep his lover in the school, that would make Harry distrust him and a whole new slew of arguments would start. They had just managed to mend the gap that had risen between
them after the events in Dumbledore's house and Draco wasn't ready or willing to test whether their relationship could survive another hit – bounded by magic or not, Harry would not stand for being forced to stay behind even if it was for his own safety and he wouldn't let the bond hold him back if he decided to call it quits.

Harry wasn't given him any choice and he resented that; why couldn't Harry just understand that he wanted to keep him safe? Why did he feel the need to put himself in danger, even when it wasn't necessary?

Why couldn't Harry just listen to him for once?

Knowing there was no way Harry would back down, Draco abruptly dropped his arms and stepped away.

"Draco, what …"

"Fine, do what you want," he said coolly and gathered his clothes; his movements stiff.

When he passed by Harry, a hand shot out to grab his wrist and he jerked his head around.

"Look, Draco, I don't want to make you angry, but …"

"But you're still not going to listen, right?" Draco let out a bitter chuckle and shook his head. "Like I said: do what you want. It's not like I can change your mind."

Leaving a pale Harry behind, he made his way to the bathroom and closed it with a loud 'click'. His head fell against the cool wood of the door and he stared at the ceiling.

He could only hope that the retrieval of Hufflepuff would go easier than the previous two times.

They met at the entrance of the dungeons – this part of the castle was rather dark and nobody was willing to linger near it on their way to the Great Hall, save for maybe the Slytherin students, but they knew better than to hang around these days.

Draco hadn't said anything to him since their argument in his room. The blond hadn't even looked at him and seemed intent on ignoring him as much as possible while they were waiting for Remus and Sirius to join them.

Snape had arrived with Narcissa shortly before them and both adults were talking in a soft tone to each other. Narcissa had greeted him with a kiss on his cheek and a short, but tight hug. Harry had seen her casting a look at his stomach, but thanks to the belt he was wearing, she didn't see anything that even resembled a bulge.

If she or Snape had noticed the tense silence hanging between the couple like a thunder cloud, neither of them remarked on it and Harry was oddly grateful for that. He hadn't wanted to start an argument with Draco; he knew it wouldn't be easy to convince him, but he hadn't expected the other boy to be so set against it.

It wasn't like Harry didn't realise how dangerous this trip could become – and how stupid he was by still following despite being six months far. He had no problems admitting that this was probably a stupid idea – but what else was he supposed to do? Sit in his quarters all day, worrying about his family and boyfriend? Wondering whether he would see Draco alive or brought to the hospital? How could Draco expect him to stay behind while he faced the possibility of risking his life?
If something bad would happen to Draco, Harry wanted to be there to help him. During the past two search trips, they had helped each other out and they made a good team.

Harry had probably not made it very clear, but he was terrified of losing sight of Draco. It probably had a lot to do with this mysterious bond between them, but the truth was that he was scared of losing the blond. He couldn't just stay behind without knowing what was happening to Draco. Draco couldn't ask that of him.

How would Draco feel if he had to stay behind without any knowledge about what was happening? Harry doubted that the Malfoy heir would like that.

He did understand that Draco preferred to keep him safe – but really, was he even safe in the school? It had become very clear that students would try to attack him if they thought they could get away with it.

His hand brushed along the long, sleek body of Garin, who was wrapped around his entire upper body. Ruby was standing behind him; every time he shook his head, Harry felt his fur brushing against his trousers. Mara was waiting behind Draco, having chosen to wash her face out of pure boredom. The only ones who would stay behind were Sapphire and Rowen.

Both Ruby and Garin hadn't said anything when Draco and Harry had had their argument; they had simply followed him out of his quarters, reminding him gently they would protect him and his baby.

Draco had given no sign that he had heard that particular message, but Harry had seen his fingers twist for a few seconds while the blond marched ahead.

If they had more time, Harry would have tried to talk to Draco – he didn't like the way the argument was still hanging between them – but as it was, their talking would have to wait until they were back in Hogwarts.

"Good morning." Remus' soft voice cut off the conversation between Snape and Narcissa.

Narcissa offered a small smile. "Good morning, Remus, Sirius." Her eyes turned piercing when they focused on her cousin. "Do you still remember the coordinates?"

Sirius huffed and scowled. "Of course I still remember, 'Cissa." He rolled his eyes.

"See that you do, because who knows where you will end up otherwise," she retorted coolly.

Sirius glanced at his godson; a frown marring his forehead. "Harry, you're joining us?" His tone clearly stated what he didn't say out loud.

You're joining us despite being six months pregnant?

Harry stiffened and his hand stilled on Garin's head. "Yes; Garin and Ruby are joining us too," he murmured, hoping that there wouldn't be another argument.

Draco shifted his feet, but when Harry looked at him, Draco was simply staring in front of him; his arms crossed in front of his chest.

Sirius looked like he wanted to protest, but the look on Harry's face must have told him that would be useless. He simply sighed and nodded. "Fine, though you'll have to cast a Protection bubble once we're in the graveyard."

Harry felt the urge to protest, but instead of giving in to it, he simply nodded and bent his head,
shifting his foot back and forth. He thought it was ridiculous to use so much protection – he had his two pets, the Malfoy pin and a layer of protection charms on the belt he was wearing – but he figured that he was already treading on thin ice and it would be best if he just kept his mouth shut for now.

"Let's go before someone sees us," Snape said brusquely and they quickly made their way out of the castle.

They halted right outside of the enormous gates; the sun was slowly coming up, bathing everything in a soft orange light.

"If it's all right with you, Narcissa, I'll take Harry and Remus," Sirius stated.

Narcissa nodded. "No problem; I'll be escorting Severus and Draco." She glanced at the two large cats. "How are you two going to travel?"

Mara showed her large, sharp teeth in her own version of a smile. "Do not worry about us; we have our own ways of following our masters."

"Harry, grab my arm and don't let go until I say so," Sirius murmured and held out his arm.

Harry grabbed his arm tightly and Remus joined Sirius' other side; Harry noticed Draco and Snape doing the same with Narcissa.

When they had been discussing the search, Harry had waited until Narcissa had been left alone for a few minutes to ask whether this special manner of transportation would hurt the baby. She had admonished him that it would be best for him to stay behind – until she had apparently remembered on her own that the school wasn't exactly a safe environment either – but had informed him that this manner of transportation was safe for pregnant people. The members of the Black family didn't wait until nobody was pregnant to die, so there had been instances when a pregnant Black woman had visited the graveyard through this way of transport.

Narcissa had urged him to stay in his quarters, despite her own reservations about the school's safety, but after hearing Harry's reason for joining the search, she had looked conflicted and eventually she had nodded, whispering that she understood.

Harry wished Draco could understand why he didn't want to let him leave on his own. It certainly didn't have anything to do with playing a hero or something stupid like that.

Right before Sirius flicked his wand in a peculiar pattern, Harry caught Draco's eyes and was struck by the amount of frustration and worry that whirled around in those silver grey eyes.

The next moment, an ice cold, rubber shield seemed to surround him, forcing his eyes to close. The shield wrapped itself around the contours of his body and seemed to double itself around his stomach and over Garin's long body. Garin let out a discontented hiss in Harry's ears, but didn't attempt to bite in the shield or even wiggle his body around, so the wizard figured there was no need to panic.

A soft whisper reached his ears – it seemed to belong to a woman, but try as he might, Harry couldn't understand a thing she was saying. A loud, heavy bell sound followed the soft whispering suddenly and the rubber shield disappeared abruptly, taking the cold with it.

Harry opened his eyes and blinked rapidly a few times to adjust to the light after seeing intense dark just now.

They had all arrived safely in front of a huge, black gate, which seemed in urgent need of repair. Mara and Ruby were already sniffing along the gate and their tails swished back and forth in
agitation.

Garin raised his head and his tongue came out to taste the air. "It smells Dark," he said with an underlying tone of disgust.

"Amazing how the graveyard seems to fit with my dear home," Sirius said sarcastically; his eyes narrowed in distrust.

Narcissa clucked her tongue, releasing the hold she had on Draco and Snape. "It looked a lot better when I last visited," she murmured, glancing at the gate critically.

"The air feels heavy," Draco muttered, taking a step forwards.

"Well, it is the graveyard of the Black family," Narcissa murmured. "My family wasn't exactly known for being welcoming to others."

"It's astonishing how you still managed to become a good host," Sirius said dryly.

Remus sighed and spoke up before Narcissa could offer a retort. "Let's not keep standing here."

"Can we just go inside?" Harry asked dubiously and looked warily at the dark gate.

The atmosphere of this place felt completely wrong – it was as if something was telling him to return, to not take one step further.

"Yes, there are no deflection spells present," Narcissa answered calmly. "My family did not think it was necessary to create such spells as only people with Black blood can find this graveyard."

Harry still felt uncertain, but he decided that Narcissa knew what she was talking about and quickly casted a protection charm on himself.

"Be on your guard," Snape murmured while his sharp eyes flitted from one side to the other. "I doubt Albus has neglected to put up traps here."

"He shouldn't be able to, but I have long ago ceased to wonder what that man is capable of," Narcissa said with a light frown marring her forehead.

The gates let them pass without any spell or curse activating. When they were completely inside, Harry couldn't suppress the shiver going through his body. The air here seemed colder than outside the gates and there was something else that didn't feel right.

It took him a couple of seconds before he realised that it was utterly quiet in the graveyard. He hadn't expected a lot of noise – not given how isolated this place was – but there was no sound at all. Not the sound of the wind; no small animals scrabbling around the place.

Nothing.

"I don't like how quiet it is," Harry spoke up and his voice seemed unnaturally loud.

"Has it always been this quiet here, mother?" Draco asked and he sounded strangely subdued.

She slowly shook her head, her lips a thin line on her face. "No. While it certainly has never been noisy, there was at least the sound of the wind and even sometimes the sound of traffic from far away."

"Can't think of a better sign that something is wrong than this quietness," Sirius mumbled and his
hand tightened around his wand.

As far as the eyes reached, there was nothing but gravestones – some on the verge of crumbling at the slightest touch – and a couple of tombs, dark outlined against the grey sky. On either side of the gate, there were trees planted, but they seemed completely rotten; one strong gust of wind would probably suffice to push them over. Their gnarly, naked branches reached upwards to the sky, as if they were pleading for something to take them away.

Once the ground probably had been covered by grass, but now only a couple of patches with brown grass remained, making the graveyard look even darker than it already was.

Various gravestones had empty vases; some still contained the remains of dead flowers, while some laid shattered on the ground.

Right in the middle of the graveyard – or at least Harry presumed that was the middle of the place – a large statue stood, looking worn by the harsh weather. It resembled a woman with long, wavy hair and her face was pointed towards the sky while one hand laid on her chest and the other hand pointed towards the ground. A small child was standing in front of her and he was looking towards the north. They both wore blank expressions, but their faces were already showing cracks from undergoing the weather's abuse and years of no care.

"Someone you know?" Remus asked lightly.

Sirius snorted and shook his head. "Nope. Can't say I ever saw her face or his when I was looking through photographs," he replied idly. "You, Narcissa?"

"No, sorry. I usually can recall every face in our family line, but I have never seen her before," she murmured, studying the woman's statue intently.

"Where are we going to start our search?" Harry asked, looking away from the imposing statue. Something about it made him reluctant to look at it.

Was there nothing normal in this graveyard?

"If I was an old bastard," Sirius mused out loud, "where would I want to hide the portrait of a Founder?"

Snape snorted. "Trying to think like Albus tends to never give you the answers you need," he said primly.

"You got a better idea?" Sirius shot back.

"Maybe one of those old tombs?" Draco suddenly spoke up and shifted his feet when everyone stared at him. "What?" he asked defensively. "I doubt he would hide the portrait behind an ordinary gravestone."

"Good point," Remus muttered and narrowed his eyes. "How many tombs are there?"

"In total? Seven," Narcissa replied and she sounded vaguely bored. "Although the biggest one is placed in the back of the graveyard."

"Why there?" Harry asked surprised.

"Who knows?" Narcissa shrugged calmly. "I believe it contains one of our most important ancestors."
Sirius made a noise of disgust, but didn't add anything to it.

"Are we going to keep standing here?" Snape snapped irritated.

Before either one of them could offer a retort, a low sound resounded through the graveyard and they all froze.

Harry slowly turned around, barely daring to breathe and his hand shot up to cover his mouth, while his teeth bit on his lower lip in order to keep his noise of fright inside. He felt Sirius stiffing next to him and thought he could hear Remus clenching his teeth.

About ten feet away from the group, one of the gravestones was trembling; bits of stone crumbling and landing on the ground.

"What the …" Draco breathed out, right when the stone crumbled down completely, making a thunder like sound.

The dust was still settling when the earth seemed to shake and Harry's grip around his wand grew tighter to the point that his fingers started to cramp.

A torturous groan cleaved through the silence and the earth seemed to erupt, shooting gravel and sand up in the air as if a mini volcano was trying to burst through.

Harry's breath stopped when a dirty, claw like, grey hand shot out of the disturbed earth, followed by a bony arm, barely covered by threadbare cloth. A second arm appeared and the hands buried themselves in the ground on each side of the hole. The bones cracked and bent and then something else popped out of the grave, clawing forwards while the thing kept groaning lowly; the bones straining and cracking sharply.

It finally stopped moving when it finished crawling out of the hole.

Harry was now looking at something he had thought he would never encounter in Great Britain.

The reanimated corpse of a male Black swayed back and forth. His entire body was grey, covered with some black spots and in various places, his rotted skin had already disappeared, showing dirty bone. His once shiny black hair was now tangled and dirty, reaching his hips while his long nails nearly caressed the ground.

"This is not good," Sirius whispered.

"Can't we just blast it apart?" Harry asked, being careful to not raise his voice.

For now the corpse was still standing there, staring blankly ahead as if it wasn't sure what to do now that he was out of his grave.

"No," Draco murmured; his eyes were trained on the corpse and his pale skin had become even paler. "Reanimated corpses are protected from any spell that can blast things apart. They are also resistant to fire and water."

"Not only that," Remus murmured darkly. "But he can also draw strength from the earth as this is his burial ground."

"So in other words, we're screwed," Sirius added tensely.

"There must be some way," Harry protested, chancing another look at the dead body. "Can't we just
run past it? I mean, it's dead, so it's not like his motoric reflexes will work perfectly."

"If this was a creature sprouting forth from a Muggle fantasy, then yes, running past it would work," Snape spoke, his lip curled up in disgust. "As it is, reanimated corpses in the Wizarding World have honed motoric reflexes and the moment it starts to chase, it will be faster than anyone of us."

"So what? We're just going to keep standing here, until it starts attacking?" Harry hissed furiously and his free hand unconsciously gripped his robes tighter.

Garin raised his head and his eyes zoomed in on the corpse, while his tongue came out. "It smells rotten," he complained and lowered his head again, though he kept his gaze fixed on the body.

"We can distract it," Mara spoke up for the first time since they had left Hogwarts. Contrarily to her calm voice, the hair on her back was raised and the fire on her tail had grown brighter and larger.

Ruby took a step forwards and he sniffed the air. "Distracting it won't do much if we cannot locate the Founder," he murmured; his paw patted the ground agitatedly.

"It's not like we have the time to casually look into each tomb." Draco frowned and he took a step closer to Harry.

"Mara," Ruby said.

It wasn't an order or a question, yet she snorted and sighed. "Yes, I'm on it."

"On what?" Narcissa asked, her eyebrows furrowed.

Mara's eyes gained a brighter glow and she scanned the entire graveyard, swaying softly back and forth.

"I sense a faint aura coming from the left in the back," she announced and her bright eyes dimmed again.

"You're certain the presence isn't another dead body?" Snape inquired sceptically.

Mara snorted and glowered. "If it was one of the undead, their aura would not be pulsing."

"Can we reach the tomb without alerting that zombie?" Harry asked, lowering his voice as much as he could.

The undead man groaned again, a low rumble rolling from deep within his mostly absent chest. His hands were grabbing at the air; his head turning slowly from left to right. His rattling breath cut through the air.

"I don't know," Remus answered slowly; his jaw set. "Can this zombie be part of the defence the Blacks set up? If so, it won't attack if any of you know the counter charm."

"No; the Blacks never used the dead in their defence line," Narcissa said firmly. "I would have been informed about this."

The small spark of hope which had flared up after Remus' question was extinguished again and Harry grimaced.

"Can we distract it?" Draco suggested softly.
Snape nodded contemplatively. "Normally we can. It may have quicker reflexes, but it's even
dumber than the majority of the students," he drawled.

Remus threw him a sharp look. "We can't run, though," he pointed out. "That will make too much
noise."

Ruby huffed. "**Mara and I will distract it, while you sneak past it.**"

Harry didn't like any of the animals coming near that shuffling corpse, but they had no other options
left.

"We'll start moving as soon as the zombie looks the other way," Remus instructed.

"Harry, stay between Remus and Narcissa," Sirius ordered grimly. "I'll be next to you."

Harry thought he could feel Draco's gaze burning in the back of his head, but he simply nodded in
agreement; his heart beat quickening despite his will.

Ruby and Mara sneaked forwards silently, looking like the predators they were. As soon as they
were less than three feet away from the corpse, Ruby opened his mouth and a large fire ball escaped
him, searing the miserable patches of grass. A curtain of all consuming fire sprung up a bit further
and the corpse turned around, releasing a blood curling scream, filled with rage.

The moment the dead body was distracted, the group started moving; swiftly, but silently hurrying
past the decaying graves.

Despite being guarded from three sides, Harry kept his wand ready; a curse waiting on his tongue,
ready to be released in case another grave was forced open. Garin's eyes were roving around, alert.

Harry winced when another furious scream tore through the silence. The scream was quickly
followed up by the murderous growls of the two large cats.

"Almost there," Garin hissed. "It's the furthest one on the left."

"It's the furthest one on the left," Harry relayed the information out loud.

"Good, we're almost there," Remus murmured and hurried to the left side.

Something glowed faintly on the right side and Harry whipped his head around, alarmed.

"Wait, Sirius, don't …!"

His warning came too late. Sirius jerked to a stop immediately, but the edge of his robes was caught
on the spiky branch of a dead bush and it triggered a spell. A loud screech wailed up and they froze
in their tracks, staring horrified at the innocuous bush.

For a few seconds – which felt like an eternity – all was deadly silent.

Then a murderous roar resounded and loud, heavy steps quickly decreased the distance between the
dead creature and the group. Two sets of footsteps hurriedly joined, but it became clear that no attack
from the two cats would deter the zombie from his murderous rampage.

"Run!" Snape barked and they broke into a run, while the corpse was quickly gaining on them.

Without any preamble, Remus used a Blasting curse on the heavy door of the large, grey tomb and it
flew open with a 'bang'.
"Get inside now!" Sirius snapped and Harry and Draco were pushed in the large tomb first.

The couple stumbled down the narrow steps, their breathing haggard, while their hearts seemed intent on jumping out of their throat.

Harry groaned and leant against the wall for support. His legs trembled – both from the sudden sprint and the fear coursing through his veins – and he felt light headed.

"Master?" Garin hissed concerned, rubbing his cool head against Harry's heated cheek.

"Harry, is something wrong?" Draco asked sharply.

The dark haired wizard looked up and only then realised that both his hands were rubbing over his stomach, while he was hunched forwards. His son was fussing, delivering several soft kicks. Harry must have startled him when he broke into a sudden run.

He shook his head, a bit dazed and straightened his back. "Yes, sorry, I'm fine," he replied, taking deep breaths to steady himself.

Draco opened his mouth, but was distracted by the others coming down the stairs; the flames on the cats' tails illuminating the dark hallway.

"That was a close one," Sirius gasped and steadied himself against the wall.

"Is everyone all right?" Remus asked, looking grimly.

They all nodded.

"What happened to the zombie?" Harry asked.

Aside from their ragged breathing and shuffling of feet, all was silent again as if nothing out of the ordinary had happened.

"We used a spell to decapitate him and put him in an air tight bubble," Narcissa replied and brushed dust off of her sleeve. "Hopefully the bubble will quicken the rotting process."

"What if it doesn't?" Draco raised an eyebrow.

"We will deal with it when that happens," she answered lightly.

Now that they were safe – for now anyway – Harry took the time to look around.

The inside of the tomb was larger than expected; dustier and full of grime and something resembling the small skeletons of vermin.

The place they were standing in was a long, narrow hallway; the walls darkened with age and some of the plaster had cracked off and was littering the ground. The air was stale and smelt musky.

"Dare I ask how large this tomb is?" Harry asked faintly. Obviously this wouldn't be a quick search through one large room and shifting through caskets if there was a need. Why the hell did a tomb need a hallway anyway?

"Large," Narcissa smiled faintly.

"Larger than it should be," Sirius added darkly, looking warily.
"Have you ever been in here, Narcissa?" Snape asked. A streak of something dark was splashed across the white shirt he wore and Harry had to look away before the urge to vomit rose up.

"Only once," she replied to everyone’s surprise. "Mother was insistent that I paid my respect to our ancestor. There are quite a few hallways and separate rooms, so we need to be careful that we don’t become separated."

"How many people are buried here?" Draco asked and looked a bit uneasy.

Harry couldn’t blame him; he wasn’t exactly fond of being in close quarters with a bunch of dead people and who knows how many traps.

"Around six or seven, I believe," she answered and cocked her head slightly. "Let us proceed. I’d rather not take the entire day roaming around in this place."

Ruby and Mara went first, using their tails to illuminate the hallway. Soon the Lumos of their wands joined their fire and this made it easier for the group to not trip over small stone particles which had dropped off from the ceiling.

The narrow hallway brought them to a hold in a small circular space. Two narrow hallways were in front of them; each had a vase with dead flowers waiting next to the entrance.

"Which one are we supposed to pick?" Draco asked and sounded slightly frustrated.

Mara sniffed and cocked her head. "The right one. That one has the strongest presence," she declared.

Without arguing the group immediately chose the right hallway, brushing past thick spider webs.

A grimace tainted Harry’s mouth when he stepped on what had once been a rat, but was now nothing more than a skeleton. The soft crunch sound of bones being crushed underneath his shoe made him shiver in disgust.

This hallway ended in a large, triangular room. It held one large coffin, standing proudly on a marble, rectangular plinth with two broad steps leading up to the coffin. The name engraved in the upper stone step revealed that one Elladora Black had found her final rest place here.

Strangely, there were quite a few boxes collected in this room and several vases, varying in sizes, occupied the rest of the empty space against the walls. A portrait of a stern looking, brown eyed woman hung up against one of the walls, but it seemed frozen, as if the painter had never gotten around to cast the spell on it which would make the painting able to interact with the outside world.

Then again, Harry mused silently, he supposed that a painting in a tomb would have no need for conversation.

"Let's search through the boxes first," Remus murmured after looking around. "Be careful to not touch them if it's not necessary. Who knows what kind of spells are on them."

Draco and his mother went to the furthest wall, casting spells on the boxes to open them and move them around. Snape and Remus were busy inspecting the stuff placed against the wall next to the pair, so Harry and Sirius chose the other wall, where a bunch of large, golden and silver chests were placed.

"Why is there so much stuff here?" Harry mumbled, casting a spell to open the first chest. It revealed nothing but various smaller, wooden boxes filled with jewellery.
Behind him, he heard Mara and Ruby padding around, using their paws and noses to move stuff around.

"It was once a tradition to be buried with your most precious assets," Sirius murmured, riffling through a box full of documents. "Most Pureblood people were stingy bastards even in their deaths after all," he added lightly and Harry chuckled softly.

"It's so pointless to let all this gather dust in a tomb," he murmured and checked the next chest. This time they were filled with a bunch of robes.

He didn't know whether one of them had triggered a ward or if the stone used for the tomb had become too brittle.

Before he could open the next chest, a strange sound came from above and he looked up in reflex.

Only to see the ceiling coming down on him and Sirius.

Chapter End Notes

AN2: Longer chapter than I originally intended, but oh well. *shrugs* So what do you think of it? Please leave your thoughts behind in a review! (And make my crappy week better!)

Next time: When someone thinks nothing can get worse, there is an unwritten law that states it will become worse. Will they succeed in finding Hufflepuff? Or will this graveyard be the last place for some of the group?

See you all next time!

Cuddles

Melissa
Author's note: Almost a month late, but at least I'm here with another chapter! As you may have noticed already, yes, it's another part. The next chapter will conclude the search.

IMPORTANT INFORMATION: Next week, my exams will start, so this means that this story will most likely not be updated before the end of January at best. I will continue to work on it as much as I can, but if you don't see another chapter appearing in two weeks or so, you know why.

But this doesn't mean there won't be other stories posted. I have planned three oneshots with Drarry to be posted in this month - one every week. They are not related to either this story or any of my others, but maybe you could give them a try while waiting for this story XD I finished those about a week ago, so they will be posted on time.

Let's move on.

Thanks for the kudos and comments!

Warnings: angst, drama, Harry having a slight form of a panic attack; smidgen of fluff; shifting povs; an author who sucks at writing action scenes

Disclaimer: I don't own Harry Potter - J.K. Rowling owns it.

I hope you'll like this chapter! Also a Happy New Year!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 27: Completed Circle Part 1

Sirius reacted without thinking; as soon as he heard the tell-tale sound of stone breaking, he spun around and practically barked the protection charm that enveloped the two wizards completely. Even with the charm springing up on time, Sirius wrapped his arms around his godson and pulled him down. With a startled yelp, Harry ended up on his back with Sirius hovering above him; his swollen abdomen completely protected by Sirius' body. Garin hissed agitatedly, draping his long, thick body across the older man's back.

Both men automatically tucked their heads against their chests and held their breaths when the ceiling broke down completely; pieces of jagged stone raining down, banging against the shield.

For a long moment, only the dreadful sound of heavy ceiling parts burying them was heard.

Then everything became silent again.

The shield shone brightly around them; Sirius raised his head carefully and squinted, peering through the blurry shield. His fear of being buried completely had been ungrounded. A part of the ceiling had created a big wall, separating them from the rest of the group. The pieces of stone were rather large and he could only hope that the entire ceiling hadn't collapsed.
After casting another wary glance at the surroundings, he slowly lowered the shield and sat up as soon as Garin moved away.

"Are you okay, Harry?" he asked worriedly. He didn't think the younger man was hurt, but the wide, green eyes staring straight through him didn't put him on ease.

"I – I'm fine," Harry stammered and sat up painstakingly slow while Garin slithered back to him.

"Let's move more to the back," Sirius suggested. "Maybe we'll be able to find a way out. I don't think we'll be able to break through that rubble."

Harry didn't budge. "What happened to the others?" he asked and his shoulders tensed up. "What happened to Draco?" His fingers dug into the ground like they were claws.

"I … They are probably all right," Sirius replied helplessly. To be honest, he had no idea at all how far the ceiling had broken down and he couldn't hear anything through the stones. He could only hope the others had used Protective shields as well if the ceiling had completely collapsed.

He didn't even want to contemplate the thought that the others had gotten hurt.

"But what if the ceiling collapsed on them?" Harry asked and panic started to show in his large eyes. "What if they got hurt? What if they couldn't get a shield up on time and they … they are …"

"Harry! Calm down!" Sirius barked when his godson started to breathe quicker and heavier, sounding like he was hyperventilating.

Harry shook his head and wanted to say something, but instead he gasped and lurched forwards, almost falling face first on the ground if it weren't for Sirius grabbing his shoulders and keeping him up.

"Harry, Harry, look at me," he ordered and carefully shook Harry's shoulders. "Come on, kiddo, you need to calm down."

"Th-the baby," Harry stammered and his arms wrapped around his stomach.

Immediately Sirius looked down at his hidden stomach; his heart thudding loudly in his ears. If something happened to Harry and the baby now, they were in deep shit. Remus was the one with the Healer's degree and Sirius' knowledge of Healing didn't extend further than knowing some spells to bandage wounds. It was nowhere near enough to deal with something going wrong in a pregnancy.

"What's happening with the baby?" he asked sharply and tried to keep a clear head. "Are you in pain?"

"He-he's moving too fast," Harry whimpered and seemed to want to curl around his stomach.

When Sirius moved his hands a bit, he hissed when his skin started to tingle painfully, as if his hands were slowly immersed in hot water. Harry's magic was rising to the surface and the young man didn't seem capable of reigning it in – whether that was because he just couldn't and was losing control over it or because he was panicking too much, Sirius didn't know. What he did know was that if he didn't manage to calm his godson down, then a collapsed ceiling would be the least of their worries.

Garin slithered around them and he raised his body until his head was on eye level with the older wizard. His thin tongue tasted the air and he turned his gaze towards Sirius.

"Nothing wrong with the hatchling as of now," Garin's voice spoke in his mind. "The hatchling
is reacting towards the Master's panic. If he calms down, the hatchling will calm down as well."

"And if he doesn't calm down?" Sirius asked through gritted teeth.

Instead of answering, the snake lowered his head again and glided behind Harry.

Right. His silence was enough answer.

"Okay, Harry, look at me, please," Sirius said and despite the heat scalding his skin, he placed two fingers underneath Harry's chin and slowly brought his head up until he was looking straight at the older man. "I need you to concentrate and follow my breathing pattern, okay? Just copy me, all right?"

He had no experience with panic attacks at all and hoped that what he was doing now wouldn't worsen Harry's condition.

Harry's pupils were large, but his eyes were focused on his godfather and Sirius inhaled loudly, holding his breath for five seconds before releasing it slowly.

At first Harry seemed too wrapped up in his panic to follow Sirius' breathing pattern, so on a whim, Sirius grabbed Harry's hand – forcing it away from his stomach – and placed it on his chest, so that Harry could feel his chest expand with every inhale and lower with every exhale.

Slowly, very slowly, Harry started to copy his breathing pattern until his magic calmed down and retreated and his pupils grew smaller again.

When Sirius thought Harry was calm enough, he cautiously released his shoulder and pulled back a bit.

"Are you okay?" he asked softly, his eyes flitting over Harry's body.

His godson gave him an embarrassed, weak smile. "Yeah, sorry. I don't know what happened," he replied sheepishly and he seemed ashamed.

"No need to apologize," Sirius retorted gruffly and leant back on his hands. "How's the baby? Still moving around too much?"

Harry grimaced and the hand on his stomach slowly rubbed up and down. "He's calmed down somewhat, but he's still kicking quite frequently."

An almost morbid curiosity came over Sirius and before he realised it, he stretched out his hand. "Can I …" he trailed off, but Harry seemed to understand what he wanted to ask.

He nodded slowly and sat up straight, allowing Sirius to place his hand on his rounded stomach.

It was weird; when Sirius looked at Harry's waist, he saw nothing but a flat stomach, but now with his hand on his belly, he could feel how rounded it was and how big already. Of course Harry being six months far meant his stomach wouldn't remain small, but it was just so strange to imagine that in his rounded stomach, a baby was growing.

Sirius thought he had grown used to feeling unborn babies kick – when Lily had been pregnant, she hadn't minded at all that her friends touched her stomach once the baby had started kicking hard enough to be felt and Sirius and Remus had probably felt Harry kick almost as much as James had. Then there had been Alice, who while more reserved, hadn't minded either that the members of the
Order occasionally felt her baby kick.

Despite that, the first kick of Harry's baby took him off guard and made him retract his hand in reflex.

Harry chuckled weakly. "He's becoming quite a kicker," he muttered dryly. "Usually he isn't this active though." A wrinkle appeared on his forehead and his eyes looked uneasily at his stomach.

Not wanting Harry to sink into another panic attack, Sirius quickly placed his hand on his stomach again and said, "Well, he probably takes after his father then. You were quite a kicker as well."

This made Harry look up surprised. "I was?"

Sirius nodded and kept his surprised sound hidden when something touched his thumb through the layer of cloth. "Yeah, it made your mum argue with your dad that instead of becoming a Quidditch player, you would do well in soccer." He smiled when he remembered the various arguments Lily and James had had whenever his best friend had mentioned that he couldn't wait for their son to grow big enough to fly.

"I take it my dad didn't agree with that?" Harry smiled.

"No, he didn't," Sirius chuckled and pulled his hand back, placing it on the ground. "By the time Lily was eight months pregnant, he had already bought you a toy broom."

Harry's mouth dropped open and he blinked. "Oh wow. Mum probably wasn't happy with that."

"James was smart enough to wait with showing the broom until you were ten months old," Sirius chuckled fondly.

Harry smiled faintly and stood up, brushing the dust off of his trousers as much as possible. He turned around and started hissing something to Garin, while Sirius stood up as well and rolled his shoulders.

Harry's relieved sigh made him turn his head. "What?"

"Garin said he had contact with Ruby and Mara. Only the part where we were standing collapsed, so the rest are unharmed." Harry explained and his eyes shone with relief.

Sirius closed his eyes and rubbed a hand over his face. "Thank Merlin," he groaned. He was more at ease now that he knew the rest of their group wasn't harmed.

He looked around, using his wand to lighten up the dark space. "I wonder whether there is a hidden exit," he muttered, squinting at the walls.

"Let's search for one," Harry mumbled and they spread out, studying the remaining three walls in the light the Lumos spell provided.

"What are we going to do if there is no other exit?" Harry's heavy question filled the small space.

Sirius stiffened before he forced himself to keep looking. "We will find something. I'm sure of it," he answered flatly.

He didn't want to consider the possibility that they were trapped here.

The Black family had been famous for being paranoid – even more than the Malfoys – and Grimmauld Place was full with hidden rooms and small passages which lead outside in case there
was ever an attack. Hopefully his family's paranoia had extended to their dead members as well and they had created some sort of escape route in case something happened in the tomb.

The light of his wand danced over the wall while his fingers glided over the rough stone, searching for a hidden door or even the presence of a ward. Abruptly he halted and brought his wand at eye level, waving the light back and forth slowly.

"Harry, come here for a sec," he called out.

Harry wandered over. "What? Did you find something?" he asked curiously.

"Do you notice something?" Sirius asked and gestured at the wall. He went over a particular spot on the wall again with the light.

"Shadows," Harry murmured after a few minutes perplexed. "It's creating shadows when it shouldn't." He looked at Sirius. "Does this mean this is an hidden exit?"

Sirius lowered his wand and narrowed his eyes. "I believe so, yes, but I have no clue how to make the ward fall down." He smacked his fist in frustration against the wall. "My family was fond of using passwords – either verbal or signs – whenever they created a hidden entrance and I have no clue what the password for this one can be."

He wanted to scream in frustration; they had finally found a possible exit and yet they were still trapped, thanks to his family's fucking need for stupid passwords. Who the fuck had decided that a dead person needed a bloody hidden entrance anyway?

A hand touched his arm and he whipped his head around.

Harry started at the quick action and retracted his arm, but didn't retreat. Instead he nodded towards the hidden ward. "Garin said he can try to bring the ward down," he murmured and bit his lip. "He's not sure whether he'll be able to, but he figures his poison should be strong enough."

Sirius sighed and glowered at the wall. "Let him try, then. It can't get worse than this I suppose," he grumbled and stepped back.

Harry nodded and hissed softly to Garin before he stepped back as well.

The large snake rose up until his head was near Sirius' shoulder level and his eyes were firmly fixated on the wall. He rocked from left to right as if he was imitating a pendulum. Garin's head reared back suddenly and his jaw dropped; he could easily fit an adult pig in his mouth. A large, white purple blob shot out of his throat and splashed open against the wall. The blob spread out, covering everything it touched with a whitish slime.

Air bubbles popped up and the liquid hissed viciously. A high shrill sound erupted from somewhere, forcing the two wizards to cover their ears, lest they wanted to risk becoming deaf.

The sound of glass shattering pierced even through the protective cover of their hands and Sirius winced. Garin bobbed up and down and then faced them again.

He and Harry held a short conversation in hushed whispering.

"The ward is down," Harry announced and a touch of relief shone through his tone. "Garin says that if we touch the wall now, it should turn into an ordinary door."

Sirius nodded abruptly and kept his wand ready. Even if the ward was down now, that didn't mean it
would be safe to let their guard down. Who knew what kind of traps were waiting for them on the other side?

"Okay, stay behind me and keep your wand in your hand," he murmured and raised his wand slightly.

Warily he touched the wall fleetingly with his fingers and with a loud rumble and the sound of stone turning on iron, the wall revealed a small opening. A large spider scurried out of the way when Sirius stepped forwards and he impatiently rubbed the dried out cobwebs out of his way.

Harry fell in place right behind him and together they shuffled through a very narrow corridor, filled with a lot of dust, dead spiders scattered across the ground and cobwebs decorating the walls. The corridor was barely wide enough for them to move around. Sirius doubted a broader shouldered person would be able to go through this one.

Considering there had been quite a few broad shouldered people in the Black family, he had to wonder what his ancestors had been thinking when they created this corridor.

Shaking his head, he concentrated on the path in front of him and chased away the darkness with a whispered "Lumos".

They ended up in another round chamber, albeit this one was smaller than the first one they encountered before.

"What is it with your family and round rooms?" Harry asked wearily and he looked around.

This room was rather plain. It had only one other exit – bar the one they had just come from – and several small alcoves casted shadows on the wall thanks to the light of the Lumos spell. The ground was covered with dirt and several small skeletons.

"I have no idea," Sirius sighed, his eyes sliding from one side to the other. Something about this space bothered him, but he couldn't figure out what exactly.

The cause of his unease was given by Harry, who had wandered over to one of the alcoves in the middle of the wall.

"Sirius," Harry called out apprehensively.

"What?"

"Can animals easily enter this tomb?"

"What? No, of course not. Most of them tend to stay away from this place, except for spiders and bugs and such," Sirius retorted. "Why?"

"Garin discovered some weird bones." Harry paused for a moment, presumably to listen to Garin's chatter, if Sirius had to go by the sudden hissing sound. "The bones have teeth marks on them."

Sirius stilled and turned around slowly. "Maybe some rat got inside?" he suggested softly.

His godson pointed towards a rather large bone resting against the wall – a bone too big to belong to a rat or a mouse.

"I doubt a rat can make such vicious marks on a human bone," Harry murmured. He had become completely still.
"Are you certain it's a human …"

"Garin can smell the difference between human and animal bones," Harry retorted flatly. Green eyes glanced at him, glittering almost feverishly while Harry's wand rose up in the air. "The question now is whether this particular animal still lives here."

"Harry, come here," Sirius barked, not liking the sudden shift in the atmosphere.

Garin was already sliding forwards when Harry took a few steps towards the older man – only to be cut off by three creatures suddenly dropping from the ceiling and landing with a high screech on the ground.

With a curse Sirius threw himself back against the wall, brandishing his wand.

In front of him a large creature rose up on his legs, resembling a Bowtruckle. Unlike a normal Bowtruckle, however, this one wasn't hand sized at all. If anything it was at least a head taller than Sirius and Sirius wasn't exactly little. Not only that, but its long, sharp fingers were covered in what seemed to be shards of glass, glinting with a red fluid – poison probably. Its skin was brown and black and covered with dark red spots; a sickening smell surrounded the creature. When it opened its giant jaw, Sirius was looking straight at three rows of razor sharp teeth, glinting dangerously in the weak light.

A long, narrow tongue shot out like lightning and grazed past Sirius, hitting the wall with a dull 'thump'. When Sirius glanced at the spot, his eyes grew wide when the stone crumbled as snow for the sun.

The next moment he had to dive sideways to avoid the long, spidery fingers aimed at his head. On his right side, he heard the vicious loud hissing of Garin and it felt as if his heart had stopped.

Harry.

Risking a glance, he saw that Harry and Garin had gotten separated when the creatures fell down. Garin was still relatively near Sirius, holding his own against the second creature, but Harry had been driven against the wall, a weak shield protecting him.

"Harry, try some Blasting curses and Heat spells!" Sirius snapped and threw a darker version of the Blasting curse at the creature blocking him.

The creature squealed when its left arm exploded and it let out a terrifying scream; its dark eyes glowing menacingly.

The creature squealed when its left arm exploded and it let out a terrifying scream; its dark eyes glowing menacingly.

So Blasting curses helped.

He ducked down to avoid the fast tongue and cast the Bound Inferno spell, hoping this one would be enough to finish off the creature. If it had any resemblance to the regular Bowtruckles, it would be extremely weak against fire.

The Bound Inferno spell hit the creature right in its stomach and it froze at first, dancing backwards, twisting and contorting its body as if trying to throw off the fire.

It didn't work. As soon as the fire got a hold on its dry, wood like skin, it spread out fast, consuming the creature's entire body.

It let out one last furious screech, but it stumbled against the wall and fell down, where the fire continued to crackle harshly, until nothing was left but a pile of dark brown ash and the lingering
smell of vomit.

On the other side of the room, he heard Harry yell out the Blast Ball spell and the responding painful screech of the third creature, making him grin viciously.

"Harry, use the Bound Inferno spell that I taught you last year! It will kill it instantly!"

Garin had managed to somehow bite the second creature as the creature was down on the ground, twitching and bucking while it let out gurgling sounds.

Not taking any chances, Sirius quickly engulfed it in another Bound Inferno spell.

"Harry, are you …"

His breath hitched.

The shield previously protecting Harry at least a bit had completely disappeared and the creature was looming forwards, missing part of its shoulder and its entire arm; its green blood dripping sluggishly on the ground.

As if through water, Sirius heard Harry desperately casting the Bound Inferno spell, but nothing was happening – as if his wand was not a magical tool, but merely a wooden stick.

The creature let out a strange cackle and then struck forwards.

"HARRY!"

"HARRY!" Draco lurched forwards, but was pulled back by his shoulder. He whirled around and wrenched his shoulder free, glaring heatedly at his mother. "Mother, what do you …"

"Ending up buried underneath the stones won't help Harry at all!" Mother snapped, raising her voice for the first time since he was a small child.

The sudden rise of her voice made him halt in shock, while the sound of rocks crashing on the ground continued.

The dust flying up made them all cough and their eyes water.

"Sirius? Harry?" Lupin called out worriedly and warily approached the wall of sharp rocks, his wand ready.

Mara and Ruby were already prowling around the make shift wall, sniffing at the stones; their tails swishing back and forth agitatedly.

Severus halted near the rocks, cocking his head to the right. He muttered a spell and seemed to listen to something.

"They are still alive," he suddenly announced and stepped back.

Draco whipped his head around to face him wide eyed. "They are?" he managed to bring out despite his sudden dry throat; his hands like claws digging into his thighs.

Harry wasn't crushed underneath the rocks? He and their baby were still alive?

Severus nodded slowly. "Yes; the spell picked up their heartbeats, so they should still be alive."
"That's good news at least," Mother sighed relieved; her already pale skin had become even paler and Draco only realised then that she had been scared as well.

Mara snorted loudly. "Yes, both are still alive. Garin is with them."

"Is everything all right with them?" Lupin asked sharply.

Ruby scraped the ground with one of his large paws. "Master seems to be caught in a bout of panic, but he is receiving help. The other man seems to be in a good state."

"What are we going to do?" Draco asked, swallowing. "Can we remove the rocks?"

Lupin grimaced, lowering his wand. "Not without risking the collapse of the entire ceiling," he admitted grudgingly. He looked longingly at the rocks. "We could try blasting a hole in the middle of it while supporting the rest, but I'm not certain whether that would be able to hold everything up until we're out of here."

"They are going to try and find another way out," Mara remarked. She shook her large head. "They suspect that there must be a hidden exit somewhere."

"What are we going to do then?" Draco asked, biting his lip. It didn't feel right to just do nothing. What if they couldn't find a hidden exit? They couldn't leave them here!

Mother grimaced lightly. "There is not much we can do here for them," she said slowly. "We can try to find a room or corridor linked to this room and help them break out through that wall, but it's going to be a difficult search."

Severus backed away; his lips a thin line on his face. "Let's continue our search. If we don't find the portrait or another way to get them out, we'll return to this room and try to find a way to clear the rubble without collapsing the entire ceiling."

Draco wanted to protest; he didn't want to leave his lover behind. What if they couldn't find another exit and they were stuck behind the rocks? Harry could go into another panic attack or his magic could start acting up again. So far he had been able to remain calm, because he had the knowledge that Draco was near him – what would happen if he thought Draco had left?

A shudder raked through his body. He didn't even dare to imagine what would happen next.

Yet, he also had to agree with his mother – at this point, there was nothing they could do. Even trying to remove one rock could cause the entire ceiling to collapse.

Here he had thought that nothing could become worse than Dumbledore's house.

"Let's go," Lupin sighed and turned around.

They passed the coffin and several boxes and walked into a slightly narrow corridor. The ground, strangely, was covered with some kind of rug and it made Draco wonder why on earth a tomb would need a rug.

Then again, one could also wonder why a tomb needed so many traps.

This particular thought had barely passed through his mind, but he could smack himself for his stupidity. Of course a tomb wasn't in need of so many traps – but when a tomb contained a very valuable item, of course it would be filled with traps.
"Draco, stay alert, please," Mother whispered and touched his shoulder fleetingly.

Draco started, but nodded quickly. Yes, losing his concentration here could prove to be fatal.

He casted one last look at the room they had left and silently promised to himself that he would be back soon to help Harry.

If they hadn't found the portrait in one hour, the whole quest be damned, he would return to this room and he would find a way to get Harry out of there. Harry was more important to him than a portrait.

She would have to keep an eye on her son. Well, she had been planning to do that either way, she mused while the small group slowly made their way through the corridor. But after being forced to leave Harry behind, she wouldn't put it past her son to sneak back and try to find a way to put a hole in the rubble without being buried underneath the rest of the ceiling.

She understood how he felt – even she had to resist the urge to stay behind and try to figure out a way to help Harry and her cousin – but she was also realistic and not blinded by the love Draco held for Harry. At this moment, they could do nothing to help them and could only hope that they either found another exit or they found the room right next to the one they had just left, so that they could make a hole through that wall.

Meanwhile they still had to find the portrait of Helga Hufflepuff.

Narcissa pursed her lips and glanced sideways at the dusty walls. Eerie shadows danced across the stone thanks to the flames on Mara's and Ruby's tails. They took up the lead, providing enough light so that nobody could stumble.

The corridor wasn't that long; they had barely walked for five minutes when they were brought into a small space, barely big enough to fit all of them inside.

This space disembogued into three other corridors; the entrances were like gaping, dark mouths and cold air was streaming through them. Above each entrance the symbol of the Black family was etched into a silver plate – a novelty, as the other entrances didn't have such symbols above them.

Narcissa tried to remember through which one her mother had steered her. She could recall passing through this exact space, but for the life of her she couldn't remember which one they had chosen. How was that possible? Her memory had always been her greatest asset and yet now, when she needed it the most, it was failing her.

Her fingers tightened in a fold of her robes.

"Which one should we choose?" Draco asked quietly; his eyes were flitting across the entrances, the grip on his wand tense.

"Mother brought me through this space, but I can't recall which corridor we chose," Narcissa admitted, taking a step forwards.

"Mara? Ruby?" Remus asked softly and gazed with hooded eyes at the two large animals wandering back and forth.

Ruby snorted; his whiskers twitched violently. "We are receiving mixed signals," he admitted annoyed.

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"Mixed signals?" Severus raised his eyebrows.

Mara spoke up, "We feel a strong presence in two of the three corridors. Both are receiving the same amount of aura, so it is difficult for us to determine which one would be the best choice." She sounded on the verge of snarling in rage.

They all looked at each other.

"I am not fond of this particular option, but maybe it would be best if we separated into two groups?" Severus broke the tense silence; a strand of his dark hair casting a shadow across his face.

"I do not think it is wise for us to split up now," Narcissa murmured, but her protest didn't contain the strength she usually put forth when opposing someone.

No, it was not wise at all. But did they have any choice?

"It isn't," Remus agreed and sighed. "But at this point, we don't have much choice." He addressed Ruby and Mara, "Point us the two corridors most likely to lead us to Hufflepuff, please. Would you each also accompany a group?" He threw a dark look at the entrances. "It probably won't help that much if there are traps, but …"

"The middle and the right corridor contain the most amount of aura," Ruby murmured and padded towards Remus. "I'll join you."

"I'll accompany you," Mara announced and approached Narcissa and her son.

Narcissa looked at both men contemplatively. She wasn't certain whether it would be a good idea to have those two form a group of their own – she doubted they would start a row, but they didn't share a lovely past.

Severus seemed to realise what she was thinking. He rolled his eyes and his upper lip curled up, as if he had tasted something sour. "Go on, Narcissa. Take Draco with you. We'll be fine."

"Don't try to maim or kill each other," Narcissa retorted dryly.

Remus offered her a small smile. "We won't," he promised.

Well, she thought while she laid her hand on Draco's shoulder, steering him towards the right corridor, Remus and Severus are more likely to get along than Sirius and Severus.

The two groups entered their corridor at the same moment.

Narcissa shivered lightly when the cold air caressed her face. It would have felt refreshing in the otherwise stuffy space, except that it smelt incredibly stale, bordering on disgusting.

"Do you think we'll find Hufflepuff soon?" Draco asked softly; his eyes focused on the path in front of them.

She squeezed his shoulder softly before letting her hand fall next to her hip. "We'll find her, Draco. And then we will all get out of here," she promised.

She had never been a mother who promised something just to have her child shut up; she despised parents who lied to their children to keep them content instead of telling the truth, no matter how much that might hurt.
Promising that they would all leave this tomb safely was a rather Gryffindor like thing to say and normally she refrained from saying things with an uncertain outcome like their situation. But in this case, she would not consider any other outcome than them leaving this forsaken tomb alive.

Draco nodded silently; he still seemed very tense and worried, but at least now he wasn't trying to cast glances backwards anymore, which he had been doing frequently ever since they left the room with Elladora's coffin.

Mara growled warningly.

"Mara?" Draco asked bewildered.

"Something isn't right," she warned them; her tail thumping harshly against the walls. "We will be entering a room soon; be careful."

Narcissa furrowed her eyebrows lightly, wondering what the snow leopard meant with this vague warning.

Nevertheless, she tightened the grip on her wand and used a nonverbal spell to heighten her senses slightly. Her ears picked up a low buzzing sound as that of insects during a warm summer's evening. Her nose picked up a peculiar scent; something sour and sweet at the same time.

They arrived at the room a couple of minutes later. It appeared to be a very plain one. It held one dark brown coffin resting against the wall, furthest located from the entrance. Next to the coffin, two iron boxes were stacked upon each other; the height nearing the lid of the coffin.

The room didn't hold any other furniture; apparently, even though this particular ancestor had been important enough to warrant a place in this tomb, the family hadn't considered him important to give him more than two boxes.

"Mara, what are you sensing?" Draco asked with a heavy frown. "There is nothing in here."

The snow leopard was walking restlessly across one wall, sniffing the floor. She growled again. "It doesn't feel right in here. It feels as if someone passed through here recently, but I can't pick up a scent or a trace of its aura!"

Narcissa shared a heavy look with her son and both immediately raised their wands, looking around carefully. If someone had managed to enter this tomb without triggering any alarm, this wasn't a good sign at all.

Because whoever it was, it couldn't be someone with good intentions.

The explosion that followed, vibrated the walls and threw Narcissa backwards, smacking her body harshly against the unforgiving wall. She fell down with a choked scream, landing heavily on her arm.

Heavy smoke entered her nostrils and made her cough violently; she surged upwards so that she was sitting on her knees, her hands on the ground the only thing holding her up. She dry heaved several times, all the while clutching her wand tightly in her one hand. The smoke burned in her lungs and vaguely she hoped it wasn't poisonous.

When the smoke finally cleared up, she dared to open her eyes again and slowly sat up.
"Draco, are you …"

"I am afraid your son cannot really answer you at this moment, my dear lady."

Her breath stopped and her heart thundered madly in her chest; the sound filling her ears.

In front of her, clad in dark blue robes, stood Albus Dumbledore; his baby blue eyes gazing at her calmly. His bony hand was patting something softly and involuntarily her gaze was drawn towards it.

She could barely hold herself back from lunging forwards to scratch the bastard's eyes out.

Her son, her only son, was tied up like some lowly animal on a rickety chair while blood dripped sluggishly from a head wound. A grey rag was forced between his lips in order to silence him and his grey eyes looked at her with a terror, the likes of which she had wished to never see in his eyes.

His pet was lying unconsciously against the wall – Mara was breathing unsteadily as if her ribs had been broken and she was having difficulties breathing properly. Her eyes, half lidded, were staring blankly at Narcissa.

"How did you manage to enter here?" she brought out in a rough voice. She slowly stood up, hiding a wince when pain shot like a hot bolt through her arm. She hoped it wasn't broken.

Dumbledore did nothing to stop her from standing up – most likely realising she wouldn't dare to do anything before she knew what would happen to her son.

"It seems that a particular group has been going around, searching for the portraits of the Founders," he replied with a merry smile. "Imagine my surprise when I discovered both Godric and Rowena were gone! But I guess I should not be that surprised – my dear boy has always managed to do the unimaginable."

"How did you enter here?" she said through gritted teeth. Her wand dangled next to her hip. She would need to figure out how she could bind – or even better kill – the old man before he could manage to hurt Draco.

Whatever he ended up doing to her didn't matter as long as her son was safe.

"Ah, that's an interesting story actually," Dumbledore smiled friendly and waved towards a plain piece of wood lying on the ground. "This graveyard is remarkable. You can only enter it when a Black accompanies you. An ingenious invention I must admit. That is why, long ago when I was here, I enchanted a piece of wood to immediately call me here if someone had entered this tomb. You could consider it a special form of a Portkey if you will."

Narcissa blanched; this particular form of magic was treading the area of the Forbidden Arts. It wasn't exactly a Dark Spell, but the Ministry preferred that nobody except authorized people used this particular spell. Some old Pureblood families still used it to protect their homes, but most people relied on wards to defend their houses now.

Anyone could use it, though, no matter whether they were affiliated with the property in question or not.

"Imagine my surprise when I found you both here," Dumbledore continued merrily. He cocked his head slightly. "Can I safely assume that this means that young Harry must be somewhere near as well? Accompanied by at least one other person and his trusted pets?"
She clenched her jaw, but refused to answer.

The old man merely nodded benignantly as if her silence was confirmation enough. "I am surprised you let him accompany you on this trip, considering his state."

"What do you want?" she asked coldly.

He smiled merrily. "No need to be so hostile, my dear lady. I am not here to antagonize you or dear Draco here."

"Don't play games."

He sighed; the twinkling in his blue eyes died out. He spread out his arms. "I just want to ensure the peace in the Wizarding World, my lady, just like you want I assume."

She glared at him. This was one of the reasons why she hated the bloody bastard: it took him far too long to get to the bloody point.

"It is very simple," he continued, lowering his arms again. "I am not a violent person nor do I wish to hurt innocent people. That is why I will let you, Draco and his pet go without harming you."

"On which condition?"

His eyes deepened and the atmosphere grew colder.

"To ensure the peace in our world, I need Harry Potter. More specifically his life." He smiled; his eyes as cold as ice. "Hand over dear Harry and you and your son can go. Otherwise, I'm afraid some measures will be taken."

Chapter End Notes

AN2: Got to love those cliffhangers, right? *coughs* I wonder how many of you think I'm evil now ^^;

Let me know what you think of this chapter in a comment!

Next time: It's going from bad to worse. Are they going to leave this graveyard in one piece - or at the very least alive?

See you all next time!

Cuddles

Melissa
Completed Circle Part 2

Chapter Notes

Author's note: I managed to keep my promise - somewhat. At least it's still posted in January, right? ^^; My exams are finally done, so I managed to finish this chapter during the last two days. I didn't even think it would become this long, but I suppose you could consider it some sort of apology for waiting almost an entire month *coughs*

Apologies in advance if the chapter seems awkward - I had a lot of trouble completing it, despite knowing where to go with it, so it may seem awkward at times. I guess being sleep deprived doesn't help much either =_= Either way, I promise to make the next one less awkward!

Thank you for the comments and kudos!

Warnings: angst, drama, a lot of pov shifts (I think the only ones who didn't get a pov in this one are Harry and Narcissa), baby drama. I think those are the major ones

Disclaimer: I don't own Harry Potter - J.K. Rowling owns it

I hope you'll like it! (Despite the awkwardness surrounding some of the scenes)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 28: Completed Circle Part 2

"How many corridors are there in this place?" Lupin muttered darkly.

"Quite a lot, I suspect; giving which family owns it," Severus retorted flatly. He studied the walls with a keen eye.

Potter's cat, Ruby, had taken up the lead and was leading them through a broad corridor. The ground was uneven at some points and had the men paying extra attention to where they placed their feet to avoid stumbling or taking a nasty fall.

Lupin growled – showing what kind of animal he turned into once a month – and squared his shoulders.

Severus let him mutter darkly to himself and concentrated instead on their surroundings. There didn't seem to be any traps in this corridor or the ones they passed through before and it made him question why. Wouldn't it be easier to set up traps in the corridors so that potential thieves wouldn't be able to trespass deeply?

How much of these traps in the rooms were courtesy of the Black family and how much were of Albus' own making?

Was it even possible for the old fool to create traps in this tomb?

Most likely, he admitted quietly to himself. If he had gained access to this tomb, it wouldn't be that farfetched to imagine that he was also capable of leaving traps behind.
So the question remained: how much of these traps were the Blacks' work and how much Dumbledore's?

Two thin candles flickered to life when the corridor ended up in a small room.

Warily, both men stepped forwards and looked around; Ruby sniffing the ground quietly.

This room contained two coffins – both made of some black wood and decorated with silver symbols. Next to each coffin a chair – decorated with a thick, green, satin pillow – was placed and at the foot of each coffin a wooden box stood. There was only one other entrance, which was half covered by a red cloth.

"Rather plain room," Lupin commented softly; his fingers trailing absentmindedly along his wand. "I doubt we'll find the portrait here."

"Still it is better if we do a quick search through," Severus murmured and went over to the coffin on the left side. After using a Detection spell, which revealed nothing dangerous, he first opened the box and peered into it. Nothing but dusty notebooks and a single dead spider. His fingers twitched with the desire to pick up a notebook and browse through it, but he restrained himself. No matter how much it annoyed him that the Black family had kept a fairly large source of knowledge hidden from the rest of the world, he couldn't let himself be distracted by it.

They were here for one thing only and that didn't include any of the notebooks, files or books.

While Ruby was examining the walls and the floor and Lupin the coffin next to him, Severus stepped forwards and studied the coffin in front of him intently. He doubted that a portrait would fit in it, but …

He cocked his head and narrowed his eyes, taking another step forwards. There was something about the coffin that didn't seem right. Something was off about it. But what? The wood was the one every Pureblood family used and aside from some protection charms against fire, there was nothing else added to it.

The paint was nothing special either and the symbols didn't call up any strange creature or used a dark form of magic.

Yet something was tugging at his mind; something that was screaming at him and practically pointing out that something was wrong with it.

His wand casually resting in his hand, he placed his other hand on top of the coffin, feeling the smooth, cold wood. No magical spark. No resistance whatsoever.

Instead of feeling reassured, he grew more wary.

He was now so close to the coffin that his robes brushed against the wood. He studied the side closest to him and his eyebrows shot up once he noticed what exactly was wrong with the coffin.

The lid had been moved to the left for an inch. It hadn't been immediately obvious, because the two candles in the room were too weak to provide decent light.

"Lumos," he murmured and held the tip of his wand to the lid. Yes, it had been moved a bit more than an inch. How curious.

For a few seconds he contemplated the thought that this coffin contained another undead body – after all, there had been one already in the front of the graveyard. But no, if there was another undead
body waiting to attack, it would have done so when they had entered the room or at the very least when he had placed his hand on the coffin.

So no undead body then.

Maybe it was simply nothing and the undertaker hadn't closed the coffin perfectly. That had happened before.

Except it wouldn't happen in a family like the Blacks who very much valued their family and wouldn't stand for it if the case housing their relative wasn't closed off properly.

Perhaps Albus had opened this particular coffin and hadn't closed it off properly – but even in his old age, he hadn't gone senile. In the off chance he had put something important in the coffin, he would have made certain it was closed off properly and would have added some extra curses to it.

So the most likely conclusion was that there was nothing of importance in the coffin.

And yet … and yet …

With an irritated huff, Severus placed the palm of his hand against the lid and pushed against it carefully, not wanting it to suddenly drop.

Once the lid was pushed away until it uncovered half of the coffin, he looked down, right into the grinning face of a skeleton. A skeleton dressed in midnight blue robes, trimmed with gold around the sleeves. A skeleton which seemed to be swallowed up by the coffin – either the person to whom this skeleton belonged, had been rather small or …

Was the coffin actually bigger on the inside? Who on earth would use Wizarding space for a god damn coffin? Surely not even the Blacks could be that insane!

Severus noticed too late the thin, shadowy tendrils crawling around his waist. When a sudden coldness penetrated through his robes, he looked down abruptly and his eyes widened when they caught sight of the dozens of shadowy tendrils tightening their grip around him. Before he could cast a spell, one tendril reached out and flicked his wand away.

"Lu - "

He was cut off abruptly by the tendrils pulling him harshly into the coffin. He struggled against them and kicked with his legs, swearing and cursing escaping his mouth, but the tendrils just crawled upwards until they rested right underneath his nose and then everything became dark when the coffin slid close with an ominous 'click'.

Then a voice started whispering in his ears.

Remus looked up when he heard a soft 'click'. His gaze roamed across the room, his senses on high alert, but he didn't pick up anything strange. The air felt a tad cooler, but that could easily come from the tiny gaps in the stone. He very much doubted that the tomb had been taken care of this past decade.

"Ruby?"

The lion was sniffing restlessly around the left coffin, his nails raking across the floor.

"I thought I felt something," Ruby clarified and stepped away from the tomb. "But it is gone."
Remus sighed and nodded. "Yes, I feel like something happened, but nothing seems out of place," he murmured and casted a critical glance at the two coffins. "I don't think the portrait is here."

Ruby sighed loudly. "The presence is weak here," he agreed. "But I think we are following the correct path." He padded over to the only other exit in the room. "The aura is growing stronger here."

"Eventually we'll have to find it," Remus muttered annoyed and pushed the red cloth out of his way, slipping past it.

While he followed Ruby through the dark corridor – only weakly illuminated by the fire on Ruby's tail – his thoughts shot back to Sirius and Harry and he bit his lip savagely. Despite being assured by both Ruby and Mara that everything was okay with both wizards, he didn't feel at ease. Harry was in an incredibly vulnerable state – why on earth had he ever let Harry join them? Because he would have followed you regardless of what you said, a voice piped up in the back of his mind and he gritted his teeth.

Harry looked more like his father than he thought – James had always been one to follow his friends wherever they went; whether it was dangerous or not. Remus could understand how Harry felt – after so long without a real family, he must have been afraid that he would lose them if he lost sight of them. Harry's mental state had become better after discussing the Dursleys with him and Sirius, but the emotional wounds of the Dursleys' neglect would forever be there and the most he and Sirius could try to do was reduce the gaping hole left behind by that vile family. It would never disappear.

In a way it was thus understandable that Harry had wanted to join them – especially considering the special bond he shared with Draco. That made Remus wonder how much of Harry's persistence to join them had come out of the natural need and fear to not lose his only family and how much had been directed by the magical bond with the Malfoy heir. After all, all magical bonds required the partners to be close together; one bond was stricter about that than the other, but from what Remus had observed and read about this particular bond, it required very close proximity between the two young men. Even more so now that Harry had become pregnant.

Still, this particular environment wasn't healthy for Harry.

And Sirius …

Remus trusted his lover with his life and even his sanity, but he wasn't certain how this whole ordeal would affect Sirius mentally. Sirius had done his best for years to avoid everything that had ties to his family – coming here had to be a difficult thing for him. Azkaban had done more damage to Sirius' mind than both liked to admit – despite being free for four years, the man still woke up due to his intense nightmares and occasionally he experienced night terrors. Remus had often woken up in the middle of the night only to find the other side of the bed empty and Sirius sitting in the living room, staring blankly at the fire with a glass of Firewhiskey in his hand. Those were the moments that scared Remus the most, because it felt as if he couldn't reach his lover then, as if there was some sort of barrier between them that prevented Remus from pulling Sirius back to reality.

Sirius' nightmares had been the worst during the time he had been forced to stay inside Grimmauld Place. That was a year Remus preferred to forget, due to how out of control Sirius had become.

How would being here – literally surrounded by the bodies of his family – affect Sirius now? Maybe having Harry with him would help to ground him to reality – his godson was one of the few reasons why Sirius had managed to retain most of his sanity.

Remus clenched his hands into fists and exhaled slowly; frustration and anger simmering right
underneath his skin, his magic buzzing with it. All he could do at this moment was find Hufflepuff's portrait soon so that he could help Sirius and Harry break free.

The wolf in him whined at him to go back now and find his mate, but he ruthlessly suppressed it. He just had to trust that Sirius would be okay for now.

His skin prickled when a wave of magic caressed his skin and he abruptly halted. Ruby kept walking forwards until he sensed Remus no longer following him. The lion turned his head and looked at him inquiringly.

Remus gestured at the entrance at his left, which led to a circular room from what he could see in the dim light. "Aren't we going inside? There is a lot of magic present here," he remarked and as if in response, his bones seemed to thrum with the heaviness of the magic reaching out to him.

Ruby shook his head. "A lot of magic, yes. A lot of dark magic, but it is not the room we need," he replied. "I do not sense the aura in that room at all. Please ignore it and follow me."

Remus furrowed his eyebrows, but decided to trust Ruby's instinct – as an Elemental Creature, Ruby had stronger senses than him. If the lion said the portrait wasn't there, then it wasn't there.

They rounded another corner and Remus wondered silently just how deep this tomb was. Surely they were nearly at the end or the centre?

Ruby halted in the middle of the wide space. In front of them were two separate corridors and they were covered by heavy, midnight blue drapes that reached towards the ground. The lion raised his head and sniffed loudly, padding back and forth in front of the two covered entrances.

Remus stayed silent and hung back, not wanting to disturb the lion.

An amused growl left Ruby's throat and Remus nearly jumped three feet in the air at the sudden disturbance of the silence.

Heart thudding wildly, he stared at Ruby, who turned back to him and bared his teeth.

"We are very close. It is the left corridor," Ruby explained and a heavy rumble made his large body vibrate lightly.

He was purring in delight.

A feral grin unfolded on Remus' face and he held up his wand. Ruby purring could only mean one thing: they were very, very close to the end of their search.

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Severus snarled when the lid closed above him and twisted his body slightly to the left, trying to ignore the taunting voice whispering in his ears. Of course there would be a bloody Dark curse hidden inside the coffin itself! At this point he didn't even care whether the curse had been put there by the Blacks or by Albus – he wanted to get out now.

"Lupin!" he barked once the tendrils had slid off of him. He couldn't see them in the darkness, but he felt significantly less cold. His hand touched the brittle bone of the skeleton next to him and he grimaced, before he braced himself and slammed his fist against the lid of the coffin.

Pain shot through his hand like a lightning bolt and he bit his lip to distract himself. He had undergone worse than this.
"Lupin!" he snapped and this time he kicked his foot against the wood.

Still no response.

He frowned and held still for a moment. There was the possibility that there was a Muffle charm on this coffin – but surely Lupin must have noticed his disappearance? The wolf could be an idiot at times, but he wasn't that stupid. He wouldn't leave him behind.

*Are you certain?*, the poisonous voice cackled in his ears. *Open your ears and listen*, the voice hissed viciously – sounding eerily similar to the Dark Lord's raspy voice.

Unwillingly Severus held his breath and listened carefully.

"Ruby?" he heard Lupin ask confused.

A vague padding sound to the right side of the coffin. A strange scratching sound.

"Yes, I feel like something happened, but nothing seems out of place," Lupin spoke up again. "I don't think the portrait is here."

Footsteps were heard, Lupin murmured something else that was too soft for Severus to pick up and then it was completely silent.

*Looks like he left you here*, the voice piped up again and it snickered. *But then that's the story of your life, isn't it? Your mother didn't care enough about you to leave your deadbeat father. Your precious mentor didn't care enough for you to believe your side of the story. Your only friend left you to marry your enemy. Even your precious lover didn't care enough about you to go against his father's will. Seventeen years you had to wait until he was back in your arms – and even now his ex-wife spends more time with him than you."

*Don't you understand it yet? You, Severus Tobias Snape, are not meant to be loved or cared for. You are deluding yourself if you believe that any of these people care about you.*

*Your lover appointed you as his son's godfather as an act of pity – because he can see how incredibly pathetic you really are. You hide it behind a cold exterior, but the truth is, Snivellus, that you are a weak, pathetic boy who will never be put first place by anyone. Even the most kind hearted one of your school bullies is more than happy to leave you behind.*

"Shut up," Severus whispered coldly and the voice shrieked in delight.

*Yes, yes, keep deluding yourself. Illusions are all you have after all.*

Severus clenched his teeth and ignored the taunting whispers; he wouldn't give in to it. He recognized this kind of curse: it was designed to pull the victim into a state of despair until the person committed suicide. Yes, some of the taunts did manage to slip past his walls – but he was stronger than that. He had grown past them and learnt to deal with those memories. He wouldn't let them control them.

The voice cackled. *Hm, not control them, huh? That may be true – but take a good look around you, smart boy. What do you think a narrow, closed off space means?*

Severus stilled and his eyes grew wide when the implication hit him. The Wizarding space had just been an illusion created by the curse; the coffin was indeed big enough to contain two bodies – but the supply of air would run out soon as no fresh air was able to enter.
Yesss, you have figured it out. At least your brain isn't that pathetic, the voice hissed viciously. No one is going to come for you, Snape. They have all forgotten about you. Don't you think it's ironic? You were taunted by a Black – and now you will be buried with them.

Severus tuned out the voice and kept himself as immobile as possible. The more he moved around and talked, the quicker his air supply would disappear. As long as he kept calm and held still, he would be able to hold out. He would try to figure out a way to open the lid; he didn’t have his wand with him, but that didn’t mean he was entirely defenceless.

However, until he had a plan of which he was certain it would succeed, he would hold still.

He would have to endure it for now – but one thing was for certain: he was not intending to die here.

Before the creature could bite through Harry's throat, his body emitted a powerful blast of pure magic. Sirius was thrown back against the wall with a cut off yell and Garin hissed agitatedly when the magic prevented him from reaching his master.

The creature – which had born the heaviest brunt of the magical blast – shrieked in agony before it completely evaporated as if it was smoke.

Harry gasped loudly and sunk down against the wall, moaning lowly.

With a grunt of pain and a swear, Sirius stumbled and raised himself from the ground, feeling his shoulders protest. Ignoring the burning pain, he hurried over to Harry and fell down in front of him.

"Harry, can you hear me?" Sirius asked and grabbed Harry's chin, pulling his head up.

Dark green eyes filled with pain and sheer panic looked back at him. "It hurts, Sirius," Harry whimpered and his breathing was irregular, as if he couldn't breathe in properly.

"What hurts?" Sirius asked sharply and looked over Harry's body. There didn't seem to be any physical wounds, bruises or blood, but that didn't put him at ease.

A magical outburst of that strength was incredibly dangerous, because it forced the body to go past its limits. The only time when the magic was able to do that was when the person was in mortal peril. It usually came with a high price, though.

And Sirius feared what that high price could be.

"My arms, my ribs and my stomach. I can't feel my son!" Harry brought out in a stammering voice and shock was replacing the panic in his eyes. His arms clenched around his stomach.

Sirius' throat became dry. "What do you mean: you can't feel your son?" he asked.

"I can't feel him anymore! I can't feel him kicking! I can't feel his magic! I don't feel anything!" Harry replied hysterically and a sob made his body tremble violently. "I don't want to lose him, Sirius! I can't lose him, I can't!"

"Calm down, Harry. You need to calm down," Sirius ordered urgently, but his hands trembled slightly when he grabbed Harry's shoulders. "Breathe in, breathe out. Breathe in, breath out, come on."

Harry did his best to concentrate on his breathing, but his wild gaze fixated on his stomach let Sirius know that his godson was close to breaking down.
His own heart felt like it would beat straight through his chest and he swallowed heavily. While Harry tried his best to calm down, Sirius reached out with his magic and tried to connect it with the faint one in Harry's stomach that he had sensed at occasions when his godson had been close to him.

He gritted his teeth together when he didn't feel anything. He closed his eyes and tried again, putting more power behind it. His magic pushed past Harry's – easily accepted by the younger man as he didn't feel threatened by Sirius – and reached deep inside. Harry's magic greeted him quickly – it was wildly out of control, pulsing and vibrating and it seemed to struggle to pull itself together again after the enormous blast they had gone through. It didn't protest Sirius' invasion, though and Sirius ignored it in return.

He reached deeper and deeper – feeling himself starting to sweat from the effort he had to go through as he wasn't used to this – and halted. He thought he sensed a faint pulse, but …

Opening his eyes again, he bowed his head and grimaced. Harry wasn't the only one that couldn't feel the baby's magic anymore. He dearly hoped that he was just not sensitive enough to pick it up – after all, Remus had always been better with this particular branch of magic – but he was afraid of the truth.

He whipped his head around when he felt something gliding past his hip and heaved a breath of relief when he saw that it was only Garin. The snake was staring intently at Harry, who was letting out the occasional whimper of pain and whose eyes were closed now.

Garin slithered close until his head was hovering above Harry's stomach and his tongue came out.

Without realising it, Sirius held his breath and stared at the snake. Of course – Garin would surely know what was happening! He had known before that the baby had been in distress because of Harry's emotional state; he would be able to figure out again what they had to do now.

"Master is in a lot of pain now," Garin spoke up in his head and the snake sounded troubled.

Sirius nodded silently.

Garin turned his head and stared at Sirius with a queer look. "The magic is wreaking havoc. It is trying to decide whether it should attack or regroup." The snake paused and his tongue came out again. Even through the mental link, the snake sounded soft when he continued, "The hatchling is on the verge of dying. He is fighting, but his magic is still too weak to soothe Master's magic."

Sirius' arms seemed to turn to jelly and he let them fall back to dangle next to him while he stared speechlessly at Garin.

"What?" he whispered. The snake had to joking. There was no way that Harry would lose the baby now – not now when he was past the dangerous first three months. They were all looking forward to meeting the baby – it couldn't be happening now. It would be too cruel.

But since when had Lady Faith ever been gentle?

"You have a plan, right?" Sirius demanded in a rough voice and glared at Garin; his hand clenching around his wand. "You're going to help both of them, right?"

Garin's head bobbed back and forth, while his tongue tasted the air. He seemed to be contemplating something.
"Sirius?" Harry's small voice brought his attention back to his godson.

"Yeah?"

"What's wrong with the baby?"

Sirius stilled when the realisation hit him: Garin had only directed his explanation of the baby to him and not to his master. Harry had no clue at all what was happening now and it left the older man with an uncomfortable dilemma: should he tell Harry the truth or not? If he told the truth, then there was a chance Harry would start panicking. If he lied, Harry would most likely be calm, but if it all took a turn for the worse …

"Sirius? Tell me, please."

Sirius opened his eyes and met Harry's worried look. Steeling himself, he said softly, "Your magic is acting up and the baby's magic is too weak as of now to help you calm down. Garin said that …" He took a deep breath and continued, "He said that there is a chance that the baby won't survive."

Harry's breath hitched and he shivered visibly, letting out a shrill chuckle, which made Sirius wince. "How ironic," Harry muttered darkly and his trembling grew worse. "I had planned to get rid of the baby before I changed my mind and now it turns out that I'm still going to lose him. Guess this is my punishment, huh?" he choked out bitterly and tears trickled over his cheeks.

"Harry, no, this is not your fault," Sirius said immediately and tried to catch his gaze.

The younger man pressed his lips together and avoided his eyes, pressing the palms of his hands against his forehead.

"It will be fine, you'll see," Sirius tried to reassure him, but even he heard the uncertainty in his own voice. He was not very knowledgeable when it concerned things like pregnancies, but he knew how vulnerable male pregnancies were. Add the abnormal stress Harry was living under due to Dumbledore and it was already a miracle he had managed to carry the baby for so long without too many problems.

He wished he could help his godson, but at this moment his hands were tied and he could do little more than try to keep him calm. He had never felt this useless before and he loathed that feeling.

All his attention was geared towards Harry, so he didn't take notice of Garin slithering past him. Harry suddenly slumping forwards made him shout in surprise and he quickly bent forwards to catch him, so that he wouldn't land on the floor.

"What the …"

"I injected some of my venom in him like I have done before," Garin spoke through their mental link, sounding pensively. "It should be strong enough to calm down his magic and make certain that everything is in balance again."

The vague comment about having injected venom in Harry before barely registered in his mind. "Does this mean that the baby will be okay?" he asked anxiously, staring down at the pale face of Harry, whose body was still faintly trembling.

Garin swayed back and forth. "Normally, yes. But someone needs to examine him when we go back."

His shoulders slumped in relief and he heaved a soft sigh. As long as the baby stood a chance of
surviving, he would take that chance.

"Let us leave. I am picking up the aura." Garin glided away, focused on the only other available exit.

Sirius struggled a bit with picking up Harry; he was practically dead weight now and he had to make sure he didn't bump against his stomach accidentally. After a moment of rearranging limbs and shuffling around, he managed to pick him up, so that he ended with his head lying against Sirius' shoulders and his arms placed over his stomach. His wand was stuffed in Sirius' back pocket.

Sirius grimaced; holding Harry in his arms severely limited his movements and he had a difficult time holding his wand deftly. If something decided to attack them now, they would be in deep shit, because he suspected he wouldn't be fast enough to defend them both.

But staying here wouldn't help them either and the sooner they got out of this god forsaken tomb, the better.

"All right, lead the way," he muttered and they disappeared through the narrow corridor, leaving the dead creatures behind.

"Eugh," Draco groaned and pushed himself up, his arms nearly buckling underneath his weight when his ribs protested. Fuck, he hoped he hadn't broken them. Hissing from the pain, he managed to sit up, feeling his back and ribs protesting the entire time; white hot pain flaring up.

"Mother? Mara?" he croaked out and carefully felt his head; he didn't seem to have any head wounds, but his head was still pounding from the impact against the wall.

"Are you all right?" Mara asked and he heard her approaching.

"I feel like shit," he told her honestly and grimaced. He opened his eyes slowly, blinking when he saw the white smoke drifting around in the room. "Where's mother?"

"We have a small complication," Mara told him delicately and she jerked her massive head towards the other side of the room.

Gritting his teeth, he managed to get up – all the while his ribs protesting – and focused his attention on the other side of the room, where the smoke was slowly dissipating.

What he saw, perplexed him.

"What on earth is happening to her?" he asked shocked and his hand automatically clenched around his wand, which thankfully was still in his grasp.

His mother was surrounded by a light rose bubble like shield and she seemed to be talking to thin air; her eyes containing a murderous rage which made Draco shiver in fear. She stumbled up, before she slumped down again against the wall, her wand trembling in her grasp. The faint colour she had in her face was drained away by whatever she was seeing and she was shaking her head, stammering something.

"She seems to be caught in some kind of illusion," Mara murmured thoughtfully, cocking her head. "It was probably triggered by the trap one of you stepped on."

"I thought you were able to sniff out all kinds of traps?" Draco raised an eyebrow and he could barely keep the snide tone in his voice down.
She glared at him. "This entire tomb is reeking of Dark magic. Excuse me if I have a difficult
time picking up small traps," she snapped. "I did warn you that something wasn't right in this
room."

Draco grumbled, but couldn't say anything in his defence. Mara had warn them about possible traps;
they just hadn't been careful enough. He guessed he should be happy that they were still alive and
not dead or bleeding to death.

"Fine, but how are we going to get her out of the illusion?" he asked and studied the strange light
rose sheen of the shield. He had never heard of an illusion manifesting itself materially.

Her tail thumped heavily against the floor, making dust swirl and fly up. "It is a rather complicated
illusion," she admitted annoyed. "Not a lot of wizards are able to call up an illusion of this
level."

He had to resist the urge to bash his head against the wall. Of course it would be a rather complicated
illusion and of course very few people were capable of creating it. Because they just couldn't have it
easy for once.

"Do you have an idea as to how to dispel it?" he asked, wincing when he heard the muffled screech
of his mother. His eyes shot towards her, but she didn't seem hurt. That didn't comfort him, though,
because no visible wounds and yet such a screech of agony could only mean that the wound was
mental – and those were often the worst. Physical wounds would heal and occasionally leave a scar
behind, but the pain would disappear; mental wounds often lingered behind.

"I have never personally encountered this type of illusion before, so it will take me a while
probably to find a way to break it," she answered and approached the shield warily, sniffing at the
edges.

That was not the answer Draco had been wanting to hear. Despite not even knowing her for a full
year, he had grown used to her being able to defeat any spell or curse immediately. That she had
never encountered this illusion before and subsequently had no idea how to break it unsettled him
greatly and he bit his lip. He didn't know how much longer his mother would be able to endure the
illusion; already she started to look quite pale and her hands were trembling heavily, her wand lying
uselessly next to her feet.

Not wanting to remain helpless and useless, he approached the shield as well and bent down,
examining the rose sheen. He wondered whether the colour had a specific meaning or whether it was
just the way the shield chose to manifest itself. Not a lot of spells or curses worked with this
particular colour, so it was most peculiar.

Hesitating for a short while, he dismissed the importance of the colour and instead concentrated on
the heavy buzz of the magic that clung to the shield. More often than not the colour had no impact on
the execution of the spell or even the strength, so he would concentrate on trying to break through
the actual magic. What did he know about illusions?

They usually messed with the mental health of the victim, though there were illusions which also
managed to cause physical wounds. There were ones which already contained a certain situation that
would be forced upon the victim as soon as they were triggered and there were ones that
concentrated on the worst memories or fears of the victim and used those to mess with the person
until they gave in.

He wasn't completely certain, but if he had to wager a guess, he'd say that this particular illusion was
most likely belonging to the second category. The rage in his mother's eyes could hardly be called up if it was just a random illusion meant to scare her. It had to be either portraying a fear of hers or her worst memory.

Furrowing his eyebrows, he tried to ignore the muted whimpers coming from his mother's mouth. If he paid attention to those now, he would lose his concentration and it would probably take longer to release her from the spell. Even though it hurt him to hear his mother so afraid and helpless – two things he had never thought he would see his mother be – he took a deep breath and focused on the thin strings of magical tendrils he could see wrapped around the shield.

They were faint and if he lost even a smidgen of his concentration, it would be difficult to discern them again against the rose hue. What did he know about this type of illusion? A simple Finite wouldn't work and any other offensive spells would just bounce off of it or feed the shield. Calling out to his mother in the hopes of snapping her out of it wouldn't work either.

Releasing a frustrated sigh, he took a step back, raking his hands through his hair while he stared at the shield which seemed to mock him. There had to be a way to defeat the illusion; he refused to believe that it would get the better of them. Hell would freeze over before he left without his mother ...

He blinked and lowered his hands slowly when an idea drifted lazily to the surface of his mind. His body resembled a statue, but his mind was busying itself with the idea, analysing it and trying to figure out whether he could make it work for this particular illusion.

With hooded eyes, he stared at the illusion and then briskly nodded. At this moment it was the best option he had and it seemed like it had the best chance of delivering him success.

"Mara, step away from the shield," he ordered and brandished his wand.

She threw him a distrustful look. "Do you have a plan?"

"I think I have an idea, yes," he muttered and a Cutting hex aimed at his left hand caused his skin to split, allowing the red liquid to seep out sluggishly.

"I hope you know what you are doing," she murmured darkly, but took a couple of steps back, allowing him free reign.

Taking a deep breath, he paid no attention to the stinging pain blooming up in his hand and placed the bloodied hand on top of the thin shield, allowing his blood to drip over it as if it was some sort of macabre sauce. He forced a part of his magic to tie itself to his blood, so that it mingled. As soon as the magic touched the shield, it started to hiss viciously like a scorned cat. The rose hue grew brighter and the magical tendrils around it grew thicker.

"Mother, it is not real," he spoke clearly, locking his gaze with his mother's terrified one. "This is just an illusion, a trap to keep you here. But you are stronger than that, aren't you? You are a Black and they never back down or let themselves be defeated by a mere spell. Weren't you the one who told me that?"

He kept talking to her, while his blood continued to drip over the illusion. Once he thought enough of his blood had been spilt, he pulled his hand back and hastily pressed a handkerchief against the wound; he would heal it later. He couldn't stop talking now if he wanted his idea to be successful.

He was starting to feel faint thanks to the blood loss, but he persisted, keeping track of the way the shield was brightening and dimming as if it was fighting with something and it refused to give up.
Encouragement welled up in him once he noticed his mother's eyes becoming clearer and she seemed to focus on him. He made his voice stronger, louder, so that she wouldn't drift back into the illusion.

Time slipped away without him being aware of it; it could have easily been an hour that he was standing there, talking to his mother, but it could have been merely ten minutes as well. He didn't know.

What he did know was that his head felt too light, his legs rubber like and the handkerchief growing damp around him when his blood was absorbed by it.

As sudden as the trap had pulled them apart, just as sudden did the shield disappear with a loud thunder like sound and he fell on his knees, allowing his mother to grasp him tightly, burying her face in his neck.

"It's over, mother," he whispered tiredly and closed his eyes when he embraced her back.

Her slim body shivered in his hold and her breath gushed hotly against his skin when she gasped silently.

"I hate that man," she whispered, her voice trembling with barely concealed rage. When she pulled back slightly, she stared at him with glittering eyes, but they didn't shine with tears, like Draco had assumed. Her hands clenched down at his arms and she took a deep breath. "He better hope I'm not the one who finds him."

Draco wanted to ask who she was talking about – he had an inkling, but he wasn't certain – but decided to keep his mouth shut when he felt her magic agitatedly hovering around her, like a cloud. The last thing he needed now was for her to lash out after she had to endure that illusion.

"How are you feeling?" he asked instead.

"I have been through worse," she answered vaguely and then her attention was caught by his bleeding hand. "You're bleeding!"

Draco casted a look at his hand. "Oh yes. I was going to heal that," he replied blankly. Now that he was paying attention, the cut did smart and he hissed when the pain flared up again.

Mother shook her head, clucked her tongue and with a murmured spell and the tip of her wand pressed against the wound, the cut slowly closed up until nothing remained but a dark red line.

She eyed it critically. "It shouldn't leave a scar," she murmured. "You'll have to be careful, though. It seems like you lost a lot of blood."

He shrugged half-heartedly. "I had to get you out of the illusion," he retorted, flexing his hand carefully. The skin tugged a bit as the cut was just healed, but it wouldn't give him any trouble.

Mother surprised him by kissing his forehead. "Thank you," she whispered against his skin and he nodded mutely, feeling a bit embarrassed.

"You are probably not at your best now, but we need to get a move on," Mara said flatly and took a step towards the other exit. "While this room does not contain her, her presence is getting stronger, so we are very near."

"Thank Merlin," Mother murmured and stood up slowly. She patted the dust of her robes. "Let us proceed, Draco. The sooner we leave this god forsaken place, the better."
A smile crept up his face. He could see how shaken she was by the whole ordeal, but she was putting herself together again and he was proud of her, proud that she wouldn't let herself be defeated by an ugly illusion.

"Yes, mother," he said and followed behind her. His own hand clenched around his wand. Just a bit longer and he could see Harry again. Then he could leave together with his lover, his mother, Black and Lupin.

She furrowed her eyebrows and turned the page of her history book. The excited swirling of the Dark magic was irritating her and it pulled at her nerves, forcing her to pay attention to it. With an annoyed cluck of her tongue, she closed the heavy tome and placed it on the small, wooden table next to her. She crossed her legs and intertwined her fingers while she leaned forwards in her chair.

Oh dear, the magic was very excited now; this had never happened before in all the time she was here. She cocked her head curiously and concentrated deeply. Six people and three unknown creatures.

Slowly she tapped her finger against her lips and blinked surprised. What was such a large group doing here?

Oh wait, only five people were on the move. The sixth one seemed to be …

She shook her head forlornly; it seemed that the sixth one had the unfortunate bad luck to be caught by one of the more severe Dark curses. Unfortunately in her situation, she couldn't do anything to help the poor man. Even if she had power in this dreadful place, it would only have interacted badly with the magic currently thrumming in the rooms. Hopefully the other five would find her quickly, because only then would all the curses and traps be disabled.

She hummed and smiled; it had been many years since she last saw someone or even spoke to somebody. She missed her colleagues dearly, but something in her told her that they were in a safe place now.

Maybe the people currently approaching her were responsible for getting her friends to safety. She hoped so, because even though they were mere portraits now, she did not want any harm to befall them.

"What a nasty man," she murmured aloud and opened her eyes, revealing the sky blue orbs. With a deft twist of her finger, she put a stubborn strand of her red hair back in her bun and adjusted herself on the chair.

How long had it been since she last saw the familiar walls of Hogwarts? How much time had passed since she last had felt the warm, comfortable magic surrounding her?

Too much time had passed, she decided after a moment of contemplation.

And she was beyond ready to return to her home.

Her eyes flickered towards the three entrances leading to her hiding place when the sound of quick footsteps approaching reached her.

A red glow illuminated the corridor on her right and she gazed at the entrance with interest when a large lion silently appeared like a ghost. Its body was the source of the red glow; its fur was subtly glowing red and his mane was made up entirely out of fire, making his red orbs glow eerily. The lion stepped forwards, revealing a man with grey brown hair, whose eyes flickered between gold and
amber and whose face was set in a grim expression.

Shock registered on his face when he saw her.

"You are …"

He was interrupted by a shuffling sound, accompanied by muted swearing from the corridor on the left and both the wizard and the lion turned towards the sounds, their eyes alight with hope and apprehension.

The first one to escape the corridor was a giant snake, whose scales glowed a soft green despite they being white, casting shadows on the walls, while its eyes were a light purple. Its tongue came out to taste the air and its hiss sounded quite satisfied.

The snake was followed by a black haired man with grey blue eyes, which were currently narrowed. In his arms he carried an unconscious, young man with wild, dark hair, who looked extremely pale.

The man came to an abrupt halt when he caught sight of the other man.

"Remus!"

"Sirius, thank Merlin you're okay! But what's wrong with Harry?" the man, Remus, asked worriedly and hurried over to the two wizards, ignoring her for now.

That suited her just fine; she was interested in their interaction.

The man named Sirius grimaced and audibly gritted his teeth, before he replied, "We were attacked by some magical creatures and Harry's magic reacted to his panic. Huge blast, which brought his magic out of control and he nearly lost the baby."

Her eyebrows shot up in surprise. A baby, huh? My, this was becoming more and more interesting. Who on earth would bring a pregnant person in this awful place?

"What?!" Remus nearly shrieked and his eyes immediately shot towards the young man.

Sirius shuffled his feet. "Garin injected him with his venom and said it should help normally," he muttered and shook his head. "He'll need to be looked after when we get back. It didn't look good," he added subdued.

"We should have kept him in the school," Remus muttered and tightened his jaw.

Whatever his friend wanted to say, was lost in the sound of more footsteps quickly approaching them from the middle corridor.

Again an animal exited the corridor first. This time it resembled a snow leopard, whose unnaturally bright blue eyes flickered in recognition when they fell on her. She smiled and waved. Such interesting creatures these wizards had. She wondered where they had found them.

A blonde woman stumbled out of the corridor with a young, blond man – who bore a lot of resemblance to her – following closely behind.

"Thank Merlin you are all right!" the woman said relieved, but her lips tightened when her attention was caught by the unconscious man. "What on earth happened to him? I thought you said he was okay!" That last sentence was directed towards the two large cats, who bristled and shook their fur.

"Harry!" The blond man shot forwards immediately; one of his hands cradling the dark haired man's
head gently while the other one carefully touched his stomach. His grey eyes narrowed and he looked almost accusingly at Sirius. "What happened to him?" he said through clenched teeth.

Oh dear, he looked almost as vicious as Godric during that one time when someone had slighted him. She wondered whether the young man was sorted in his house.

Sirius glared. "We encountered some nasty creatures. Harry's magic was acting up and it produced a large blast. His body couldn't properly deal with it, so Garin injected some venom in him that is supposed to stabilize him until we get back to Hogwarts."

The blond hissed furiously and he suddenly held out his arms – which were trembling a bit she noted and she saw the faint smears of blood on his hand. She clucked her tongue softly in sympathy; the group had had a very rough time to get here.

"Give him to me!" the blond demanded, his entire body tensed up.

"Look, there is no need for you to …"

"I'm not asking," the young man said coldly.

The older man looked ready to argue, but Remus stepped forwards and clapped his shoulder. "Give Harry to Draco, Sirius," he muttered after casting a weary glance at the blond. "He might be able to help him stabilize his magic."

Displeasure clearly displayed on his face, Sirius handed the unconscious man to the blond, who possessively hugged him against his chest, dropping a kiss on his cheek.

The dark haired man's face twitched a bit, his fingers flexing against his stomach, before he seemingly settled himself against the blond, who relaxed visibly.

She raised an eyebrow, seeing the white hue hanging around both men. A magical bond, hm? That explained the fierce possessiveness of the blond one.

After giving the group another moment to collect themselves, she cleared her throat delicately; having to hide a smile when four heads whipped around to face her.

"Hello everybody. My name is Helga Hufflepuff," she greeted them gently and stood up. "May I be so bold to presume that you are here for me?"

"Yes, we are here to take you back to Hogwarts," Remus answered, shaking his head in wonder. "I'm sorry for not saying something sooner. We just got separated and we're happy to have found each other again."

Helga offered them a warm smile. "I understand; do not be worried. I am not offended. But are you not perhaps forgetting someone?"

As soon as those words left her mouth, a cold breeze went through the room, enveloping the small group, clearing away the last remnants of the curses that clung to them.

"Oh Merlin, Severus!" the woman breathed out horrified.

Ah, so that was the name of the unfortunate man.

"He has around ten minutes left," Helga said after she reached out with her magic. "If you are quick, you will be able to release him on time. I will help you locate him."
Shock and anguish were shining through their eyes – the two older men seemed more shocked than anguished – but they didn't linger. The two older wizards helped her from the flat stone she had been resting on and then they hastily made their way through the narrow, dusty corridors, following her lead.

The coffin was wrenched open, revealing a very pale, lanky, dark haired man, who clambered out with the help of Remus.

While the blonde woman was fussing over the shivering man, Helga studied them carefully, taking note how the three creatures were hovering near the two youngest wizards. She may not be as cunning as Salazar, as smart as Rowena or even as brave and boisterous as Godric, but she did know that this group had retrieved her for a very particular reason and not just because they wanted to meet one of the Founders. She was not naive nor oblivious after all.

That knowledge did not bother her in the slightest. To have found her, the group had to have been in contact with her friends – which could only mean that her colleagues approved of whatever reason the group had for retrieving them.

She would help them in succeeding in their goal. She was finally going home and that was all that mattered to her now.

Chapter End Notes

AN2: In case of confusion: the coffin contained another curse; this one caused others to forget about the one trapped in the coffin. Meaning that as soon as the tendrils had gotten a hold on Snape, the memories of him were wiped out of the others' heads.

So what do you think of it? This concludes their final quest! But of course this story isn't over yet.

Please leave your thoughts behind in a comment (and yes, I am aware I'm mean for making you all believe that Dumbledore was really there)!

Next chapter: The Founders are finally together again and they start planning out the ritual. Meanwhile Harry experiences some very troubling nightmares ...

See you all next time! (Some oneshots will be posted throughout February, if anyone is interested in reading them!)

Cuddles

Melissa
Chapter 29: Noxious Nightmares

17th of March

Two days.

Two days had passed without so much as a twitch from his fingers, let alone him waking up.

Teeth grinding against each other, Draco leaned forwards to put his ear against the rounded bulge: clearly visible now, even through the blankets, thanks to the removal of the belt. At first he didn't hear anything and he held his breath, his hand clammy around the cool one in his grip.

Eyes slid close in relief when the faint rush of fluid moving sounded through the layer of skin and thin blanket; a ripple went through his stomach and he felt a soft push giving against his cheek.

That was the things that got him through the day: the calm breathing of his lover and the faint movements of their child. Those were all he had to clamp on to for now.

Lupin hadn't wanted to tell him the whole truth. After examining Harry, he had reassured Draco that the dark haired wizard would be fine after he rested. Garin's venom had been successful in calming down Harry's erratic magic and it was working on re-establishing the link between Harry's magic and their son's.

While Draco had remained seated next to Harry, keeping their hands intertwined so that his magic had it easier to mingle with Harry's, Lupin had left the room after admonishing him to rest and eat. He must have thought Draco was too lost in his worry for his lover – and that wasn't far from the truth actually – because he had a hushed conversation with Black and Draco's mother, who had refused to leave until she was certain Harry would be fine.

"And? How is Harry?" Mother asked concerned after Lupin had left the room.

Draco stared listlessly at his lover, whose face was so pale as a white sheet. For some reason the
bed seemed to swallow his body, making him appear much thinner and smaller than he really was. The belt hiding the pregnancy had been removed, allowing the blond to see the rounded belly clearly.

Draco gripped Harry's hand tighter, hoping that his magic would be able to aid him into calming down, while he rubbed furiously at his eyes, feeling the sting of tears pressing against the back of his eyes.

He could hear Lupin sigh in exhaustion.

"It was a close call," he murmured.

Their voices were hushed, the door only slightly ajar, but Draco focused part of his attention on the conversation. Lupin hadn't told him it had been a close call. He had said everything would be fine. Had he been lying?

His other hand tightened into a fist on his knee.

"What do you mean?" Black asked apprehensively.

"Garin's venom is working, but from what I have discovered, if he had injected the venom even five seconds later, Harry would have lost the baby," Lupin responded grimly and there was the sound of someone gasping and the muted sound of something hitting the wall.

"Was it that bad?" Mother asked aghast.

"His body had started the process of triggering the contractions; only Garin's interference kept him from going into labour."

"But if he had gone into labour then …"

"Then he nor the baby would have survived, as he didn't have the potions to help him," Lupin finished Black's sentence uneasily. "Harry was lucky to have Garin with him; if he hadn't been there …" he trailed off, but the message was clear.

Draco swallowed what seemed like a leaden ball down his throat and he stared blankly at Harry, whose eyebrows were furrowed even in his sleep. He knew it had been a close call from what Black had told him, but to hear that he could have lost them both …

"Does Draco know this?" Mother inquired softly.

Lupin sighed heavily and someone was pacing up and down. "No, I told him the most important part and that is that Harry and the baby will be fine as soon as they have rested. I didn't want to worry him more than he already was."

Draco managed to conceal the harsh snort that wanted to escape him; this was about his lover and his child and Lupin thought he had no right to know the complete truth? Any other moment and he would have stormed out of the room to raise some hell, but now he was too exhausted and too spent to even move a single muscle.

As long as Harry and their son would be okay, he didn't care how much Lupin had embellished the truth. At this point only Harry and their baby mattered to him.

"Let's go; I'll examine Severus as well," Lupin announced tiredly.
Soft footsteps approaching the door alerted the blond to his mother's presence.

He barely deigned her with a glance when she stuck her head around the door. Her blue eyes regarded Harry with sorrow before she shook her head and looked at her son.

"Make certain to rest as well, darling," she spoke; a strand of her hair dangling next to her cheek. Her face was drawn, tight and she looked older than she was. "It won't do for you to collapse as well."

"Will do," he muttered almost inaudibly, just wishing for her to leave now. He appreciated her concern and her worry, but at this moment he really couldn't give a shit about anything else besides his lover and their son.

Mother seemed to understand that, as she nodded once before closing the door behind her, leaving him alone with an unconscious Harry.

He had barely slept during the past two days and only ate when Mara threatened to put him to sleep with her own magic. It was Tuesday evening now and he had remained cooped up in Harry's bedroom, refusing to attend classes.

Daphne had popped by – after some help from Severus – and had delivered him his homework and had talked about the current gossip in an attempt to distract him. Thankfully she seemed to understand that he was not in the mood to listen to her gossip for a long time and had left after an hour.

His head felt heavy due to exhaustion, but he couldn't fall asleep. At most he managed to nap a bit, before he startled awake again when the fear that something would go wrong with Harry spiked up again. Lupin had visited him early this morning to do a check-up on Harry and had reassured him that Harry's magic was stabilized now.

Now all they could do was wait for Harry to wake up.

"Don't you think it's time for you to wake up?" Draco murmured and lifted his head to look at Harry through half lidded eyes. "It's been two days. I'm not even mad anymore that you went with us. Just please wake up already."

It seemed to become the story of his life when it came to Harry: he never listened, no matter what he said.

"Master is doing fine. He is just resting," Ruby spoke soothingly and padded over to stand next to the bed, placing his massive head on the mattress.

Garin was curled around one of the bed posts, acting like some odd ornament, while Mara was sleeping in front of the fireplace. Harry's cat, Sapphire, had found a spot next to Harry's head and was purring faintly, her ears twitching in her sleep.

"That may be, but I want him to wake up," Draco retorted curtly and rubbed a hand over his face.

"Why don't you get some sleep?" Ruby suggested, one of his ears twitching. "You look ready to collapse."

"Can't. What if Harry …"

"He'll be asleep for at least two more hours," the lion cut him off sharply and this time he was subjected to a fierce glare. "Go to sleep. Fainting from exhaustion won't help either one of you."
He huffed, the fire of his mane flaring up a bit. "We will keep an eye on him."

Draco wanted to protest, but his eyes were slipping close and it took him considerably longer to keep them open. With great reluctance, he stood up, letting his hand release Harry's and stumbled his way across the room, so that he could crawl into the bed from the other side.

Sapphire grumbled, but scooted to the side, allowing the blond to place his head on the pillow.

With a weary sigh, he sunk down in the bed and turned around so that he was facing Harry. His hand roamed across the bed and tightened around the hand they found. As soon as the familiar warmth was back in his hand, he let his eyes fall close and succumbed to the exhaustion.

"Now I understand it," Hufflepuff murmured and nodded thoughtfully.

Severus looked up from the old potions book he was examining; the three other Founders had filled her in on what had happened to them and what they were planning to do now. It was slightly unnerving to have all four Founders resting in his quarters; he didn't think he would ever get used to hearing the gruff voice of Gryffindor in the mornings when Severus woke up early – it turned out that Gryffindor wasn't a morning person and did not appreciate being woken up before eight o'clock – or witnessing the heated banter between him and Slytherin whenever Severus returned to his rooms after his last class was finished.

They wouldn't remain in his quarters forever, though. As soon as Dumbledore was dealt with, he would bring them back to the room they were original placed in. He was becoming fed up with his privacy being disturbed.

"So you are planning to perform the Elementari Ritual?" Hufflepuff asked curiously, patting her skirt to remove the non-existing dust.

"Yes, that seems to be the best solution to make certain that his magic is sealed away completely," Ravenclaw responded and closed the heavy tome she had on her lap.

"It is also the most difficult and energy draining one," Hufflepuff pointed out mildly.

"It is not like they have much choice," Gryffindor retorted gruffly. He was examining a sword that was placed on the table next to him – where he had gotten the sword was a complete mystery.

"How is the young man doing?" Hufflepuff directed this question to him. "The one who was unconscious."

"He hasn't woken up yet, but he should make a complete recovery," Severus murmured idly, finishing the paragraph he was reading.

He hadn't seen his godson since they returned on Sunday and promised himself he would drag the boy out of Potter's quarters if he didn't show up tomorrow. There was no need for Draco to stay cooped up while waiting for Potter to wake up.

"Will he and the blond boy not be the focal point of the ritual?" Hufflepuff furrowed her eyebrows and uncertainty was laced through her voice.

Severus abruptly closed the book and favoured the three other Founders with a sharp glare. "You did not mention before that Potter and Draco would be in the centre of the ritual," he said coldly.

Slytherin smiled affably. "I know it is not ideal, especially considering Harry's state, but it is not
possible otherwise. They are the masters of the Elemental Creatures and therefore they have the most power to work with. Not only that, but Harry is also the rightful owner of the Invisibility Cloak; as a Deathly Hallow it will be quite unpredictable, so trying to have someone else control the power would be dooming the whole plan from the start," he explained mildly.

"You are practically throwing them for the lions," Severus spoke bitterly.

Gryffindor snorted. "It is not as if they will be alone during the implementation of the ritual. We will be there in spirit and you and the others will be there to lend your support. We told you from the very beginning that the ritual wouldn't be completely safe to perform." He gave him a meaningful look, disregarding the sword next to him for now.

Severus gritted his teeth, but relented. He knew when he was fighting a losing battle. "How soon can the ritual be performed?"

"As soon as either the Resurrection Stone turns up or the old coot," Gryffindor replied calmly. "It is preferable to have all three Deathly Hallows in our possession, but we can make do with the two we have currently if we need to."

"I just have to look up a couple of more details and then we will be ready to explain the ritual to you and the others," Ravenclaw took over and offered him a reassuring smile. "You might also want to inform the others about the role of the Deathly Hallows."

Severus didn't reply, but threw a dark look in the direction of where he had hidden the Elder Wand. He couldn't wait for all this to be over.

The sun fought its way through the heavy clouds, casting thin sun rays on the grass and the trees, making the water drops on the grass shine like small diamonds.

He was walking through the Forbidden Forest, making certain to keep on the path. It was still rather chilly, but the temperature was bearable with his heavy cloak. One hand was rubbing slowly over his stomach in which his son was tumbling around, causing a smile to spread out on his face.

"How much farther?" he called out to the blond wizard in front of him, who had woken him up this morning to announce his idea of taking him somewhere into the Forbidden Forest. It seemed like a weird place to bring him, but he wasn't overly concerned. Rowen was with them, flying low over their heads; occasionally stopping to pick at some berries he found.

Draco turned around, a brilliant smile illuminating his face, causing his breath to catch. It had been a long time since he had last seen that brilliance shining through Draco's face.

"Not much longer," his lover assured him. "It's just a bit further."

He nodded and stepped over a snapped off branch; listening to the furious squabble of two birds high up in a tree. He wondered whether they were getting close to the unicorn territory; he hadn't seen one since his first year – and that hadn't been a pleasant memory at all – and he wanted to know how they looked like during the day.

Draco slowed down to a stop and grinned excitedly; he stared back with a bemused smile.

"Close your eyes."

"Why?"
Grey eyes glittered mischievously. "It's a surprise."

He raised one eyebrow, but decided to humour his lover and obediently closed his eyes. He heard Draco’s footsteps approaching him and a hand taking his own, so that he could be guided.

Thanks to the detailed instruction of the blond wizard, he managed to not trip or stumble at all during the entire time his eyes were closed – though it was an unnerving experience to be able to hear and smell everything, but not see anything. Eventually Draco instructed him to wait and he heard him walking a bit further.

"All right, you can open your eyes now," Draco called out.

Harry was met with the familiar sight of the ceiling in his bedroom when his eyes opened. He blinked bemused; he was laying in his bed apparently. He could feel a sheet covering him to right underneath his collarbone and when he shifted slightly, he deduced that he had to be wearing his pyjamas as the cloth felt soft against his skin.

So he wasn't outside then; his eyes trailed over his desk – cluttered with parchment, ink and quills – over Garin who was curled around the bed post, regarding him solemnly and towards Ruby who lifted his head as soon as he noticed that Harry was awake.

"You have been asleep for two days," Ruby informed him, picking up on the unspoken question.

Two days? What on earth had happened to … His breath hitched when the last remnants of the dream left him and he recalled what had transpired last Sunday.

He paid no heed to the body next to him and sat up, his hands immediately seeking out his stomach, which wasn't the illusion of a flat stomach, but his actual belly. When he crossed his legs, he could practically cradle his rounded belly and so he did that, all the while trying to pick up the thin thread of magic he had been aware of for some time already; he would already be happy to feel a faint nudge at this point.

His breath left him in a relieved 'whoosh' when he not only was able to connect with the thin thread of his son's magic, but he also felt what seemed to be a foot pressing against his thumb.

"The hatchling is fine. No need to worry about it," Garin hissed and raised his head, uncurling himself, so that he could slither on the bed.

"I thought I would lose him," Harry replied back in Parseltongue and blinked rapidly, swallowing down the lump in his throat.

Garin looked at him solemnly. "It was close," the snake admitted. "But he survived."

"Harry."

The soft voice of Draco made him twitch and it was with great reluctance that he turned his head to look at him.

"How are you feeling?" the blond asked softly, while he sat up and leant against the headboard. One side of his hair was sticking up a bit and he absentmindedly carded his fingers through it in a vague attempt to flatten it.

"A bit tired," Harry replied slowly; one hand still resting on top of his belly, he traced meaningless patterns in the blanket with the other one. "How are you?"
"Peachy. Except for the fact that my boyfriend and my son nearly died." Instead of it being said coldly, it came out sounding exhausted.

Despite the lack of coldness or even anger in Draco's voice, Harry still winced and he looked away, not able to bear Draco's heavy glance any longer. "I'm sorry," he whispered; his hand clenched around the blanket, crumpling it together.

Draco sighed and from his peripheral vision, Harry saw him stretch his legs underneath the blanket. "I feel like I should be furious at you, but to be honest, at this point I just don't care about it anymore. I'm already glad that you didn't die," he replied quietly. "That doesn't mean however that you can continue pulling stunts like that. You're lucky we managed to get the last Founder here, because if we still had one Founder to go, I would have prevented you from joining us – even if that meant I had to use a Sleeping charm on you."

"I'm really sorry. I didn't think it would be that dangerous," Harry said, feeling guilty for the stress he had put his boyfriend and family through. He didn't even want to imagine how anxious Sirius must have been and he bit on his lip.

"Yes, well." Draco paused and Harry nearly jumped up when he felt a finger caressing his cheek. "It's over now and I don't want to think about it ever again."

Harry risked a glance at the blond wizard next to him, who looked contemplatively at Harry's stomach.

"Draco?" he whispered and let his hand drop from his stomach. The atmosphere in the room – while not charged with tension any longer – was heavy with something else and he couldn't figure out what it was.

Draco shook his head sluggishly, as if he was waking up from a deep slumber and offered him a faint smile. "Nothing," he murmured and bent forwards, catching Harry in a surprise kiss. Their lips parted before Harry could lean into it.

His lover closed his eyes and touched their foreheads together, releasing a heavy sigh. "Don't ever do something like that again," he said quietly. Despite the soft tone, he couldn't have sounded more solemn if he tried and a faint trace of anger was audible in the tremor of his voice.

He wished he could promise him that; he really did. But they both knew that making a promise like that would only end up in disappointment as long as Dumbledore was out there. That didn't mean Harry wouldn't try his hardest to remain safe, though.

"I'll try," he replied; his voice barely audible.
A sardonic smile was his answer. "I suppose that's the best I can get for now," Draco murmured and opened his eyes again. "Let's go; you need to eat." He turned around to step out of bed.

Before Harry realised what he was doing, his hand shot out and gripped Draco's shirt tightly, holding him back.

"Harry?" Draco looked at him bemused; a hand came around to pull Harry's hand away, but he only tightened his grip.

The dark haired wizard opened his mouth – and then realised he had no idea what he wanted to say, how he wanted to explain his action and closed his mouth with an audible 'snap'. Confusion and apprehension whirled around in him and his stare was fixed on his hand gripping the white shirt. If he let go now, would they go back to that brief period in their relationship when it had seemed likely they would break up? Draco hadn't attacked him now, though, so it wasn't the same. Not at all. He hadn't even yelled at him or had grown furious.

And yet Harry was utterly terrified of letting go of him, as if releasing his shirt meant that that awful distance would start growing between them again. As if letting go of him now meant a permanent goodbye. He couldn't go through that again. Not now, not ever.

"Hey, we're okay," Draco murmured and instead of removing Harry's hand, he simply turned around so that he was facing Harry and the latter was awkwardly hugging him with one arm. A soft kiss was pressed on his lips and a thumb caressed his cheekbone. "We're okay, I promise."

The tension slowly bled out of his shoulders and he smiled weakly; feeling the bundle of apprehensive fear disappearing.

They were okay. That was all that mattered right now.

21st of March

"Just a bit closer, Harry and then you're there!" Laughter ran through his voice and Harry huffed.

"It would help if you would let me see something," he complained and took a hesitating step forwards. "I'm going to kick your arse if I fall!"

"You know I would never allow you to fall," the blond gently chided him and the warmth in his voice made Harry's cheeks warm. "Besides you're in your own quarters! Don't you know the layout by now?"

"Oh fuck off," Harry said good-naturedly and stretched out his arm, hoping to at least feel something. "Can't I take the blindfold off?"

"And ruin all my fun? How mean." Some clothes rustled. "But all right, here."

The blindfold finally fell off and he opened his eyes …

To suddenly come face to face with a row of old books. He reared back and stumbled backwards, catching himself against a familiar table.

"Harry?"

He whipped his head around and faced Hermione, who looked at him with worried eyes and a frown marring her forehead. She stuck a curl behind her ear and tightened the grip she had on a heavy
"Are you okay?" she asked uncertainly and took a hesitant step forwards, obviously not knowing whether her presence was appreciated.

Harry blinked and rubbed a hand over his forehead, dazedly staring at the floor. "Eh, yeah, yeah, I'm okay."

"Are you really sure? You don't look so well," she retorted carefully, biting her lip.

No, he wasn't sure. He didn't know what the bloody hell was going on here. He had been taking a nap in his quarters – how on earth had he ended up here in the library? Thank Merlin he hadn't taken off the magical belt before he went to sleep, because otherwise his secret would be out for the whole school to see.

But how the fuck had he ended up here?

"Do you want me to bring you to the nurse or get Malfoy or so?" Hermione asked apprehensively.

He shook his head hastily, giving her what he hoped was a reassuring smile. "No, no need. Don't bother; I'm just going back."

"Weren't you looking up a book?" she asked baffled.

"Yes, but I didn't manage to find it," he lied, rubbing the back of his neck. Only then did he realise neither one of his pets was with him. He grew restless immediately; it wasn't like them to let him go off on his own at all. Fuck, had something happened to them?

"Maybe I can help you look for it?" Hermione suggested with an expectant look, placing her book on the table.

His smile grew slightly warmer, though most of his mind was preoccupied with trying to figure out where Ruby and Garin were. "Thanks, but it's not urgent. Good luck with studying, 'Mione."

She looked ready to protest, but at the mention of the old nickname, she became clearly flustered and she fumbled a weak, "All right, Harry." before she picked up her book again and walked further down the shelves.

Harry didn't pay attention to a familiar blonde haired girl approaching Hermione with a mysterious smile on her face, when he rushed out of the library as quick as he could without risking the ire of the librarian.

He had barely left the library when Garin came slithering towards him with Ruby immediately following behind him.

"Where were you two?" Harry asked lowly, patting his pockets. The familiar wood of his wand made him relax slightly.

"That is something we better ask of you," Ruby retorted and he sounded mystified. "We left for a bit while you were taking a nap and when we came back you were gone."

Harry furrowed his eyebrows. "So I was taking a nap," he muttered, allowing Garin to wound himself around his waist. At least he hadn't imagined that.

That didn't make him feel better, though.
"Why were you in the library?" Garin asked curiously.

Nervously twisting the ring around his right middle finger – which was hidden from the sight of curious eyes by a charm – he shook his head and walked down the hallway, intent on returning to his quarters. Ruby let out an odd huff, but followed next to him, forgoing his invisibility.

"I don't know," Harry replied slowly and ceased fiddling with the ring. "One moment I'm laying down in bed and the next I'm standing in front of a bookcase."

"Sleepwalking?" Ruby inquired; his feet soundless over the tiles and carpets they walked over. "Do you have a history of doing that?"

"I don't know," Harry answered lowly, ignoring the apprehensive look of a student they passed by. "I've been told I can get restless in my sleep, but I don't know if I have sleepwalked before. If I have, I apparently always returned to my bed before I woke up."

Sleepwalking made the most sense – but only as an explanation as to why he had suddenly woken up somewhere else. It didn't make him feel better overall.

Had he done this before? If not: why had he started now?

He was probably worrying about nothing, he reassured himself and stepped through the opening the dragon revealed. A lot of bad things had happened lately, but that didn't mean he had to become paranoid and think everything was out to harm him whenever something slightly unusual happened.

He nodded determined to himself and smiled faintly when he felt a nudge near the top of his stomach. The baby seemed to agree with him.

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23rd of March

"Don't forget to finish your assignment! The deadline is this Friday and I am not giving any of you an extension," Sirius warned the class after Transfigurations was finished for that day.

Some of the students groaned in disappointment and the older man grinned. "Hey, it's a holiday for me as well, guys, and I'm not going to spend my entire time correcting your papers."

Some still grumbled, but there was no real heat behind it. They did know that Sirius was not joking around, though. In spite of his laidback nature, he was quite stern when it came to assignments and no one was allowed to be late with it, unless they had a valid excuse.

Harry and Draco were, as always, the last ones to leave the classroom. Harry had received a furtive look of Hermione and they had nodded at each other in greeting before she had to hurry off to one of her other lessons.

Luckily for Harry, this was his last class of the day and he couldn't be more grateful for that fact. He was tired and wanted nothing more than to take a nap, but at the same time he didn't dare to do that. Yesterday, when he had taken another nap in the afternoon – he would be concerned about his desire to nap more if he hadn't read in Narcissa's book that it was normal for pregnant men in order to keep their energy level balanced – he had woken up only to find himself at the entrance to the dungeons with Garin finding him a minute later.

That same night he had woken up after a couple of hours of sleep and found himself in the middle of his quarters. When Ruby had asked him sleepily why he had woken up, he had played it off as needing to go to the bathroom in order not to alarm him, but he was quickly becoming worried.
Was it just a coincidence that he had started sleepwalking? He hadn't been hit by a curse or any potion lately, so it couldn't be that.

Pressing his lips tightly together, he finished gathered his supplies and stuffing them in his bag and straightened his back.

"You okay?" Draco asked softly, holding out his hand for Harry to grab it.

He offered him a weak smile. "Yeah, just a bit tired."

At least that wasn't a lie.

Draco nodded and they started walking to the door. "Mother said you would be getting more tired," he murmured. "You can take a nap now if you want. I'll wake you up for dinner."

"Yeah, maybe I will," Harry muttered and frowned. Would he start sleepwalking again? If he did, at least Draco would be there to stop him, he supposed.

"Harry?" Sirius called out when they were almost at the door.

He turned around; giving his godfather a questioning look. "Yeah?"

With a flick of his wand, Sirius closed the door and an Anti-Eavesdropping charm was quickly applied to it.

"Do you have everything prepared for your exams next week?" he asked, raising an eyebrow while he gathered his own stuff together.

Harry grimaced. "Yeah, I've been studying for them every moment I could. They start on Monday, right?"

"Yes," Sirius confirmed, stuffing his book carelessly in his bag. Remus would probably scold him for his mistreatment of his books. "You're starting out with Transfigurations I believe."

"That's going to be fun," Harry muttered dryly. Despite the fact that next week the Easter holidays would start, he wouldn't be able to really enjoy the time off until the last week, as all his exams had been put in the first week. Waiting until the end of the year to do the exams would have been too dangerous with his magic going haywire – not that it was any better now – so McGonagall had arranged for him to take his exams in the first week of the holidays. Studying for important exams and feeling tired due to carrying a baby were not a good combination. It actually surprised him that he hadn't fallen asleep during classes yet.

"Hey! No complaining about my teaching style," Sirius reprimanded him with a grin. He sobered up quickly. "Are you feeling all right, though? Moondagger told me you seemed out of it during his class this morning."

Draco's hand tightened around his own and he sighed. "I'm just a bit tired." He shrugged, hoping that Sirius wouldn't continue badgering him about it.

"Hm; well, make sure to rest well then," Sirius advised him and after that he was allowed to leave.

"How is the studying going?" Draco asked curiously when they made their way down to the dungeons. Mara was following closely behind, growling occasionally at students who came too close to them for her liking.
"Eugh, I'm getting tired of it to be honest," Harry groaned, scowling at the floor. He raked a hand through his hair harshly. "I just want to get them over and done with."

His lover chuckled amused. "Well, in two weeks you will be done with them. At least you're prepared, right?"

"Yeah, I suppose," he muttered, adjusting his shoulder bag.

As soon as the portrait closed behind them, Draco reached out and took Harry's bag from him, dropping it on the floor. Another tug and some fumbling later and Harry's silver green tie was removed as well.

"What are you doing exactly?" Harry asked bemused, but allowed the blond to remove the magical belt. Without the illusion, it was obvious how rounded his stomach had become and his sweater was stretched around it. It wasn't too tight yet, but he probably would have to start wearing a larger one soon.

"Making it more comfortable for you to take a nap," Draco stated frankly and stepped around Ruby so that he could gently guide Harry to his bedroom.

"I could have done all that on my own, you know," Harry pointed out mildly, but was a bit too amused by Draco's fussing to really be irritated by it.

Draco shrugged and smiled faintly. "I know, but I wanted to do it." He gestured towards the bed after he had pulled back the blankets. "Come on, in you go now."

Harry rolled his eyes and snorted, but complied after kicking off his shoes. "You staying with me?" he asked, sighing in contentment when his head was cushioned by the soft pillow.

A nap sounded good now; maybe later on he could convince Draco to massage his back. The back pain wasn't that severe, but it was quite annoying.

Just as annoying as his sudden tendency to sleepwalk, but he wouldn't think about that now. Just like he wouldn't think about the odd atmosphere that clung to his dreams and unsettled him whenever he woke up.

The mattress dipped down when Draco joined him; their legs pressed together, sharing their body warmth. "Of course. I'll wake you up on time, okay?"

"Okay," Harry sighed and let his eyes slip close, lulled to sleep by the gentle scratching of a quill against parchment and Draco's calm breathing.

The next couple of days, Harry was relieved to notice that he didn't sleepwalk anymore – at the very least when he woke up now, it was in his own bed and his pets didn't mention any sleepwalking either. The strange atmosphere clinging to his dreams had disappeared as well, which had as effect that he woke up well rested each morning.

It was probably the stress about the exams and Dumbledore in general that had caused him to sleepwalk, he reassured himself. Nothing too strange about it; just his own quirky way of dealing with it. He was glad that he was done doing that though, because it was unsettling to wake up in a completely different place each time.

There would be no classes on Friday afternoon, as the students would return home then for the holidays. Sirius and Remus would go to the small house where they had spent Christmas in his sixth
year, while he and Draco would stay in Draco's – well, their manor, as Harry had agreed to living together, for the entire holidays in order for the wards to adjust themselves to their presence. They would receive visits from their family, but for the most part he and Draco would be alone and that caused butterflies to race in his stomach.

One could argue that he shouldn't be so nervous about the prospect of living together with his lover as Draco had stayed many nights in his quarters at school. Somehow, though, sharing a bed at school was completely different from sharing a bed in their own manor. They would be living together soon; raising their baby in their own manor and it made him jittery with excitement and nerves at the same time.

There was still the threat of Dumbledore looming over them both, but he didn't want to spend every second of his life looking backwards, constantly fearing he would be attacked. Just for a while he wanted to feel normal, wanted to know how it felt like to share a house with his lover for the first time, making it into their own.

That wasn't too much to ask for, right?

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On Thursday evening, the couple found themselves cuddling in Harry's bed. They had just finished dinner – which had been quite peaceful considering most of the students had ignored them – and Draco had helped him with packing, so that they could leave tomorrow without having to rush to gather their stuff.

"I can't wait until we're at the manor," Draco sighed from between Harry's spread legs. He was sitting on his knees, his fingers trailing up and down over Harry's bare stomach. The minute they were alone in Harry's quarters – well, aside from their pets of course, who had wisely decided to sleep in the other room now – Draco had tugged at the magical belt, requesting Harry to take it off.

"Me neither," Harry murmured; his half lidded eyes taking in the sight of slender fingers caressing his stomach. Their son was slowly tumbling around, giving soft nudges and kicks; making his presence known. "Any particular reason why you want me to take the belt off so soon in the evening?" he asked lightly. It wasn't that he minded it; before he went to sleep, he always took off the belt, but it was easier to keep it on until he was certain he wouldn't be disturbed.

Ever since they returned from the graveyard, Draco had been very peculiar about the belt, wanting it off as soon as they were alone.

"I just like seeing you like this; without the illusion. Makes it all more real, you know?" Draco replied; he awkwardly scratched his cheek, which was covered by a red flush. He looked a bit embarrassed.

"You need to see my belly to make you realise you got me knocked up?" Harry asked teasingly, shifting a bit so that he was sitting more comfortably.

"You make me sound like some kind of pervert," the blond complained and huffed. His eyes shot down and he let out a surprised sound. "Oh fuck; was that a foot?"

"Quite the kicker, huh?" Harry retorted dryly and hissed softly when another swift kick was delivered to his side. "He knows we're talking about him."

"You might want to soften your kicks or there will be a limit placed on your birthday presents,"
Draco informed their unborn baby; rubbing soothingly over the spot where he had kicked.

Another harsh kick – this time it seemed a fist pressing against his skin – was his reply.

"Yeah, he doesn't quite like that," Harry snorted. "He probably has that greediness from your side of the family."

"Malfoys are not greedy," Draco sniffed and scowled at him. "We just appreciate the finer things in life."

"Sure, sure; believe what you want," Harry chuckled. He winced when another kick was delivered to his kidneys. "Fuck! That one hurt!"

"Maybe I should try another tactic," Draco mused and bent his head until his lips touched the top of Harry's belly. "If you calm down, there will be extra presents for you. How does that sound?"

For a few minutes nothing happened, until Harry could feel a soft nudge. He stared incredulously at his stomach. "I can't believe that actually worked," he said surprised and gently poked his belly. A hand pressed back.

Draco grinned triumphantly. "Good baby!" he cooed and kissed his stomach.

"You're going to spoil our son," Harry sighed exasperatedly, but shook his head fondly.

"Aw, don't worry. I'll make sure to spoil you as well," Draco murmured and leaned forwards to press their lips together, softly rubbing them together.

"Yeah?" Harry hummed, leaning into the kiss; sliding a hand through fine, blond hair. "I'm holding you on to that."

Before their kiss had any chance of becoming heated, Draco pulled back with a disappointed sigh.

Harry saw him looking at the clock and guessed with slight disappointment tainting his voice, "You need to go?"

"Yeah," Draco grimaced, but his hand was still caressing Harry's stomach. He was clearly reluctant to go. "I promised Blaise I would spend the night at the dorms. Some Slytherins are starting to ask questions again."

"Go on then, before he starts whining that you're late," Harry chuckled and pushed down his sweater, covering his stomach.

"I'd rather stay with you," Draco whispered, pressing a kiss in Harry's neck; making the latter shiver in response.

"I know. I want that as well, but just think of this: after tonight we'll be spending two whole weeks together on our own. In our own house," Harry murmured, smiling suggestively. "We can do whatever we want then."

Grey eyes shone with ravenous heat, which made Harry's throat dry up with anticipation. It had been a long time since they last had some real time together. And soon they would have two whole weeks to enjoy themselves …

"I'm looking forward to that," Draco murmured throatily and after another soft kiss, he got up from the bed. "I'll see you tomorrow."

Harry nodded with a small smile and heard Draco stumbling around, gathering his shoes, his wand and his bag, before the portrait opened and shut again; silence falling down in the quarters like a blanket.

With a sigh, Harry doused the candles and snuggled deeper into the blankets, crossing his arms behind his head. He only had one more morning to go before he would leave this castle for two weeks. He was looking forward to spending time with Draco without having to deal with homework and classes in general.

Sapphire joined him in bed, cuddling close to his side and he fell asleep with the sound of her soft purring.

"Did you really have to wake me up this early?" Harry groused and rubbed his tired eyes. It was barely six thirty and he was already up thanks to his lover waking him up at five a.m. Sure, he had gone to bed early last night thanks to the fact that Draco had to stay the night in the Slytherin dormitory, but that didn't mean he was wide awake – or even decently rested. For fuck's sake, he had hoped to sleep until seven at least. They still had a couple of classes before they had to leave to catch the train and he wasn't looking forward to paying attention in his sleep deprived state.

If he wasn't so tired, he would hex Draco for daring to wake him up so early.

Draco chuckled lowly; his hand squeezing softly in Harry's. "Yes, there is something I want to show you and it's only possible now."

"What could you possibly want to show me at this damn hour?" Harry asked irritated when they rounded another corner. They were currently going through the fourth floor, passing various portraits who were sleeping soundly – the lucky bastards - and there was no sign that Draco would stop here.

"It's something Blaise told me about yesterday," Draco muttered distractedly and they went up to the next floor.

"So I need to hex Blaise as well?" Harry said darkly, hiding a yawn behind his hand.

"I could bite him for you," Ruby offered, sounding uncharacteristically tired. He had offered to join them, while the other pets remained in Harry's quarters.

Harry seriously contemplated the offer for a couple of minutes, until he realised he would most likely get into trouble with a professor – either Snape or McGonagall – and that just wasn't worth it. He sighed disappointedly. "No, you don't have to."

"Don't sound so put out," Draco admonished him gently, but he was stifling a grin.

"Did you take a Pepper up potion or so?" Harry narrowed his eyes when they entered the sixth floor. "There is no way you can be this happy on this hour."

The blond shrugged casually. "I just can't wait to show you what Blaise told me about," he said gleefully and pulled Harry behind yet another corner.

"This better be damn good," Harry muttered and fell silent, allowing his lover to guide him through the castle. It was a miracle that they hadn't stumbled upon a ghost so far. He knew they didn't have to fear coming across a professor on patrol – the patrol ending at five in the morning, so there would be no professors catching them out of their beds.

"It will be," Draco promised him and they were silent until they arrived at the staircase that would
lead them to the Astronomy tower.

"The Astronomy tower?" Harry asked baffled. "What are we doing here?"

"Be patient, will you?" Draco laughed and pulled him along. "Just a bit longer and I'll show you."

Harry grumbled for a few seconds, but acquiescent quickly and followed the blond wizard; unwillingly, anticipation was building up in him and he wondered what on earth the Astronomy tower could have that would make Draco take him there at this hour. He hadn't noticed anything particularly interesting about the place since he had first entered it after all.

"All right, now what?" Harry asked impatiently when the door swung open, revealing the room where they spent their nights studying the stars.

Ruby padded past them and started sniffing at the telescopes set up throughout the entire room.

"Come on," Draco smiled mysteriously and brought him close to one of the large windows. He brought Harry in front of it and stepped behind him, arms winding themselves around his waist. "Look up. Can you see that constellation there at your right? It means …"

With a low rumble, Ruby shook his head dazed and forced himself to wake up. His head felt heavy as if something was pressing down on it and trying to convince him to go back to sleep. He was more stubborn than that, though, and he succeeded in shaking off the lethargy that wanted to snare him.

The snake slithered into their master's bedroom (as it had been his turn to do the usual check-up around the quarters for any suspicious activity) and suddenly halted. "What is going on here?" he spoke agitatedly.

"What are you …" Ruby stiffened when he took notice of the empty bed. "Where is he?" he growled; his eyes flashing up in ire.

"You did not notice our Master disappearing?" the snake asked incredulously and his eyes flashed up in anger.

"Obviously not!" the lion snarled and sniffed at the blankets. A faint warmth lingered around them, signalling that their master hadn't left the bed for that long. "I do not know how it happened, but I apparently have fallen asleep. Did you encounter him?"

"No, I did not." Garin glided towards him, climbing on top of him; his cold scales clashing with Ruby's warm skin. "We need to find him and soon."

In an unspoken agreement, they both focused on the bond linking them to their master. They had many powers and locating their master was but one of them. It took Ruby a bit longer to locate their master as he was still busy blaming himself for falling asleep – how that had happened was a complete mystery to him as he took guarding their master very seriously – but once he received the location in the form of a mental picture of the scenery, he stiffened and heard the snake hissing furiously above him.

Their master was standing in what was called the Astronomy tower: standing on the edge of the windowsill on his bare feet, his rounded stomach displayed to the early morning with his eyes closed; his hair gently swaying in the breeze.
On the verge of falling down; a fall that would surely kill him.

Both the lion and the snake saw through their link how their master lifted his foot, swaying back and forth on the windowsill.

Without wasting another second, Ruby tore out of the room, his feet pounding harshly against the floor on his way out of the dungeons, while the snake rushed deeper into the dungeons, intent on locating their master's mate and sending the snow leopard after him.

No matter how fast he ran, no matter how much Hogwarts helped him by guiding him through the shortest passages and adjusting the floors so that he would be able to run across them without slipping, he was too late.

Because right when he was running up the stairs to the Astronomy tower, growls and snarls escaping his mouth, panic coursing through his body, the link showed him how their master took a step forwards …

And fell out of the tower.

This time Ruby was too late to save him.

Chapter End Notes

AN2: ... Yep, I really ended it like that. *nods* Cliffhangers, you've got to love them, right? *coughs* So, your thoughts about it? Please leave them behind in a comment :)

We're close to the ending, guys. Only a couple of more chapters and then this story is finished. I hope you stick with me to the end of this!

See you all in the next chapter!

Cuddles

Melissa
Chapter Notes

Author's note: Hey, look at that! A new chapter on time! Just as a warning: university has started again for me two weeks ago and I'm being overwhelmed with work and assignments, so I'll try to have the next chapter out on time, but if it doesn't appear in two weeks, you'll know why (you guys rock for being so patient with me! I know there have been a lot of delays for this fic, despite me having the plotline written out, and I'm grateful that you guys are still willing to give this fic a chance!)

Thanks for the comments and kudos!

Warnings: some angst, some drama; some foul language. You know the usual

Disclaimer: I don't own Harry Potter - J.K. Rowling owns it

Also, as you can see this is again the first part of two parts (fitting both parts in one chapter would have been too much)

I hope you'll enjoy this chapter!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 30: Calm Before the Storm Part 1

"I still don't see it," Harry said frustrated. Arms withdrew from around his waist and silence rung. "Draco?" He turned around confused and was baffled to see nobody standing behind him. The scenery around him dissolved and was reshaped until he was standing on what looked to be plain grass with a grey sky above him.

What on earth was going on here? Was he dreaming? That had to be it. What kind of odd dream was this, though?

A white silver shape approached him from the right and when it came close, his breath escaped him in a loud 'whoosh' when he realised what the shape actually was.

Lily Potter nee Evans was standing in front of him with a soft, but sad smile on her beautiful face.

"Mum," he whispered and stretched out his hand before he realised what he was doing. When he encountered a warm and very solid arm, he stiffened. Was it normal for something to feel this real, this solid in a dream?

"You're not dreaming, sweetheart," Lily murmured and flicked her wrist so that she could grab his hand tightly, letting him feel how warm she was, how slender her fingers were.

"What's going on?" Harry asked bemused. He felt odd; not completely shocked but not really calm either. As if everything was happening to someone else.

"Dumbledore was influencing your mind, Harry," she answered; her full rose lips pressed tightly together while her emerald green eyes burned furiously. "Your Occlumency shields have weakened
somehow and he managed to get a link between you and him."

"Influence how?" His throat felt dry; his voice came out like a croak.

He didn't need to hear her reply to know what Dumbledore had been doing. "He's the one who caused you to start sleepwalking. He wanted you to kill yourself in your sleep."

He trembled and clenched his eyes shut. So his gut instinct had been right; the sleepwalking hadn't been normal. All this time he had been so close to dying in his sleep and he had never realised it. He shivered and opened his eyes.

"How … How do you … Why are you here?" he asked in a small voice. How did his mother know what was going on? What kind of world was this? His parents were dead – there was no way he was really talking to her. And yet, here she stood in front of him; if he just reached out, he could hug her.

His throat constricted a bit.

"Your dad and I never left you, sweetheart," she smiled sadly and her other hand started caressing his cheek tenderly. "We may not be able to protect you in the physical world, but we won't ever give up on you. At this moment, James is closing off the link between you and Dumbledore. After this you won't be influenced by him anymore, I promise you that." She took a step closer; her bright red hair swishing back and forth across her back. "It took us quite some energy, but there is no way I'm going to let him win. No matter how much I love you and miss you, it isn't your time yet to join us."

"Is … Will I see dad?" he asked, forcing himself to speak around the lump in his throat. The news about Dumbledore should distress him more, he knew. The man had been invading his own mind, violating it. Yet the knowledge that his father was fighting against it, was helping him, even after all this time, put him at ease somehow.

He wasn't fighting alone. He still had his parents caring for him, looking over him.

"Of course you will," Lily smiled and Harry could understand why James had fallen in love with her. Her smile was capable of chasing the clouds away; such brightness did it contain. "You don't think he would leave without saying goodbye at least, did you? He wants to say hello to his grandson as well."

Almost as a reflex, Harry's hand shot down to cover his bulging stomach and he felt himself flush. "I, eh, …"

She shook her head with a tender smile, before she casted a forlorn gaze at his stomach. "I wish we could be there for you, Harry. There are so many things we couldn't experience with you and this is just one of the many things that we're missing out on."

"You're not angry?" Harry asked. The stupidity of the question made him wince. Out of all the things he could be talking about, out of all the questions he could ask his mother now that he finally had the chance to speak to her and he asked that?

Her answering laughter sounded like chimes in the wind. "Why would I be angry, darling? We could never be angry at you, Harry. Just let your son know we love him, okay? And that we wished we could have gotten to know him." Her eyes glistened with tears. "You're making us so proud, sweetheart. Never ever doubt that."

He didn't know who moved first. One moment there was still some distance between them and his mother's hand was warm against his cheek and the next she was fully embracing him, letting him feel how warm she was. Without hesitation, he immediately hugged her back – even if this was some sort
of weird dream world, at least he finally knew how it felt to be hugged by his mother; he wouldn't miss out on this opportunity.

Her curly hair hid his face and the scent of roses filled his nostrils; a couple of teardrops fell on her shoulder, dampening the white fabric.

Slender hands caressed his back; not once did she make an attempt to pull back, even though their position was a bit awkward due to his stomach.

"I love you, sweetheart," she whispered in his ear and pressed a soft kiss against his temple. Her cheek felt wet against his and he realised with a start that she was crying as well.

"I – I love you too, mum," he managed to choke out around the lump in his throat. He felt light headed, not capable of taking deep, needed breaths, but he wouldn't give up this moment for anything.

Soon he would have to say goodbye to her and that thought hurt – he ruthlessly supressed that thought and focused on the warm arms hugging him as tightly as they dared.

A sound of protest was wrenched from his throat when Lily loosened her embrace. She released a trembling chuckle and jerked her head backwards, while she stepped to the side.

Bewildered Harry glanced at the appointed direction and looked right into warm, hazel brown eyes who regarded him tenderly.

"Hello son," James Potter greeted softly and a wry smile played around his lips when he opened his arms. "Are you too old to hug your dad now?"

Harry nearly stumbled when he approached his father and the arms around him hugged him firmly; his mind flashed back to a photo in his photo album in which James had been hugging baby Harry tightly while they both laughed merrily.

Despite the proper lack of care during his childhood, his growth hadn't been that stunted apparently for he was only three inches smaller than his father.

"The last time I got to hold you, you were still just a baby," James murmured and his arms tightened for a fraction before he slowly released him. "And look at you now. All grown up and expecting a baby."

"Our baby grew up," Lily murmured and took a deep breath; clearly steeling herself. "Did you manage to sever the link?"

It was as if a switch had been turned on. The tender look on James' face was exchanged for a troubled, dark one and he squeezed Harry's shoulder briefly before taking a step back. "I did, but new shields are needed just in case. And no offense, son," he threw Harry an apologetic look, "but I don't think you'll be able to create shields of the strength needed to keep that son of a bitch out of your mind."

Harry hastily wiped across his eyes – embarrassed at the tears that had gathered there – and cleared his throat. "I know someone who'll be able to help me with that."

"You do?" Lily said surprised. "Who?"

Harry paused, before he answered reluctantly, "Snape."
James released a tortured groan. "Of course it's him. Out of all the damn people in the world," he moaned exasperatedly and threw his hands up in the air.

He received a smack against the back of his head for his antics. "Oh, do shut up, James," Lily huffed and scowled at him. "Be grateful that Severus is willing to help Harry."

"Hell will freeze over before I'm grateful to him," James muttered darkly and quickly jumped aside to avoid the next incoming slap of his annoyed wife.

Somewhere a high chirp sound filled the air and it made the three of them still.

"What was that?" Harry asked warily, his eyes roaming across the space. He didn't see anything coming towards them, but that didn't really assure him.

Lily smiled sadly. "It's a sign for us that we need to return. We've accomplished what we wanted to do here, so now we need to go back."

His heartbeat seemed to slow down and he had to work hard to swallow. His eyes stared blankly at the ground; his hands clenched into fists next to his hips. Right, he couldn't stay here. This wasn't reality; this was some kind of dream world and now it was time to wake up again.

It was time to leave them.

He didn't want to do that. He wanted more time with them, wanted to bask in their presence longer. Surely, they could stall for a bit longer?

James seemed to know what he was thinking and he shook his head, smiling wanly. "We can't stay here, son," he said softly. "We need to go back and you need to wake up. You can't stay here."

"It's just … I …" Harry fidgeted with his sleeves and no matter how hard he tried, he couldn't exactly convey what he was thinking. Why was it so hard to tell them that he didn't want to leave them, that he had missed them? That he loved them and wanted to stay with them?

Fingers brushed against his cheeks and he looked up startled, right into softened, green eyes. "We know, honey," his mother whispered and cool lips pressed a kiss against his forehead, right across his scar. "We don't want to leave you either, but you need to go back. You have people waiting for you, people who love you as much as we do. You can't stay here."

"I know," he whispered and clenched his eyes shut, trembling underneath her tender caress.

"We'll always be near you," Lily murmured shut with a soft smile and squeezed his hand.

"Tell Padfoot and Moony that I'm not expecting them any time soon, all right?" James grinned; his hazel brown eyes glittering oddly. "They are still in charge of letting the Marauders live on. Tell Padfoot I'll kick his arse if he shows up any time soon."

Harry laughed weakly. "I will." He swallowed harshly when he noticed how the outline of their bodies started to blur.

Something small, hard with jagged edges was pressed into his hand by his mother. "That's for you," she said and closed his hand around it. "The Founders will know what to do with it."

Any other time and he would have immediately looked down to see what he was holding, but this time he merely clenched his hand tighter around it – feeling the edges of the hard rock cutting into his
skin – and he kept his eyes fixed on his parents, hungrily taking in the details.

Lily stepped backwards until she was standing next to her husband. Their bodies were fading; their hands and feet weren't visible anymore and the rest of their bodies was starting to disappear as well.

He blinked confused when his head started to feel heavy, as if some unknown force was pressing down on him and he gritted his teeth.

"Take care, son. We love you," James told him and smiled proudly at him. "Just be strong for a little bit longer, all right?"

A strange sensation welled up in him and he uttered a sound of surprise when he looked down and realised he could see the ground through his feet – he was fading out as well.

"Harry?"

He whipped his head back up to stare at Lily.

"When the time is there, tell your partner that our answer is yes," she said cryptically and offered him a gentle smile.

Before he could ask what she meant with that, a bright light filled the space, forcing him to close his eyes and the sound of howling wind filled his ears.

When he opened his eyes again, the sound of howling wind was not restricted to his odd dream only, but filled his ears even now, while the sky above him was tinted a dark pink. Dawn was approaching.

His gaze was locked on the open window of the Astronomy Tower, but he wasn't looking at it from the inside. The sight of the window was quickly replaced by that of the weathered stone and his eyes widened in terror when he realised what was happening.

He was plummeting straight to the ground – and this time there was no broom to keep him in the air.

In a fit of panic, he tried to force his magic to help him Apparate, let him stay afloat, just anything that would prevent him from smashing against the ground, but while he felt his magic buzzing madly underneath his skin, he couldn't get it to act.

His mouth opened, but there was no sound coming out of his throat; terror was strangling him, keeping him silent, while his heart beat madly, hammering wildly against his chest. He was suddenly too aware of how heavy he actually was; everything from his hair to nails, from his organs to his bones felt too heavy. Gravity was merciless, dragging him down quickly and he felt as if he was weighted down with heavy stones. His arms were scrambling for purchase he wouldn't be able to find and he felt like he couldn't get any air.

In just a couple of seconds, he would meet the unforgiving ground and he and his son would both die.

It seemed that despite his father's interference, Dumbledore would still succeed in killing him.

Unlike all those times before, there was nobody and nothing to help him now.

"Wake up!"
The growl snatched him roughly from his deep slumber and he wrestled himself upright, rubbing over his tired, gritty eyes.

He glared sleepily at Mara, who was standing right next to his bed. "What on earth do you want?" Draco snapped after casting a quick Tempus charm. Six o'clock. How fucking lovely.

"Your mate is sleepwalking and is on the verge of throwing himself off the big tower," Mara snarled at him; her eyes flashing up in the dark.

That immediately removed any lingering traces of sleep.

With a loud curse Draco threw himself out of his bed, snatched his wand from his nightstand and bolted out of the room, ignoring the bemused, sleepy question of Blaise.

He was vaguely aware of Mara running behind him while an angrily hissing Garin accompanied them, but he didn't care about them. Heart thundering madly in his ears, he bolted through the castle, taking every possible detour he could find.

Anything that could bring him closer to Harry on time. Anything that could help him prevent Harry from falling and meeting his death.

Terror and panic were filling him and they threatened to slow him down, but he pushed himself to run faster, paying no heed to the portraits that he woke up when he ran past them.

He didn't question when Harry had started sleepwalking; didn't question why none of Harry's pets had been able to wake him up on time; didn't question why Harry had gone up to the Astronomy Tower of all places …

All his thoughts were focused on one thing and one thing only: getting to his lover on time before it was too late.

He nearly tripped in his haste to run up the last staircase separating him from Harry and he cursed vehemently; his hands scrambled for support against the stones and he used them to push himself off, using the momentum to propel himself forwards.

His lungs burned, desperate for oxygen, and his muscles screamed in protest, but he forced himself to run even faster; his burst of speed fuelled by the overwhelming terror which threatened to overtake him.

The door of the Astronomy Tower was open and he heard the familiar snarl of Ruby and for one moment hope filled him. Maybe Ruby had been on time; as soon as he entered the room, he would see Harry standing safely on the floor, unharmed.

The loud roar of fury demolished the spark of hope ruthlessly.

The moment he flung himself in the room, he caught a glimpse of black hair before it was gone and he rushed over to the window, foolishly hoping he would still be able to grab Harry's hand.

"HARRY!" Draco screamed terrified when he saw the unconscious body of his lover falling to the ground. He would have fallen over the edge as well if not for strong teeth clamping down around his leg, steadying him. He kicked furiously backwards, attempting to dislodge the sharp teeth. "Let me …"

The sudden screech of a bird stopped the scuffle and before Draco or the magical creatures could react, the weak light of the rising sun was blocked by a large shape, casting the small group in the
shadows.

Rowen – a whole lot bigger than he was since Draco had last seen him – was keeping himself afloat on an invisible current …

With Harry sprawled across his large back.

"I have him," Rowen announced calmly and Draco's legs gave out, leaving him crumbled on the floor while sheer relief coursed through him. His heart seemed to restart as well and his limbs trembled in the aftermath of the all-consuming terror he had experienced.

"Thank Merlin," Draco managed to bring out weakly in a rough voice.

Harry was safe. He hadn't finished his fall; Draco wouldn't meet his broken body if he looked down now.

There were no words to describe the sense of utter relief filling him at the realisation that Harry wasn't harmed.

"Draco," Harry choked out; his face white as a sheet while he shivered violently.

Draco somehow managed to retrieve enough control over his limbs to stumble up right and help Harry back into the tower.

The second Harry's feet were standing on solid ground, they fell into a tight embrace and their arms clutched tightly at each other. They ended up with Draco sitting with his back against the wall and Harry seated in his lap, leaning heavily against his chest.

They still had their arms wrapped around each other; they weren't planning on releasing the other one soon.

"Fuck, don't do this to me again," Draco whispered; a hint of fear still tainting his roughened voice. In the back of his mind, a voice whispered that he seemed to be saying that a lot to the dark haired wizard. His arms around Harry's back tightened and he burrowed his face in soft, dark hair; comforting himself with the solid and reassuring weight of his lover in his lap.

Harry was still shivering violently. "It was Dumbledore," he brought out in a trembling voice. "Dumbledore was influencing my mind, Draco. He broke through my Occlumency shields. He caused me to sleepwalk. He wanted me to kill myself in my sleep." Fingers curled around Draco's shoulder, nails digging into his skin to the point of it being painful.

Draco wetted his lips. "How do you know that?" he asked, feeling numb.

"My parents appeared in my dream," Harry replied almost inaudibly. "My dad helped destroy the link between me and Dumbledore."

"What?" Draco asked bewildered. He hadn't expected to hear that particular answer.

"I know it's strange, but they really appeared. It wasn't really a dream, because I could hug them. Look, my mum gave me this." He opened his right hand, revealing a small, black stone with jagged edges which had left red lines behind in Harry's palm. The daylight caused it to glitter oddly, as if something inside the stone was scurrying around.

The stone looked familiar, but Draco had trouble recalling the memory. Where he had seen it before was currently not important, though. The most pressing matter right now was try to figure out just
what the hell had happened with Harry and how he had come into possession of this peculiar stone.

"I think it's best if we talk about this to the others," Draco murmured and tore his gaze away from the stone. The mysterious gem was trying to enthrall him – to do what he did not know – and he wanted to get rid of it soon. Even if Harry's mother had given it to him with a specific purpose, something was wrong with it and it would be best to dispose of it soon.

"I agree. I need to talk to Snape anyway, so that he can help me with my Occlumency shields," Harry muttered and sounded exhausted.

"Mara and Ruby have gone to warn the rest of your group," Rowen announced; his long talons clicking softly against the stones.

"You're up for walking?" Draco asked concerned and one of his hands involuntarily sought to cover Harry's stomach.

Harry's hand encased his and gave it a reassuring squeeze. "I'm fine," he said quietly; his eyes downcast. "I don't think I'll stop trembling any time soon, but the baby and I are okay."

As if on cue, something vaguely pushed against their joined hands.

"I'm still going to ask Lupin to examine you," Draco muttered and his jaw clenched tightly when he thought about all the things that could have happened if their pets hadn't been there to help them.

"I just want to leave now. I don't want to stay here any longer." Harry shuddered.

Draco couldn't agree more and they stood up; the blond wizard keeping an arm around the pregnant young man to steady him and lent him his support.

Without looking back, they trudged back to the dungeons, led by Garin.

Harry's breathing was a bit strained by the time they met up with Severus, whose face was closed off, but Draco would take Harry being out of breath over any other state now.

Right now, all that mattered was having Harry safe with him.

"And that's all I can remember," Potter finished recalling the events of the past week and rubbed his forehead. He fell back against the couch with an exhausted sigh.

Draco grabbed his hand and intertwined their fingers; his grey eyes glowing unnaturally against the white pallor of his skin.

Severus pinched the bridge of his nose and counted to ten underneath his breath. One would assume Potter had become smart after being a target for so many years and would have realised he needed to talk about anything out of the ordinary happening to him. Like, for example, a sudden bout of sleepwalking.

"Why the hell didn't you tell us about this sooner?" Black snapped, leaning forwards like a dog ready to jump.

For once, he and the mutt shared the same train of thought.

Potter had the good sense to look ashamed; he seemed to drown in the thick, grey quilt Severus had given him, which swallowed his frame and yet was not thick or large enough to conceal the shape of
his rounded stomach. 

"I thought it was because of stress," Potter responded weakly, tugging the quilt closer around him. "I didn't sleepwalk for the entire week either."

"You still should have said something, Harry," Lupin said softly; his gaze was fixated on Potter's stomach, but he removed his piercing gaze in favour of frowning at Potter. "Even if Albus wasn't behind this, sleepwalking was still dangerous in your state."

Potter looked down mulishly, but accepted the scolding. 

"How did that old coot even manage to influence his mind?" Lucius murmured, crossing his legs. 

He had visited Severus the day before and had decided to stay the night. After hearing the warning of Draco's pet, he had refused to leave until he was assured both young men were safe.

Ruby lifted his head and flicked his ears. "Most likely it happened in that place of death. There were a lot of traps present," he rumbled.

Draco spoke up for the firsts time since he had entered the room. "Does anyone know what kind of stone that is?" He jerked his head at the dark stone resting innocently on the table. "It looks familiar."

A loud snort drew their attention to a sneering Gryffindor. "That, lad, is nothing less than the infamous Resurrection Stone. Congratulations, you have now all Deathly Hallows gathered."

"You're joking, right?" Black said flatly, narrowing his eyes. "There is no way that the Deathly Hallows are real!"

"It seems that you were not informed yet," Ravenclaw murmured and threw Severus a sharp look of reproach, which he countered with a blank look. He had never promised he would tell the mutt and the wolf about them any time soon. "The Deathly Hallows do exist, I assure you, and they are needed for the ritual."

"Where are the other two then?" Black demanded to know; his voice full of suspicion.

"The Elder Wand is tucked away in these quarters and young Mister Potter is in possession of the Invisibility Cloak," she replied calmly, placing one leg over the other one.

While the others – save for Lucius and Potter, who bore a look of utter confusion – were gaping in shock at the news, Severus glared at the stone.

He knew he should feel relieved to have all parts of the ritual ready at their disposal, but instead a wave of revulsion swept over him and he dug his fingers in his sleeves, needing the slight sting to distract him from getting up and cursing the stone. Out of all three instruments, the Resurrection Stone was the one which had caused a lot of heartbreak, insanity and – ironically – even death. How many people had toyed with their own lives and sanity in an attempt to see their dead loved ones again? How many people had been killed in order to get a hold of the damned stone? It brought nothing but death and despair and now it was in their possession.

What had Lily been thinking when she had given the stone to her son? Severus didn't even try to question how the dead woman had gotten a hold on the stone – how could she give something that dangerous to her own son?

"Excuse me, but what on earth are the Deathly Hallows and what does my Cloak to do with it?" Potter asked fairly irritated, quickly glancing at the stone.
"You never heard of them before?" Draco asked surprised.

"If I had, would I ask about them now?" Potter bit sarcastically and Severus concealed a snort.

"The Deathly Hallows are said to belong to Death itself, who gave them to three brothers," Lupin explained calmly, reclining back in his seat. His eyes had acquired a distant sheen. "Each has a special ability. The Invisibility Cloak has the ability to make the owner completely invisible. The Resurrection Stone grants the user the chance to bring their loves ones back from the dead. The Elder Wand is said to be the most powerful one of all wands and chooses to serve the, what it considers it to be, strongest wizard or witch. If its current owner is defeated in a duel, the ownership of the wand is transferred to the winner. Another tale tells of the wand deciding who the strongest one is with or without a duel."

"All three combined would make the person the strongest witch or wizard," Slytherin took over; his contemplative gaze resting on the stone. "But that is not our aim. The Deathly Hallows can also be used in the Binding Ritual; their presence lends a great deal of magical strength to the ritual."

"And we have them all now?" Potter asked bewildered.

"Yes." Slytherin inclined his head. "The Stone has turned up now and the Elder Wand was retrieved from Dumbledore's house. The Cloak is in possession of the Potter family, so you have had it the entire time."

"My Cloak is a Deathly Hallow?" Potter sounded both sceptical and intrigued.

A dangerous combination if you asked Severus.

"Yes, and now that all Hallows are gathered, the Wand can receive an order and we can start setting up the ritual," Ravenclaw answered and sounded satisfied.

"Why was Dumbledore not using the Elder Wand if it was in his house?" Black wrinkled his nose. "Or did he not know it was there?"

Severus kept quiet, but begrudgingly had to agree with the mutt. In all those years of working with Albus, he had seen him using only a dark wooden wand.

"Hardly," Lucius murmured disdainfully. "I suspect it is merely the old coot thinking he is too powerful for anyone to be able to defeat him, so he saw no need to use the Elder Wand."

A contemplative silence blanketed the room for a while.

"What did Prongs and Lilyflower do to help you?" Black broke the silence with an odd infliction to his voice.

Potter shifted on the couch, raking a hand through his messy hair. "I don't know exactly," he admitted readily and his hand fell back in his lap. "Mum was talking to me, saying that Dumbledore had been influencing my mind, but that dad was destroying the link. "Mum was talking to me, saying that Dumbledore had been influencing my mind, but that dad was destroying the link." His breathing hitched and his eyes shot towards Severus, who raised an eyebrow. "He said that I would need help of someone to raise stronger Occlumency shields."

"I doubt he recommended me," Severus murmured silkily, correctly interpreting Potter's gaze as a request for help.

Potter smiled faintly and lowered his gaze. "No, he didn't, but I told him you were the best choice."
The corners of Severus' mouth twitched a bit in a forbidden attempt to smile. He wished he could have been there to witness James Potter's face when he heard his own son recommending the help of his school enemy.

"Prongs probably wasn't happy with that," Black snorted weakly and when he raised his hand to push his hair back, it was plain to everyone with a sharp eye that a tremor was going through it.

"No, but mum made him shut up," Potter replied quietly and then visibly hesitated. "Dad said he wasn't expecting you two for a long time and that he would kick your arse, Sirius, if you dared to meet him soon."

Lupin cracked a smile and Black released his annoying, barking laughter.

"Can you help Harry create stronger Occlumency shields, Uncle?" Draco asked tersely once Black shut up.

Severus slowly nodded, having no reason to refuse his godson's request.

"It won't be easy, though," he warned them. "I will need to use Legilimency on you, Potter, seeing as you do not possess the necessary skills to form the shields on your own."

"That's not a problem," Potter murmured. "As long as Dumbledore can't influence my mind anymore, I don't care." His hand clenched on top of his stomach.

"We will do that now," Severus said resolutely, not accepting any protest. He doubted Albus would try again, but it was better to be safe than sorry.

Lupin stood up. "I will inform Minerva that Draco and Harry will be leaving sooner than the rest. Classes have started by now and you two are not in a good state to attend them." He urged Black to stand up as well. "You can pick up their stuff and the other animals."

Black nodded his consent and the two men left the room swiftly.

"I will take you two with me to the manor," Lucius informed his son and Potter. "You can go to your own manor afterwards."

Severus stood up abruptly, taking a couple of steps until he was standing in front of Potter. "Lower your shields, Potter." Or what remains of them, he added silently.

Potter took a deep breath, looked Severus right into his eyes and allowed the other man to perform Legilimency on him.

It was extremely disconcerting to feel Snape rummaging through his mind. Unlike his first disastrous attempt at Occlumency in his fifth year, though, Snape's intrusion didn't really hurt now. He wasn't tearing through his mind, ripping through his memories, but instead was carefully stepping around in his mind, avoiding the memories.

Despite the almost gentle approach, Harry couldn't wait for all this to be over and done with.

Patience is a virtue, Potter, Snape's rebuff rose up in his mind and he huffed soundlessly.

He was vaguely aware of Garin's and Ruby's presence near him and Draco's clammy hand clutched into his and focused on those sensations to distract himself from the rummaging and tugging going on in his mind.
A while later, he became aware of something clicking into place – a very odd feeling – and he gasped out loud when Snape retreated.

"Did it work?" Draco asked immediately, while Harry blinked and shook his head as if dispelling the fog of sleep. He didn't feel any different, but that didn't mean anything.

Snape took a step back and tucked his wand away. "Yes, the new shields are in place," he murmured.

"Thank Merlin," Harry sighed relieved and felt drained. He just wanted to sleep now.

"You can leave whenever you want," Remus announced when he and Sirius entered the room again. Both his and Draco's possessions were floating behind Sirius; the cage with Sapphire growling in it was held by Sirius and Hedwig was carried by Remus.

"Rowen decided to fly straight to your new manor," Remus informed the blond wizard.

"Let's go. You both could use some more rest," Lucius said calmly and walked over to the fireplace.

"As soon as we have incorporated the Deathly Hallows in the ritual, we will explain it in full detail," Ravenclaw promised solemnly.

"For now, try to relax as much as you can," Hufflepuff piped up with a warm smile.

"Thank you for your help," Harry murmured and Snape inclined his head with an unreadable look on his face.

"I'll see you next week, cub," Remus told him softly and squeezed his shoulder.

Sirius didn't settle for a squeeze in his shoulder, but instead engulfed his godson in a hug, as tight as he dared – which wasn't that tight. Harry was suddenly very conscious of the lack of his belt around his waist.

"Take care of yourself, pup," Sirius murmured in his ear. "And of the little one too."

"I will," Harry promised and looked up, struck speechless by the sight of the red rimmed eyes of his godfather. Maybe he shouldn't have relayed his dad's message to him. Sirius had obviously taken it hard.

"Sirius," he started uncertainly, but Sirius shook his head with a faint smile.

"Go on, we'll see each other next week."

Harry hesitated, but nodded and joined Draco in front of the fireplace. Draco grabbed his hand, weaving their fingers together. Harry's mind flashed back to what his mum had told him before he woke up. What would Draco do that would require his parents expressing their permission?

"Are you ready, Harry?" Draco asked softly, pulling him back from his memories.

Harry took a deep, measured breath and nodded. "Yes, let's go."

Now, more than ever, he craved to be alone with his lover. It was time to visit the place that would be Harry's home from now on. A place he wouldn't allow to be tainted by the darkness brought forth by Dumbledore.
AN2: See, I didn't make Harry die ^^ That would have been too cruel. What do you think of it? Please leave your thoughts behind in a review!

Next time: Harry and Draco spend the Easter holidays in their manor and try to pretend that nothing is amiss by discussing some important things. Of course their time together is more like the calm before the storm ...

For the ones following the series centering around Scorpius and his new family, "A Wonky Start" has been posted today as well ^^

See you all in the next chapter!

Cuddles

Melissa
Chapter 31: Calm Before the Storm Part 2

1st of April

"Time is up, Harry," Tonks – sporting short, bright blue hair today – announced cheerily and stopped the timer.

Releasing a loud groan, Harry straightened his back – a twinge of pain shooting through it – and placed his quill on the table, which temporarily acted as a desk.

His last exam – the theoretical part of Charms – was finished and with that, he was officially free. On Monday he had had both the practical and the theoretical exams of Transfiguration and Potions – one in the morning, the other one in the afternoon – followed by Defence Against the Dark Arts and Curses on Tuesday. Today he had had the theoretical exam of Care of Magical Creatures (Hagrid hadn't seen the need for a practical exam) and the theoretical and practical parts of Charms. Despite having known what to expect, the exams hadn't been easy and he could only pray that he hadn't bollixed his exams of Transfiguration and Potions.

"All right, I'll be going now," Tonks grinned after gathering up his papers.

Harry nodded, returning the smile, and stood up; his hand absentmindedly rubbing his back.

"Oh, by the way, Harry; please, for the love of Merlin, give your son a normal name and don't be like my mother," Tonks sighed exasperatedly.

He chuckled. "I promise."

She left after one last cheery wave, prompting Ruby – who had kept watch in the corner of the room – to rise on his large legs and pad over to Harry.

"You look tired," the lion informed him, sounding concerned.
"The exams sucked up a lot of my energy," Harry admitted and snatched his quills and ink pot off of the table. *Carrying the baby is taxing as well,* he added silently and threw a furtive glance at his midsection. He had forgone wearing the belt as there was no risk of other people discovering the truth in the manor and it struck him as surprising once more how big he had become already.

Ruby followed him out of the small room – well, Draco claimed it was small, but it was still as big as the Potions' classroom – out into the brightly lit corridor. Several paintings of serene, picturesque nature scenes decorated the pale blue wall and a soft, white carpet covered the marble floor, muffling his footsteps.

The heavy scent of lilies resting in the large, dark blue vase filled his nostrils when he passed them on his way to the broad staircase and he sneezed.

The room in which he had taken his exams was situated on the ground floor, close to the large kitchen and as the room he shared with his lover was on the first floor, he ascended the staircase, paying heed to not trip over a step. Before he entered the bedroom, he first dropped off his writing utensils in the room next to it, which had been transformed into a mini library with room for two desks where both young men could study.

Draco wasn't in their bedroom, so Harry wandered through the long hallway, wondering where the blond could have gone. He didn't think he went outside; even if he would only have gone to the garden, Draco would have informed him that he went outside.

Ruby sniffed the air, cocking his head. "*Your mate is in the second to last room,*" he rumbled and then turned around, obviously having decided that Harry could take care of himself now without running into trouble.

Snorting in amusement, Harry walked further down the hallway; the second to last room in this particular corridor was the nursery and he quirked his eyebrows, wondering why Draco would be there.

The door was slightly ajar and he silently opened it further, leaning against the threshold while he took in the sight in front of him.

Draco was standing in front of the white crib Lucius had given them and was caressing a brown teddy bear, which had a bright red bowtie around its neck. He seemed lost in thought; his grey eyes fixed on the green bedding.

"Draco?" Harry said softly and stepped forwards.

Draco turned his head and gave him a smile, while he placed the stuffed toy back in the middle of the crib. "Hey. How did it go?"

Harry shrugged and approached him. "It went well, I suppose. Can't get any worse than Potions."

Draco chuckled. "I'm sure even Potions wasn't that bad."

"That remains to be seen," Harry sighed and stopped in front of the blond. He raised an eyebrow. "Why are you here?"

"Just looking around," Draco murmured and slipped his arms around Harry's waist, pressing him closer. "Mother did a great job with decorating it."

"That she did," Harry agreed, his own eyes lingering on the crib in the middle of the room. It seemed now more real than ever that they were going to have a baby. Seeing his bump whenever he
removed the belt and feeling their son kick was one thing, but actually seeing the decorated nursery … It made it all that more real. That was rather ridiculous, he knew that. After all, what could make it more real than actually feeling their baby kick and move inside of him? Yet, the fact that their manor was prepared for the new arrival with a beautiful nursery really drove it home. They were really going to have a baby together and raise their son in this manor. In just a couple of months they would be living here and it made him jittery with anticipation.

Thinking about their baby made him recall Tonks' small comment about names and he clucked his tongue. "We haven't talked about names yet," he remarked casually and smiled faintly when he felt his son tumbling around.

"Hm? Oh yes, that's true," Draco replied surprised and started to steer the dark haired wizard out of the room. "I guess it's time we start discussing that, considering it will only be a few more months."

"Tonks made me promise to not give our son a ridiculous name," Harry informed him amused as they entered their bedroom. Sapphire was seated on Harry's nightstand, her tail flicking back and forth agitatedly while her gaze was fixated on something she had spotted outside.

"Her first name is Nymphadora, right?" Draco scrunched up his nose and shook his head. "I don't know what my aunt was thinking."

"Yeah, neither does Tonks," Harry chuckled and sat down on the bed, sliding back until he was leaning comfortably against a small mountain of pillows. He waited until Draco was settled next to him and then asked, "Do you have any names in mind?"

"I've been thinking about it," the other one admitted sheepishly. "I'd like to continue my family's tradition of giving names related to constellations, if you don't mind."

"I don't mind," Harry said slowly, mulling it over. He supposed it wouldn't be bad to continue that particular tradition. "Do you have a name picked out?"

"Two actually," Draco murmured and visibly hesitated before he continued, "I was thinking of naming the baby either Scorpius or Hyperion."

There was no way he would name his son 'Hyperion'. It didn't matter what kind of fancy backstory that name had; their son would be teased mercilessly if he had that name.

Draco noticed his poorly hidden grimace and raised an eyebrow. "You don't like the names?" he guessed.

"Scorpius isn't that bad, but I don't like the name 'Hyperion'," Harry answered reluctantly, rubbing absentmindedly over his stomach.

"Maybe we can compromise? One of us chooses the first name and the other the second name," Draco offered, not in the least put out or offended by Harry's comment.

"No 'Hyperion'," Harry insisted stubbornly and scowled.

Draco snorted amused, but acquiesced without any fuss. "Fine, I'd like him to have 'Scorpius' as first name then."

"I want him to have 'James' as a second name," Harry stated, his hand stilling. He hadn't given it much thought, but something in him had made him say it and he blinked bemused. It seemed a good idea to name their son 'James', although he couldn't explain why.
"After your father, huh?" Draco remarked with a queer look on his face.

"You don't agree?" Harry questioned; a hint of defensiveness slipping into his tone.

Draco leaned forwards – supporting his weight on his hand – and kissed him quickly on his mouth. "I like it; I don't mind naming him after your father. Considering what he did for the Wizarding World, it would be an honour to name our son after him."

"Idiot," Harry muttered, feeling oddly flustered and he glanced away. "I'm choosing the first name of our second one."

Draco laughed merrily. "Already decided we're going to have more than one?"

Harry felt himself flush and he glanced at the still smiling blond. "Don't you want more than one?" he asked uncertainly. They hadn't discussed this, thanks to all the other issues they had been forced to deal with, but Harry had merely assumed they would have more than one child, which in retrospect was a stupid assumption to make. Most Pureblood families seemed to prefer only having one heir; the Malfoys – aside from Lucian – were a prime example of this.

Still he couldn't get rid of his wish to have more than one child. Even though he had grown up with the Dursleys, they could hardly be considered a warm family and he yearned to have a family of his own with more than one child running around.

Draco shrugged and grabbed Harry's hand. "Growing up as an only child was rather lonely, so I definitely want to have more than one. But only two or three at the most. I love you, but I don't want to copy the Weasley clan." He wrinkled his nose in disgust. "Sorry, but they are just with too many and I don't want to lose my sanity."

"That's fine; I'm not fond of having so many children either," Harry chuckled and squeezed Draco's hand reassuringly. "Two or three are fine."

"This was probably the quickest a couple decided on the names of their child," Draco commented dryly.

"I can start arguing again if you want to," Harry quipped.

"No, thanks; I'm quite happy with our agreement," Draco replied hastily.

Harry smiled faintly and they became quiet, enjoying the peaceful silence filling the room. When Draco put his arm around his shoulders, Harry willingly leaned against him, while stretching out his legs.

Draco lazily rubbing his side underneath his sweater caused him to become drowsy; the soothing, repetitive motion putting him in a pleasant daze.

His eyes were slipping close and his breathing had slowed down when Draco's voice pulled him back out of his slumber.

"You took Transfigurations, Potions, Charms, Curses and Defence against the Dark Arts as exams, right?" Draco inquired curiously.

"And Care for Magical Creatures, yeah," Harry replied and blinked sleepily. "Why?"

"Do you have a specific career in mind?"
"I thought about becoming an Auror, but …" Harry trailed off and furrowed his eyebrows.

Before the whole mess with Dumbledore had started, he had been certain that he wanted to become an Auror and catch Dark Wizards. He wanted to help people and protect them, so becoming an Auror seemed like the most logical career option. Now, however, having to watch out for Dumbledore and being forced to deal with dangerous traps, he was starting to doubt his decision of being an Auror. He was growing tired of fighting to stay alive. He didn't want to stay on his guard for the rest of his life. He longed to have a normal life without being attacked by others who thought he was better off dead.

"But?" Draco implored softly and his hand stilled, resting immobile against Harry's warm skin.

"But I'm growing tired of fighting," Harry admitted and heaved a soft sigh. "I don't want to become an Auror anymore. I just don't know yet what I'll be doing instead of that."

"You still have time to decide," Draco murmured and pressed a kiss on Harry's cheek. "There is no rush."

Harry nodded mutely, feeling oddly dismayed. He had thought he had finally found his future goal, but now that image was shattered and he needed to find a new career.

He supposed that deciding on a new career was an insignificant hassle compared to the other issues he was forced to deal with.

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**Fifth of April**

The piercing look of his father was slightly distorted due to the flames flickering and swaying gently.

"How are you and Harry doing?" Father inquired curiously.

"We're doing fine. Harry tires quicker than before, but that was to be expected," Draco replied and smiled weakly. It was obvious that carrying a baby was starting to take a toll on his dark haired lover. Harry was too stubborn to admit this, but Draco had already found him napping in their bed and on the couch a couple of times this week. The blond feared contemplating how bad it would become in the last two months.

"Where is Harry?" Father asked and his eyes quickly roamed across the room, as if he expected the young man to jump into view.

"He's in the garden with Garin and Ruby," Draco replied and settled himself better on the thick, large pillow; careful not to disturb the slumbering cat on his lap. "He wanted some fresh air."

"Good. That will make it easier," Father said grimly.

Draco's body tensed up in response. "What will be easier?" he asked warily.

"We think we have discovered the person who tipped off the old coot."

His mind went blank and numbness filled his body until it felt as if everything existed out of lead. The sounds were muted as if he was swimming underwater.

They had found that person? They had discovered the identity of the bastard who had been fucking with their lives? How … who …

Thoughts raced through his mind; too quick to be coherent, but the underlying emotion tied to the
thoughts was the same for them all: fury and a simmering hatred while the desire to have revenge grew steadily until it threatened to boil over like a potion that had been warmed up too fast.

"Who?" he managed to bring out through gritted teeth; his nails dug into the soft flesh of his palms, leaving behind crescent moon marks.

"Ronald Weasley," Father replied; his eyes glowing menacingly.

Draco had to close his eyes and force himself to stay calm. Raging like a lunatic would be useless, even though every cell in his body screamed to get up, find that son of a bitch and demonstrate why nobody should try to hurt someone he considered to be his.

"How did you find out?" he asked when he was certain he wouldn't jump up in a rage.

"Hogwarts felt Dark magic brewing in the Gryffindor Tower, but couldn't pinpoint the exact source until a couple of days ago," Father answered and grimaced. "Not many students stayed behind for the holidays; Weasley is one of the very few Seventh Years who stayed behind. He was in the possession of a package with crushed roots and that particular concentration of Dark magic made it easier for Hogwarts to locate the source."

Draco furrowed his eyebrows, trying to decide which question should take priority. "What made you decide that Weasley is the one giving information to the old coot?"

The Weasel possessing something Dark was suspicious – especially given the fact that his family had practically been the symbol of the Light side – but that didn't automatically mean he was the snitch.

"The crushed roots are typically used to cause harm to expecting people," the older Malfoy murmured; disgust dripping through his voice. "When inhaled, they force the victim's body to set off contractions. He was planning on scattering the roots in the dungeons. They are harmless to everyone who isn't carrying a baby, but the moment that a pregnant person inhales even one particle … That wasn't the only proof, though." Father threw him a peculiar look. "Miss Granger stayed behind as well and was willing to inform Severus and the Founders that she had heard Weasley saying that he wanted to make Harry pay. She doesn't seem to know what the roots would have caused, but she knew enough that it couldn't be good for Harry."

Draco blinked bemused. Granger had willingly condemned her ex-boyfriend? Now that was a surprising turn of events.

"Where is he now?"

"In Spinner's End; trying to recover from the Legilimency session Severus subjected him to," Father smirked; satisfaction lurking deep inside his eyes. "Turns out he doesn't have such a good grasp on Occlumency, imagine that."

On one hand, it was a relief to hear that Weasley hadn't managed to escape and that he was suffering from having his mind invaded – there was no doubt that Uncle Severus hadn't been careful – but on the other hand, it wasn't enough. Weasley had to suffer more for what he had done and what he had been planning to do. He hadn't taunted Harry – he had actively tried to murder him. He couldn't forgive for that.

"What is going to happen with him now?" Draco asked in a rough voice, leaning forwards slightly. Vaguely he was aware of Mara strolling into the room.

"We have enough evidence in the Pensive and an admission under influence of Veritaserum to have him charged with an attempt of murder, use of forbidden magic and conspiracy with a criminal,"
Lucius said slowly; a queer look on his face. "We can hand him over to the Aurors any time we want. However, considering it was Harry he was targeting, Severus and I agreed that we should let you two decide what happens with him."

"We can decide?" Draco repeated flatly and he flexed his fingers absentmindedly, feeling Mara settle next to him. His first reaction was to get rid of Weasley, but he immediately realised that that wouldn't be enough, that that fate would be too merciful.

Not to mention; how would Harry react towards this news? Draco doubted that Harry still wanted to reconcile with the Weasel, but it was one thing to deal with the fact that their friendship was unsalvageable and a whole other thing to deal with the fact that his ex-best friend had actively tried to kill him.

"I'll need to discuss this with Harry," Draco sighed, raking a hand through his hair.

"**I could accidentally bite through his throat,**" Mara offered idly; her tail thumping softly against the floor.

"Accidentally," Draco repeated incredulously.

She made an awkward rolling motion with her shoulders, as if she was shrugging. "**Accidents do happen. It would be remarkably easy for the boy to slip and fall with his neck in my mouth if I happen to yawn. It would not be my fault if I close my mouth too soon.**"

Draco once again wondered why he had to be bonded to such a bloodthirsty creature.

She threw him an offended look, having picked up his thought. "**Ruby is messier than I am. He just rips them apart.**"

"Yes, well, thank you for the offer, but I'll talk with Harry about this," Draco muttered, shaking his head. He ignored the irritated huff.

"Severus has agreed to host the Weasley boy, so there is no rush," Father remarked idly. "We will visit you this Thursday, so that we can discuss the ritual in detail."

Draco nodded. "All right." He paused for a few seconds. "Do Lupin and Black know about Weasley yet?"

Lucius snorted softly. "If they did, Severus wouldn't have had the chance to use Occlumency most likely."

"Point taken," Draco murmured and released a soft sigh.

"We'll see each other next Thursday. Take care, son," Father murmured.

Draco nodded and the fire flashed green momentarily, turning back to red once father's head had disappeared.

"**Are you really going to talk with your mate?**" Mara sounded sceptical.

Draco scowled and stood up; his knees protesting slightly after being in the same position for a while. "Of course; out of all of us, he has the most right to decide what will happen to that bastard. I just need to find the right moment for it."

He didn't want to ruin Harry's good mood with that particular conversation. They hadn't had much
time to relax lately and they needed to take advantage of the time they had now. The blond was reluctant to break the relaxed atmosphere hanging in the manor.

He left the room and exited the manor, followed faithfully by Mara. He found Harry in front of a bush with closed yellow rose nubs. The weather was slowly warming up; soon the entire garden would be in full bloom, bursting with bright colours. Now, most flowers were still in the progress of growing or being planted by some house elves.

He halted behind Harry and placed his hands on his slim hips, feeling the curve of his rounded stomach against his thumbs. His eyes trailed over the blue shirt the other man was wearing; Harry had taken to wearing Draco’s shirts around the manor as those were slightly bigger than his own, but even his shirts were stretched tightly over his seven month bump.

He would be in need of new clothes soon.

"It's so peaceful here," Harry murmured and his hands covered Draco's, gently squeezing them. He pressed back against Draco's chest, moulding their upper bodies together.

Draco hummed in agreement and dropped a kiss on the thin sliver of skin that was bared to him. "So you won't mind living here for the rest of your life?" he inquired playfully, but at the same time his voice carried a trace of earnestness.

Harry turned his head towards him and smiled. "I agreed to that last year, remember?"

"Yes, but now you're actually here and it's not just something on paper anymore," Draco retorted and brushed their cheeks together, nipping at Harry's ear. "Can you imagine spending the rest of our lives here? Raising the baby here, coming back here after work, having our wedding here …" he trailed off.

None of them both had ever discussed the notion of marriage between them and he found himself holding his breath, awaiting Harry's answer nervously. He hadn't outright asked him, but …

Silence surrounded them for a while, only broken by the occasional rustle of the grass when one of their pets moved.

Draco's heart nearly rammed straight through his chest when Harry turned around completely to face him.

Hands released his and came up to cover his cheeks. Harry rose up to kiss him on his lips. "I have no trouble imagining all of that," he whispered and his eyes glittered.

The band of the ring he had given to Harry during Christmas seemed exceptionally hot against his skin.

Draco smiled and brought their foreheads together, comforted by Harry's warm presence in his arms and the bump pressed against his stomach.

He would talk to Harry about Weasley later; he wasn't about to ruin the serene atmosphere between them.

"I love you," he muttered, turning his head to press a kiss on Harry's palm.

"I love you too," Harry whispered and they shared a soft kiss.
The next morning Draco’s eyes shot open while a moan forced its way out of his throat. His hips automatically bucked up to feel more of that wonderful mouth covering his prick, a tongue caressing a prominent vein and dipping into the slit almost hesitantly, as if the owner wasn’t certain whether he liked the peculiar taste. The tongue caressed him completely, lavishing attention on him and he couldn’t help but arch his back when he felt lips tightening around him, the sounds of soft sucking filling the air, and hands pressed down on his hips warningly.

“Shit, sorry,” he gasped; the last traces of sleepiness disappearing with each suck and lick. He couldn’t hold back the whimper slipping past his lips when the head of his cock pushed against something very soft, causing the throat to tighten around him in surprise, before his lover pulled back abruptly and coughed.

Immediately he threw the covers off of them, revealing a flushed Harry, whose lips glistened; a faint, white fluid covering parts of his lips before a tongue peeked out and licked it off. The pink tongue slid across his lower lip almost obscenely.

Draco felt his cock twitch at that sight. His concern for his lover won from his desire, though. “Are you all right?” he asked worriedly, trying to regulate his breathing. He had forgotten that Harry wasn’t that experienced with deep throating yet and he cursed himself silently. It had been difficult to hold himself back once he realised Harry was going down on him and in his sleepy state, he hadn’t had sufficient control over himself. He usually paid better attention to what he did when Harry sucked him off.

“Yeah, don’t worry,” Harry replied almost flippantly and took a deep breath, coming up to sit between Draco’s spread legs. Only then took Draco notice of Harry’s naked – and very aroused – state.

“Harry?” he questioned in a rather high voice. This was not the sight he was used to seeing upon wakening up. He couldn’t say he was opposed to this.

Harry grinned and he threw something next to him on the bed.

Draco’s throat dried up when he realised what it was: an open tube of lubrication. Harry’s hand was already slick when he wrapped it around Draco’s engorged prick – still wet from Harry’s saliva – and the blond inhaled sharply when his lover spread out the cool lubrication, coating him thoroughly.

Still with a mischievous glint in his eyes, Harry rose up on his knees and hovered above Draco’s cock – which was insistently pointing upwards – for a few seconds before he started lowering himself on it, keeping a hold on it so that it would be easier for Draco to enter him.

Draco’s hands shot out and grabbed Harry’s hips, halting him.

“What …”

“We need to prepare you first,” Draco said breathlessly. Although he desperately wanted to push Harry down and enter him, he wasn’t willing to hurt him.

Harry chuckled and shook his head, steadying himself with his hands on Draco’s chest. “No need. I already prepared myself.”

Draco felt himself flush when an image of Harry fingering himself – those slender fingers disappearing and reappearing in his arse - popped up in his mind and he groaned aloud. Fuck, that was a sight he would have liked to witness.

They both gasped loudly when Harry suddenly sunk down on his cock completely, taking him in
completely, and both young men stilled, staring at each other.

“You okay?” Draco asked roughly; his muscles trembled with the force to hold himself immobile. That velvety, slick heat was driving him nearly insane and he wanted nothing more than to start moving, feeling those tight muscles clenching around him with every thrust he delivered. His hands caressed up and down over Harry’s quivering thighs and he bit his lip when muscles tightened briefly around him.

Harry exhaled softly and nodded. He started to rock back and forth, his hands firmly placed on Draco’s thighs to keep his balance and Draco bit harder down on his lower lip as that tight channel tightened around him with every thrust forwards, drawing him in further. He watched through hooded eyes how Harry moved on top of him – his own hard cock slowly dribbling and looking quite red – and Draco rose up to capture that tempting mouth, sneaking his tongue past slack lips, swallowing the moan his action elicited from the dark haired man.

His hand caressed his naked stomach, trailing over the bulge, tracing meaningless patterns on the soft skin. He shifted, sat up straight and Harry let out an odd squeak at the sudden change in position – which brought Draco even deeper inside of him, if that was possible.

Draco laughed breathlessly and made certain that the precious bundle his lover was carrying, was cradled securely between their bodies.

“Oh … There,” Harry murmured and clasped his arms around Draco’s neck, clinging to him tightly, bringing their chests together as much as possible while his legs were wrapped around Draco’s waist.

Their shared body heat and the friction of their bodies rubbing together caused a slight sheen of sweat to coat their bodies, but it didn’t bother Draco in the slightest. Instead of pulling back, he clung to Harry’s body as tightly as he dared and their kisses grew fierce, tongues caressing and sucking on each other; nails digging into skin, on the verge of breaking through it, while they started moving faster. Harry was practically bouncing on top of him now, aided by Draco’s hands on his hips, which made sure to drag him down in just the right place to drive the dark haired man wild, while their guttural groans and weak whimpers filled the room, accompanied by the odd creaking of the bed.

“Hah, hah, a bi-bit more,” Harry gasped and the moan he released at feeling Draco’s teeth in his neck and a slick hand wrapped around his cock, stroking him quickly, but firmly, was bordering on being utterly obscene.

It only served to spur on the blond; he loved the way Harry moaned in his ears, trying to hold himself back, but failing miserably once Draco located his sweet spot and kept hammering against it; loved the flush taking over Harry’s body the longer they were united; loved how dark his eyes became, the bright green being swallowed up by the endless black of his pupils; loved how debauched he looked, how he let himself go, free, without any restraints …

Harry threw his head back with a hoarse yell when he was overtaken by his climax, brought there by a last, rough snap of Draco’s hips, soaking Draco’s hand thoroughly; while his inner muscles clamped down tightly; his body trembling and quivering from pleasure. The blond followed him a few seconds later, filling the air with a series of curses mixed with Harry’s name in it, while he came deeply inside his lover, feeling his heart hammering against his chest.

They stayed in that position for a long time, while they calmed down and the sweat on their bodies dried up.

Draco raised his head from Harry’s shoulder where he had been lazily worrying at his skin; a bright red bruise was left behind as proof.
He weakly squeezed Harry's hips, which made Harry's muscles tighten for a few seconds before he relaxed.

"Good morning," he said dryly and wiped the sweaty strands of his hair out of his face. "Did you sleep well?"

Harry laughed and opened his eyes; his pupils were still slightly dilated. "Yeah, I did, actually," he chuckled and gave him a chaste kiss.

"That was one hell of a wakeup call," Draco murmured against his lips and slowly started rubbing Harry's back, sliding his hands over the knobs of his spine.

"I couldn't hold myself back," Harry admitted with a bashful smile; he arched his back underneath Draco's ministrations.

"I'm not complaining." Draco chuckled and paused when a soft hiss escaped Harry as he wriggled around; a flash of pain crossing his face. "Are you okay?"

"My back aches a bit; I think I slept in a wrong position," Harry grumbled. "I didn't notice it before."

Draco gazed contemplatively at his lover and then lightly tapped his arse, indicating he wanted him to move. Harry complied and with a slight wince, he removed himself from Draco's lap, settling gingerly next to the blond.

"Lean forwards; I'll give you a massage," Draco instructed, conjuring some lavender scented oil in a small bowl. An added charm ensured that the oil was warmed up to the perfect temperature.

"You don't have to do that," Harry protested, shaking his head.

A gentle smack against his thigh was his retort. "Yes, I do. Now lean forwards," Draco ordered and dipped his fingers in the bowl; the oil felt smooth and pleasantly warm between his fingertips.

Harry still looked doubtful, but he leaned forwards, supporting himself on his hands.

Draco sat down behind him, his legs splayed out on each side. He spread out the slippery oil over Harry's back first, feeling his muscles contract in surprise when his skin came into contact with the warm substance.

The heavy scent of lavender rose up and penetrated the air once Draco began kneading the muscles in Harry's shoulders. A frown marred Draco's forehead when his hands encountered tight knots in Harry's shoulders. How stressed was he?

Harry hissed softly and his shoulders slumped; his hair brushing Draco's hands. Draco kept firmly kneading his shoulders, pressing his palms on various spots which felt too tight for his liking until muscles felt completely pliant and soft. Slowly, he brought his hands lower, making certain that he wasn't too rough with the tense muscles. His thumbs pressed into the dimples right above Harry's arse while his knuckles ran over his lower back.

Draco's ears picked up the soft sigh leaving Harry's lips. "Feels good?" he inquired curiously and pressed deeper with his thumbs.

"Yeah," Harry sighed contentedly and let out a moan of appreciation when Draco pressed against a particular spot in his lower back near his left side.

Draco cleared his throat softly and forced himself to concentrate on the massage and not on the
sounds of pleasure – Harry was almost purring like a satisfied cat by now – coming from his lover. It was difficult, though; especially because they were both still naked and Harry had no qualms about arching his back and shifting around to display his pleasure. Did he even realise how seductive he was?

When Harry leaned back in his hands, Draco tried to stifle the groan that wanted to escape at feeling his arse pushed against his groin.

Harry stilled. "Oh," he uttered surprised.

Draco clucked his tongue, feeling slightly exasperated, and laid his forehead against Harry's shoulder. "What do you expect when you move around like that?"

A breathy chuckle was his reply and he inhaled sharply when a hand reached back and took a hold of him.

"Ready for round two?" Harry murmured and gently squeezed him.

Draco licked his lips and placed his hands on Harry's hips, abandoning the massage. "You're up for it?"

"I wouldn't ask if I wasn't," Harry retorted and turned around to face the blond with a heated glance colouring his eyes. "Your massage helped."

"Of course it did," Draco sniffed and stole an open mouthed kiss from the dark haired wizard. "My massages are perfect."

"Shut up," Harry muttered and pushed him flat on his back, climbing on top of him.

Any other time and Draco would refuse to keep quiet after such an order out of spite, but this time he thought he could comply with Harry's request.

Their mouths were far too busy, anyway, to speak coherently.

9th of April

From one fancy, over the top parlour, to the next fancy, yet bearable parlour – all Malfoys seemed to have the same taste when it came to manors and their interior.

A house elf appeared in the parlour with a quiet 'pop' – Remus thought he had seen it tending to the garden in the Potter Manor years ago – and bowed to the four men, who had just stepped out of the fireplace.

"Lasky will be warning masters," the house elf squeaked and snapped its fingers. A second house elf appeared, who bowed as well.

"Lify be bringing guests to living room," the house elf murmured and while the first one disappeared again – presumably to warn Harry and Draco about their visit – the second one led the small group through a hallway, past a large staircase, into a room with large windows and two large, midnight blue couches dominating the room. A rug with an intricate pattern covered the floor and hid the wooden floorboard from sight. A square, black coffee table stood right between the two couches and as soon as the men took a seat on the couch – one of them was large enough to seat five people – a silver plate bearing six cups, a can with milk, a tea pot which steamed gently and a plate filled with chocolate chip cookies appeared on the table.
As soon as the house elf was certain that they each had a cup with hot Earl Grey in their hands, it disappeared again with another bow.

"How many house elves are working here?" Sirius asked curiously, snatching a cookie off of the plate.

"Five," Lucius answered calmly. "Three from my manor and two from Potter Manor."

"How did you convince the two from Potter Manor to work here?" Remus inquired bewildered. It wasn't unheard of that house elves would work in another manor than the one they were tied to, but they usually only worked for a short period in the other house and then returned back to their own.

"Narcissa told me that when she was finishing up the last touches to the nursery, one of the older house elves of Potter Manor had appeared in front of her and had asked whether it would be possible for two of the house elves to work here permanently," Lucius replied, taking a sip from his tea. "I am not certain why, but I can only assume that they somehow were alerted to the fact that Harry would be living here and they wanted to make certain that at least some of them would be able to serve their master."

"Let's hope Granger never enters this place," Sirius muttered and ignored the soft jab Remus delivered him in his side.

Severus snorted derisively and shook his head, but didn't retort.

The door opened and Harry entered the room, looking rather frazzled; his cheeks were slightly flushed, his eyes were glittering brightly, his hair looked windblown and he was smoothing his shirt over his protruding stomach. The cloth stretched around his belly and most likely wouldn't fit him anymore in a couple of weeks if his stomach kept growing.

The cause for his frazzled appearance became apparent when Remus' sensitive nose picked up a peculiar scent being exuded by his cub and he hid his grimace behind his cup of tea. Of course it was more than clear that his cub had long since passed the innocent holding hands stage with Draco, but really, he didn't need to know what exactly they had been up to before he and the others had arrived.

Once again he was glad that while Sirius' Animagus form was a dog, he didn't keep the sharp senses of the animal in his human form. Remus didn't even want to guess what would have happened if his lover had picked up the pheromones wafting off of his godson.

"Where is Draco, Harry?" Lucius asked bemused when his son didn't follow immediately.

Harry cleared his throat and sunk down on the couch, shifting around until he could sit comfortably. "He'll be here soon. I just finished my shower and he's in there now."

"Your hair looks remarkably dry for just having left the shower," Severus remarked casually.

Harry looked at him with a blank look on his face. "I used a charm to dry it quickly. I've become much better at those," he answered flippantly and took a cup, throwing a couple of sugar cubes in it.

The door opened again and revealed Draco with mussed hair and a suspicious red flush decorating his cheeks.

*They really can't be inconspicuous,* Remus thought exasperatedly and he breathed in the calming scent of his tea to distract himself from the new whiff of pheromones drifting through the air when the blond sat down next to Harry.
"That was a quick shower," Sirius remarked dryly, stealing another cookie.

Draco blinked and Harry shifted casually, glancing away. "What? Oh yes, couldn't have you waiting too long after all," Draco muttered and accepted the cup of tea Harry handed over.

"Late night?" Lucius asked amused; his stone grey eyes shining.

"I've been trying to teach Harry how to win a game of chess, but he hasn't had much luck with it," Draco smirked.

Remus wagered that the two young men had a completely other game of chess in mind.

Harry scowled and jabbed him non-too gently in his side, making the younger Malfoy grunt. "Shut up. I almost won."

"Sure, sure," Draco muttered, rubbing over his side with a grimace. "You still need a lot of practice."

"While I'm certain that Potter's exploits with chess are delightful to hear, that is not why we are here," Severus drawled; his eyes slightly narrowed.

They all sobered up quickly at Severus' reminder.

"Before we discuss the details of the ritual, there is another matter we need to clear up first," Lucius murmured and he looked grimly. "Have you two discussed what you want to have done concerning Weasley?"

Harry stiffened visibly and he clenched his jaw, discovering a sudden interest in the content of his cup.

"We've talked about it," Draco said slowly and threw an apprehensive look at Harry.

"And?" Remus asked softly.

Next to him Sirius had tensed up, but he kept quiet. Remus had barely been able to hold him back, as the man had wanted nothing more than to get rid of Weasley after Severus had informed them about the boy's intentions. A dark part deep inside Remus had wanted to hurt Weasley until he would beg to be spared, but he had ruthlessly suppressed that part. Even though the wolf inside him and he himself wanted nothing more than to make certain Weasley would rue the day he had decided to harm his cub, doing so would put him on the same level as that bastard and he wasn't willing to stoop so low.

But if Harry wanted revenge …

"What kind of punishment would he receive if he had to face trial?" Harry inquired in a subdued voice; his eyes had darkened and shuttered close. His hand gripped his cup tightly.

"Most likely a lifelong sentence. While he hasn't succeeded in killing you, his list of crimes is too long for him to be let off lightly," Lucius answered contemplatively.

"That list would include him trying to trigger a miscarriage, right?" Draco questioned tersely. His fingers flexed over his knee.

Harry stirred; a heavy frown painted on his forehead. "I thought it was best if the Wizengamot doesn't know about the baby until he's born?" His cup was placed on the table in favour of him rubbing anxiously over his stomach.
"Yes," Sirius spoke up; a grimace lingering around his lips. "To prevent more legal trouble, it would be best to wait with prosecuting Weasley until after you've given birth."

"Where would he stay in the meantime? Could he stay in a cell?" Harry asked, biting his lower lip. Aside from looking pale, his cub was taking the betrayal of his former best friend relatively well, Remus noted surprised. *That's probably partially due to Draco's support,* he thought when he caught sight of their clasped hands.

"He would be able to stay in a cell while he awaits his trial, but they will still need a list of offenses," Lucius replied with a hint of frustration ringing through his voice.

Harry sighed and let his head fall back against the couch. "So no matter what, they would still know about the baby before he's born?" He scowled; annoyance lurking inside his eyes.

"I would suggest we keep him at Spinner's End, but I won't be able to regularly check up on him," Severus murmured, staring contemplatively at his tea.

"I'd say we keep him at Grimmauld Place and let him be guarded by that crazy house elf, but I'm not certain whether that damned elf would obey that order," Sirius said irritated.

"Why not keep him at Malfoy Manor?" Lucius suggested suddenly. "Narcissa and I will keep an eye on him until it's safe to prosecute him. And none of the house elves would be tempted to help him out."

"What do you think, Harry?" Remus asked softly. They had already informed Minerva about Weasley and she had been horrified and quaking with fury by the time they had finished their explanation. A shudder ran across his spine when he recalled the intense, cold look of fury in her eyes. He had never seen her so furious before and he prayed that he would never see her like that again. She had pondered about calling in the Aurors, but after remembering Harry's predicament, she had given them permission to keep Weasley apart.

And while she was a prime example of how a Gryffindor should behave, she had never asked how exactly Severus had discovered Weasley's plans. It seemed that even she had a limit to her patience and her desire for justice.

"Keep him at Malfoy Manor; I don't particularly care," Harry sighed; a hint of exhaustion audible in his voice. "I don't want to think about it anymore."

Draco looked like he wanted to say something, but he remained quiet; choosing instead to slip an arm around Harry's shoulders.

Remus wondered why the blond wasn't demanding some sort of revenge, but as he picked up on the look the younger man was sharing with his father, he realised that just because Draco wasn't saying it now, that didn't mean he didn't want some sort of revenge.

Remus should probably feel pity for Weasley now – angering a Malfoy was never a good idea – but he couldn't find it in himself to try and talk the Malfoys out of getting some revenge.

Weasley had made his bed – now he had to lie in it.

This time Molly wouldn't be able to help him either as she was preoccupied by keeping herself out of Azkaban. Lucius' lawyer was having way too much fun with trying to get her behind bars for slander and disturbance of the peace to allow her time to check up on her children. Arthur and his other sons had apparently decided to completely distance themselves from Molly; they seemed more than fed up
with her behaviour. Not that Remus could blame them; after the divorce went through, Arthur seemingly had decided that keeping his life and that of his sons and daughter on track was more important than indulging his ex-wife's whims.

Harry didn't know about this whole debacle as they had decided that he didn't need more stress and worry in his life. Remus figured that Draco had to have some sort of clue, but he didn't seem inclined to discuss it with either Harry or them.

"All right." Lucius nodded and his eyes sharpened. "Let us discuss the ritual now."

"So the Founders managed to put the Deathly Hallows in the ritual?" Draco sounded sceptical as if he hadn't believed them to be capable of such a feat.

"Yes, once we start to set up the ritual, the Hallows need to be put in a triangle inside the circle; each one has to be accompanied by a white and black candle," Remus started to explain. He had his reservations about the ritual – especially Harry's involvement in it – but they had no choice.

"We and the four Elemental Creatures will serve as the anchors, so we will form a circle as well," Sirius took over and the frown marring his forehead deepened while a perturbed look muddled his eyes. "The actual calling up of the ancient magic part needs to be done by you two, as you both have links to the Elemental Creatures and at least one of the Hallows. The Founders will aid you with their magic, but …"

"Everything will be fine," Ruby reassured them when he slipped into the room, closely followed by Mara and Sapphire.

If the situation wasn't so dire, Remus would have laughed at the silly sight of Sapphire being dwarfed by the two large cats.

"You two will have enough support to pull through. Even if it has to occur in your present state, Master," Ruby added almost as an afterthought and settled down in front of the window so that he could soak up the weak sunlight, together with Mara.

Sapphire jumped onto Harry's lap and Harry started to caress her back slowly, making the adult cat purr loudly in delight. "I hope you're right," he murmured darkly.

Lucius placed the rolled up parchment containing the details and the exact wording of the charm on the table. "This contains the charm; make sure you both memorize it so you can perform it at the same time," he warned them.

Both young men nodded, looking rather subdued. Draco leaned forwards to grab the parchment and unrolled it to study it, passing it on to Harry after he was done reading it.

"How are we going to get Dumbledore inside the circle? The ritual requires too much preparation time to just set it up if we encounter him," he remarked annoyed and gestured impatiently at the paper.

"That is something that still needs to be solved. Slytherin assured us they would find a proper solution for that." Severus' lip curled up in a sneer.

"Do the Aurors know which ritual we are planning to perform?" Harry asked softly and his hand halted on top of Sapphire's back. She opened her eyes to give her owner a reproachful look, but appeared too lazy to actually jump off of his lap.

"We talked about it with Kingsley," Remus replied, recalling the grim look on the man's face. He
and Sirius hadn't been the only ones stung by the old man's betrayal. "He agreed that it was the best option and we just need to call him after we have done the ritual, so that he can bring Dumbledore to a cell in Azkaban."

"At this point, they are probably considering him to be as bad as Voldemort, so they don't particularly care what happens to him," Sirius grunted, placing his cup rather roughly on the table.

"All the better for us," Severus murmured coolly.

They remained silent for a long while. Sitting in this large, sun filled room, surrounded by the sounds of birds chirping outside, it was difficult to believe that they were planning to rob a powerful wizard of his magic. It was even harder to believe that the most difficult part of the ritual would have to be performed by Draco and Harry – Harry who was carrying a baby and whose magic was divided between various entities.

Inconspicuously Remus studied the dark haired wizard. At the moment he was very pale and tired, but that could be because of the conversation they had had just now. His stomach had swelled up even more since he last saw him and Remus thought he could see the vague outline of a foot or a hand pressing against the top of his stomach for a few seconds. At seven months, Harry was now in a dangerous stage: his magic was more out of control than ever and he would need Draco's magic near him practically all the time now for support.

Remus found himself hoping that they would only encounter Dumbledore after Harry had given birth. Certainly, the sooner the old man was deprived of his magic, the better, but it would be healthier for Harry if he performed the ritual without the pregnancy draining his magic. The more magic Harry had at his disposal, the better the outcome.

He knew Harry's pets would never let anything happen to their master, but …

"Why don't you tell us what you two have been up to? Narcissa thinks your letters are not detailed enough," Lucius smirked. "She would have joined us today if she hadn't been roped into helping Blaise's mother with some issue."

It was as clear as day that he was trying to change the subject and better the mood hanging in the room and Remus was grateful for that. Just for today he wanted to ignore the threat of Dumbledore and focus on being around his family and friends.

Judging from the relieved look in Harry's deep green eyes, he shared Remus' sentiment.

On Sunday, the couple regretfully said goodbye to the manor – for now at least – and returned to school. If it had been up to Harry, he would have preferred to stay at their manor. Their stay there seemed like a dream now; for two whole weeks they had been alone – bar some visits from their family – and he hadn't realised how much he had relished that opportunity to spend so much time alone with Draco. In their manor, he hadn't had to share Draco with other people and they could enjoy each other's company without being constantly on their guard.

And just in a couple of months, that would be their life the whole time. After they graduated, they would live together, spend their entire lives in that manor and that was something Harry was looking forward to, now more than ever.

Draco had also been reluctant to leave the manor, but they couldn't keep stalling and they had arrived in the station on time; Harry's stomach once again hidden from sight by his magical belt. Not seeing his rounded stomach after two weeks of not wearing the belt was rather unsettling – more than Harry
had expected it to be – and he had to refrain from caressing his stomach in a too obvious way.

When they entered the Great Hall the next morning (later than most students as Harry hadn't wanted to leave his bed), Draco was barely able to bring up a shield on time before Ginny’s hex could hit him. She had been too furious and had screamed too loudly for any of them to understand what she was accusing him of, but after she had been taking away by Professor Flitwick, it all became clear.

McGonagall had informed the school that morning that Ron wouldn't return to Hogwarts as he had been charged with trying to curse a student. The Headmistress hadn't mentioned any names, but for some reason Ginny had decided that it was all Draco's fault and as soon as she had caught sight of him, she had tried to hex him. She hadn't known about her brother as she had stayed with her father during the holidays and had assumed that Ron would remain at school.

Her attempt to hex Draco resulted in detention for one month with Filch and advice to stay away from Draco.

The Weasley twins had been quick to send Harry a letter to reassure him that they – and their father by extension – didn't blame him for what had happened to Ron. They had sounded resigned in their letter, but had told him not to worry about their little brother as Harry hadn't been the one at fault.

That didn't stop Harry from feeling slightly guilty; from the warm, friendly family he had met in his first year didn't remain much. One brother was dead, another one waiting to be put in jail, the mother hated him now and Ginny … Harry had no clue where he stood with Ginny now and decided that it was best to let that matter rest for now.

He and Hermione started talking more to each other; she seemed to have found a good friend in Luna and while Draco remained sceptic (he insisted on being with Harry whenever he and Hermione talked), Harry was just glad that he had managed to repair one broken friendship. It was too late for Ron, but that didn't mean he had to shun Hermione. It was good to talk to her again, to see her smiling again. No, they probably would never return to being the best friends they were before this whole mess started, but they weren't entirely lost either.

The days after Ginny's attempt to hex Draco passed by rather uneventfully, filled with homework and chattering with friends. The other students seemed to have finally decided that antagonizing Harry and Draco was too much trouble and they had taken to entirely ignoring the two men – which suited them just fine. It was nice to not have to be constantly on guard. That didn't mean they were completely relaxed, but they preferred being ignored to having to look around in case someone tried to hex them.

The weather was warming up, the sun showed itself more and more, beckoning the students to linger on the grass and make their homework there. Meanwhile Harry's stomach kept growing and during the first week of May he was called to Snape's office so that he could take another potion. This particular potion would help his body prepare itself for the birth and like any other potion, it tasted absolutely vile. He had been more than happy to drink the glass of water Snape had handed him afterwards.

The thought that soon their son would be born created butterflies in his stomach and he could hardly wait until he would graduate – all the while hoping that he wouldn't give birth in the school. Remus had given him another check-up, a couple of days after he had taken the potion, and had announced that the baby was growing at a good pace. They would need to check in a month again to make certain that the baby was in the right position to be born – his cheeks still heated up whenever he thought about how exactly the baby would be born – but so far there were no problems and he was progressing as expected.
The good weather and the lack of threats from other students caused him to become more relaxed and he allowed himself to enjoy the little time he had left at the school. He was looking forward to graduating, yes, but that didn't mean he wouldn't miss Hogwarts. Hogwarts had been his first home after all and it would sadden him to say goodbye to it – even if he had risked his life a lot during the past seven years.

As faith would have it, he wasn't allowed to enjoy his last months as a student peacefully.

15 th of May

"My back is killing me," Harry hissed softly when they made their way out of the greenhouses back to the school, trailing behind the other students. His back ached; his feet were sore; his shirt was sticking to his back and he wanted nothing more than to return to his quarters, take a nice shower and lie down. He had one hour before lunch, but he was seriously considering holing himself up in his quarters.

Draco looked at him concerned. "Do you want me to give you a backrub?"

"That would be lovely, yeah," Harry sighed and squinted when the sunlight hit him right in his face. The baby's weight was becoming very taxing on his back and he couldn't wait until their son was born. He felt bloated, fat and he thought he would never see his feet again whenever he removed his belt. Draco thought he was ridiculous when he mentioned that, but he wasn't the one carrying around all that extra weight!

A slender hand touching his arm wiped the scowl off of his face and made him whip his head around.

"Luna?" he exclaimed surprised when he saw the blonde girl leaning against the wall in the shadows.

A faint smile lingered across her lips, but she seemed sad somehow; her eyes glassy and frankly frightening to look at.

"Are you all right?" Harry asked concerned and took a step closer to her. Should he call a professor?

"Harry?" Draco asked warily; one hand of his rested on Harry's shoulder.

"The Old One will be here soon," Luna said dreamily; her body swayed back and forth. Her bright blue eyes seemed to look straight through him, making him shiver. "He will arrive when the moon is halved and will try to reclaim what he considers to be his."

A hand seemed to squeeze around Harry's heart and his breath hitched while he stared shocked at the slender girl. For once he didn't need to decipher her dreamy speech. It was more than clear to him what – or better who – she was talking about.

Dumbledore would be here soon.

Trying to finish what he couldn't do last year.

Chapter End Notes
AN2: So what do you think about it? Please leave your thoughts behind in a review :)

Next chapter will have the final confrontation with Dumbledore and after that there is an epilogue planned, which will wrap up this story (I can't believe it took me two years just to bloody finish this, even with my plot outline. Curse you, university workload!).

So two more chapters and then this story is finished, but you can expect one more oneshot to be posted as well ^^ That one will be in Sirius’ pov and will be posted after the epilogue.

See you all in the next chapter!

Cuddles

Melissa
"The half moon is next Saturday," Lupin murmured with a sigh and tapped his wand against his thigh; it emitted a couple of blue sparks.

"We don't have much time left then," Black said aghast; his eyes seemed to burn against his pale skin.

"Did my granddaughter mention the place?" Ravenclaw asked; her eyebrows furrowed.

Draco shook his head. "No, only when he will show up," he replied flatly. He glanced furtively at his lover, who stood immobile as a Muggle statue in front of the fireplace; the small fire creating a hallow of light around him.

After Draco had pulled him with him to the dungeons, so they could warn the others about Lovegood's warning, he hadn't said anything and this worried the Malfoy heir. Harry's face was drawn, lines of worry etched into his forehead and he looked lost in thought.

"Can we trust this girl? Her warning is very vague," Gryffindor grunted, crossing his arms in front of his chest.

"Luna would never lie to me," Harry spoke in a hard voice, startling the other occupants in the room. His hands were restlessly wandering up and down over his hidden stomach. "If she says he'll be here, he will appear. I have never doubted her warnings."
"The question remains: where will he show up?" Severus murmured in a silken voice. His studious gaze slipped from a stone faced Harry to Draco, who had to resist the urge to squirm. "I doubt he will be able to show up in the school."

"Hogwarts would go in lockdown immediately before he even set foot on the grass," Slytherin said absentmindedly.

"No holes in the wards were detected either," Lupin remarked. "The new wards are set up to keep him trapped in one place as well."

"Setting up the ritual at the border of the wards will not work either," Ravenclaw commented, clasping her hands together. "Not only do we not know from which direction we should expect him, but the wards' magic will interfere with that of the ritual, rendering it useless."

"So how is he planning to bypass the wards?" Hufflepuff wondered. "Your descendant sounded certain that he will show up inside the wards."

"Maybe he will be helped by someone?" Draco suggested doubtfully. He was slowly starting to realise how grave the situation had become. In just one week they would be facing Dumbledore again and they had no clue whatsoever where he would appear. It was as if they were playing a cat and mouse game, with as stakes their lives. Would they even be ready to take him on? Dumbledore had years of battle experience and a wealth of knowledge concerning hexes and curses. How could they hope to counter that?

"Could be," Black muttered, narrowing his eyes. "He's after Harry, so there's a multitude of things he can do to get to Harry."

"Like using a hidden Portkey?" Lupin offered, cocking his head to the left.

A flinch went through Harry, prompting Draco to go over to him to wrap his arms around him. Harry's body was tense and even Draco pressing a reassuring kiss on his forehead wouldn't relax him.

"None of us have sensed a Portkey here," Mara piped up; her nails glinting dangerously in the weak light.

Ruby agreed. "Peculiar magic like that is difficult to miss," he added calmly.

"Perhaps it is time that I pay Lucius' guest an extra visit," Severus said thoughtfully; his dark eyes glinting.

"You think Weasley knows more?" Draco asked, raising an eyebrow. Admittedly, that thought wasn't that farfetched.

"It is worth trying," Lupin sighed. He glanced concerned at the couple in front of the fireplace. "Why don't you go to Harry's quarters and have your lunch there? If you want, you can stay the rest of the afternoon there. I'll explain it to your professors."

Draco looked at Harry questioningly. He wouldn't mind skipping his lessons of the afternoon – he only had one class – but maybe Harry preferred to distract himself with classes. Harry visibly wavered, indecisiveness dancing in his eyes, before he inclined his head.

"Thanks," he murmured.

"We'll have to talk to Minerva as well," Black remarked with a heavy frown. "Maybe she can help
out as well."

They murmured their goodbyes and they left the room, their two pets following like shadows behind them. The short walk to Harry's quarters was filled with a heavy silence that seemed to linger around them, not intent on dispersing any time soon.

Once they were in Harry's quarters, Draco called for a house elf and asked it to bring them some lunch. The house elf glanced furtively at Harry, who was staring at the fire with a blank look on his face, and gave a respectful bow, before it disappeared again.

Gingerly Draco sat down next to Harry and wondered what he should say to break the stifling silence.

"What are we going to do?" Harry asked, startling the blond wizard (who hadn't expected him to say something). Dark green eyes looked at him forlornly while fingers clenched into the fabric of the couch.

"We perform the ritual and get rid of him," Draco replied confidently after a short silence.

Harry snorted bitterly and raked a hand harshly through his hair, causing it to stick up in the back.

"You don't believe me?" Draco raised an eyebrow dubiously.

Their attention was momentarily diverted when a silver plate filled with a small tower of sandwiches and two glasses with pumpkin juice appeared on the table while their pets received their own – more on the raw side – meal.

When they each had a sandwich in their hand, Harry said, "I thought we would have had more time. At least until after the baby was born." He clenched his teeth; frustration clear as day on his face.

"We will be fine," Draco said soothingly, though a leaden ball of worry mixed with panic lay heavily in his stomach.

"You can't be sure of that," Harry insisted, scowling at his sandwich. "My magic has gotten even more out of control lately! What if we screw up the ritual?" His voice grew a bit shrill at the end and he practically flung his belt away. It hit the wall with a loud 'thump' and fell on the floor.

"We're not going to fail," Draco snapped; his nerves high strung. "We have the four Elemental Creatures, the Founders and the Deathly Hallows on our side! We have practiced the charm until we were perfectly in sync. We won't fail, Harry. If it comes to that, I'm willing to pump more of my magic in the ritual to compensate for you."

"My, aren't you confident," the dark haired wizard laughed harshly with bitterness tainting his eyes.

Draco's shoulders slumped and a wave of exhaustion doused his flaring temper. "I don't want to fight with you over this," he sighed.

Harry glanced away, visibly uncomfortable. "I don't want to either, but …" he trailed off; his hand making an helpless gesture in the air before he dropped it on his lap.

"Hey." Draco reached out to grab Harry's clammy hand and wove their fingers gently together. He squeezed softly and waited until he had the other one's complete attention, before he murmured, "We're going to be fine, I promise. There is no way we are going to lose against that old coot. It's going to be over soon."
"I wish I was as optimistic as you," Harry murmured; his eyes half lidded. The fight seemed to have left him as well. "But I guess that doom-mongering won't help us either." He offered a hesitant, weak smile.

Draco kept quiet and shuffled closer to his lover, so that they touched from their shoulders to their thighs. "Let's eat," he murmured, though he didn't feel particularly hungry.

Contrarily to what he had been saying, he wasn't feeling that confident. Yes, they had some very powerful allies, but would that be enough? Draco chanced a glance at Harry, who was nibbling listlessly at his sandwich and caressing Sapphire's head.

He would prefer it if Harry didn't have to participate in the ritual. The last couple of weeks hadn't been easy with Harry's magic growing out of control. It was a miracle that nobody had been hurt due to his wayward magic. What would happen to Harry once the ritual started? Would his magic behave? Would he regain enough control over it? Or would he become a victim of his own magic?

His magic had already nearly killed him before – Draco was still filled with an icy fear when he remembered that – it wasn't that farfetched to think it could happen again.

Then there was their unborn son to think about as well; would he be able to withstand the amount of magic that the ritual would call up?

Draco didn't think they would be able to cope if they lost their baby. It wouldn't matter if the ritual was successful if it meant they would lose their son.

They had come so far … Surely they wouldn't lose everything now?

He closed his eyes and buried his face in Harry's hair, inhaling his familiar and comforting scent to calm down. One of his hands found its way on Harry's rounded stomach, where he was greeted by a soft push of a tiny hand. A slightly more slender hand covered his own and they remained like that until Severus entered the quarters with Black, Lupin and Draco's father in tow, to inform them what he had discovered during his brief visit.

Not once during the whole explanation did the couple release each other; finding strength and reassurance in each other's presence.

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The dark haired man woke up with a start and for a long, unsettling moment he had no clue as to what had woken him up. A soft push near his kidneys enlightened him and he released a soft sigh as he sat up in his bed. Rubbing the back of his neck tiredly, he grabbed his wand and whispered, "Tempus."

The soft white glowing numbers revealed it to be four thirty in the morning. Resisting the urge to curse, he placed his wand back on his nightstand and contemplated whether he would be able to go back to sleep.

Another nudge against his bladder this time made the decision for him and with a wince, he slipped out of the bed and hurried to the bathroom to relieve himself.

"Can't stand me sleeping an entire night, huh?" he grumbled while he washed his hands.

This particular aspect of the pregnancy was something he wasn't going to miss at all. He longed for the moment he could sleep decently again in any position he preferred without the extra weight being a hindrance.
"Just around five more weeks and then you'll be here," he murmured, taking in his rounded stomach in front of the mirror. It was a miracle he hadn't toppled over yet with most of his weight being concentrated at the front.

'If you survive the confrontation with Dumbledore at least,' a poisonous voice piped up in the back of his mind.

Harry gritted his teeth together and in a fit of restlessness, he went to the living room instead of his bedroom.

The embers faintly glowing in the fireplace flared back to life as if sensing his presence and for one moment, he felt as if everything was normal and that he wasn't being chased by his ex-mentor.

Remaining in front of the fireplace, he lost himself in the gentle crackling of the fire while his thoughts swirled around like a tornado in his head.

How had it come to this? The fighting was supposed to have ended with the defeat of Voldemort, and yet here he was: in two days he would be facing his ex-mentor and attempt to bind his magic without losing his own life. Would they be able to defeat him? Or were they doomed to fail after all?

He didn't want to think about failing, but he couldn't ignore that possibility either. His hands drifted down to his stomach and he felt his son shifting underneath his hands. More than he was worried about the lives of his family and lover, and even his own, he feared for his baby's safety. He was about to enter the last month – would their son be able to withstand the magic of the ritual? Harry had come close to losing his baby too often for his liking; he couldn't bear the thought of losing him now. Just one more month and their child would be born; nothing was allowed to go wrong now. He hadn't carried their son for almost nine months for nothing.

If only Dumbledore had waited at least two more months. His hand clenched in his shirt and his gaze hardened.

Was this how his parents had felt when they were forced to go into hiding? This mixture of fury, worry, fear and panic?

"Harry?" Draco's low, raspy, sleep laced voice pulled the brooding wizard out of his thoughts and he looked up.

"Did I wake you up?" Harry asked softly, unclenching his hand.

"Not really," Draco yawned and approached him. "Why aren't you sleeping?"

"Woke up because of the baby and couldn't go back to sleep," Harry murmured.

Draco gave him an indiscernible look and took Harry's hand, tugging at it gently. "Let's sit down on the couch," he proposed with glimmering eyes.

"You don't have to stay awake." Harry shook his head, ignoring Sapphire sneaking into the room. "Go back to bed. We still have a few hours before classes start."

"Will you be able to go back to sleep?" Draco looked at him intensely, making Harry almost squirm underneath the heavy gaze.

He hesitated and begrudgingly admitted, "No, I don't think so."

Draco nodded as if he had expected that answer and pulled more insistently at his wrist. "Come on,
let's sit down."

Harry sighed, but followed him to the couch. He was gently pushed down and Draco plopped down next to him, fussing around until he was stretched out on his back on the couch with his head pillowed by Harry's thighs.

Harry raised an eyebrow bemused and questioned bewildered, "Are you comfortable?"

Draco smiled. "Actually, I am. Your thighs aren't bony anymore."

Emerald green eyes narrowed and Harry huffed. "Well, sorry for having bony thighs before," he remarked snidely.

Draco chuckled and patted Harry's side in a placating manner. "Even if you still had bony thighs, I wouldn't have minded," he murmured and winked. He turned his head so that his ear ended up being pressed against Harry's stomach. A concentrated frown appeared on his forehead.

"What are you doing?" Harry asked confused.

"I can hear him moving," Draco announced. He raised a hand and his fingers trailed over Harry's belly underneath his loose shirt. The caress felt very warm against Harry's skin. "I didn't realise before I could hear him moving." Wonder coloured his voice. He pressed a kiss against the skin, right underneath Harry's popped out bellybutton, making the other man flush.

"Can you believe our baby will be here over a month?" Draco asked; awe clearly displayed on his face.

"Yeah," Harry smiled wistfully. If everything went according to plan at least.

His lover seemed to have picked up on his afterthought. "Hey, we'll be all right. You'll see," he murmured and grabbed Harry's hand, squeezing it.

"I just don't want to lose either one of you," Harry whispered; his throat seemed to want to close up and his eyes stung. He took a shuddering breath to calm himself down.

"You won't. We are prepared thanks to Rowen's idea. We will be the ones taking him by surprise." Draco rose up and looked at him determined. "You trust our pets, right? They wouldn't suggest a plan if they thought it would fail."

"You're right," Harry sighed, recalling Rowen's idea to lure out Dumbledore. It sounded fool proof and he knew better than to doubt their pets.

"You've beaten the odds before and you'll do it again," Draco assured him.

Harry snorted. "No pressure," he muttered dryly.

"The only difference between Voldemort and Dumbledore is hair," Draco said with a straight face. "And a nose I suppose," he added thoughtfully.

Unwillingly, an amused chuckle escaped Harry and he looked down at glittering, grey eyes.

"I missed that laugh," Draco murmured and stretched out a hand to caress Harry's cheek almost reverently.

Harry felt his cheeks heat up in embarrassment and he glanced away, uttering a flustered, "Shut up."
"No, seriously, I want to see you laugh more. You're not made to look like you're brooding all the time," Draco informed him sincerely. "You – out of everyone I know – deserve to be happy."

"You're such a sap, you know that? Waking up early doesn't do you wonders, I see," Harry retorted, but a smile tugged at the corners of his mouth.

"Yeah, but I'm willing to be a sap if it means that frown disappears. I got you to stop brooding, right?" Draco remarked with a raised eyebrow.

Harry blinked surprised and fell silent when he realised his lover was right. While worry still lingered in him, he felt a bit lighter and a tad more relaxed.

"There is no need to keep worrying. We are prepared and we will win."

The dark haired wizard smiled faintly and squeezed Draco's hip with his free hand. "I'll hold you to that."

The flickering flames of the small fire kept them company while they dozed until it was time to go to classes.

"Everyone still remembers the plan?" Lucius asked sharply. He stood with his back to the window and the bright sunlight cast a golden hallow around his long, blond hair.

Everybody nodded tersely; the knowledge of what was to come a heavy burned on their minds.

"Don't you need to take the portraits with you when you set up the ritual?" Kingsley asked with a quirked eyebrow.

"No, their spirits will appear once we start the ritual," Remus answered; his eyes flickered with an amber colour: a sign the wolf was close to the surface.

"Where will it take place?" McGonagall asked; her face was as white as a sheet and her clasped hands trembled slightly.

"In a clearing in the Forbidden Forest," Sirius replied gruffly. "So it's best to keep the students out of it today."

"Does anyone else in your department know what we're planning?" Snape inquired coolly, with his arms crossed in front of his chest.

"Only Tonks," Kingsley retorted calmly. "We already have our story ready when we bring him in."

"It's time," Garin hissed suddenly. "The eagle can sense him. In an hour he will be here."

Harry gritted his teeth together, but announced, "Rowen has sensed him. He'll be here in an hour."

"Then we better set up the ritual before we run out of time," Lucius said abruptly, tapping his cane on the floor.

"Good luck," McGonagall told them solemnly and they left her office quietly; her heavy gaze resting on their backs.

"If you look at the weather, you wouldn't guess something bad is going to happen," Harry said darkly after he threw a quick glance out of the window while the staircase brought them down.
The sun was shining brightly and there were barely any clouds covering the bright blue sky. Some birds could be heard chirping and both Mara's and Ruby's ears perked up at that sound.

"Consider it a good sign for us," Draco muttered. His hand felt slightly clammy in Harry's grip. "I'm sure that daft professor of Divination would say something like that."

Harry felt too worried to be able to crack a smile at that remark. Their baby was reacting to his stress by fussing around. He barely had room to move around now that he was almost full grown and Harry had to conceal a wince when a firm kick was aimed at his bladder. He hoped the baby would be lulled to sleep by his walking, but he guessed that would be futile, as long as he stayed stressed.

The group was so focused on the upcoming ritual that none of them took notice of a curious pair of eyes locked onto them. The three Elemental Creatures shared a look, but didn't alert their masters.

Twenty minutes later, they reached the clearing that had been chosen as the intended place for the ritual; it was fairly deeply located inside the forest and rather deserted looking. Not one bird or other animal could be heard.

Draco and Harry were ushered to the middle of the circle, where they exchanged their school uniforms for deep blue robes, which were covered with various runes stitched onto them with golden thread. The belt was a white rope and Harry had some trouble adjusting it around his waist. Their feet remained bare on the cool, damp earth, as the ritual required close contact with the earth: the main source of magic.

Around them Sirius placed the Deathly Hallows – the Elder Wand visibly trembled when it was put on the ground – in a triangle accompanied by a black and a white candle on each side. After he had placed the Invisibility Cloak on the ground, he took a step backwards and Remus started creating the first circle with salt, murmuring something which Harry couldn't pick up. The second circle was created with the smoke of sage and Lucius waved the burning sage around, chanting something underneath his breath, after the other men and the Elemental Creatures had taken their places.

"We need to sit down," Draco whispered; his eyes seemed to burn against his pale face.

Harry swallowed and nodded, sinking down slowly until he was sitting with his legs crossed and his visible belly cradled by his thighs.

Draco held out his hands and Harry grabbed them, entwining their fingers. Throughout the ritual they had to hold hands to ensure that the connection with the ancient magic wouldn't be broken. For that reason they also had to rid themselves from any watches or jewellery that they wore, because those could interfere with the magical flow. Harry hadn't known how used he had become to feeling the familiar weight of Draco's gifts on him until he had to put them aside. It made him feel naked and restless.

They all looked up when the leaves rustled heavier than before and Rowen appeared; his large wings whipping up dead leaves and dust when he landed on the ground.

"The illusion is leading him here," he announced and his sharp eyes flashed up in blood thirst.

Harry took a deep breath and his son nudged him with a foot. As they were counting on support from Hogwarts herself, performing the ritual near the borders of the wards would have been useless. Luring Dumbledore to this place would have been too dangerous, as the ex-Headmaster was likely to try killing Harry immediately.
Yes, luring him to this place would have put them in grave danger – but only if it was really them luring him out. Rowen had managed to create an illusion of Harry, of which the magic would be strong enough to influence Dumbledore and convince him to follow the illusion to the clearing.

At first Harry had had his reservations about the plan – Dumbledore was not a weak, easily influenced wizard after all – but apparently he had underestimated just how powerful an Elemental Creature could be.

"Remember, boys, don't let yourselves get distracted by him," Remus reminded them tersely; the knuckles of his hand had turned white with the force of his grip on his wand.

Harry and Draco both nodded; their faces grim and tense. As soon as Hogwarts trapped Dumbledore once he came near enough, they would need to start chanting to make certain that the wizard was immediately caught by the magic. If they even hesitated for one second, the whole ritual would be ruined and they would be in danger then.

They weren't allowed to hesitate or let themselves be distracted by what happened in and outside of the circles. They had to depend on the others to make certain that Dumbledore wouldn't be able to attack them.

And while Harry did trust the other men with his life, he wasn't comfortable at all with the thought that he was practically defenceless as long as the ritual was in place.

Both he and Draco stilled when the illusion came running into the clearing, halting right in front of the first circle.

For a very short moment, Harry was amazed at the details that had been put into the illusion; he could have been looking into the mirror. Even the roundness of his stomach was perfectly replicated and it honestly disturbed him a bit.

He swore his heart stopped beating for a few seconds when the air became heavy, oppressive, filled with powerful magic. A low buzzing sound filled the space and the rustling of leaves was merely background noise.

Then Dumbledore calmly stepped forwards, out of the shadows, allowing Harry to look at him for the first time in almost a year. He hadn't changed much – somehow Harry had expected to see some significant changes – only his beard had grown slightly longer and his bright blue eyes glittered brightly; a fire seemed to burn deep within them.

He seemed to be still caught inside the illusion as he gave no sign that he had noticed the other people gathered into the clearing. His eyes narrowed slightly and a friendly smile danced upon his lips.

"Come on, now, Harry. You know running is not good in your condition," he said gently and took a step forwards.

Harry tensed; just two more steps and he would be in the right place for Hogwarts to act. He could practically feel how still the other men had become.

The illusion sneered and drew his wand, taking a step back.

"I see a lesson is in order," Dumbledore murmured lightly and stepped forwards.

Only to suddenly turn around and point his wand at Harry, whose eyes widened.
"Lesson number one: illusions don't work on high levelled wizards," Dumbledore chided him gently, as if correcting a mistake in his pronunciation, and raised his wand.

At that moment, several bars of golden light sprung up from the ground and rose up fast until they came together several feet high up in the air, trapping Dumbledore inside the cage like an animal.

Stone grey locked onto emerald green and from their mouths, the chant they had practiced together rose and mingled in the air, calling up the ancient forces of magic.

It was time to put an end to this threat once and for all.

As soon as they started chanting, their own magic rose up, eager to mingle with the ancient forces that would soon arrive. The earth trembled underneath them and shook and it made Draco tighten his grip around Harry's hands.

A loud roar from somewhere on his right made him flinch, but he continued chanting, looking right into emerald green to ground himself.

Slowly he became aware of different sensations battling with each other. There was a soft 'thud' sound and it took him a couple of seconds to realise that it was not one single sound, but multiple ones which were in sync with each other: their heartbeats. The rustling sound that accompanied the 'thud' sound was their breathing synchronized.

His ears picked up the voices of the other men, who were chanting their part of the spell. Occasionally their magic brushed against Draco's magic, like a fish which quickly swam past someone. Harry's magic was like a beacon, calling out to him and his own mixed with it effortlessly until they were so entangled that he could no longer tell where his own was in the mixture.

Once their magic was entwined, all the other sensations seemed to dull and die out. He could feel their bond roaring to life; the mark in his neck burning as if something hot was pressed against it. He became aware of burning rage, deep sorrow and slumbering panic. Were those emotions his or Harry's?

A third presence flashed up every now and then, like a spark of light in the endless darkness: their baby. For now still safely resting inside Harry.

Suddenly something heavy, unfamiliar touched their joined magic; it didn't feel dangerous or threatening, but it didn't feel safe or comforting either.

A stream of images filled his mind without any warning: there was a circle a lot bigger than their own; a square stone drenched with blood; a body bound tightly against a large tree; dark clouds quickly gathering over a patch of grassland; a full moon against a pitch black sky; a roaring fire in a circular room with a group of people dancing around it …

The sound of a liquid dripping against stone filled his ears, followed by nonsensical muttering; a haunting song; the crackling of a fire …

It dawned on Draco what exactly had joined their magic: the ancient powers, the beginning and ending of all, the source of all the magic in the world, had appeared. This realisation hit him like a ton of bricks, leaving him breathless.

The ancient powers purred, as if delighted by the apprehensive fear they could feel pouring out of the participants of the ritual.
This was the most crucial part of the ritual; if they messed up now, the ancient powers would turn against them and take their magic. They didn't care who had called them; they just wanted to receive their offer. They were as ravenous wolves, not satisfied until their prey was no more.

Draco and Harry stopped chanting, closed their eyes and started drawing runes in the air, which indicated what they sought to accomplish.

The ancient powers seemed to still for a couple of long, agonizing seconds until an eerie chuckle filled the air and the clearing darkened, as if something was hiding the sun.

Draco started murmuring the next spell, Harry joining him immediately, "And we call upon Thee," and they became aware of all the changes the circles had gone through by now. They were surrounded by a broad, silver thread of light, tinted with black and purple, which hummed and thrummed.

Their family stood spread out – one on each point of the compass – with their eyes closed, bodies as still as a statue; only their mouths moved, murmuring spells.

All the candles were lit; the Invisibility Cloak hovered in the air in such a manner that it looked like someone was wearing it. The Resurrection Stone glowed a dark red and several strands of dark shadows were slithering across the ground, sprouting from the centre of the stone. Right in front of Draco, the Elder Wand was swaying from left to right, visibly trembling.

The Deathly Hallows weren't the only ones affected by the ritual. Rowen was hovering mid-air, surrounded by several torrents of wind; Ruby's whole body was engulfed in flames and he was breathing fire. Mara sat immobile in a large bubble of water with several spikes of ice scattered around her; Garin's long body was wrapped around a miniature hill of earth and grass, while his venom dripped sluggishly from his glinting fangs.

Meanwhile four spirits – the ghosts of the four Founders – roamed around the circle, their eyes blank, while they chanted something in an unknown language with deep, echoing voices.

Draco could feel himself grow weak; never before had he been forced to use so much of his magic. Never before had he lowered all barriers.

He forced himself to stay awake and he released more of his magic when he sensed Harry's strained breathing. The ritual had to finish soon, because Harry was nearing his limit. Draco could feel it in the trembling hands, the strained breathing, a part of their joined magic that pulsed more erratically …

Panic and worry started to blossom in him and he forced himself to concentrate on the golden cage containing Dumbledore, lest he would ruin his focus by being overwhelmed with emotions.

There was only one word to describe the old man: terrifying. Utterly terrifying. His eyes shone with unbridled, insane rage and his voice roared in fury; his magic – swarming around him like purple thunderclouds – clashing with the cage, attempting to destroy it.

For one heart stopping moment he almost succeeded: the bars of the cage were bending and groaning in protest; the golden light started to splinter as if it was mere wood.

Then the ancient forces swept down like an eagle which had caught sight of its prey. They draped themselves over the confinement like curtains, muting the screams and then they started squeezing and prodding.

Several things happened at once. The shadowy tendrils of the Resurrection Stone latched onto the
cage, pumping their own power in it. The Cloak and the Wand switched places until they were hovering above the Stone, forming a triangle upside down. A poisonous green light was exuded by the three Hallows and that light was sucked in by the ancient forces as well.

After the shadowy tendrils and green light, a chunk of earth dripping with venom, a fireball, a large jet of ice cold water and a miniature hurricane collided with the wriggling mass around the cage.

Somewhere a faint scream sounded, but that was quickly swallowed up by the ancient forces that were making low, rumbling noises before they stilled.

For several seconds all was quiet.

Then a razor sharp wind raged around them, half tearing Draco's and Harry's robes to shreds and a sickening slurping sound filled the air.

A pillar of purple light started to form above the hidden cage and the screaming intensified until it turned into agonized howling, which almost drowned out the howling of the wind.

Draco felt sick when he caught sight of fleeting images being inhaled by the pillar of light. He didn't dare to look at them directly; he instinctively knew that those were Dumbledore's memories, devoured together with his magic.

A long time seemed to pass until the pillar of light finally faded out. The ancient powers slowly released their grip on the cage.

All was silent.

The ancient powers hovered above them like a dark cloud, but Draco's attention was focused on one spot only.

Dumbledore laid crumpled on the ground; his wand was shattering in several tiny pieces and all life seemed drained from him so that he resembled a skeleton more than a human being.

Draco could no longer sense his magic; it was as if it never had existed in the first place. As if Dumbledore had been merely a Muggle.

The ancient powers swept past them with a deafening, almost pleased sounding roar and then they were gone.

Birds started chirping, the sun peeked through the leaves and rodents shuffled through the bushes. Everything had returned to normal.

All of a sudden Draco became aware of the way his magic and Harry's were buzzing madly.

"Draco, Potter, reign your magic in now!" Severus barked and for the first time Draco detected a hint of panic in his voice.

That did nothing to soothe Draco's own worries.

However instead of wondering why Severus would be panicking, Draco focused on his magic and started to pull it back. It went slow. Very slow.

Sweat broke out on his forehead and he lost his grip on Harry. His sight wavered and nausea was starting to creep up, but he kept pulling at his magic. It finally got untangled from Harry's and it sunk back into him slightly easier now.
At least that was what he thought.

His head started to feel awfully light, he thought faintly and he was barely aware of hands gripping his shoulders while a familiar voice snapped at him to remain with them.

Remain with who?

A low moan came from somewhere at his left and his hand reached out weakly to grab Harry's. He had to close his eyes, because the world was started to spin, but he managed to grab a hold of Harry's wrist.

A wrist that felt very cold, yet clammy. Or was his own hand too cold to feel warm skin?

"Draco, stay with me, son!"

Who was that? His father?

Hands shook his shoulders and he groaned in distress. His magic was buzzing even louder now and felt uncomfortably warm when it sunk back into his core.

Was this normal?

"…arry! Come on, Harry! Get yourself together!"

What was happening to Harry? Panic swirled in his stomach and tried to fight with the exhaustion that was taking him over.

"… doesn't look good. Lupin, we need to …"

"They both need to get immediate …"

"… do about the baby?"

It was getting harder and harder to concentrate on the conversations around him and even though he felt someone slapping him, he couldn't open his eyelids. They felt so heavy, as if something was pressing them shut.

Something long slithered over him and he felt the cool breath of Mara washing over him.

"Draco, come on! Just a bit more. Your magic is almost reigned in."

Did that explain why he was feeling so sick?

He wanted to open his mouth, say something, ask what the fuck was going on, but darkness surrounded him completely and he was too weak to fight against it.

Darkness engulfed him.

And then there was nothing.

Chapter End Notes

AN2: Yes, yes, I did leave you at a cliffhanger again. Yes, I know I'm evil. At least I
updated on time now, right? (Silver lining, guys, silver lining.)

Next chapter will wrap everything up, followed by the epilogue and the oneshot in Sirius' pov.

Please leave your thoughts behind in a comment! (If you notice any mistakes, please point them out to me).

See you all in the next chapter!

Cuddles

Melissa
Chapter 33: Of New Beginnings and Old Endings

28th of May

The light rose fumes of the bubbling potion drifted lazily through the room and grey eyes studied them solemnly before he nodded satisfied.

The new potion was a success. It had taken him a couple of times, but he had perfected the recipe.

After putting a Stasis charm on the cauldron – the potion had to rest for three days – he cleared up his worktable and washed his hands thoroughly. When the Silencing wards were lowered, the faint sound of a child's excited laughter rang through the building, putting a smile on the man's face.

Two pair of glittering eyes looked up simultaneously when he entered the living room, of which the floor was littered with all kinds of toys.

"Done with brewing for today?" the dark haired man questioned with a smile.

"Hm. You're home early," the other man remarked and approached him to give him a 'welcome back' kiss.

"There were not enough patients for me to be needed," his partner explained with a shrug while he adjusted the toddler in his lap, so that he wouldn't fall off.

A soft kiss was pressed on the toddler's smooth forehead who giggled.

"I see he can't decide which toy to pick," the blond man commented dryly when his eyes swept over the littered floor. Thank Merlin they had house elves to help them clean.

"Oh, he's been playing with them all, but he's constantly picking up something else," the other one
laughed and their toddler clapped his hands in glee.

"Say, Harry, what do you say about …"

A fuzzy, white ceiling greeted him when he opened his eyes slowly and a groan slipped out when his muscles screamed in protest. It felt as if he had fallen off of his broom and he had to regrow most of his bones.

Where was he and what happened to him?

A door opened and he heard a sharp intake of breath.

"You're finally awake. That took you quite a while, brat."

Severus appeared in his vision, waving his wand over the bed.

"What happened?" Draco asked in a rough voice and winced when his throat protested fiercely.

His godfather held a glass with cold water against Draco's cracked lips, allowing him to drink slowly.

Dark eyes regarded him sharply. "What do you remember?"

Draco furrowed his eyebrows and bit his lip while he raked his brain. He had a difficult time recalling everything with the pounding headache he was experiencing. "We performed the ritual," he murmured and blinked. "Did – did it work?"

"Yes, he has no magic left. The Head Auror took him and he is currently in a holding cell awaiting his trial," the older man replied.

"Why am I here? And why do I feel as if my body was crushed?" he wondered silently.

Severus stilled and looked grimly. "You are recovering in Lupin's quarters. After the ritual was finished, you had trouble separating your magic and calling it back. You were too exhausted and your magic rebelled, causing you to go into shock. You've been in a magical coma for almost five days. Your magic has stabilized, so you should completely recover in two days with enough rest."

Draco barely registered the whole explanation as his attention was caught by one specific detail.

He forced himself to sit up, ignoring his protesting muscles. "How's Harry?" he asked while his heart hammered violently against his chest. Dread rose up in him. "And the baby? Are they all right?"

"It's best if you don't try to sit up just yet. You need more rest," Severus murmured.

Draco ignored the hand trying to push him back down and clenched his fingers around Severus' wrists, paying no heed to the apprehensive look etched onto his face. "What. Happened?" he repeated through clenched teeth.

"Potter is worse off than you," his godfather admitted reluctantly and glanced away. "He had weakened more and his magic was all over the place, because it is being shared by three entities: the bond, the baby and himself. His body closed down before most of his magic had returned."

"And now?" Draco brought out; his throat dry. Terror slowly unfurled in his stomach.

"He's still in a coma. Lupin and Black are helping him establish the link with his magic and forcing it to go back into his core."
"And the baby?" He barely got the words out of his mouth. Afraid of the answer.

"We don't know. He doesn't appear to have gone into labour, but we haven't sensed the baby's presence yet either."

Draco froze, his heartbeat loud in his ears.

A hand awkwardly patted him on his shoulder. "Look, I do not want to worry you, but there is a chance that … Just prepare yourself for the outcome," Severus said softly, clearly uncomfortable with having to be the one to break the news to the young man.

So in the end, would he still lose what was precious to him?

Taking a deep breath, he shook his head and took a step back, removing his hands from Harry's chest. He took a moment to steady himself and make certain that he didn't remain connected to Harry and looked up at his lover, who stood right across him with a heavy frown on his face. His hand was hovering above Harry's stomach, lightly glowing with his own magic.

"And?" Remus asked softly.

Sirius shook his head slowly, lowering his hand until it rested on the bed. "Nothing," he spat and glared at the sheets.

With a heavy heart Remus stared at the unconscious man, who was resting in bed in the new room Hogwarts had temporarily added to their quarters. After they had disbanded the ritual, they had rushed with Draco and Harry to the castle to help them as soon as they could. Draco had finally stabilized after three days, but was still resting. Harry was a completely other story. By the time the ritual had ended, he barely had any magic left in his body and his magic had refused to return to his core. Both he and Sirius had worked day and night to make certain that Harry's magic was connected to him again and yesterday they had finally managed to force it back into his core.

Today Remus had been working on re-establishing the last remaining links between Harry's magical core and his magic while Sirius had been trying to sense the baby's presence. Ever since they had returned from the clearing, Remus had been unable to pick up even the faintest trace of the baby's magic. As he was nearly full grown, picking up his magical trace should have been easy, but during the last five days he had not picked it up even once. He was starting to fear the truth. There was no visible movement either and even though he and Sirius had tried talking to the baby in the hope that voices would make him react, there was nothing.

Remus had checked multiple times already whether Harry's body had gone into labour, but there was no sign of that all. There were no contractions, his water hadn't broken … Nothing. Normally that meant that everything should be fine with the baby.

But the fact that they couldn't feel his presence anymore …

Remus dearly hoped that he and his lover were just too worn out to properly pick up the magical trace. After all they had been working on little to no sleep to ensure that Harry didn't lose his magic.

"You didn't pick up anything odd either?" Sirius asked quietly, staring morosely at his godson.

"No, I didn't," Remus replied and shook his head. "I managed to establish the last link with his magic and it seemed to have calmed down, so it shouldn't act out again."

Before the other man could react, the door flew open and they both immediately swirled around,
their wands ready.

Draco was standing on the threshold, leaning heavily on Mara's shoulders. His burning, grey eyes immediately fixated themselves on Harry.

"Draco, you shouldn't be up yet. You still need to rest a bit more," Remus admonished him, but lowered his wand. He was relieved to see Draco relatively unharmed. He and Severus had been rushing back and forth between Draco and Harry the first few days, monitoring them both and administering potions and casting Healing spells on them; all the while dealing with their own small depletion of magic. As both young men had taken the worst brunt of the ritual, the older men didn't even stop to rest before they were certain that the two young wizards wouldn't die.

"He wouldn't listen," Severus muttered; his eyes unreadable.

Draco stumbled towards the bed, obviously still rather weak, but determined to reach Harry. He scrambled on the bed and his hands visibly trembled when he caressed Harry's cheeks. He lowered his head until he could press his lips against Harry's forehead.

"Harry, can you hear me?" he whispered.

Discreetly Remus pulled Sirius with him out of the room, letting Draco have a moment with Harry. He glanced at Severus, who looked very grim. "Did you tell him about the baby?" he murmured, catching sight of Draco caressing Harry's rounded stomach gently.

"I did. I told him the truth," Severus muttered and sighed. "He insisted on seeing Potter and made it quite clear to me I would regret it if I tried to stop him."

"Master's magic is completely restored," Ruby interjected and padded over to them.

"Good to hear that at least one thing has succeeded," Remus muttered darkly.

"Can you sense the baby's magic?" Sirius asked abruptly; his back ramrod straight. "You did it before, right, Garin?"

The snake rose up with his eyes fixated on Harry and swung gently back and forth. While the three men waited with baited breath, Garin flicked his eyes to Ruby and they seemed to have a conversation going on between them.

"Well, can you?" Sirius asked impatiently, shrugging off Remus' hand on his shoulder.

"We cannot pick up a trace," Ruby replied slowly. "He looks like he carries a cub, but he does not feel like he is expecting a litter."

They all stiffened and Remus picked up the harsh curse Severus murmured underneath his breath.

He swallowed with some difficulty and asked the one question that had been on their minds for nearly a week now. "Is the baby … Has he died?"

Garin's tongue came out and he seemed to be tasting the air, before he replied, "We are not certain. It could be. Perhaps the ancient forces thought that the hatchling's magic was included in the offer as well, as it was not giving its magic freely."

"If the ancient forces did indeed take the magic of the cub, there are two explanations why we cannot sense him," Ruby took over; his tone very solemn and heavy. "Either the cub has died or
it lost its magic and will be born without it. How do you wizards call such a person? A Squib?"

Sirius sunk down on the couch with a trembling chuckle and he buried his head in his hands. "So there are no options left? Either the baby is dead or it will be a Squib?" he spat out enraged and his wand reacted by firing off some sparks.

"Perhaps there is another answer, but as of now we cannot detect any trace," Ruby replied and scraped softly with his nails across the floor.

"We shouldn't have let him join the ritual," Sirius said bitterly. "What good did those Deathly Hallows do if they couldn't even keep one baby safe from the ritual?"

"Black, you know as well as I do that there was no other option left. There was no way for the ritual to succeed without Potter's input," Severus snapped and crossed his arms in front of his chest.

"Fuck off! It's not your godson lying there, fighting for his life and that of his baby's!" Sirius hissed and brandished his wand when he jumped up, ready to confront Severus.

"Sirius!"

Severus' eyes narrowed into small slits. "Do not think for one second that I don't know how you feel, you foul mutt. My godson has a big chance of losing his own son, while he can't do anything about it. That baby is not only Potter's, Black, and you would do well to remember that fact." He strode out of the room, the painting slamming shut behind him.

"Padfoot, damn it," Remus sighed and slumped into a chair. The last thing they needed, was a fight amongst them.

At least Sirius had the grace to look ashamed. "I just don't want Harry to lose the baby. He doesn't deserve that after everything they have gone through. It's not like I have forgotten who the other father is!" His hands clenched next to his hips.

"I know, Sirius, but you should apologize to Severus. We're all exhausted now, but that doesn't give you the right to snap at him when he's done nothing but help us," Remus scolded him and rubbed a hand over his face. He wanted nothing more than to collapse in his bed and sleep for at least two days, but he needed to monitor Harry for a little while longer until he could rest with the knowledge that Harry was safe in his pets' care.

"I know; I'll do it later," Sirius sulked, obviously not looking forward to apologizing to his former school enemy.

"Sev didn't lie when he said that you couldn't feel the baby, huh?" Draco asked suddenly and Remus approached him cautiously. The blond was staring blankly at Harry's stomach; he had pulled his shirt back so that the rounded belly was revealed.

"There is still a chance that the baby survived. Your baby is a fighter, just like you and Harry," Remus murmured soothingly, hoping against all reason that he was right.

Draco put his hand carefully on Harry's stomach and traced patterns on it while his eyes remained fixed on Harry's face. "I promised him everything would be all right," he said in a smothered tone. Teardrops started gliding over his cheeks, falling down on the sheets that absorbed the droplets. "He didn't want to believe that we could win and I told him we would. Why the fuck does he need to be right about this?!"
Hesitatingly Remus reached out, aware of Sirius coming up behind him, and touched Draco's shoulder. "Draco, nothing is lost yet. You can't give up yet, because there is still a chance that your son survived."

"Then why can't I feel him?" Draco snapped and smacked his hand away, throwing him such a harsh glare that it made Remus shiver in slight fear. He had never seen the young man so furious before and he wondered whether he should try to take him away from Harry before he could lash out with his magic. "I can't feel him moving and he always moves when I talk to him! I can't sense his magic either! He's gone! He's fucking gone! I promised Harry we would be okay. I can't lose him; we can't lose him after all this time." Draco's shoulders slumped and he broke down, crying in earnest now.

Sirius took a deep breath and walked past Remus, who was frozen in shock. "This is not the moment to break down," he spoke in a low voice. He hadn't tried to touch Draco, but he still managed to snag his attention. Grey eyes looked at him in sorrow and anger. "Harry and your son need you to be strong right now. Your baby is a fighter; how can he not be with you two as his parents? You need to believe in them. Remus and I will …"

"Believe in them? Such a Gryffindor thing to say," Draco sneered viciously and glared at him venomously. "Believing in them won't give me our son back! Nothing is going to give us our son back! Nothing!"

"Look, I know you're upset now, but Garin and Ruby think there is still a chance that the baby survived. They don't know for sure that the baby is gone and …"

"SHUT UP! JUST SHUT UP!"

Remus had seen the glow around Draco growing brighter, but he was too late to warn his lover. Before either one of them could open their mouths, a strong force pushed harshly against them, throwing them violently out of the room against the wall of the living room. They slumped against it with a groan and Remus felt as if his ribs had been broken. He scrambled up, ignoring the hot flashes of burning pain, and watched wide eyed how the door to Harry's room was sealed shut with a pinkish yellowish liquid which hissed and crackled.

"What the fuck is going on?" Sirius asked aghast; his hand already going to his wand.

Ruby cocked his head and answered solemnly, "It is the bond. It reacted to the master's mate's distress."

"What exactly do you mean?" Remus asked shocked. What on earth was the bond doing? Why had it sealed off the room? Would it hurt either one of the boys?

Mara's eyes flickered with a strange emotion. "The bond is going to help get rid of the distress."

That cryptic answer did nothing to alleviate Remus' concern. "How, Mara?" he asked; urgency ringing through his voice.

"The bond helped Master save his mate's life before." Ruby mumbled while his eyes remained focused on the sealed off door. "Their combined magic is capable of doing many things. That includes cheating death."

"What?! They are not strong enough yet to use their magic!" Remus protested in a shrill voice. Panic squeezed around his heart. They had barely managed to get Harry's magic back into his core – how would it react if it had to act again so soon? He stood up on wobbling legs and took a step towards
the closed off room. "We need to stop them before they hurt themselves more!"

A warning growl made him halt in his steps and he heard Sirius inhaling sharply.

"I apologize, but we cannot let you through," Ruby growled; the hair on his back rising up in his ire. He stalked towards the door and sat down in front of it, joined by Mara and Garin. "As long as the bond is working, you cannot interfere."

Remus shared a helpless look with Sirius. What on earth were they going to do now?

He felt so cold, so very cold. He had felt warm at first, comfortably warm even. And even though his room was getting smaller, he had been able to move around and feel things pressing back against him when he reached out.

Now he was too cold to move. Even the wriggly, small things attached to him and which he had noticed a while ago didn't want to move.

What was happening? Why wasn't he warm anymore? Why was he feeling so weak, so sleepy?

Was the one who carried him around angry at him? He thought that his carrier was called 'Daddy'. That was what he had said when he talked to him. He liked it when this Daddy person talked to him; he sounded so soothing and so nice. It made him feel loved and welcome. But now he couldn't hear this Daddy anymore. He didn't hear the other person either, the one who had called himself 'Papa'. Papa had talked to him a lot before; always sounding so very happy. It had made him wave his chubby arms around, happy to be acknowledged. They had sounded so nice, like they wanted him.

He had felt so safe, cradled in this warm room.

But it wasn't warm anymore. Nobody was talking to him anymore. What did this mean? He could still hear the strange 'thump, thump' sound that had calmed him down so many times before – but there was nobody speaking to him. Didn't they love him? Why were they not trying to help him? He needed their help! He felt so scared, so alone …

He was slipping away; he knew not much, but he knew that the coldness was an awful thing and that it was going to take him away. It was going to take him away and he was too weak to stop it.

He wanted that warmth back; he wanted the voices of Papa and Daddy. But nothing was there. He was alone. So very alone …

A trickle of warmth touched him. It confused him. Was the warmth coming back or was he just imagining it? Was the coldness playing tricks on him?

But no, no. The trickle grew into a small stream slowly until it filled his small room and started to warm him up again. Slowly the warmth returned to him and he slowly wiggled around.

He still couldn't hear the voices, but the warmth was back. That was a good thing. They hadn't forgotten about him; they were bringing the warmth back to him. So they hadn't forgotten him. They were helping him.

He was so, so happy …

He was safe again. Safe and warm and happy.
His whole body screamed in protest and the headache had grown worse, almost to the point where he couldn't open his eyes from the pain. But he kept going until he could go no longer. Until the tingling in his hands had stopped and the buzzing in his ears had died out.

His magic fleetingly brushed against his cheeks when it retreated back into his core and he opened his eyes slowly.

Was it just a trick of the light or was there more colour in his lover's cheeks? Was he imagining his lover breathing easier?

Draco froze when something touched his palm. He held his breath and looked down at where his hand laid on top of Harry's belly. Had he dreamt the touch? Was he just imagining it? He would go crazy if he had been imagining it. He had no fucking clue whatsoever what his magic had done; only that he had felt compelled to close his eyes and let his magic do whatever it wanted to do. His hands had felt very hot and they had tingled.

Another soft, hesitant push. A soft ripple that went through Harry's stomach.

Draco started crying again, both from exhaustion and relief. He wasn't imaging this, right? He was feeling their baby kick, right?

"Dr-Draco?"

With tears still streaming down his cheeks, he looked up and saw soft green eyes squinting at him. "Wh-what happened?" Harry croaked and looked disorientated. His eyes widened when he caught sight of the tears on his lover's face. "Why are you crying?"

Draco leant down and pressed a fierce kiss against surprised lips. Sleep was pulling at him, trying to drag him under, but he resisted for a little while longer.

"We won, baby," he murmured, the nickname slipping out before he realised it. "We won; you, the baby and I – we don't have to worry anymore." His chuckle was watery. "I love you so fucking much; don't ever scare me like this again."

And with that, he slumped next to the dark haired wizard on the bed, allowing the darkness to take him away once again. This time he welcomed it, because he knew that when he surfaced again, Harry and their baby would still be there.

"Today never seemed to end," Draco sighed and plopped down on the couch, his hand already busying itself with removing his tie. He kicked off his shoes with a low groan.

Harry smiled and after putting down his bag and removing his belt, he slowly walked over to his lover. He was still quite tired even after resting for more than a week, but Remus had warned him that he probably wouldn't fully recover until he had given birth.

Bending down slightly, he pressed a soft kiss on pale lips. "At least you can enjoy your birthday now, hm?" he murmured and smiled.

A smile brightened Draco's face and he pulled Harry down until he was sitting on his lap. "That's true. And I am more than happy that I have the chance to celebrate it with you," he whispered and caressed Harry's cheek; his grey eyes alight with intensity.

Harry understood the double meaning and he sighed, closing his eyes when a thumb brushed across his cheekbone. It still felt surreal to realise that he wouldn't have to worry about Dumbledore
anymore. To know that this time he really was safe and there was no insane wizard out to murder him.

After he had woken up from his magical coma, Remus and Sirius had filled him in on what had happened. Apparently his magic had gone haywire and refused to return back to his core, leaving Remus and Sirius to work day and night to get it back to him.

What had shocked him to the core was the fact that he and Draco had been on the verge of dying. Sirius had been reluctant to talk about it, but had eventually admitted that it was a very close call. It had been Remus who later told him that he had nearly lost the baby as well. The only reason why the baby still lived, was because Draco had used the bond somehow to help their son.

It didn't matter anymore how they had been able to survive the aftermath of the ritual. All that mattered now was that they were safe and wouldn't have to be on their guard anymore. They could finally start living their lives as they wanted.

"Where are your presents? I thought your parents had sent you some this morning?" Harry asked curiously, remembering the two owls who had delivered three packages for Draco when they woke up.

"They are in the dormitory." Draco shrugged. "The other presents are there as well. I think even your godfather gave me something and I'm not certain whether I'm willing to risk opening it."

Harry rolled his eyes and lightly punched Draco's shoulder, ignoring his grunt. "Don't be such a baby. If he wanted to prank you, he would have done it sooner. Besides," he hummed, "I was with him when he chose your present and I can assure you it's nothing bad."

"When did he choose a present?" Draco asked bewildered, narrowing his eyes slightly.

"Four days ago," Harry retorted lightly. His godfather had actually asked him whether Draco would like the present he had picked out for him and it had pleased Harry to see his godfather putting effort into something for his boyfriend. It seemed Sirius was finally loosening up completely to Draco and Harry couldn't be happier.

"Huh," was Draco's brilliant response and he blinked, while his hands trailed up and down over Harry's back; his hands searing warm through Harry's shirt.

June had announced itself with hot weather and the Cooling charms had to be cast every half hour, because they wore off too quickly. Harry was so not looking forward to having his baby in this heat, but on the other hand he couldn't wait for the baby to be born either. It was becoming too tiring to drag around the baby's weight – his back protested every evening – and after all this time he just wanted to have their baby in his arms.

But he still had a couple of weeks to go before the baby was there and now he had a more pressing matter to attend to: Draco's birthday present.

He wriggled himself free from Draco's grasp and walked to his room, where he had hidden the present a while ago.

"Where are you going?"

"To get your present!" he called back and rifled through his drawer until he found the small, rectangular box, which was wrapped in midnight blue paper. He bit his lip and stared anxiously at the box. Now that the moment had arrived to hand it over to Draco, he suddenly wasn't certain about it anymore. What if the other one thought it was too stupid, too sentimental? Too weird?
On the other hand … Harry's thumb caressed the ring around his finger. Draco didn't seem opposed to sentimental gifts. He would most likely appreciate the sentiment Harry was trying to convey with this particular gift.

There was no going back now; he would just have to deal with whatever Draco's reaction would be to his gift.

When he entered the living room again, he was met with Draco's curious face. After hesitating for a few more seconds, he took a deep breath to steady himself and approached the blond wizard. He sat down next to him and presented the blue package, biting his lower lip when Draco accepted it with glittering eyes. All the while Draco was removing the paper from the small box, butterflies raced like mad in his stomach.

The sound of the lid being removed from the box seemed extremely loud in the silent room and Harry was aware of their pets' eyes trained on them both, making him shift around.

"Harry …" Draco murmured surprised and his finger slowly caressed the golden locket, which laid on a dark red, silk cloth. The golden locket itself was engraved with a large shell which had a rose instead of a pearl resting in the middle of the open shell. The shell represented the protective quality of love and the rose represented love itself. It had cost a bit extra to have those two symbols engraved on the locket, but it had been worth it. Casting the protection charms on the locket had been slightly tricky, but he had managed it in the end.

"Open it," Harry urged him on and his fingers fiddled nervously with his shirt.

Draco let out a soft "Oh," when he managed to open the locket. Inside one half was empty, but the other one was filled with a picture of them. It had been taken by Daphne several months ago when Harry had visited the common room. He and Draco had sat together on the couch – him on Draco's lap – and they had been arguing about something silly; they had a hard time keeping serious and the picture showed them laughing and stealing a quick kiss.

Wrapped around the small picture was a couple of Harry's hairs, which also had a charm cast on them. It allowed Draco to locate Harry whenever he needed to and Harry had needed Remus' help to accomplish the charm.

"I thought you would be more at ease if you had a way to contact me all the time, so I put a Locus charm on my strand of hair," Harry spoke softly, taking notice of how fixated Draco was on the picture. "The other half can be filled with a picture of the baby or something else. I know it's an odd and silly gift, but I …

He was cut off when Draco leant forwards and embraced him tightly, lips pressing a flurry of kisses on his cheek. "It's perfect, thank you," Draco whispered against his skin and when he pulled back slightly, his eyes were shining brightly while a light flush decorated his cheeks.

Harry smiled relieved; he was happy that Draco liked his present and that he had understood the underlying message. That from now on Harry wouldn't try to reject his help anymore; that he was willing to rely more on Draco than he did before.

By giving Draco a way to locate him whenever he so desired, he had wanted to convey that he would relinquish more control to Draco and that he wouldn't try to fight against Draco's protective instincts anymore. Harry wasn't planning on relinquishing all control – they were equals after all – but after everything that had happened, after everything they had gone through and realising how much Draco was willing to give up for him, he decided that relinquishing some control wouldn't hurt.
Judging by the soft, but meaningful look Draco gave him, the blond understood the unspoken message.

They had their whole lives ahead of them now, without any serious threats lingering, and Harry intended to fully enjoy his life with Draco.

"I love you," Draco whispered into his ear later that night when they were wrapped up in each other's arms on Harry's bed. His hand drifted down to rub slowly over Harry's stomach.

Harry closed his eyes, burrowed his face in Draco's shoulder and smiled. "I love you too."

When the portrait opened and closed again to allow their visitor entrance to their quarters, Sirius looked up from where he was seated at the table, reading the newspaper. He raised his eyebrow when he noticed the Malfoy heir standing in the middle of their quarters with a determined look on his face and his shoulders squared as if he would enter a duel any moment.

Slowly Sirius lowered the newspaper and studied the blond man quietly. "Something you need?" he asked; curiosity faintly stirring inside of him.

The other one inclined his head. "Yes, I have come to ask you an important question."

"I'm all ears."

14th of June

With an exhausted sigh Harry closed the book and leant back in his chair, rubbing over his forehead. While he didn't have any exams – contrarily to the rest of the student body, who were currently busy studying for them as they would start in a couple of days – Remus had still given him a book about various wards that could be used to call up magical creatures and told him to read it, so they could discuss it. The book itself was interesting – despite the occasional boring text – but after reading it for most of the day, he was too tired to continue.

"Can't wait to have you out of me," he murmured, clucking his tongue, while he briefly caressed his bulging stomach. As soon as he had returned from dinner, he had removed his belt and changed into a loose T-shirt and shorts as his regular uniform irritated him. He could barely stand the restricting clothing nowadays; both because of the warm weather and because of his stomach.

Draco wasn't with him now – he had a study session with Blaise and Daphne in the library – but he had promised to come to his quarters soon, so that they could spend one last night together before Draco was busy with his own exams.

"Are you okay, Master?" Garin hissed concerned, unwinding his long body from the bed post.

Sapphire had curled up on his pillow like a giant ball of fur and Ruby was dozing off in the living room. Now that the main threat of Dumbledore was gone, his pets had been more relaxed – though they were still ready to jump to his defence whenever it was needed.

With a low groan, Harry stood up, stretching his back as much as he could. "Yeah, I'm fine. Don't worry. The baby is just tiring me out," he replied lightly. It was more than just the baby, though; he was still recuperating from the strain his body and magic went through during the ritual, but there was not much he could do about it, save for resting a lot. And he was starting to go stir crazy from not being able to do much.
The sound of the portrait opening made him smile involuntarily; Draco was back. Maybe he could convince him to give him a back rub again; his back was killing him and Draco could really work some magic with his hands.

He made his way to the living room, calling out while he walked, "Draco, could you give me a …"

He shut up immediately when his brain registered who was standing in the middle of his quarters.

"Hello Harry," Luna smiled brightly at him; the small bells hanging from her ears made a soft whistling sound when she moved.

Harry's attention was caught by the second person standing slightly behind Luna – whose eyes had widened at seeing his rounded stomach.

His stomach which was on full display, because he had foregone using his belt.

His arms automatically shot downwards to cover his belly, but it was useless.

"He-Hermione," he stammered and felt Garin sliding closer to him. Ruby rose up on his large legs, studying the two girls with a distrustful look on his face. "Luna! What are you two doing here? How did you even find me?"

A tinkling laughter left Luna's mouth and she practically skipped over to Ruby, petting him on his head without any fear. "The water fairy told me where to find you."

That still didn't explain why they were here now. Shit, what was he supposed to do now? He had kept his baby a secret for a damn good reason!

"He-hello, Harry," Hermione smiled uncertainly. Her curly hair was pulled back into a high ponytail and her fingers were slightly stained with ink. It was a surprise she wasn't walking around with notes, considering the exams were almost starting. "I'm sorry for intruding so late. Luna insisted we needed to see you and I … Well, I … Eh, I wanted to see you as well." She glanced away; her cheeks fire red.

Harry opened his mouth and closed it again when he didn't know what on earth he was supposed to say now. He suddenly wished he had thought of grabbing his wand with him; it was still laying on his desk.

Bright blue eyes studied him with a knowing look. "She won't tell anyone, Harry," Luna told him gently. "He is safe with her."

"A little warning would have been useful," Harry muttered, rubbing the back of his neck. He knew he could trust Luna when she said that Hermione wouldn't tell anyone about the baby, but he very much disliked having the choice of informing her being taken away. It was supposed to be his choice who he informed about the baby, not someone else's.

"Ah, I swear I won't tell anyone about it!" Hermione said hastily. "I know there is a good reason you're keeping it a secret and I didn't want to intrude. If you want, I can leave now. You can … use a charm on me to make sure I keep quiet if you want." Her voice was subdued at the end, but sincere.

"I know," Harry sighed and studied her. He then slowly made his way to the couch, passing her, before he sunk down on it. He patted the space next to him. "You can sit here if you want."

The secret was already out, so what would it matter if she stayed a bit longer? As long as she would keep quiet about the baby, he was resigned to her knowing about it. He was too tired to put up a fuss.
about it.

Hesitating visibly, she accepted the place next to him while Luna remained standing next to Ruby, focusing her attention on petting his large back.

Brown eyes glanced quickly at his stomach before they looked away. "Eh, how, you know, how far are you?" she asked almost shyly.

"Nine months; he'll be born soon," Harry murmured, shifting a bit until he found a better position. The awkward atmosphere hanging between them was starting to bother him. "I'm surprised you aren't studying," he mentioned lightly.

She chuckled and shook her head. "Luna didn't give me much choice. She took my books from me and announced that we were going to see you." The exasperated, but fond look she threw at Luna made him raise his eyebrow slightly.

What an interesting look.

"How's the rest of Gryffindor coping with the exams?" Harry asked with a small smile.

They chattered about school for a while; Luna kept herself busy with cooing to Sapphire – who had joined them after a couple of minutes – and studying Garin.

Somehow they reached the topic of Ginny and Ron and Harry felt himself grow cold when he thought about those two.

"Thank you for helping me with Ron," he murmured; his eyes trained on his hands which were placed on top of his stomach.

Hermione let out a soft sigh and when Harry looked up, he was met with a self-deprecating smile. "I just wish I had said something about him sooner. I didn't realise how far he had gone already to hurt you. Wait, no." She shook her head and her fingers clenched down in her skirt. "I didn't want to see how far he had gone already. I thought he wouldn't hurt you too much, because you were friends once, but clearly I underestimated him. I'm really sorry I didn't speak up sooner. Maybe this entire mess could have been solved sooner."

Harry shook his head, waving his hand dismissively. "Don't blame yourself, Hermione. I didn't think either that he would go so far. How is Ginny taking it? I haven't seen her lately."

After her attempt to curse Draco, she had seemed to avoid them and Harry couldn't really say he minded that. He had never been able to really figure out what she thought about him, but clearly she hadn't been happy with the fact that he was together with Draco.

Hermione fidgeted and a frown marred her forehead. "She has been in the hospital wing for two days two weeks ago. Nobody knows what happened, but her face and hands were badly burnt." She bit her lip. "Since then she mostly stays in the dormitory. From what I've seen, the nurse managed to heal her, but she refuses to say what happened."

"That's odd." Harry furrowed his eyebrows. "Maybe she got into a fight with someone?"

Although it was strange for her to be so badly wounded; she wasn't exactly weak and she could hold her own in a duel. Who would hurt her so badly anyway?

Hermione shrugged uneasily. "I don't know, Harry. She refuses to say anything about it and we stopped asking when she tried to hex us."
Well, her being confided to the Gryffindor Tower explained why he had barely seen her during the past few weeks.

"Good riddance," Garin hissed and he sounded on the verge of snickering – if snakes were capable of doing such a thing.

Harry frowned. "That's not nice, Garin," he admonished him. Why was he getting the feeling that his pets knew more about what had happened to Ginny?

"She deserved what she got," Ruby murmured and his teeth glinted into the candlelight.

Before Harry could react to that peculiar statement, the portrait opened again and revealed a haggard looking Draco, whose eyes immediately widened when they caught sight of the two girls in front of him.

"What the hell are you doing here?" he asked sharply, dropping his bag on the floor with a heavy 'thud'.

Hermione flinched a little underneath the heavy glower and cleared her throat nervously. Luna merely smiled gently, turning her attention to Mara who had slipped past Draco.

Hastily Harry stood up and made his way to Draco, who automatically enclosed him in his arms once he was in his reach.

"It's okay, Draco," he murmured, bringing his own arms around Draco's waist. "Luna brought her with her and she promised me she wouldn't tell anyone about the baby."

"And you believe her?" Draco asked sceptically, throwing a wary glance at the brunette on the couch.

Harry waited until he held his gaze before he replied calmly, "Yes, I believe her. She won't tell anyone."

Grey eyes studied him for a while until they softened and the blond let out a resigned sigh after apparently finding whatever he was looking for in Harry's face. He pressed a soft kiss against Harry's lips before turning to address Hermione. "Looks like you're not going to disappear out of our lives after all." He made his way to the couch before the dark haired wizard could reprimand him about the comment and to both Harry's and Hermione's shock, he held out his hand. "We started out on the wrong foot years ago, so let us try again. Hello, my name is Draco Malfoy."

Slowly Hermione reached out and accepted his hand. "My name is Hermione Granger. Nice to meet you." Her brown eyes looked at him in determination.

"One warning: hurt Harry in any way and you will be sorry," Draco murmured silkily; his smile containing more teeth than was considered to be friendly.

Hermione paled a bit, but nodded. "I understand."

"Don't threaten her, Draco," Harry muttered with a slight huff, swatting his arm.

He was happy, though, to see Draco finally interacting decently with Hermione. He didn't expect them to become good friends – despite the fresh start, there was still a quite nasty history between the two of them, but at least now they could try to build a better relationship.

When he caught dark brown eyes with his own green ones, he smiled and received a gentle smile in
Yes, it was a fresh start for all of them.

29th of June

"Is Harry feeling okay?" Blaise murmured in his ear while McGonagall's voice filled the Great Hall, talking about the many achievements the students had gathered.

Draco chanced a glance at Harry, who was a bit further down the row. Emerald green eyes were fixated on something in front of him and he looked rather pale; his slim waist – thanks to the magical belt – looking oddly out of place after so many evenings of seeing him walking around without it. He startled when green eyes met his and he narrowed his eyes slightly when a wavering smile greeted him.

"He told me he was well enough to attend the ceremony, but I'm really starting to doubt that," Draco muttered, clenching one of his hands.

Maybe he should have insisted that Harry stayed in his quarters, or even better already left to their manor. McGonagall could have given his diploma later on. There was no need for him to attend the graduation ceremony in his state.

Harry was due any day now and Draco had started to become really antsy about that. For the past week he had woken up every morning with the silent question whether that day would be the day that Harry went into labour. Their trunks were filled up completely and most of their possessions had already been transferred to their manor, so that they wouldn't have to take so many bags with them when they left. The device which would transport Harry safely to the manor in case his water broke was put in sight in his quarters, ready to be used immediately.

This morning Draco had asked him whether he really was certain about attending the ceremony – the dark haired wizard had looked rather unwell when he woke up – but Harry had assured him he would be fine.

Now Draco wished he had insisted on Harry departing to the manor already.

They were called to the front one by one, receiving their degree from a smiling Headmistress and under the watchful and prideful eyes of their family. Draco spotted his mother and father sitting in the second row, right next to Lupin and Black and he couldn't help but smile when he received his own degree. After today he would no longer be a student of Hogwarts; come September he would be starting his apprenticeship with Severus to become a Potions Master. That prospect made him feel both elated and nervous as hell.

Draco studied Harry carefully when it was his time to accept his degree, but there was nothing in his way of walking that would suggest something was wrong with him.

When the ceremony ended an hour later, they were free to mingle around and enjoy the plates of food that the house elves were setting up on the tables against the walls.

"Are you okay?" Draco asked concerned, brushing a hand across Harry's arm softly.

Harry smiled fleetingly. "Yeah, I'm all right."

He did look a lot better than this morning, Draco had to admit that. He didn't look that pale anymore and didn't look ready to faint.
They were immediately approached by their family, who congratulated them and gave them hugs.

"Do you know what you are planning to do after this, Harry?" Black asked curiously once they had found some free spots in a more secluded corner of the Great Hall.

Their degrees were laying on the table while the two boys busied themselves with picking out food and drinking cooled pumpkin juice.

Harry shrugged, taking another sip from his glass. "I've given up on the idea of being an Auror," he admitted. "After fighting Dumbledore, I've grown tired of fighting for my life. I don't know yet what I'm going to do, but it's definitely not going to be chasing after criminals."

"That is probably the most sensible thing you have said so far, Potter," Severus commented dryly, sipping from his own goblet of Firewhiskey.

Harry huffed, but only rolled his eyes, not deigning the older man's remark worthy of a reply; Draco was grateful for that, because he wasn't in the mood to hear an argument between his lover and his godfather today.

"Well, you have plenty of time to decide what you want to do next," Mother murmured soothingly and smiled. She lowered her voice even more when she asked, "How are you feeling, Harry?" Her eyes flickered meaningfully to his hidden stomach.

"I'm fine," Harry answered, waving his hand. "My back is killing me, though."

Draco made a mental note to give Harry another massage when they were alone; almost every evening for the last couple of weeks he had given his lover a massage to help relieve the ache in his back. Draco didn't mind doing that; it was the least he could do after all, considering it was partly his fault Harry had back pain.

When Draco shifted into his seat a while later, the object in his pocket reminded him about the plan he had come up with a couple of weeks ago and he stilled. Now was as good as any time, right?

Somehow he managed to get Harry to accompany him alone outside; Black had thrown him a speculating look, but had said nothing to stop them and the blond took that as his final answer.

Outside, the sun was glaring and the air simmered with heat, making it fairly stifling. It was also quiet and perfect for what he was planning to do; here they wouldn't be disturbed and they would be at ease.

He walked with Harry – hands locked – to the edge of the forest, where the shadows of the trees provided them with much needed coolness. Ruby had followed them outside – Mara and Garin had preferred to stay in the castle, where it was colder – but remained a couple of feet away from them, giving them some privacy while he looked through the bushes.

An large, polished rock next to a rose bush provided an improvised seat and Draco softly directed Harry to sit on it while he remained standing in front of him.

Emerald green eyes stared at him curiously. "Is something the matter?"

"No, I just … I, eh, wanted to ask you something," Draco murmured and took a deep breath. Butterflies were rampaging in his stomach and his head felt fairly light – he hoped he wouldn't faint from being too nervous. He needed this to be perfect, damn it. Nothing was allowed to go wrong now.
"I need you to listen and be quiet for a little while, all right?"

Harry blinked confused, but nodded slowly. "Okay," he acquiesced bemused.

Draco sunk to his knees on the ground – not caring one wit whether his trousers would get dirty or not – and adjusted himself until he ended up sitting with one knee on the ground and the other holding him up.

"Draco …" Harry trailed off and he inhaled sharply.

"Ah, ah, you promised you would be quiet for a while," Draco reminded him and grabbed Harry's hand – the warm skin underneath his helped him steady himself. When he looked up into wide, forest green eyes, all thoughts fled his mind and he was left speechless.

Ever since he had made his decision, he had been trying to come up with a speech; trying to figure out how he would go about this. Now it turned out that even if he had a speech, being subjected to intense green eyes was enough to empty his mind completely.

Well, too late for any grandiose speech. He would just state what he felt and hope that would be enough to receive the proper response.

"When I first heard about you, all I could think of was that I admired you and wanted to get to know you. I was – and still am – fascinated by you and all I could think of when I was eleven was becoming your friend," Draco started softly; not allowing himself to look away from Harry's gaze. "I clearly screwed up becoming your friend." A pained chuckle left his mouth and he let out a soft sigh. "I sulked for ages and I made the stupid decision to taunt you, because any attention from you was good – whether that was good or bad, it didn't matter. It took me years to figure out that I wanted to be more than your friend, more than your best friend. I can say with absolute certainty that the day you agreed to be my boyfriend, that was one of the happiest days in my life. This is going to sound sappy as hell, but you're a dream come true and I'm grateful for every day I have with you, every day I can spend at your side." He took a deep breath and released Harry's hand in favour of placing it on his stomach.

"I'm grateful for the fact that out of all the people you could choose, you chose me. You could have anyone you wanted and yet you chose me and I still don't understand how I could have been so lucky. You make me complete, Harry. You're my missing half and I can't fathom how I could have lived all this time without you. You are the light of my life, you make everything worth it. And now you're giving me a son as well – I'm the most lucky son of a bitch in existence," he chuckled and he squeezed Harry's knee.

"Draco …"

Draco reached into his pocket and closed his hand around the small box. "I love you, Harry. With each day that passes I love you more and I cannot wait to share the rest of my life with you. I want to wake up next to you every morning; I want to come home and see you there; I want to be the one who you confide in, who you tell your worries to, who will make you laugh. I want to make you happy."

Green eyes misted over and he felt him trembling underneath his hand. As he hadn't gotten up yet or shoved him away, Draco felt it was safe to continue, despite the nerves trying to get the upper hand.

"Words cannot describe how much I love you, how much I desire you and want to be with you. All I can say is that I'm going to try my hardest to make you happy every day of the rest of our lives. I want to be a family with you and our baby. Harry James Potter, will you marry me and make me the
happiest man alive?" he asked softly and opened the small box.

A golden band with a small diamond on top of it glinted in the sunlight.

Harry stilled and took a shuddering breath. His eyes were as wide as saucers and he seemed speechless.

"Harry?" Draco smiled nervously and he held his breath while his heart beat madly inside his chest.

A wince passed over Harry's face and Draco stiffened, concern welling up in him.

"Draco, … oh no," Harry muttered almost horrified.

All right, he had to admit that he hadn't seen that particular response coming. He had thought he had a fairly good chance of receiving a positive answer after their conversation in the manor, so this threw him off completely. It actually hurt quite a bit.

His smile wavered, when he said – as light as possible -, "We don't need to get married right away. We can wait a couple of years if you …"

"No, no, Draco. That's not it!" Harry interrupted him. He swallowed visibly and he looked down at his stomach. "I – I think the baby is coming."

"What?" Draco retorted blankly and his eyes were involuntarily drawn towards Harry's waist – and then slid down to see the light grey trousers darkening slowly with a water like fluid.

"Shit!" he exclaimed and jumped up, stuffing the small box back into his pocket. "All right, come on. We need to get you to the manor. Ruby, warn the others; especially Lupin. We need him to help with the delivery."

While Ruby gave an affirmative grunt and ran back to the castle to alert the rest of their family, Draco turned towards Harry and held out his hand.

"Can you walk?" he asked worriedly.

Harry slowly stood up and then grunted; a grimace of pain contorted his face. "Ah, shit, that one really hurt," he huffed and his hand shot out to grab the blond's arm. "Yeah, I can walk. There's still a lot of time between each one."

Draco refrained from scolding Harry for not warning him about his contractions earlier – those must have been the reason why he had looked rather unwell – and together they made their way to Harry's quarters.

He didn't even stop to take a last look at the quarters; – it would be the last time he would ever be here after today – his mind was filled with both worry about Harry and jittery anticipation.

They would welcome their son in the world very soon; he could hardly wait.

"Harry, lay down on the bed, please. I need to check your progress again," Lupin asked a couple of hours later.

Harry halted, his hands pressed against the wall, while his body trembled with yet another contraction. Beads of sweat were trickling down his face and the large, white shirt which reach mid-thigh, was drenched with sweat, sticking to his back and stomach.
Draco guided him carefully to the bed and helped him lower him on it; Harry kept a tight grip on his hand and Draco didn't even flinch when his clammy hand tightened around his.

It had been a bit more than three hours since Harry's water broke and they had to play the waiting game for now. Harry hadn't been ready to start pushing yet, so all he could do was breathe through the contractions and distract himself from the pain by talking to Draco and Lupin.

Draco knew that his parents and Harry's godfather were waiting outside in the hallway – he could hear their voices drifting through the door – but he paid them no mind and they didn't bother them either. Their pets were staying outside as well; there was not much they could do to help Harry now and Harry would only become agitated with more people in the room.

"And?" Draco asked softly, while he stroked Harry's hair slowly, not minding the sweat coating it. Harry hissed sharply and his leg jerked softly. "Fuck, that one fucking hurt even more!" he swore, tossing his head back against the pillow.

Lupin clucked his tongue and nodded. "You'll be ready to start pushing soon. You need to wait a bit more, but it won't be much longer."

"Thank Merlin," Harry groaned and glared at the ceiling. "I can't wait to have him out of me. Can't you just give me some sedative potion?"

"I'm sorry, Harry, but we don't know what kind of effect a potion would have in your state now, so we don't want to risk it," Lupin apologized and looked genuinely sorry.

"Of bloody course," Harry muttered darkly and then his glare shifted towards Draco, who started. "This is your bloody fault!"

Draco chuckled weakly and felt brave enough to brush a kiss against Harry's damp forehead. "I accept all responsibility," he said solemnly. "Just think of this: it won't be long anymore before we can hold our baby in our arms. You just need to hold on for a bit longer, love."

"Easy for you to say!" the dark haired man grunted and groaned when he was assaulted by another contraction, which lasted even longer than the previous ones.

"Just a bit longer," Draco whispered and kissed his temple.

Seeing Harry in pain like this and knowing it was partly his fault made him feel incredibly guilty – especially when he realised that at the same time he was excited as well. Because Harry was in pain now, but they would have their baby in their arms soon and that thought made him happy.

He couldn't wait to finally see their son after nine months.

A little while later Lupin put a basin with warm water on the bed with a stack of towels next to it. He pushed Harry's legs up, so that they were bent and spread out.

"All right, Harry, with the next contraction, I need you to start pushing, okay?" Lupin said; his golden eyes studying the dark haired man solemnly. "You can stop when it ends, but then you need to start again. Are you ready?"

"Not really, but it's not like I have a choice, right?" Harry muttered, strangely subdued and he swallowed loudly.

"You'll do fine," Lupin stated confidently. His gaze shifted towards Draco. "Draco, let him lean
against you; that will help a bit."

Draco nodded and, while butterflies were racing around in his stomach, he shifted until he was sitting half behind Harry, letting his lover lean against his chest. Feeling his tense back, Draco reached out and rubbed over his back, offering his other hand again.

Harry blindly reached out to grab his hand and a whimper escaped him.

"I'm here; you'll be okay," Draco whispered in his ear and Harry barely had time to nod, before a new contraction seized him and he started pushing; his face becoming even redder than before.

He fell back against Draco's chest when he stopped pushing and he took a deep breath.

"You're doing fine, Harry," Lupin reassured him. "Just keep going."

Harry looked ready to lash out, judging by the venomous look in his eyes, but a new contraction rolled over him and he started pushing again with a low moan, while his grip around Draco's hand tightened to the point where Draco thought he could feel his bones being grinded together.

The dull pain in his hand was nothing but a vague notion in the back of his mind while he murmured encouraging words in Harry's ear in the course of the next half hour, rubbing over his back in the hopes of alleviating his pain somewhat. Tears started to mix with the sweat on his face and Draco kissed them away, feeling the hot skin underneath his lips.

"You're doing so well, love. Just a bit more," he murmured encouragingly and his gaze shifted towards Lupin.

"I can see his head; keep pushing!" Lupin encouraged him and his wand shot out to fill the basin with warm water.

After a couple of more pushes, Harry suddenly fell back with a loud gasp; his breathing laboured and his face fire red.

"I c-can't," he whimpered and shook his head. "It hu-hurts too much."

"Harry, you can't give up now," Lupin told him sternly. "Come on, you need to keep going."

"Harry," Draco murmured and he waited until pained, green eyes locked on to his face. "I need you to be strong for a little while longer, all right? Our baby needs you now; you can't give up. He's almost here, but he needs your help getting here."

Harry clenched his teeth, but with a pained moan, he nodded and started pushing again.

"His head is out and his shoulders are almost there," Lupin announced around ten minutes later and Draco's heart started beating wildly again.

Their son was almost there. Just a bit longer and they would finally be able to see him.

Time seemed to stretch on until suddenly the room was filled with Harry's muted shout, followed by a loud, sharp cry of discontent.

Draco was certain he had never heard a sound so sweet as the cry of their new born baby.

He was finally here.
"I do not understand the point of waiting here," Snape muttered darkly and crossed his arms. "It will be a while before the brat arrives, so we could have easily stayed at Hogwarts."

Narcissa clucked her tongue. "Severus, don't be like that. There is not a fixed hour at which the baby is supposed to arrive. You're his family; Draco wants you here."

"I'm fairly certain that the brat is more occupied with his boyfriend than with his family here," Snape retorted dryly, but didn't offer any other resistance.

Uncharacteristically Sirius kept quiet and didn't attempt to antagonize the Potions Master. All his thoughts were focused on his godson and how he was coping. As soon as Ruby had informed them that Harry had gone into labour, they had hurried out of the Great Hall and had taken it upon themselves to send the last pieces of baggage of the couple to the manor with them following closely behind.

Remus had immediately gone into their bedroom, closing the door behind him and had remained there for the last couple of hours now. Sirius desperately wanted to know whether Harry and his baby were doing okay, but he figured that as long as Remus didn't say anything, everything was going smoothly.

Still, after waiting for the past couple of hours in this hallway, he was starting to become very antsy and he really wanted to know what was going on.

"It is too bad Harry's parents aren't able to experience this moment with us," Narcissa murmured and her eyes softened with sadness for a couple of seconds.

"James would have been besides himself with worry," Sirius chuckled, remembering how out of control his best friend had been when Lily had gone into labour. "We probably would have to put a Sticky charm on his feet to keep him still."

"We just have to make up for their missing presence then," Lucius smiled. "I'm certain they would have been very happy if they could have been here."

"Prongs would probably have tried to curse Snivellus," Sirius snickered and brushed his hair out of his eyes.

"At least I'm not becoming a grand uncle before I'm forty, you foul mutt," Snape retorted snidely.

Sirius offered him a sweet smile. "That's true; but while I may be the grand uncle, you're going to be a grandfather. Tell me, how does it feel to become a grandfather before you're forty?"

"What on earth are you …"

"Severus, he is not wrong, you know. Accepting my proposal means you are officially Draco's stepfather, which will make you the step grandfather of this baby," Lucius pointed out mildly, but his eyes had a mischievous glitter to them.

Before Snape could retort, the door of the bedroom suddenly swung open and they all immediately turned their attention towards the person in the threshold.

Draco stood there with a blue blanket bundled up in his arms; his cheeks were flushed and his eyes glittered with both excitement and the film of unshed tears.

He took a couple of steps forwards, allowing them a better look of the bundle. A baby with plump cheeks; a small, cute button nose; pouty lips and a small tuft of dark blond hair greeted them.
"Everyone, meet Scorpius James Malfoy," Draco laughed brightly and he practically glowed with happiness.

Sirius felt something blocking his throat at the mention of the baby's second name and he took a deep breath, a smile breaking out on his face as he was handed the baby; its small weight reassuringly warm against his chest.

*Prongs, Lily, meet your grandson.*

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After their family had each held their son – even Severus had held him for a few seconds – Draco took him over again and returned to their bedroom, where Harry was resting in the bed after being cleaned up. Lupin left the room with a nod and a gentle smile.

Tired eyes glanced towards him and a soft smile broke out on Harry's face when he caught sight of the precious bundle in Draco's arms.

"Let me see him," Harry murmured with a rough voice and Draco sat down next to him, carefully laying Scorpius down on Harry's chest.

A couple of tears escaped his green eyes. "I can't believe he's finally here," he whispered and carefully caressed the baby's soft cheek.

"You did so well, Harry. I'm proud of you." Draco raised his head and pressed a tender kiss on his mouth. He thought he would explode with happiness; how was it possible to be so happy?

"Look at what we made," Harry chuckled watery. "He's so beautiful."

"That he is," Draco agreed and looked down with a tender look. He hoped that Scorpius would inherit Harry's intense green eyes. He couldn't help but give Harry another kiss. "I love you so much."

"I love you too," Harry murmured. He reached out with one hand and placed it on Draco's cheek. "And Draco? My answer is yes."

"What?" Draco asked, smiling bemused. What was he talking about?

"Yes, I want to marry you."

Draco's eyes widened and then he smiled brightly, digging up the box again to slip the ring around Harry's finger.

"You, Harry James Potter, have made me the happiest and luckiest man alive," he said and embraced him as tightly as he dared.

"I can say the same about you," Harry murmured with a loving smile.

After sharing another tender kiss, filled with their love, they both turned their attention towards the sleeping baby in Harry's arms.

Against all odds their baby was here now. There was no longer a Voldemort or a Dumbledore who threatened to take them away from each other.

It had taken longer than expected, but they could finally start living their lives as they wanted. Together.
AN2: So yes *coughs* I'm not particularly happy with some scenes, but I couldn't figure out what to change about them to make them better *sighs*

Anyway, what do you think of it? Please leave a comment behind with your thoughts! If anyone has noticed a grammar or spelling mistake, please point them out to me so that I can edit it.

Join me for one last time for the epilogue (and Sirius' oneshot), guys. See you all in the last chapter in two weeks!

Cuddles

Melissa
Epilogue

Chapter Notes

Author's note: After two years, we have arrived at the end of the story. I'm both happy and sad to end this. Happy, because this means I can focus on other projects, but sad as well, because I really loved writing this fic - despite the many hours of sleep I missed to write the chapters.

I want to thank you all for your continuous support, even despite the many hiatus moments this fic went through. I really appreciate your kind comments, your notes of support and I treasure each and every one of them. Whenever I felt down, I looked at your reviews and they never failed to bring me into a better mood.

Really, guys, thank you for being willing to give this story a chance and for reading it. I really appreciate it.

Thanks for the comments and kudos!

Warnings: set a couple of years into the future; fluffy moments; flashbacks; mainly Draco's pov; implied Hermione/Luna; mentioned character death.

Disclaimer: I don't own Harry Potter - J.K. Rowling owns it.

For the last time for this story: I hope you enjoy this chapter :)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 34: Epilogue

The blond man lowered the file slowly and regarded the other man with hooded eyes. "He lasted longer than I would have expected," he murmured and grimaced.

Lucius inclined his head. "He has always been a stubborn fool," he replied and took a sip from his brandy. "I cannot say I regret his death, though."

"I don't either. He had it coming," Draco sighed and placed the file back on his father's desk.

One week ago, Albus Dumbledore had passed away in Azkaban; not being able to cope with the loss of his magic any longer. It was amazing he had lived this long; most people who lost their magic died after two years.

"Are you going to inform Harry about this?" Father asked softly; his eyes alight with curiosity.

Draco released his breath slowly and shook his head. "No, he doesn't need to know about this. Knowing him he would probably blame himself," he snorted and rolled his eyes. None of them had ever informed Harry about the consequences of the ritual; Harry may have wanted to stop Dumbledore, but he was soft heartened enough to try using another ritual if he had known that Dumbledore would die without his magic.

Father hummed, acknowledging it but doing nothing to convince him otherwise.
"Any news about Weasel?" Draco asked after a bout of silence.

Ron Weasley had been given a trial three months after Scorpius had been born. He had been convicted of working together with an A class criminal, using Forbidden and Dark magic and actively attempting to murder someone. All those charges together with his big mouth at the trial had resulted in him spending the rest of his life in Azkaban without any chance of parole.

"He has been transferred to the highest level of security – the one with the Dementors – after he tried to escape a month ago," Father informed him and his lips tightened; his face showing his aggravation. "I very much doubt he will be able to do anything else again."

"That is a relief," Draco muttered. He wouldn't be held responsible for what he would do, should Weasley ever come after them again.

"Anything special planned for this weekend?" Father asked and leant back in his chair.

"Yes, we are planning on visiting Harry's parents again. Scorpius wants to give them some drawings," Draco replied and smiled.

It had become a ritual of some sorts to visit the graves of James and Lily Potter a couple of times every month. He could clearly recall the first time they had visited their graves.

"Are you sure you want to go with us?" Harry asked and he sounded uncertain.

Draco looked up from his task of putting a fresh diaper on Scorpius and clucked his tongue. "Of course I'm sure. Wasn't I the one who suggested going?"

"Well, yeah, but your apprenticeship with Snape has just started, right? I don't want to take time away from your studying," Harry pointed out and bit his lip, tugging at his shirt.

Finally finished fighting with the stubborn diaper, Draco carefully exchanged Scorpius' blue crawler with a pure white one, while the baby gurgled and kicked with his tiny feet. Before he buttoned it close, he bent his head and blew a raspberry on the small, rounded belly and was rewarded with a soft, high pitched gurgle, which vaguely sounded like a giggle, making him chuckle in response.

Turning around to face his dark haired fiancé with Scorpius cradled against his chest, Draco made his way to Harry and sat down next to him. "Harry, love, it's fine. It's not like we are going to be away for days," he pointed out calmly. "It's beyond time for you to visit them and we have finally figured out where their graves are exactly."

"Fine, but if Snape complains, don't come whining to me," Harry warned and huffed.

Draco brushed a kiss against his forehead and smirked. "Don't worry about that. Now let's go, before this little one here starts to get cranky."

They Apparated to Godric's Hollow where the graves of Harry's parents were put. There were only a couple of people wandering through the streets and they hardly looked up when they passed the young couple with the baby cradled in the dark haired man's arms.

Harry and Draco only stopped once on their way to the graveyard to purchase a bouquet of lilies and then they were in front of the old graveyard. The old, iron gates – mostly hidden behind ivy – were open and revealed a well maintained graveyard. Practically all the graves had flowers on them and there was barely any weed present to ruin the graves.

"This graveyard smells better than the last one we visited," Garin mused and Harry felt him raising
his head besides his cheek.

Their pets still insisted on accompanying them whenever they left the manor, in case they had to ward off persistent paparazzi or delusional fans of Harry. Only one of them joined them on their trips outside, while the other three remained at the manor.

"I would hope so," Draco murmured and placed his hand on Harry's back, between the coils of Garin's body. "Otherwise I would be really worried."

They made their way into the graveyard, passing an elderly woman tending to one of the new graves and a middle aged couple a few rows further. The deeper they went into the graveyard, the older the tombs started to look like, but they were still all maintained well.

Remembering Sirius' instructions, Harry turned right at the old oak tree – which had been planted right into the middle of the graveyard – and slowly walked further until he finally halted in front of a large, white marble headstone, which faintly shone, as if illuminated by something from within.

Harry was barely aware of Draco's presence next to him when he read the inscriptions on the tombstone.

'In Loving Memory of James Potter, Born 27 March 1960, Died 31 October 1981
And Lily Potter, Born 30 January 1960, Died 31 October 1981'

The inscription underneath their names and the dates read, 'The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death'.

A lump started to grow in this throat and he blinked several times, wondering why his vision was so blurry until he realised that tears were obstructing his sight.

"Mum, dad, …" he murmured and stepped closer, holding one hand out to touch the cool marble. He barely registered Garin sliding down until he was on the ground next to him.

This was the place where his parents were buried; one of the few physical reminders that they had once been alive.

The bouquet of lilies was put into a vase and placed in the middle of the grave and the petals swayed softly in the wind.

He felt an arm coming around his shoulders and Draco tugged him softly against his side, Harry going with it willingly. He was trying his best not to cry, but it had hit him harder than he thought it would to finally see their last resting place.

"Mister Potter, Mrs. Potter, we would like to show you our son, your grandson Scorpius James," Draco murmured and Harry stilled, listening almost breathlessly. "Please look after Scorpius like you looked after Harry. I doubt our son is going to need as much protection as Harry, but well …" He laughed softly.

Even Harry had to smile and he shook his head. "Jerk," he muttered, but there was no heat behind it. The lump in his throat was slowly disappearing and he felt like he could breathe more easily again.

A quick squeeze in his side was his acknowledgement.

"We are not only here to visit you and show you your grandson, but there is one more thing I would
like to do," Draco paused and seemed to gather his thoughts, while Harry blinked at him bemused.

One more thing? What thing?

"I have already asked Harry's godfather for permission, but it wouldn't feel right to not ask yours. Mister and Mrs. Potter, your son is the best thing that ever happened to me and I love him very much. I will try my best to make him happy and love him like he deserves to be loved, and so I would like your permission to marry him," Draco asked serenely. He didn't seem to feel awkward at all to ask permission from a grave.

The heavy scent of lilies filled the air and it triggered a certain memory in Harry, making him smile and look at the grave in wonder.

"They had already given their answer before you asked me," Harry murmured and felt Draco's surprised gaze on him. "When they helped me in that dream, mum told me that their answer to your question was 'yes'. I didn't understand what she was talking about back then, but it's clear now. They give you their permission."

"Thank you," Draco spoke sincerely to the grave. "I promise I will take care of him." His arm tightened around Harry's waist and Scorpius gurgled softly; his bright green eyes staring at them in wonder. "I'll take care of them both. You can count on that."

When they turned around to leave after a while, Harry threw a last look at the grave – they would be back soon, he knew – and swore that for a couple of seconds he saw two shimmering shapes waving at them.

His parents might not be there in physical form, but he knew they would never really leave him.

"How is Harry doing?"

Father's voice broke through his thoughts and the smile on his face brightened before he realised it. "He's doing fine; he's been taking it easy lately and he has reduced his hours."

"Saint Mungos is probably crying about that," Father smirked.

"Draco chuckled. "His boss wasn't particularly happy with that, no, but it's not like they can force him to keep working."

After a couple of months of browsing various job offers – a lot of companies were eager to hire Harry, even if he didn't have the right degree – Harry had decided to become a Healer. That way he could still help people, but he wouldn't have to bring himself in danger to accomplish that. He had received his degree two years ago and since then had grown out to be one of the best Healers they had had so far. The hospital wasn't happy to see him working reduced hours, but they were smart enough to realise they couldn't force him to keep working his regular hours.

If they hadn't, Draco would have been more than happy to tell them what exactly they could expect to happen if they kept being foolish.

After an hour of idle chatter, it was time for Draco to return to his own manor and he left with a last nod directed to his father. He would have sought out his mother to say goodbye to her as well, but she was visiting Paris at the moment. She claimed it was to shop and visit an old friend, but the curious blush on her face told Draco it was more likely she had found a partner there. He didn't begrudge her that; his father was Bounded to Severus now and his mother deserved to be happy with someone else as well.
He would insist on meeting this man as soon as possible, though, to make certain that he was worthy enough for his mother.

"Draco, I did not know you were visiting today." Severus appeared at the foot of the staircase and peered up at him with a slight frown. He was wiping his potion stained hands on a towel.

Draco took the last step and landed on the sparkling floor. "Father called me to discuss some matters relating to Dumbledore," he murmured, not seeing the need to withhold that information from his godfather.

"Ah yes, he passed away. Lucius told me this morning," Severus retorted and something stirred in his dark eyes. "I cannot say I feel sorry." His lips curled up in a sneer.

"I doubt anyone would feel sorry," Draco answered laconically.

"Do not forget to hand in your research paper next week, Draco. Stepson or not, you will receive a failing grade if you do not hand it in on time," his godfather reminded him sharply and narrowed his eyes.

Draco resisted the urge to roll his eyes, knowing full well an action like that would result in being hexed. "I know, Severus. I just need to adjust some paragraphs and then it's done. I will hand it in on time," he reassured the older man.

Severus snorted. "See that you do. Do not let yourself be distracted by your husband like a couple of months ago." His eyes contained part amusement and part exasperation.

Draco could feel himself flush and he shuffled with his feet awkwardly. "Exonerating circumstances," he muttered and could barely hold himself back from pouting like a child.

"Of course," the Potions Master sighed. "Off you go then. The batch with new potions will be ready next week."

"Thank you, Sev," Draco smiled gratefully.

"Yes, yes. Go now. Do me a favour and let that canine pair know that the new batch of Wolfsbane is almost ready as well." Not even awaiting Draco's reply, Severus disappeared through a heavy door, which hid his large laboratory.

Feeling excitement growing in his stomach – he would never get tired of returning home and seeing Harry there – Draco hurried towards the foyer where he would be able to Floo directly to their manor.

When he stepped out of the fireplace, he removed his cloak – which carried most of the soot – and placed it on the single chair next to the fireplace; confident that a house elf would appear soon to pick it up and have it cleaned.

Making his way out of the small foyer, he met Granger in the hallway, who looked only mildly surprised to see him.

"Malfoy," she greeted him friendly and nodded.

"Granger. I'm surprised to see you here without your other half," he remarked dryly.

She rolled her eyes and brushed a stray curl out of her face. "Her father thinks he has discovered a
new subspecies of the wood fairy and has asked her to join him today. She left you a present, though." Her lips twitched in amusement.

His sigh was of tolerance, he decided, and not of exasperation. He just knew that this particular gift had something to do with Lovegood's odd – and at times just plain creepy – way of predicting the future. Despite her quirkiness, she was still a dear friend of Harry and he knew better than to voice out loud what he thought of her occasionally.

Ever since Harry had reconciled with Granger, the woman visited them a couple of times each month, depending on how busy her schedule was. She had started working at the Ministry as a lawyer with a speciality in defending magical creatures.

Her career choice wasn't that surprising, considering her interests, but she had shocked a lot of people when she had announced that she was together with Lovegood. Even Draco had been slightly shocked; Granger hadn't struck him as someone who was interested in the same gender, but he honestly couldn't care less who she went to bed with. As long as she didn't hurt Harry, she was welcome to visit any time she wanted with her girlfriend.

Well, as long as she gave some warning of course. Having her almost walk in on them once had been more than enough.

"Are the She-Weasel and her mother still bothering you?" Draco inquired and cocked his head.

Molly Weasley – she had stubbornly kept her last name even after the divorce went through – seemed to have focused her ire on Granger, blaming the woman for putting her son behind bars. Her daughter seemed to have become very bitter and while she didn't dare to do anything to Harry or Draco, she wasn't afraid of antagonizing Granger, egged on by her mother.

It was a wonder those two women hadn't joined Weasel in Azkaban yet.

Granger smirked and twirled her wand nonchalantly. "They will be too busy the upcoming weeks to keep bothering me," she answered pleasantly and Draco chuckled briefly.

"They targeted the wrong one," he hummed.

"I have no patience to deal with misguided people," she retorted and then relaxed. "I'm going home now. If I want to have some decent dinner tonight, I'm going to have to start on it myself."

"See you around," Draco murmured and after a quick smile, she left, using the Floo network to return to her own house.

Draco shook his head bemused and continued his search for Harry and their son. That was one of the downsides of a manor: it took considerably longer to locate someone without using any magic.

The sun shone brightly and nearly blinded him when he stepped outside and he squinted, feeling the warm sun rays hitting his bare forearms.

He was greeted by a bright smile and glittering, emerald green eyes. "Hey, Draco," Harry greeted him and turned his head to accept Draco's kiss.

The blond came to stand behind him, his arms slipping around his waist. His eyes lingered on their son, who was sharing his miniature Quidditch toy set with a brown haired boy of his age. A large, familiar, black dog was curled up next to them, keeping a watchful eyes on the two five year old boys. Draco's and Harry's pets were dozing in the shade of a large tree, lulled to sleep by the warm
"Good afternoon, Draco," Lupin greeted him friendly. He was sitting on a chair, sipping from a cold glass of lemonade.

"Have they been playing nice?" Draco asked, jerking his chin towards the two boys.

"Who? Scorpius and Teddy or Sirius?" Lupin retorted dryly. "The boys have been absolute angels. They have been chasing Padfoot for most of the afternoon."

Teddy was the adopted son of Lupin and Black. Three years ago, when they had been on vacation, they had discovered the two year old abandoned in an alley. It hadn't been clear at first why the boy had been abandoned and by whom, until he had changed his whole appearance to match that of Black's.

It had never been officially confirmed – as the biological parents had never been found – but it was suspected that the boy had been left behind, because the parents couldn't deal with the fact that he was a Metamorphmagus: someone who could change their appearance at will, without the aid of spells, charms or potions. It was an incredibly rare gift and it was something one had to be born with, as it wasn't a skill one could learn. Usually wizards and witches with this particular gift were admired, but clearly the parents of this child had had another opinion about that. The boy was a Halfblood, so the possibility of the parents not having any knowledge about magic had been ruled out.

Lupin and Black hadn't been able to leave the boy behind at an orphanage and so, thanks to the combined help of Lucius and Harry, Lupin and Black had been able to officially adopt the little boy only ten months after finding him.

Despite being abandoned, the toddler had quickly become attached to his new parents and referred to them as Daddy Remus and Papa Sirius. Teddy had quickly taken to Draco and Harry as well, adopting them readily as his uncles and Scorpius as his cousin.

The boys often could be found together, playing and having fun.

Draco was glad that his son had a playmate. While they had become parents at a young age, none of their friends had children of their own as of now – most of them weren't even married yet – and finding playmates for Scorpius had been rather difficult.

Luckily Scorpius had taken to Teddy and they were quickly becoming best friends.

Draco nuzzled the patch of soft skin underneath Harry's ear, feeling him shiver slightly, and asked, "How was the check-up?"

"Everything is fine," Harry smiled and his hands came up to cover Draco's on top of his rounded belly. "The baby is growing as it should."

"That's good to hear," Draco breathed out and pressed a soft kiss in his neck. A smile broke out on his face when he felt a gentle kick aimed at his hand.

Currently Harry was six months pregnant with their second child and he was absolutely glowing. This baby had been an accident as well; they had been using contraception charms, but one night they had gotten slightly drunk, having celebrated their fourth wedding anniversary, and they had forgotten to cast the appropriate charms. Two months later, Harry had had a pleasant surprise for him.
This was one of the times when Draco silently admitted to himself that Harry might have been correct when he stated that Severus could be a bit too demanding at times. He was currently slaving over his third assignment: an essay of forty pages about the properties of the various dragon eggs and their effects in potions. He was nearly finished; he had only three more pages to go, but writing those pages was quite difficult as he struggled with the last property of the Peruvian Vipertooth's egg.

He needed to finish it by tonight, though, as the deadline was tomorrow morning and Severus did not appreciate tardiness.

He sighed and stared broodily at his half-finished paragraph. He really appreciated the fact that his godfather had been willing to accept him as his apprentice, but Merlin, he could use a break!

Consulting the heavy tome about the Peruvian Vipertooth again – the Black library had a surprising amount of dragon books available and Harry's godfather hadn't minded that he had borrowed the book – his ears picked up the vague sound of his son's bright laughter and unwillingly his lips curled up into a soft smile.

Scorpius would be turning five in less than four months and had already developed quite the stubborn streak. He didn't misbehave often, though. The chances of him landing himself in trouble in the presence of their four pets were very slim and that reassured both Draco and Harry. They themselves might have complained once in a while about the overprotectiveness of their pets, but at the end of the day they appreciated the sentiment.

They also were good babysitters.

To be honest, he rather wanted to be with his husband and son, but he was unfortunately stuck at his desk, trying to figure out what else he could write about the egg.

The door to his study opened and revealed a small, dark blond haired boy with startling green eyes, who was holding a stuffed toy in the form of a bunny against his chest.

Draco turned around and quirked a smile when his eyes fell on his son. "Hey Scorpius, what are you doing here? Shouldn't you be in bed?" he asked and stood up, throwing a quick glance at the clock in the corner. Yes, as he suspected: it was eight o'clock, the time when Scorpius was supposed to get into bed so that he could go to sleep.

Scorpius pouted and held out his arms, demanding silently to be picked up. "I want see papa," he said as if that excused him from being out of bed.

Not able to say no to the toddler, Draco picked him up and settled him on his hips, feeling small arms closing around his neck. The vague scent of roses reached his nose when he pressed a kiss on the soft, blond hair.

He looked up when he heard footsteps approaching him. Harry appeared in the door opening, rolling his eyes when he caught sight of their son snuggling up against his husband. He crossed his arms and shook his head.

"You're supposed to be in bed, Scorpius," Harry chided the young boy gently.

Scorpius turned his head to look at him and his pout grew. "I want see papa," he declared again.

"Papa is busy with his work, darling, and you need to go to sleep," Harry replied, but didn't sound angry.
Scorpius seemed ready to sulk – and Draco was already preparing himself for a tantrum – until the boy sighed and nodded. "Night kiss, papa," he muttered and pressed a sloppy kiss against Draco's cheek.

"Good night, Scorpius," Draco smiled and kissed his forehead, making Scorpius smile at him brightly.

The blond boy then wriggled around until Draco lowered him on the ground.

"Night, papa!" Scorpius said and then allowed Harry to take him by his hand and put him in his bed again.

Draco chuckled and returned to his desk; Scorpius had made it an evening ritual to kiss them both goodnight before he went to bed. He also often tried to use that as a way to stay awake past his bedtime.

He sat down behind his desk and took up his quill again; at least that small interruption had cleared his mind somewhat.

Almost twenty minutes later, a soft knock on the door broke through his concentration and he blinked, calling out, "Come in, Harry."

"Am I interrupting?" Harry asked and cocked his head to the right.

"No, come on in. I can use the distraction," Draco smiled wryly. At least he only had two more pages to go now. Any progress was good at this point.

Harry closed the door behind him with a soft 'click' and sat down on the only other chair that was present in his study.

Noticing the peculiar look on his husband's face, Draco placed his quill on his desk and asked concerned, "Is something the matter?"

Harry hesitated visibly and took a deep breath. His hands were hidden inside his long sleeves – apparently he had borrowed another sweater of Draco. "Do you remember the first time we lived here and we were discussing names for Scorpius?"

Admittedly that odd question threw him off, as he had no idea what could have brought that on, but he merely nodded. "Of course I remember. You were adamant that you are going to choose the first name of our second one," he answered dryly.

"I was wondering … Do you still want more than one child or is Scorpius enough?" Harry inquired and there was an queer shine to his eyes.

"I wouldn't mind another child, no," Draco spoke slowly after a moment of silence. "Why? Do you want to try for another baby?"

He wouldn't mind trying again if he had to be honest. After Scorpius was born, they had looked up contraception charms as they hadn't wanted another baby so soon after Scorpius. The only downside to those charms was that they had to be casted every time they were about to make love, but it was preferable to having a second child so soon after Scorpius. They had decided to first settle down decently, get used to a life without danger and work on their studies before they would attempt to have another child.

Draco would say that with Harry working as a Healer and him part time studying as a Potions
apprenticeship and part time helping Severus brew potions to sell, a second baby would be welcome now. He didn't want the age difference between Scorpius and the other child to be too big after all.

Harry licked his lips and his foot bobbed up and down, causing Draco to become wary. "What would you say if I told you I'm pregnant again?" he asked apprehensively.

Draco blinked, not certain whether he had understood it correctly. "I – I'd ask how long already," he replied and stilled.

"Would you be angry?"

"Angry?" A sharp bark of laughter escaped him and he felt Harry's wide eyed gaze on him. "Why the hell would I be angry for that? If anything, I would be happy!"

Harry's lips quirked into an odd smile and he pulled something out of his pocket. He held up a small vial containing a midnight blue liquid.

A very familiar liquid despite the fact that Draco hadn't seen it in five years.

"I have been unwell lately and I took the test today," Harry said softly and his hand trembled slightly. "I'm two months pregnant."

"You – you're serious. You're really pregnant?" Draco asked shocked and his ears seemed to ring faintly.

Harry nodded silently, biting his lip.

Draco stood up and strode towards Harry, wrapping him up in a hug as soon as he could touch him. "That's amazing, Harry!" he laughed and pressed several kisses against Harry's cheeks. He pulled back to stare at the dark haired man, whose cheeks were flushed. "You're really pregnant? We're really going to have another baby?" he couldn't help but ask to be certain.

He wasn't dreaming now, right? He hadn't fallen asleep at his desk? Harry was really carrying another baby?

"Yes, we're going to have another baby, Draco," Harry smiled excitedly and a single tear escaped his eye.

"I'm so happy; you don't know how happy I am right now," Draco babbled and kissed Harry deeply, pouring all the love he felt for the man into the passionate kiss. He was rewarded by a pleased moan and arms going around his shoulders, pressing him closer.

Fuck, they were going to have another baby. Harry was pregnant again.

He pulled back, leaving the both of them rather breathless, and pulled Harry's sweater up, baring his stomach. His stomach which housed their second child.

He pressed a tender kiss against the – for now at least – flat stomach. "Hey there, I'm your papa," he murmured and despite knowing he wouldn’t feel the baby kick for another couple of months, he couldn't help but kiss the skin again.

When he looked up, he was met with a teary gaze.

"I was afraid you would be mad," Harry whispered in a smothered voice. "That you wouldn't want this baby."
"Why on earth wouldn't I want this baby?" Draco asked confounded.

"Because it's not planned."

"I don't care whether it's planned or not. I want this baby; you do too, right?"

Harry nodded with a wavering smile.

"Then we're good. We're going to keep this baby and Scorpius will have a brother or a sister in seven months." Draco rose up and their mouths met again in a tender kiss. "I love you so much."

"I love you too."

"Granger said that Lovegood left a present behind?" he murmured, letting his hands slip underneath Harry's loose shirt. The baby gave another kick when he softly pressed down with two fingers.

"Ah? Yeah, it's on the kitchen table," Harry replied smiling. "It's a pink unicorn doll; a present for the baby," he chuckled.

"Can we assume from that that we are going to have a girl?" Draco asked cautiously.

His husband turned around to face him completely and his eyes glittered excitedly. "Remus discovered the gender today. We're going to have a girl, Draco," he announced delighted.

"That's fantastic news!" Draco grinned and couldn't help but kiss him thoroughly, ignoring the presence of the other people around him.

They were going to have a daughter; their own little girl.

"Papa, you're home!"

They broke apart when their son came running to them and Draco ruffled his blond hair. "Hey Scorpius, have you been a good boy today?"


"Yes, they were very good assistants," Harry chuckled.

"That's good to hear. You've been very good, boys," Draco praised the two small boys, who preened under the attention.

While the two boys cajoled Lupin into playing a game of tag with Black, Draco slipped his arms around Harry again, feeling him lean back against his chest.

At this moment, surrounded by his family, it was hard to believe that almost six years ago they had been fighting for their lives, barely surviving.

But against all odds they had survived. They were here now, together, safe. They had a beautiful son now and soon their daughter would arrive.

When Draco had developed his plan to have Harry join him in his House, he had not foreseen that this was the future he would end up getting.

But he regretted none of it.
They were finally able to live their lives as they wanted and Draco was intent on living his to the fullest.

Together with Harry and their children.

Love truly conquered everything.

Chapter End Notes

AN2: (I suck at writing endings, forgive me guys *sweatdrops*) This is the end of the story, guys. For the ones interested, I posted a oneshot in Sirius' pov, called Following Tradition, which will expand on a scene which briefly appeared in the previous chapter.

For the last time in this story, please leave your thoughts behind in a comment!

And just for the heck of it: what was your favourite moment in this story? :)

For now I say farewell, but I hope to see you all again in my future stories!

Cuddles

Melissa

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!