Pilfered Progeny -- Stolen Dreams

by HPFandom_archivist

Summary

by SisterGryffin_SisterSlytherin

Harry and Draco have been bonded for many years. They want a family desperately, and have gone to extreme measures to conceive, all to no avail. Even the aid of potions concocted by famous Potions Master Severus Snape could not help them succeed. Why, then, are children showing up with unmistakable Potter and Malfoy features?

WARNING: Contains same-sex pairings, male pregnancy. Rape and Suicide are intimated.

Disclaimer - The main characters of this book are the exclusive property of J. K. Rowling and belong to her fantastic wizarding world; I'm just visiting with them for a bit. Set Post-Hogwarts and Post-Voldemort era.

SHAMELESS PLEA - WE LOVE TO READ YOUR REVIEWS! WE READ EVERY ONE OF THEM - WE LOVE TO HEAR YOUR OPINIONS....!
Note from SeparatriX, the archivist: this story was originally archived at HP Fandom, which was closed for health and financial reasons. To preserve the archive, I began manually importing its works to the AO3 as an Open Doors-approved project in August 2016. I e-mailed all creators about the move and posted announcements, but may not have reached everyone. If you are (or know) this creator, please contact me using the e-mail address on HP Fandom collection profile.
A Walk In the Park

Draco Malfoy strolled alone through the park, listening to the sounds of the children at play. He paused a moment to watch a group of teenage boys as they ran about on a blacktop court, trying to put a ball through a hoop. He grinned softly as he watched, trying to figure it out. Was it the muggle version of Quidditch, perhaps…? So many things these muggles did still didn’t make much sense to him even though Harry had tried many times to explain them. He turned to continue on when the ball flew out of their control and bounded his way, ending up at his feet.

“Hey! Hey mister!” One boy called, moving to the edge of the cement slab they were playing on. “Can you toss our ball back?” All the boys were standing, looking over at him.

Draco picked up the ball and tossed it back with a grin. “Here you go kid.” He answered and then continued on his way.

He came to the edge of the open park where the trees were allowed to grow freely, and a stream ran through the park interspersed with footbridges here and there to allow the patrons of the park to access the other side of the park. Draco didn’t even have to pay attention to where he was going; his feet knew which bridge to cross to get to the little island with the big weeping cherry tree on it. He paused in the center of the footbridge to glance down at the water that passed below him. The creek, usually slow and meandering, was running much higher than normal. The warm weather they’d all enjoyed the past few days had definitely made a change in the flow of the water; the fast current caused little whitecaps along the banks as it swept along. The center of the stream seemed to be moving much slower, which Draco knew meant the current underneath was very strong. Some of the banks had been eaten up by the water, and there were areas where the grass of the park overhung like little cliffs with very little dirt underneath. The runoff from the melting snows in the mountains, no doubt… that water would be awfully cold.

He moved along on his way, getting back on firm ground and soon arrived at his destination. This was a special place. Their special place… A muggle park was the one place in the world where Draco had been spent the happiest and most cherished moments in his life. Draco smiled at the memories as he parted the blossom filled branches and slipped between them to the sheltered place underneath. He spread out a blanket and set down his picnic basket then sat down as well, taking a moment to enjoy the sweet fragrance of the cherry blossoms and savoring the memories. Here, in the heart of a muggle park, under this weeping cherry tree was where Harry had first asked him out. This was where Harry Potter had first kissed him… This very spot was where Harry had first made love to him, that spring night twelve years ago…

It had been such a perfect night… Harry had taken him to the theater to see the Phantom of the Opera, then they had gone out to a late dinner and dancing. Harry had been so charming that night… Draco hadn’t wanted the night to end as they had strolled through the empty moonlit park.

They had ended up here under this very tree… Harry had been so tender and so loving… Merlin; he had treated Draco as no other ever had. He treated his lover as if he had been a precious thing, one to be worshipped and loved forever. Harry had completely won Draco’s heart that night… and there would never be anyone else in his life now except for Harry.

Draco sighed, allowing his gaze to drift over the park around him, though it was partially screened by the branches. He hoped to catch a glimpse of the one longed for… Harry had been gone for three weeks this time. Three long, lonely weeks… but he would be home soon.

They had been married for eleven years now, but to Draco it still felt like yesterday. The newness
and the special feelings he felt for Harry had never faded. Draco’s eyes landed on a young couple snuggling as they pushed a pram with their baby down the park’s path. Harry had always longed for a large family. They had tried and tried, but it just didn’t seem to be in the cards for them… After the second year of no results, they had turned to potions which Draco had brewed specially for the purpose of assisting in pregnancy. Draco had become pregnant twice, but he had lost both of those babies in the first trimester. After the second miscarriage Draco had taken ill, and Harry had called in Severus Snape. Following several scans, Severus told them that Draco was intolerant to the potions and to continue to use them could be fatal… they had nearly given up on their dreams of a family.

Harry had suggested they start looking into muggle adoptions so they could finally be fathers and Draco had been considering the possibilities. Around that time Hermione Weasley had approached them, telling them of her work at the medical clinic. She said she was helping couples unable to bear children of their own do exactly that. She described a new procedure that they were doing at the clinic and she was deeply involved in the development of the procedure. She had taken the muggle process and adapted it magically; a mixture of wizarding and muggle science that was still quite experimental… Draco at that point had been willing to try anything.

Three more long years followed of ups and downs, tears and frustrations. Finally, they had told Hermione that enough was enough and they were not going to torture themselves anymore. Together they had decided that they would go ahead with an adoption. They had filled out all the paperwork and gone through the interviews and exhaustive background checks. They had done everything they could to prove that they would be good fathers, and now they were on a waiting list. Magical children were so seldom available… if a child’s parents were killed it was the duty of the godparents to care for the child. If godparents were unavailable then it was the duty of the Lord of the bloodline to take the child under their personal protection and guidance. No honorable wizard would ever turn a child of their blood out.

Draco smiled softly as he relaxed, waiting, one hand idly drifting to the slight bulge hidden by his wizard’s robes. He had given up, not even thought of trying any more… and as it usually does, fate stepped in and their miracle had finally happened without any planning. He had been sick for a week, horrible retching morning sickness that had him unable to keep water down, much less any type of food. Nothing had helped him to feel better and he’d been tempted to go see either the medi-wizard or Severus Snape… as a last resort he had brewed the potion to test himself for pregnancy. He brewed it three more times before he finally was convinced of the positive results. Even then, he couldn’t bring himself to tell Harry that he was pregnant… He couldn’t bear to see that pain in Harry’s eyes again; and he wasn’t sure if either of them could bear it if they lost another baby.

But now he was past the point of danger he had never passed before with the other babies. They had all been lost in the first twelve weeks of pregnancy and he’d passed that with no problems or signs of trouble whatsoever. The mediwizard had assured him that the magic about his baby was very strong and the child was healthy and hale. He had gone as far as to tell Draco that even if the unthinkable did happen and he miscarried again, this baby would be able to survive with wizarding medical care. Today would be another special day under this tree… he planned to finally tell Harry that he was to be a father.

A soft giggle brought Draco out of his memories and planning. He blinked and turned to see a little girl standing peering at him through the branches of the weeping cherry tree. “Why, hello there…” he smiled at her. “Aren’t you a pretty girl?”

She pushed aside the branches and stepped inside the shelter of the tree, smiling shyly at him. Dark ringlets framed a little heart-shaped face and eyes… eyes as green as Harry’s gazed back at him with shy interest. A girl of three, perhaps four years old to judge by her size; she was wearing a flowered sundress with a yellow ribbon in her hair. She had clearly shucked off her shoes somewhere for she
was barefooted, her pretty little toes covered in dirt. In her hand she held a half-dead, drooping bouquet of ragged wildflowers. “Uh-huh…” she agreed shyly.

“Where’s your mum…?” Draco asked, looking around curiously. No one in the park seemed to be looking for a little girl, nor paying any attention at all to where she was.

She tilted her head slightly, her smile fading just a bit. “My mummies are in Heaven.” She replied. “Where’s your mummy?”

Draco smiled. “She’s at home with my father… I’m Draco. What’s your name…?”

“I’m Angel.” Her smile returned, lighting up her little face. She held up one grubby hand, extending five fingers. “I’m this many… I had a birfday…”

“You’re five…?” Draco said and she nodded enthusiastically, proud of herself. She didn’t look her age at all… “My, such a big girl… Who are you here with, Angel?” He asked.

The girl looked back at the basketball court and pointed. “David.” She answered.

“Is he your big brother…?”

She shook her head, frowning. “No… he don’t like me.”

“Why ever not…?” Draco asked.

She shrugged, looking down. “He says I’m not an Angel. He says my mummy should have named me Devil ‘cause I am one…”

“What…?” Draco asked, shocked.

Angel looked around quickly and furtively, and then looked back at Draco. She grinned and moved closer to him to stand at his side, holding out the drooping wildflowers to him. Draco watched as the withered petals unfurled and the flowers became whole again.

Draco took the offered flowers with a smile. “My, you are a special little angel…”

She giggled and turned, scampering off again, slipping off through the curtain of drooping branches and flowers.

“Should I be worried, my Dragon…?” A teasing voice, the one he’d been longing to hear, spoke up just behind him. “I’m gone a few short weeks and you’re taking flowers from pretty girls…?”

“Harry!” Draco surged to his feet and Harry pulled him into his arms, kissing his husband, letting him know in just that one embrace just how much he’d missed him.

“It’s been far too long my Dragon… I’ve missed you…” Harry murmured.

“Welcome home…” Draco said, kissing him again. “You’ve been gone too long…”

Harry held his husband close, inhaling the familiar musky scent of his beloved. “I hate when they send me out on these damned trips…”

Draco smiled at him. “You’re home again. That’s all that matters…” he said, gazing at him lovingly. “So, are you hungry? I’ve brought all your favorites…”

He chuckled softly. “You’re spoiling me, Draco Malfoy.” He accused, stroking his cheek tenderly
before they moved back to the blanket.

“Only the best for you love.” Draco moved to serve Harry; pulling out a chilled bottle he poured Harry a glass of wine. He sat back then, nibbling a piece of fried chicken then pouring himself a glass of tea. “How was your trip? Did everything go well?”

“Merlin, it was boring.” Harry sighed. “We got everything done, but it seemed to drag on forever… I’m so glad I’m home. I don’t give a damn what they say, next time I’m taking you with me.” He said firmly, and Draco chuckled. A comfortable familiar silence settled between the two, simply enjoying each other’s presence and nearness as they enjoyed their shared picnic. Harry finally noticed what his beloved was wearing and it bothered him. “Draco…? Why are you in robes…?” He asked with a faint frown. “Did you have to go to the ministry today…? They had better not still be bothering you; I swear…!”

Draco laughed and interrupted quickly to soothe his husband’s quickly increasing ire. “Do you honestly think the Minister of Magic has the guts to even LOOK at me after the last time you got hold of them…? Oh no; I’ve not heard a single word from any of them at all…”

Harry looked mollified. “Good. They’ve got no right to say or do anything. You’re mine and that’s that. So why the robes…?”

Draco shrugged. “They’re comfortable.”

“Perhaps they are, but they’re not exactly common dress in a muggle park.” Harry chuckled softly. “They probably think you’re a priest or a monk or something…”

“A monk…? Me?” He laughed.

Harry smirked teasingly. “That’s probably what they think. Uncle Vernon used to say ‘Clothes make the man’ and he was right… most muggles tend to believe what they see.”

“Maybe that’s why no one has bothered me.” Draco smiled. “Would you like some more? I’ve cheesecake for afters…”

“Mmm… some more of that potato salad, perhaps…” he said, reaching for the bowl. “Did you cook all of this…? It’s fantastic…”

“I had help.” Draco admitted. “I like cooking for you.” He was rather proud of the food that he had produced this time with very little help.

“Your cooking is getting better by the day… and you never cease to amaze me, Dray…” he leaned over to kiss him tenderly. Draco returned the kiss, running his fingers through Harry’s dark hair and gazing at him lovingly when the kiss ended. “So, love… who was your little girlfriend…?” Harry asked as Draco sat back to serve him more of the potato salad.

“She said that her name was Angel… she’s such a pretty little witch.” Draco smiled.

“She’s a witch…? Did you speak to her parents?”

“No; she said her mothers are dead. I was worried because she was out here on the island all alone. No one seems to be watching over her…”

“She’s just a little girl… she’s here all alone? That river is high and really wild…” Harry frowned, concerned.
“Well, she did say that she was with someone playing at the ball court, but she said that he thought she was a devil.” Draco scowled. “Harry, what does that mean…? What is a devil…”

“It’s a creature of pure evil.” Harry replied. “Muggles believe in evil and good, and they are embodied by angels for good and devils for evil… they believe in heaven and hell and all that…”

“And someone is keeping her, even though they believe she is this evil thing…?” Draco frowned. “That doesn’t sound like the kind of a home that a child should live in…”

Harry frowned as well. “Merlin… it’s like the Dursleys all over again… but she certainly seems to be happy…”

“She is such a sweet child; and older than I thought she was… she wasn’t fearful or shy at all…”

“Maybe she’s muggle born and her brother’s jealous.” Harry suggested. “That was the problem between my mother and my aunt…”

“I still don’t like it.” Draco frowned. “She’s a very pretty little girl and in my experience horrible things can happen to pretty little girls…” he gazed about, trying to catch a glimpse of the little dark-haired girl among the kids playing but he wasn’t able to spot her. “I couldn’t help but notice her eyes, they’re so pretty and nearly the exact same color as yours…”

“Well, love, I’m afraid there isn’t much we can do. She may have a fine family… not all muggles are as bad as the ones I was unfortunate enough to be related to…” Harry sighed. “It’s just sad that there are children out there unwanted by their own families, and couples like us who want a child are rejected because we’re not a ‘proper’ family…”

Draco took Harry’s hand, kissing it. “You are a wonderful godfather to Teddy… and also to Ron’s little Rosie, Harry. You’ll be the best father to our son…” he smiled, placing Harry’s hand over the slight swell of his stomach.

Harry was stunned; he stared at him, wide eyed, a million thoughts racing through his mind. “Dray… you mean…?” he whispered.

“Yes, Harry… we’re having a son.” Draco confirmed.

“But…” Harry’s fear was clear in his eyes; the last thing he wanted to do was lose his husband.

“It’s okay, love…” Draco reassured. “Healer Dylan said I’m just fine and the magic is strong with this baby… We’re going to finally have our family…” he kissed Harry lovingly. “We’re going to have our son…”

Harry ran his hand slowly over the bulge, taking a moment to let it sink in. “Seriously…? He’s… he’s all right…? Merlin…!” At Draco’s nod, Harry hugged him tightly. “A son… our son…!” he said, finally allowing himself to feel the joy of the situation and it bubbled forth in his enthusiasm. Draco chuckled as he hugged him back.

“He’s healthy and very strong…” Draco assured.

“How far…? How soon…?” Harry asked. “And how long have you known…?”

“I’ve just reached fourteen weeks.” Draco responded. “I didn’t want to worry you, Harry… I wanted to wait. I had a hard time believing it could be true, and then I couldn’t bear the thought of losing another…”
Harry pulled Draco into his arms. “Are you sure you’re all right...?” he whispered.

He laughed. “I’m fine, Harry…”

“Just... all that time, they said it was killing you to even try anymore...”

“It was the potions I was taking that I was having the reactions to...” Draco said reassuringly. “I’m absolutely fine this time beloved; my healer said that we’re both very healthy...” he laughed.

“When can I talk with him?”

“I’ve an appointment next week...”

“And you KNOW I’m coming with you, right?” He kissed him again, all thoughts of anything but Draco and the baby driven out of his mind.

“Of course, love; I wouldn’t have you anywhere but at my side...”

Harry’s eyes sparkled as he caressed the rounded swell of Draco’s belly. “I’m so happy... I feel like I could fly... it all feels like a dream...”

“Welcome to my world, love.”

He chuckled, and then reached for the food. “You need to eat more...”

Draco laughed. “That’s not what my healer said... it seems my fondness for sweets is my downfall...”

“You and your desserts... more GOOD food, love. Vegetables, fruits, meats, pasta...”

“But Harry, Cheesecake with fudge sounds so good right now...”

“A bit, perhaps; but you need to eat healthy too...”

Draco nibbled Harry’s neck teasingly. “Are you planning are going to feed me...?”

Harry chuckled, taking the comment as a sexual one. “Dragon, it’s the middle of the day in a crowded park. I’ll feed you later.”

Draco laughed, feeling that everything was finally all right in their world. “Oh, yes, you’ll do that for certain lover...”

“But... but only if your healer says it’s all right...” Harry said voice soft.

“I already spoke with him; he says it’s perfectly safe for us to make love.” Draco smiled.

“Well in that case...” Harry kissed him. “Let’s go home.”

“An offer I’d never refuse.” He said, his wand appearing in his hand. He gestured and the picnic basket packed itself up. Harry rose, helping Draco up and taking up the basket himself. “I can’t wait to tell Hermione and Ron...” he grinned, his arm about his husband.

“I told them you were going to be home tonight... Ron is actually in town this week, you know.” He commented, parting the branches of the tree so they could slip out of its concealing branches.

“I’d rather they came over tomorrow anyway for dinner...”
“Tonight is all ours.” Draco agreed. The two strolled off at a leisurely pace, enjoying simply being together and the knowledge that there was going to finally be a baby, after all their years of trying. The sounds of happy children squealing with laughter and delight as they ran about and played in the park drifted about them. Everything seemed perfect…

“I’ve always loved this place…” Harry sighed.

“Our most important and precious moments have been spent in this quiet little muggle park…” Draco smiled, arm in arm with his lover as they strolled. “I wanted to be sure to tell you here…”

Harry smiled, strolling about the small island with Draco once before turning toward the bridge. “Oh… did you hear…? Ron’s had some good news, finally… He may get to play for his favorite team, the Chudley Cannons. They’ve been sending scouts to watch him play…”

“Oh?” Draco said. “It would be wonderful if he was picked; he’s been in the minor leagues long enough. Blaise would love it if Ron was on his team… I don’t see how he and Hermione make it on his salary, even with Hermione working in that clinic…”

“Hermione won’t discuss their budget; they seem to be doing all right over all… they don’t seem to be struggling at all, honestly… I suspect Granger has gotten a raise or something…” Draco mused.

“Say… how would you feel having Blaise and Charlie over this weekend? We can ask if they would like to be godfathers to our little Dragon.”

Draco stopped, looking up at Harry, startled. “Really…? What about Ron and Hermione…?”

“Well, Blaise is your best friend.” Harry grinned. “He’s a brother to you, isn’t he? It’s only right…”

“Yes, but… I don’t want to cause a rift between you and Weasley…”

“Ron will always be a part of our child’s life; he’ll be fine… he’ll be a good uncle for our son.”

“That will be simply fantastic…” Draco sighed happily as they began to walk again. “Blaise will be beyond ecstatic…”

Harry chuckled softly, his mind wandering a bit back to their school years, deciding it wouldn’t hurt to let Draco in on the secret he’d been keeping about his best mate all this time. “Did you know, Dray…? Ron had a bit of a crush on Blaise back in school…”

“Did he…?” Draco grinned.

“Yeah… He had it really bad for him in sixth year and I thought that perhaps he would go for it. But you know Ron; anything sexual comes up and he turns red and runs for the hills. He wouldn’t have had the confidence it needs to go and say anything to Blaise. Then Hermione caught his attention and she was much more accessible to him, so he just let it go…”

Draco chuckled. “Well, to tell you the truth, Blaise held a torch for Ron back then, and he still does… but he’s mostly given it up. He’s quite satisfied with Charlie, I think…”


Draco laughed. “Blaise was rather fixated on your best mate for several years but never said anything to him. Guess it was just as well…”

“Yeah… hey look.” Harry gestured. “There’s your little friend…” Harry pointed towards the
footbridge where a large dog was chasing the squealing curly-haired girl.

“She seems to be having fun now…” Draco smiled, watching for a moment as they approached the bridge.

Angel squealed and dodged to the right without paying any attention to where she was going. Draco and Harry watched as everything seemed to slip into slow motion; the girl stepped right onto the bank of the swollen creek where the bank had been chewed away by the swollen river and there was only a thin overhang… it gave way under her slight weight, crumbling out from under her feet. The dog skidded to a halt barely avoiding following the girl into the water. With only a tiny gasp of fear, the girl plunged into the raging icy waters and vanished from sight.
“Angel!!” Draco gasped, starting to run toward the water. He had to help; he had to do something…! His hand slipped inside his robes, grasping at his wand.

Angel surfaced for only a moment, struggling briefly, and then slipped quietly under the water once more. Harry threw down the basket and his coat as he surged past Draco. Harry had no hesitation at all; the child must be saved. His shoes fell off his feet as he ran and selflessly dove into the freezing waters after the girl. Several muggles began to move over, hearing the commotion. Maddeningly, none of them moved to assist; they all seemed to be petrified as they watched.

Draco rushed to the bank, feeling panic rising. “Somebody help him!” He demanded, outraged at their lack of assistance. He raked his eyes accusingly over the onlookers but his attention was drawn back immediately to the water as Harry surfaced several yards downstream a moment then went back under, struggling to get to the child. Draco ran down to keep up with him and the surging current.

Before Harry surfaced again, one of the boys playing ball leapt in to help. He looked around frantically, unsure of where they were and Draco began to fear that he might have lost his love when Harry surfaced again, the limp and frail little body held firmly in one arm. The boy cried out and swam toward him and together the two struggled to get to the bank. The onlookers, Draco included, hurried along to keep pace.

Harry and the teenager found plenty of willing hands ready to pull them up onto the shore and up onto solid ground. He laid Angel down carefully, looking at her with great concern. He’d never taken any classes on First Aid; he had no idea what to do…

“Call an ambulance Milly…! She ain’t breathing…!” The boy gasped, shivering and sinking to his knees, arms wrapped tightly about himself. A girl of fourteen had a cell phone in her hands and she nodded quickly, her face reflecting fear and panic and horror as she spoke with the emergency operator and in a shaking and high-pitched tone, told them what had happened.

The muggles now began to crowd around them; Harry found himself wrapped in an old wool blanket. Another one was draped over the sodden girl who lay pale and unmoving. A young woman pushed her way to the front, insisting that they bloody well better let her through, because she was trained in CPR. She took control of the situation without hesitation, much to Harry’s great relief. She immediately began giving Angel small puffs of breath to get oxygen back into her body, one breath for every fifteen depressions of the girl’s heart, counting loudly as the crowd looked on in horror and some in fascination.

Draco wrapped his arms about Harry, tears on his cheeks as he watched the woman work. “Come on Angel… come on…” he whispered over and over. Harry, shivering increasing as the cold of the water seemed to sink into his very bones. He held tightly to Draco, watching as nothing seemed to help. She just wasn’t breathing… and it seemed like forever before the wail of a siren was finally heard approaching the scene.

Both police cars and medics pulled up; the crowd moved back to allow the stretcher and the emergency workers through with their bags and medical equipment. Several police officers spread out asking the people there about the child and who she was.

“Her name is Angel…” Draco whispered.

“Should’ve stayed where I told you, little brat…” Harry heard a young male voice mutter. He looked
up sharply to try to spot who had spoken but no one was talking anymore.

“Come on Angel… come on, baby…” the paramedic muttered, working on the girl. Suddenly she began to choke, coughing up water. The crowd gave a cheer and the child was laid on her side to allow her to cough up the remainder of the water.

“We need to take her, right now.” The paramedics lifted the girl onto the stretcher.

“Where..?” Draco asked.

“Are you her father?” An officer asked, eyeing him and Harry.

“No, but…”

The officer immediately ignored him, and looked at Harry who was shivering. “You better go too; they need to check you out. I’ll have several questions for you at the hospital.”

“Of course, sir…” Harry was still shivering as he got to unsteady feet, trying not to lean on Draco. The paramedics stepped forward to assist both Harry as well as the young teen who had bravely followed Harry into the water over to the ambulance.

“Harry…?” Draco started, his eyes frightened; he did not want to be separated.

The ambulance driver smiled reassuringly. “There’s not enough room for you back there; you can ride in front.” The medic said. “Don’t worry; we’ll take good care of him. He’s a hero…”

“Can’t I ride with him…?” Draco asked in a small voice.

“He’s my legal partner…” Harry said to them.

“Not much room in back…” the paramedic considered.

“Hey, you know I’d love to ride up front… I’ve always wanted to.” The teen spoke up immediately, much to Draco’s relief. “He can have my spot…” he told the driver, then looked at the blonde wizard. “I know how it is; I’ve got a boyfriend too.” He grinned at them and winked as he slipped out of the back of the ambulance. The medic laughed and agreed with the seating arrangement.

“Thanks.” Harry grinned at the boy as Draco slipped into the cramped back compartment of the ambulance as well. Someone handed in Harry’s jacket and even their picnic basket just before the doors were slammed shut. They pulled away quickly, sirens blazing, headed for the hospital.

Draco sat cuddled next to Harry, whispering a warming charm on the blanket. “Are you okay, Harry…?” he asked softly. “I was so worried… I didn’t dare do anything to help you…”

“I’m all right… sorry I worried you; I wasn’t thinking, lover… I just saw her go in and I had to do something, I had to help her…” he said, stroking Draco’s hair soothingly.

“I’m glad you did.” Draco murmured as he watched the female medic in the back with them tend to the little girl who lay on the gurney. Angel looked so tiny, her pale face shocking white against the sodden black curls of her hair. “Will she be okay…?” Draco asked in a voice slightly tremulous. “Oh Merlin, please let her be okay…”

The medic glanced at him. “We’ll do all we can… the only good thing about that river is that it was so very cold; that actually is to her advantage…”

“It is…?” Draco asked, confused.
“Cold slows the body’s functions… keeps it from needing air, helps the body to survive much longer without it. She has some water in her lungs, but she’s doing fairly well…” she said reassuringly as the ambulance bounced, arriving in the hospital parking lot. A police car pulled in behind them.

The girl was hurriedly unloaded first, her gurney popped to its wheels and rushed past the automatic sliding doors of the hospital’s emergency room entrance. Two hospital attendants moved out with wheelchairs and as Harry and the teenager got carefully out of the vehicle, finding their limbs refusing to cooperate as they were trembling with cold. The attendants would have nothing other than both of them sitting in the wheelchairs to be wheeled inside.

Draco clung to Harry’s hand nervously looking around as they were taken directly into a room. Harry was given a hospital gown to wear so he could shuck off his wet clothing. He gratefully changed out of his cold wet clothing and into the gown, but still made a look of distaste. “Ugh… I like being dry, but these gowns… I hate them. Always open on the back…”

“Reminds you of the clinic…?” Draco smiled, but he was very worried. Harry’s skin was red all over from the cold…

Harry chuckled softly. “Yes… why do they all have to open like this on the back? Makes no sense to me…”

Draco grinned softly at him. “I like it… it shows your sexy bum, love…” he commented as Harry sat on the table.

“We’ll find something more suitable for you when the baby comes…” Harry said, tugging at the back to cover his backside self-consciously.

“I will most certainly not be having our son in a muggle hospital, love.” Draco whispered teasingly to him, standing close beside him and slipping an arm about him.

“True…” Harry said, kissing him tenderly.

They were waiting only about ten minutes when a nurse came in to take Harry’s vitals and get a sketchy medical history for the doctor, who entered just as she was checking his temperature and blood pressure. Draco watched them work on Harry, bemused; he could do the same things with a simple wave of his wand… they had to use at least five contraptions to get the same results. He much preferred to be a wizard…

Harry answered their questions, and then smiled reassuringly. “I’m fine, really… absolutely frozen, but fine. How is Angel…?”

“Angel…? Oh, the girl…” The doctor smiled. “She’s resting comfortably. You saved her life, young man. Another few moments under that water and she surely would have been beyond our ability to save her…”

“Can we see her?” Draco asked.

“I’ll see what I can do.” The doctor assured.

“I think the cops need to speak with you… I’ll fetch you some spare scrubs, too. I know these hospital gowns are horrible to wear if you’re going to be walking around anywhere at all…” the nurse added as the doctor moved out first.

“Thank you.” Harry smiled with great relief.
“Anytime…” she winked at him and moved out as well. She returned in only a couple of minutes with a set of hospital scrubs. The pattern was a bewildering collage of neon representations of cat faces. “Sorry about the colors; I hope these will do, sir. Once you’ve dressed, the police would like to speak with you…”

“These will be fine, thank you.” Harry smiled at her.

After she left he changed quickly, finding the scrubs garishly comical but actually rather comfortable. “Ah, much better…” he sighed.

Draco laughed. “Well, it will do for now.”

Harry gave him a soft, lingering kiss in the privacy of the room, and then they moved out to find the police to speak with. He didn’t have to look very far; the nurse’s station was only a few steps away and two police officers were standing there at the desk, one leaning on it and clearly flirting with a pink-cheeked nurse. “You needed to speak with me…?” Harry asked the first officer as they approached.

“Oh, yes… I’m Officer Patterson, and I just have a few questions… your name…?” he said, producing a notepad and pen from his pocket.

“Harry Potter.”

“Mr. Potter, can you tell me what happened today in the park…?”

“Yes, of course. My partner and I were enjoying an outing in the park… we were on our way home when we spotted the little girl playing with a dog. The riverbank gave way and she fell in…”

“Did you see anyone with her?”

Draco chose to speak up now. “No… I spoke to her a few moments earlier in the day; she told me her name was Angel. When I asked her about her parents she said her mum was dead… and she was with some boy…” he frowned, trying to recall precisely. “Dan…? No, not Dan… David. But I never saw him.”

“No one has come to claim her yet; we’re trying to contact her relatives, but that seems unnecessary since you are here, sir…” He began; he’d made the same connection Draco had unconsciously done as he studied Harry.

“No, I’m not her relative; I have no siblings and no children…” Harry replied. “Not yet, anyway. I’m expecting one soon. We’re on the adoption lists but so far nothing… why would you ask…?”

“That little girl is the spitting image of you, sir…” he frowned, looking at him critically now. “I would have sworn she was in your immediate family…”

“We would be blessed if she were…” Draco sighed.

“Excuse me, Officer Patterson…?” A nurse moved up to them. “Olivia Masterson with Social Services is here. She needs to speak with you; it seems that little Angel is one of her foster kids…”

“Oh, all right… thank you, sir, for your service to the community.” He smiled at Harry, then moved away.

“Foster kids…?” Draco turned to his husband. “Harry, what did he mean by foster kid…?”
“A foster child, lover, is a child who has no parents, or their parents are in prison or unable to care for them for some reason; and they are living with another family who is paid to take care of her…” Harry explained.

“Harry…” Draco began. “Harry, do you think her parents are magical…? Perhaps we could be her new family…”

Harry smiled softly. “We’ll see, Dray… first, let’s see what we can find out about Angel. She may not be available for adoption, love.”

“But she’s so beautiful Harry… it would be amazing if we could be the ones to give her a forever home, the poor thing…”

Harry pulled Draco into his arms. “We will see, love…” he whispered, not wanting to get his hopes up. “Come on; let’s see how she’s doing…” Draco nodded and followed Harry to see if they could find out about the girl. The hospital was fairly busy but everyone was close-mouthed about the situation, telling them that they could only divulge information about the child to family.

The two finally spotted Officer Patterson down one of the hallways. He was standing beside one of the rooms with a window, speaking in quiet tones to a dark-skinned woman in a burgundy business suit. Her hair was reddish-brown, caught up in a smart and professional-looking bun at the nape of her neck.

They moved down the hall toward the pair, and Harry spoke up before they were close enough to eavesdrop on whatever private conversation the two were having. “Excuse me…” he started and the two looked at him; the woman looked irritated but the officer curious. Harry directed his next question to the woman. “Sorry to interrupt, but are you the person in charge of little Angel…?”

The woman eyed him, frowning slightly. “I am Ms. Masterson, her case manager, yes.” She answered, glancing into the window to the room. Angel lay in the bed, sheets pulled up, and face pale against her dark hair and she appeared to be sleeping.

“How is she? May we see her…? What is going to happen to her? It seems to me the family she was with was extremely neglectful…” Harry asked in a worried tone.

“Excuse me, sir, but I cannot discuss her case with you.” Ms. Masterson interrupted quickly before he could go on. “She is a ward of the state. Although we do appreciate your efforts to save her life, that action does not give you rights to delve into private details, sir. Her case is confidential.”

“I understand.” Harry assured. “Can you at least tell me if she is up for adoption? If she is I would appreciate it if you could at least give me a number to call; I assure you that we that we will be in to apply for her custody…”

She frowned at him. “Have you even begun the process for an adoption or is this some spur-of-the-moment thing?”

He smiled softly at her; he understood her reticence. After all; he’d only met the child this afternoon… “We’ve been approved for adoption. We’ve been on the waiting list for two years to get an infant. Angel isn’t an infant, but she really does need a family that will love her and care what happens to her…”

“My Harry is a detective.” Draco smiled. “You can check the records; we’ve been waiting a long time…”

She eyed them a moment, then produced a card and a pen from an inside pocket of her blazer.
“Here’s my card… Angel’s case has been a rather troublesome one…” she said, writing a number down on the back. “This number is a direct line to my office, and the reference number for Angel’s case if you can’t get me right away…” she said, handing Harry the card. “There was no abuse, but the neglect that this accident reflects has spurred an investigation into the appropriateness of her current foster parents for fostering any further children. I understand at this point the doctors are projecting that she’ll be here at the hospital for at least a couple of days…”

Harry smiled warmly at the woman, who seemed to be accepting of their seriousness regarding the child. “Thank you; I assure you I’ll be in touch first thing in the morning to set up an appointment…”

Draco smiled softly. The events of the day seemed to be far less ominous now and he felt his good mood returning to him. “Come along, Harry… We need to get you home and cleaned up…”

“Yes… a nice hot shower sounds heavenly…” he agreed, moving back down the hall with him toward the nurse’s station and the exit. Harry’s attention was called by one of the nurses to attend to the paperwork to get him discharged before they could leave. He moved over to proceed to fill out what they needed.

Draco glanced around at all the equipment, as foreign to him as a cat with four heads. None of it was anything at all that he was familiar with; he’d much rather visit St. Mungo’s than this place. Certainly St. Mungo’s was a weird place to go, but it felt of healing and cleanliness… this place felt of misery and smelled strange, the odors of antiseptics and disinfectant nearly overpowering. He hesitated, seeing a familiar dark-haired wizard gliding up the hallway with a clipboard in his hand. He left Harry at the desk signing the paperwork, moving to intercept him. “Uncle Sev…?” he murmured softly.

Severus looked up from his clipboard, first surprised, and then quickly his expression turned to a scowl. “Draco…?”

Draco wasn’t fazed by his godfather’s scowl; he’d often seen him with that same expression on his face when he was attending Hogwarts. “Uncle Sev, what are you doing here…?” he asked.

He snorted as if the question itself was impertinent. “I work here, Draco. I have every right and reason to be here. So why in the world are YOU here…? And why in Merlin’s name is Harry dressed as an intern…? Tell me he’s not on staff here…”

“No… Harry saved a little girl’s life today.” Draco countered proudly. “She fell into the icy river and he couldn’t let her drown…”

“Still can’t resist being a hero…” Severus drawled, eyes lowering to his chart. “Victim aged five, female, submerged in an icy river… and all in a muggle park. You couldn’t use magic.” Severus mused thoughtfully. It could have been a mess to clean up if Draco had given in to his impulse and used his wand. “I was just on my way to adjust her medication…”

“Take care of her… I think she’s a very special little girl…” Draco smiled.

Harry, done with his signing and paperwork, saw them and moved over to join them. He was as surprised as Draco was to see the potions master here in a muggle hospital. “Sev…? You work here…?”

“Indeed. I specialize in pharmaceutical analysis and treatments.” He answered coolly.

Draco smiled fondly at his godfather. “I’m certain she’ll be just fine and recover quickly with you tending to her.”
“I do all I can for all of my patients, Draco.” He drawled with a hint of impatience to his tone.

“Severus, can you and Remus come over for supper tomorrow…?” Harry asked.

“I shall see if Remus has plans.” He answered in the same cool tone, promising nothing. “Now, if you will excuse me, I have work to do…”

“Goodnight, Uncle…” Draco smiled. Severus moved on his way without deigning to respond.

Harry put his arm about Draco. “Ready to go home, Draco…?”

“More than ready… I can’t stand the smell of this place…” he complained. Harry laughed softly as he led Draco away.
Draco gazed down at the photo of little Angel McCallister. A recent photo of the girl was paper-clipped onto the first page of her case file, which was horribly thick. Draco shuddered inwardly, thinking every page of that folder was another incident, another family... the poor little thing. He wished more than life itself that he could have this child in his life; she was so sweet, so beautiful...

“So Ms. Masterson; why do you say her case is a troubled one...?” Harry asked as he and Draco settled into the rather worn chairs in the caseworker’s office. “Was the child traumatized in some way?”

“No, not that we have uncovered... she came from a very loving birth family. It’s a tragedy, really. Her birth mother was killed in an accident while the girl was in daycare; there was a fire at their home and her mother was trapped in the flames. She never had a chance to escape. We couldn’t find her father, or any relatives. Little Angel has gone from home to home but had a difficult time fitting in; regardless of the fact that she is very sweet and wants to be loved... she is...” she paused a moment, considering the proper term. “Gifted, I would call it...”

“Gifted isn’t a problem; we can certainly deal with that.” Draco smiled.

Ms. Masterson paused, glancing at him. “None of the foster homes have been able to cope with her... there were often accidents in her presence that no one could explain. I don’t think she intends to do anything, and she’s always remorseful... I was sure this would be her final placement, too. This was a good, strong catholic family and they have a strong track record of dealing with children that other families were unable to cope with...”

“Cope with...? They told the girl that she had been named incorrectly; they called her a devil.” Draco said softly. “Angel told me that while we were in the park.”

“Good heavens, such superstitious nonsense...!” she frowned. “She’s such a sweet, tractable child...”

“How is she doing...?”

“She was transferred last night up to intensive care, but they say she is actually doing quite well, considering what has happened to her. She has the best doctors available to tend to her, I assure you...” she answered

“Please; do keep us informed as to what’s going on. You can’t call too often.” Draco said softly, his gray eyes holding his worry for the child.

A soft smile crept across her lips. She rarely saw such interest in a child anymore... “Of course, Mr. Malfoy... If you wish, I can arrange a visit for you at the hospital...”

“Yes, please...” Draco said.

She pulled the file to her side of the desk, and closed it. “Well, I took the time this morning to pull your file up on the system, and I find it is in much better shape than most of the foster parents that get approved... your documents are in perfect order, the home study is completed and your financial reports are excellent. I see no reason to delay getting the paperwork started. If everything checks out, I see no problem in fulfilling your wishes...”

“Thank you, miss; you have been very helpful...”
“That is absolutely perfect…” Harry smiled contentedly, rising and shaking hands with the woman. “Thank you, Ms. Masterson. It was a pleasure, ma’am… Ready love…?” He asked Draco.

“Yes… I need to stop at the market if we’re having dinner guests…”

“Very true… have a great day…” Harry called to the woman as they moved out. “So what are we having…?”

“Hmm… Remus likes meat, and Sev is partial to pasta… what would you like, Harry…?”

“I have everything I need right here.” He said as he rested his arm about Draco’s waist.

Severus Snape stood beside the bed that Angel lay in, eyes closed, looking much like the angelic beings she was named for.

“This poor little girl…” the nurse murmured as she adjusted the intravenous line.

“Indeed.” Severus agreed in a quiet tone as to not disturb the girl. “But she has shown vast improvement…”

Emerald green eyes blinked sleepily and looked confused a moment, then focused and gazed up at Severus. “Hi… Are you gonna take me home with you…?” she asked in a raspy and drowsy voice.

“Not I, child… but someone does want you…” he said quietly to her. “If everything works out, you might have finally found your true home…”

“Hurts…” she whispered.

“Is there anything you need, doctor?” The nurse asked, turning to leave.

“Not at the moment; I need to check her charts.” He answered, moving to the foot of the bed and picking up the chart that was hung there, lifting the page and studying the writing there.

“Call me if you need me.” She said, and Severus nodded absently, paying her little attention as the nurse walked out.

Angel gazed at the cart outside her door. A pitcher of ice water and juices was on the cart, along with glasses of ice for the patients. Her throat hurt so bad; she needed a drink… Angel glanced at Severus, and then held out her hand toward the pitcher. It floated toward her. Severus’ eyebrows rose as he noted the movement, and he reached out and caught it by the handle, turning his eyes to her questioningly.

She looked up at him and flushed, looking down. She wasn’t supposed to ever let anyone see; that other doctor man who her last foster mother had made her talk to said it was bad to ever let anyone see… “Oh… I’m sorry… am I in trouble…” she asked timidly. The man in the black smock, pants, and white physician’s jacket smiled at her and with a wave of his hand he shut the door. She looked at the door, then at him, her eyes wide. He could do stuff too…?

“You will never again be punished for being what you truly are, child.” He poured her a cup of ice water, placing a straw in it. He used the bed’s hydraulic lifts to help her to gently sit up, and then assisted her to drink by holding the cup for her and guiding the straw to her lips. “There you are… is
“Yes… thank you mister…” she murmured, relaxing back on her pillows. “You can do it to… but… but they all told me it was bad. Even David said I was evil because I could make things happen…”

“There are choice words I would like to use to describe them, but you are much too young to hear them, child. Simply put; this ‘David’ is a muggle fool.” Severus pulled out his wand and slowly guided it over her prone body. The wand glowed different tones according to the health of the body it ran over and Angel watched in complete fascination. Severus nodded, slipping his wand away up a sleeve and he noted her trying to see where he’d put it. “This explains why the medicine they are giving you is not working as well as it should… you are quite a powerful little witch… I’ll have you better in no time, now…”

“You… you do it too…?” She asked timidly, gazing up at him. “Are you a bad man…?” her eyes flicked to the dark fabric of his scrubs.

“That’s utter nonsense someone has taught you, little one. Magic itself is not bad.” Severus soothed in an uncharacteristically gentle tone. “It is special, as you are special. Who was your mother, child…? Do you remember her name…?”

She looked sad and sighed softly. “Mama is gone…”

“Yes, I know. But she will always be with you, in your heart… What of your father?”

“I don’t have a daddy, mister… Mummy Sandy said the doctor put me in mommy’s belly…” she said softly. The foster parents had told her that talking of her mother wasn’t proper either, as she had not had a father…

“Mummy Sandy…?”

“I had two mummies but… they wouldn’t let Mummy Sandy keep me and she had to go away…”

“And why is this…?” Severus asked, pulling three phials from inside his white jacket. Angel watched curiously as he poured the two into a third, mixing them thoroughly by swirling the different colored liquids together until they became a uniform sky blue.

She eyed his jacket; it wasn’t all that loose but he had all that stuff inside and it didn’t show…? “The worker-lady said she wasn’t really my mommy but she was…. And they said she couldn’t be with me anymore…”

“I want you to drink this down; it will let help you to feel much better and it will help you to sleep deeply. You are safe here, little one; you will be much better when you wake…” Severus helped the child to sit up enough to drink the potion, and then laid her back on her pillow and powered the lifts to lay her back down. “Go to sleep now, little one…” he whispered, stroking her dark curls. She sighed and her bright green eyes fluttered closed, and the girl drifted peacefully off to sleep.

Snape gazed at the child a long moment. “Who are you, little Angel…?” He murmured softly to himself. “And why do you remind me of Potter…?” He mused, and then shook himself. He was sure that Potter would be pressing forward on his adoption, and he knew what he must do to assure that it would be possible. He took the child’s limp hand and used his wand to extract a sample her blood to find the child’s hereditary background.
Harry moved up behind Draco, wrapping his arms around his love, snuggling up behind him and just enjoying holding him in his arms, inhaling the sweet musky scent of his husband. “Harry…” Draco laughed softly. “I’ll never get the cake done if you keep this up…”

“I can’t help it… I just can’t keep my hands off you…” he chuckled softly, kissing his neck.

“It’s your fault; you’re the one who left me for three long weeks…” Draco pouted at him. His pout didn’t last long, turning into a smile as Harry’s hands slipped down to caress his rounded tummy.

“You know I’d have rather been here with you… I didn’t have much of a choice; I was needed, baby…” he murmured.

“Well I guess so…” Draco gave a small smile that faded as he prepared to ask the question that had nagged at him all day. “Harry…? What do you think father will say about the baby…?” Draco asked.

“Honestly I really don’t know… I can only hope he’ll be happy. But you know how he feels about me, love…”

Draco sighed. His father had never truly forgiven him for bonding with Harry. “I know… I can’t stand what he’s been doing to you, how he treats you…”

“I’m used to it; I’ve come to expect it, really… but it certainly will be nice to be able to shove his words down his throat. He’s always making it a point to say something disparaging about my manhood, accusing me of not being man enough to father a child…”

Draco snorted with derisive laughter. “A lot he knows. He didn’t father a child with another man, did he?” he countered, spooning the cake batter into the pan. “But you’ve always been more than enough man for me, and mother loves you. I’m delighted with what I have…”

Harry dipped his finger into the batter. “Ummm… sweet, just like you…” he grinned, licking the batter off.

“Get out of that, you!” Draco scolded, chuckling.

“Your cooking is too delicious, Dray…”

“You have an incurable sweet tooth.” Draco chuckled as he put the cake in to bake.

“And you are the sweetest of all.” He grinned, looking around as the doorbell rang. “Hey… how long do you think it will take before someone notices…?” Harry asked as he moved to answer the door.

“I guess we wait and see.” Draco grinned softly, moving to join him.

Harry opened the door. “Hey Charlie, Blaise; come on in guys.” He greeted, stepping back to allow in his guests. Charlie Weasley was tall and still quite slim, face bearing several scars from his continued work as a dragon tamer. His red hair was trimmed rather short as it had been scorched by a dragon only a week ago, but he had an easy smile and a relaxed attitude. Blaise Zabini, his bonded of over ten years, had only grown more handsome over the years. He had allowed his hair to grow out nearly to the middle of his back and it was sleek and wavy. His face was finely chiseled and beautiful, and his eyes drew others to gaze into them… He was beginning his third season as a chaser with the Chudley Cannons, a world cup-level Quidditch team. They showed promise for taking the cup for the first time in several decades, if only they could flesh out a proper team.
“Hey Harry…” Blaise moved to give Harry a hug. “Welcome home…”

He hugged the dark-skinned wizard back fondly. “It’s good to be home, believe me… you want a drink?”

“Not for me, I have a game in the morning.” Blaise grinned, strolling in, Charlie following with a smile. “Oh, hey, have you heard about Ron…? I think they’re going to be scouting him; I heard my coach talking…” he said as they took a seat on the couch.

“He is being scouted.” Draco confirmed, moving to sit as well. “I hear it’s your team; the Chudley Cannons…”

Charlie chuckled softly. “Ron must be excited; the Cannons have always been his favorite team…”

“More than just excited…!” Harry laughed softly. “Ron’s over the moon about it. He dropped me a line and from what I understand he’s practicing every free moment…”

Draco moved to answer the door when the bell rang again, leaving the three to do a bit of catching up. At the door were Severus Snape and Remus Lupin. Severus was wearing his normal outfit of darkest black robes. Remus wore a fairly nice looking set of robes in a pale tan that greatly contrasted Severus and made him seem less pale and careworn. “Uncle Sev; Remus, come in…” he smiled, stepping aside to allow them inside. “Can I offer you a drink…?”

“Just fire-whiskey will be fine…” Severus agreed.

“Tea for me…” Remus agreed as he followed Severus inside.

Draco moved to fix Severus his drink and Remus went to get his own. He rarely allowed Draco to wait on him regardless of the situation. “Tonks couldn’t come…?” Draco asked.

“No, business at the Ministry again…” Remus smiled softly, a little regretfully. “I often wish she hadn’t taken that post as head of the Auror department… we’ve left Teddy with his grandparents tonight…”

Severus waited for a pause in the conversation as he settled himself into a chair. “I’ve taken the liberty of tending to the little girl you rescued personally, Harry… I’m having her transferred to St. Mungo’s. She is actually a powerful little witch, but muggle medicines aren’t helping her very much…” Severus said, though he had his eye on Draco as he spoke.

“Will she be all right, Sev…?” Draco asked softly.

Severus was quite satisfied to see that Draco was not hurt by the girl’s appearance, and seemed interested in her recovery. “Oh, yes; she will be fine… Her magic causing conflicts between her body and the medications they were giving her… the muggle medication was actually harming her. St. Mungo’s will help her with her problems. They have plenty experience with that type of problem. Whoever her parents are, one of them was a powerful mage.”

“How do you know she wasn’t muggle born?” Harry asked.

“She is controlling her magic.” Severus answered simply. “Children must be taught to control their magic, and this obviously requires at least one wizard or witch to have contact with her. Most wizarding children don’t begin controlling their magic consciously until 7 or 8; muggle-born don’t begin until they start school where they gain instruction.”

Harry sighed sadly; that was the last thing he had wanted to hear. “In other words, I haven’t a
prayer... she probably has family that will take her.” He said softly.

“I will determine that in the morning when the potion matures and I can add her blood to determine her heredity. Since she was already in the muggle foster system, I find it doubtful that she had any living family members…”

“And you’re much cleverer than any muggle.” Remus smirked at his mate, causing Severus to glance at him and roll his eyes.

“But... what if the father didn’t know of her...?” Draco asked.

“A child with that sort of power...? I doubt it. But I will be able to tell you, one way or the other, in the morning.” He agreed.

Harry kissed Draco tenderly. “It will be okay, baby... don’t worry…”

“I was just hoping... she’s such a precious little girl...” Draco murmured softly, his tone of sadness unmistakable. He looked up when a buzzer sounded. “Oh... oh, the cake...” he rose from Harry’s side, moving off into the kitchen.

“He didn’t have to cook anything complicated...” Remus sighed with a grin, rising to his feet. “I’ll just go and give him a hand...”

Harry watched him go. “So, how’s it been going with you and Remus...? Have you set a date yet...?” He asked Severus quietly.

Snape paused, and then shrugged in a non-committal manner. “Not yet... but he often speaks of preferring weddings in the fall... perhaps we will set it this fall, maybe next.” He said, sipping his drink. “Our work always seems to get in the way. A formal bonding isn’t truly necessary; after all he is already bound to Nymphadora…”

“Don’t wait too long; he may get away from you.”

“It is not my intention to let him escape me.” He responded.

Draco pulled the cake out of the oven. “I hope everyone is hungry... by the time supper is over, the cake will be ready to frost...”

“You didn’t have to go to all this trouble for us, my boy... you cook such outstanding food every time we come over...” Remus closed the oven for him. “A simple dinner is fine...”

Draco smiled at him. “But I like to cook for everyone...”

“I put on five pounds every time we come over...” he chuckled softly, gathering the dishes to set the table.

“I hardly think you should complain about that... you seem to lose ten pounds between each of your visits. You’re little more than skin and bones as it is...”

“The nature of my life doesn’t allow me to gain much...” he said with a shrug, placing the sliced fresh bread onto the table beside the condiments already set out there. “Although between you and Snape, I don’t see how I don’t weigh a hundred pounds more...”

“Supper is nearly ready; let’s call the boys.” Draco said as he pulled the stew off the stove. Remus went to the door and called the others in.
“Great; I’m starved.” Blaise said as he rose, pulling Charlie up. “Com on, lazy; up ya get…”

“Hey, I work hard…!” he complained, though he went willingly along with him, an easy and amused smile on his face. Severus and Harry followed them into the kitchen.

“This smells wonderful, Dray.” Harry smiled as they all took their seats about the table.

“Indeed…” Severus agreed. “It seems you’ve been enjoying learning to cook; you seem to be putting on a few pounds…”

“Severus, be nice!” Remus scolded.

Draco just smiled, not put off in the least. “A few pounds, but nothing out of the ordinary…” he said agreeably, serving the meal.

Blaise stared, the truth of the situation dawning on him. “Merlin… Dray… are you pregnant…?” he murmured.

“Yes, I am.” His smile glowed forth, as did Harry’s.

“How…? When…?” Charlie asked. “Are you… I mean, are you okay…?”

“I’m absolutely healthy, the baby is perfectly fine, the magic is strong and my personal mediwizard says that everything is proceeding according to normal standards…”

“Oh, Dray…! After so long…!” Blaise’s eyes sparkled with joy for his friend. “You two must be thrilled…! When are you due?”

“About six months…” Harry began.

“Less, actually… less than five months, one week and two days…” Draco said, serving himself.

“You are past the danger period… I am very pleased for you…” Severus smiled. “Who is your mediwizard? Did you go back to that clinic that Hermione works at…?”

“We gave all that up months ago.” Draco answered. “I’ve been seeing Mediwizard Kilpatrick and he’s the absolute best. He came highly recommended; he specializes in male pregnancies. He’s been monitoring my health very closely.”

“I will brew any potions you need.” Severus said immediately. “And if you don’t mind, I would like a chance to speak with this mediwizard you’re seeing…”

“Not at all…” Draco said with a chuckle. “He’s expecting you, actually…” he admitted; he had told the mediwizard that his uncle would be calling the moment he found out.

“Have you informed your father?” Severus asked as he buttered his roll.

“No, not yet…” Draco sighed. “I’ve been putting it off…”

“Oh, don’t tell me he’s been after you about Harry again…” Blaise asked with a frown.

“Why would he do any different…? I will never be good enough for Draco.” Harry shrugged; he was used to it after twelve years and he wasn’t about to let his father-in-law’s attitude put him off now.

“He’s a dunderhead…” Charlie stated firmly. “…and a nitwit…! You two belong together.”
Harry laughed at his friend’s comments. “I dare you to tell him that…”

Charlie rose to his feet with a grin, completely unafraid to go right ahead and do so. “Just watch me; you ought to know by now that I’m not afraid to speak my mind… he’s no worse than a Hungarian Horntail protecting its eggs…”

Blaise reached out and caught Charlie by the waistband of his tight-fitting jeans and pulled him back down to his seat. “Calm down, Dragon Tamer... Eat.” He said firmly.

He smirked, conceding to his husband’s wishes. “I’d do it, you know…”

Harry chuckled softly. “Eat, you big oaf.”

Charlie chuckled and started to eat, clearly enjoying his meal. “This is really great, Draco; you’re definitely developing your skills in the kitchen…” he complimented.

“Molly gave me this recipe.” He smiled.

“Mum is amazing; that goes without saying, mate… I’m sure you’ll give Harry a proper middle-aged paunch before long…” Charlie grinned.

Remus chuckled. “I’d like to see that; Harry’s never had extra weight on him…”

“I prefer to see them on Draco… he’s gorgeous.” Harry smiled.

“Merlin, Draco; I swear I always overeat when I come here…” Charlie sat back, rubbing his stomach.

“Don’t worry, lover. I’ll work it off you.” Blaise smiled lasciviously.

“You’d better. A fat Dragon Tamer is also known as a delicious dragon SNACK.” He smirked.

“Shall we have our cake in the sitting room?” Draco asked. “It would be more comfortable…”

“I would love to, Draco, but I am afraid that I have a potion that I need to get back to…” Severus rose.

“Dinner was wonderful; thank you for having us.” Remus smiled formally, rising as well.

“At least take some cake home, uncle…”

“We’ll take it.” Remus assured. “Go on ahead, Severus. I’ll be along in a moment or two…”

As the others said their goodnights, Remus moved with Draco into the kitchen to get the cake to take along home with him. The others moved into the living room to relax over dessert, drinks and a movie.

“Before we start the movie…” Draco said softly, taking his seat beside Harry and gazing at his best mate. “I do have something quite important to ask you, Blaise…” he said softly.

“Fire away, mate.” Blaise said, settling in beside Charlie.

“I want you… both of you… to be our son’s godfathers.” He said firmly.

“What?” Charlie’s eyes were wide.
“Seriously…?” Blaise asked also, as surprised as his husband.

“No, we’re just having a lark… of course, we’re serious.” Harry laughed.

“That’s a big responsibility…” Charlie started, and Blaise swatted at him.

“Ignore him, Draco; we’re proud and thrilled and honored that you chose us…! We’d never even imagine turning you down…!” He smiled, clearly enchanted by the idea.
Fidelity Proven

Lucius Malfoy scowled as he looked over the paperwork. His contact within the Ministry of Magic, Wendell Wilkins, had contacted him when the adoption paperwork had reached his desk. When would Potter ever learn? It would be a cold day in hell before Lucius allowed him to adopt a child; any child at all. His bloodline would not be sullied by a child not born of his own son. No matter the bloodline; he would find a family member to take the child Harry desired even if he had to CREATE one!

“Is there a problem, Lord Malfoy…?” Wilkins asked, looking concerned. He was quite the willing tool; that was for certain. He was easily more venomous in his pursuit to maintain pureblood families than Lucius himself was…

“That useless beast that my son has attached himself to has the audacity once to again apply to adopt a child…” he sneered. “I need to have a paternity charm performed upon her at once…”

“Naturally… we must ensure all familial claims are followed up on; blood lines must be maintained…”

“I shall see to it myself.” Lucius stated turning to firecall Severus.

Severus looked down as he heard the clearing of a throat to see his house elf, highly nervous, ears trembling. “Master Snape… Lord Malfoy calling by firecall, he… he seem very angry, master…” she added nervously.

“He is not angry with you, Missy…” Snape reassured her. “Go now; fix me some coffee, will you?” he said, and then moved off into his study as the house elf vanished. The fireplace was burning brightly; the coals had coalesced into the haughty visage of Lucius Malfoy. “Lucius.” He greeted coolly.

“I see by the paperwork that another orphaned wizarding child has been located?” Lucius commented.

“Yes; it amazes me how quickly you find out about these things…” he commented, studying his nails a moment before he looked back. “The child appears to be muggle born… her parents died and she has been in muggle foster care. I met her at the hospital…”

“Appearances are often deceiving… squibs try to live as muggles but they still belong to our world. Every avenue must be explored to place the child properly…”

“What do you want, Lucius?” Severus asked a bit wearily. He didn’t have time for this; he had to complete his potion, then had rounds at the hospital before nine...

“To ensure that wizarding bloodlines are restored to their proper families. What else would I desire, Severus?” he asked in a cool, measured and overly reasonable tone.

“Lucius, you and I have been friends for quite a few years… I think the need for dancing about the subject for political propriety is unnecessary, don’t you?” Snape asked pointedly.

Lucius half-smiled; he had known Severus wanted to get directly to the topic, but sometimes it was just entertaining to irritate the slightly younger wizard. “True, very true… Very well; I require your unrivalled skills in potions making to determine the child’s genealogical background.” He answered, using the most flattering language he could muster.
Snape rolled his eyes at the compliments. He didn’t need to be told he was good at what he did. “I only found the child yesterday evening; I’ve already begun the potion.” He said with a tired sigh. “You know that I know how to do my job.”

“I’ve never doubted you for a moment, Severus.” Lucius smiled, and then his expression showed disapproval as he heard Remus call to Severus from another room. “I suppose I should let you go… it sounds like your bitch is home and he’s in heat…”

“Finis!” Severus snapped and the fireplace flared, sparks flying up the chimney and soot billowing out as the coals were shattered out of their magical formation, falling into a much more normal random pattern. How dare that sanctimonious bastard say anything at all about his life…!

Remus moved into the study, worry showing in his soft golden eyes. Moving to his mate, he slipped his arms around the darkhaired man’s slender figure, feeling the tenseness within him. “What’s wrong, love…?”

Severus called upon years of practice stifling his emotions and quickly did exactly that; he quelled his anger so Remus got no more than a glimpse of it. “Nothing… Nothing that truly matters.” He said, pulling Remus into his arms.

“The coffee is ready… come and have breakfast with me before you go hide in your potions room then leave me for the entire day…” Remus gave him a teasing smile.

“All right… just let me tend to this one last step and I will join you…” Remus gave him a soft kiss then moved out to let his husband work.

Severus watched him go, then moved through the connecting door to his lab to complete the potion to identify little Angel’s familial relationships. When properly brewed, the potion would reveal the parentage and even grandparents of any person tested… she did not need to be with a wizarding family for the potion to be effective. Severus tipped the vial of blood into the potion, stirring the required ten strokes before he extinguished the flames to allow the potion to cool for exactly two minutes. He summoned a parchment and laid it out on the table, weighting down the corners with potions bottles. Taking a silver dagger, he dipped it into the potion in the cauldron and allowed five drops to fall onto the parchment as he recited the spell. There was a flash of golden light and the blood-colored potion spread out rapidly to form a tree on the paper, the child’s name and parent’s names inscribing themselves upon the document.

Severus picked up the paper and stared in disbelief. “Oh… bloody hell…!” he whispered.

Remus looked over as Severus moved into the room. “All done…?”

“Yes.” He sighed. “At least for now…” he sat, taking up the cup of coffee that Remus poured for him.

“So you know who the girl’s family is…? Is she of wizarding stock?” He asked, serving up some coffee cake. Severus handed the parchment to Remus wordlessly. The sandy-haired man looked at it, expression going blank with disbelief and shock. “No… Severus, this can’t be…” he whispered.

“It’s correct, Remus. I haven’t had a false reading off that potion in years. That parchment tells the truth.” Severus said firmly. “Harry Potter is the biological father of that girl.” He said with a scowl.

“Could the blood have been tainted…?” Remus ventured.

“Not possible. I took the sample myself.”
“But…how can this be…”

“Obvious, isn’t it…?” Severus asked darkly. “It seems that Potter has betrayed my godson.”

“Harry wouldn’t…! He loves Draco…” He murmured, shocked.

“What other explanation can there be…? I know Potter wanted a family, but why leave this child in the care of others? It makes absolutely no sense…”

“They’ve been trying for so long, Sev… if Harry knew he had fathered a child anywhere, I can’t believe for a moment he would have abandoned her into the Muggle foster system. Draco would not have cared if it was Harry’s child; he would have loved her…” Remus said, shaken by the possibility.

“Then it must have been a one night stand… on one of those trips no doubt, where he leaves Draco alone for weeks.” Severus sneered. “Leave Draco home alone and go have a fling with some whore!”

“I still… I can’t believe it…” Remus shook his head, refusing to believe that Harry, no matter how desperate, would ever do such a thing. “We have to tell him before we file that…” he said, tossing the paper on the table as if it was repulsive.

“Lucius will have a field day with this…” he sighed. “Let’s go and see what he has to say for himself…”

Harry emerged from the bathroom curious, hearing the floo activate, his toothbrush in hand and dressed only in red sleeping pants that hung low on his hips. He looked surprised to see Snape and Remus. “Good morning… is something wrong…?” he asked.

“Where is Draco?”

“He’s still in the shower… Severus, what’s wrong?” Harry asked.

“Care to explain this, Potter?” Snape growled in barley restrained anger, shoving the parchment at him.

Harry took the parchment and opened it, gazing at the results of the test with pure disbelief. He’d seen this genealogical tree from Severus’ potions before… he knew what it was but he couldn’t understand why his name was above Angel’s. “What the… this is a lie…!” He whispered, looking up at Severus, confused. “It isn’t true!”

“I made the potion myself!” Snape snapped irritated. “Convenient, Potter, adopting the girl… it clears you of all guilt for the affair that created her!” he sneered.

“I didn’t!” Harry said instantly, offended by the accusation. “I’ve never had one single affair! I’ve only been with Draco, I swear it!” He looked like he was in shock, which was now turning to anger. “Isn’t Draco’s father and all his acidic comments driving enough of a wedge between us?! Why the hell are you doing this, Snape…? I thought you were our friend! I thought you gave a fuck about Draco!”

“Doing what…?” Draco asked, looking very worried as he moved out, a towel around his waist, showing the swell of his belly. “What’s going on…?”

“Draco… perhaps you should sit down…” Remus said, concerned for the pregnant young wizard. There had been enough heartache for him…
“I’m fine, Remus…” Draco said dismissively, looking at the dark-haired wizard for the answer. “Uncle Sev, what is it? What’s happened…?”

“It appears that your husband has been unfaithful.” Severus answered bluntly, face clearly reflecting his anger.

“What?!” Draco gasped. “No! Harry wouldn’t, not ever!”

“I swear I didn’t, Dray…!” Harry said, glaring at Snape with acidic anger now, crushing the paper in his hand. “Severus seems to have decided that your father was right about me all along and is trying to force us apart just like your dad!”

“Severus there are ways we can prove his innocence…” Remus began.

“Bring it on! Bring it all on, I have nothing to hide!” Harry challenged angrily. Draco wrapped his arms about himself, pale and shaky. Harry threw the parchment aside and put his arms about his husband. “Draco… baby…” he whispered.

Severus summoned a calming draught. “Draco, Drink!” He ordered, moving to him.

“It’s a lie…” Tears rolled down Draco’s cheeks. “Harry wouldn’t, he wouldn’t…”

“Drink!” Snape ordered in a tone that brooked no argument. “Calm down; we will find the explanation…” he said soothingly as Draco shakily downed the potion. Snape picked up the discarded parchment.

Harry shot Snape an accusing, angry glare. Severus had done this to his husband…! Damn him for coming here tonight and fucking up the entire day…! He said nothing more, though, too concerned for the health of his mate to risk venting any more anger. “It’s a lie, Draco, I swear it. I swear it on everything I love; it’s all some weird twisted lie…” Draco took the document from Snape with a trembling hand, smoothing it out. He ran his fingers over Harry’s’ name, tears rolling down his cheeks. Harry glared at Snape furiously. “Legilimens me!!” he demanded. “Right now…! Give me veritaserum! Anything! I have absolutely nothing to lose by being asked for the truth!!”

“Oh, I fully intend to, Potter.” Severus produced a vial of the potent truth potion out of his robes, his tone an angered growl. It was his last vial but he truly didn’t care. He’d give Potter the lot to ensure his godson knew the truth.

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“Ask your fucking questions, you greasy old bat…!” He growled challengingly.

Severus glared back at Harry with narrowed eyes, carefully observing every nuance of his movements as he began to ask questions. There was no doubt that Potter had imbibed the entire potion and was fully under its effects. “Tell me, Potter… the name of every person you have ever slept with.” He asked bluntly.

Harry didn’t avert his eyes, the answer coming quickly to his mouth. “Once – and one time only – I had sex with Ginny Weasley when I was sixteen and I’ve told Draco all about that. My only other lover has been Draco Abraxus Malfoy. THERE HAVE BEEN NO OTHERS!” He growled. The speed and clarity of the answer was very convincing; he obviously was not fighting the potion.

“And affairs? Flings…? Sexual relations…?”
“I have never. Not once. Not ever have I even imagined cheating on my husband. I have not even kissed another person in anything other than a brotherly manner or as a son. I have not touched another person with any kind of sexual intentions!” His voice remained strong, fluid and even, indicating he spoke the truth willingly.

Snape handed Harry the antidote, frowning slightly. How was this possible..? “There must be a logical explanation… the hereditary potion does not lie…”

“It doesn’t matter…” Draco trembled in his husband’s arms; his loyal and loving and faithful husband… “Harry was never unfaithful to me…”

“I apologize.” Snape said quietly.

“You’ve upset him.” Harry growled softly, eyes narrow as he glared at Snape, holding Draco close to him. “I don’t think that I need to be around you right now; I know damned well I won’t be civil. Get out.” He snarled quietly at the dark-haired wizard.

“Get some rest, Draco. I’m sure your father will see you tomorrow. He has already demanded to see Angel’s lineage.”

“He can’t take her from us now…” Draco whispered. “According to that paper she’s ours… my father can’t take her…”

“No, he cannot take her from Harry; this is true… but he could try to annul your marriage due to adultery.”

“What…?! That’s insane! I never…!” Harry spluttered.

“I know, Harry. But do you really think that will stop Lucius?”

“I’ll take more veritaserum. I’ll go before the entire Wizengamot, I don’t give a fuck what I have to do. I’m telling the truth, and I will do what it takes until everyone knows I’m telling the truth!! I was NEVER unfaithful to my husband!!” Harry insisted.

“I just wanted you to be informed. Take care of Draco.” Severus said softly as he turned to go.

“Just get out! You’ve upset him twice now!” Harry snapped, holding his husband close. “I won’t leave you Dray. I swear it. Never…!” he murmured soothingly to him as Snape and Remus slipped away back to the floo.

“He can’t take you from me… Our baby needs his father…” Draco whispered.

Severus Snape sighed, glancing out the window at the early morning sun as he passed; barely noticing the pretty little garden for the patients was covered in blossoms this morning. So early, and he felt as if he’d already put in a full day’s work as he walked into the neonatal unit at Mercy Hospital. He had worried and fretted half the night that he had upset Draco far too much last night, and truly for no reason; there was little doubt in his mind that Potter had not intentionally done anything to create a child. But still… the girl was living proof of the simple fact. Potter was her father…

“Good morning, Dr. Snape… has it already been a long morning…?” Nurse Walker smiled at him.

“Indeed.” Severus sighed. “How is the Stock boy…? Has his breathing improved?”

“Yes, he’s been doing quite well, since you adjusted his medication…”
Snape moved over to the incubator and checked on the infant himself; the tiny boy was sleeping and breathing evenly. “Good… he is much improved… if he continues to show progress we can take him off the respirator tomorrow…” he said with a satisfied nod. “So… where are the two born last night? I heard they are barely over a pound each…?”

“Yes… but they seem to be doing incredibly well considering the fact that they are only 30 weeks old…” she led him to the back section where the twins lay in an incubator together. Snape stopped; his eyes wide and face losing a shade of color. Inside the bed were two tiny babies, miniature copies of Draco Malfoy as a newborn babe.

“Is there something wrong, doctor…?” the nurse asked softly.

Snape gathered his wits quickly. “Tell me, Miss Walker… why is it there are no names for these infants?” He asked, the cards giving him an excuse for distraction, gesturing to the cards that simply said baby girl and baby boy.

“We have no names for them at all… their mother came in to the hospital as a suicide attempt… the poor thing looked to be maybe sixteen; no one found out her name. We were able to save her babies, but she did not survive… The ambulance drivers that brought her in think she must have been raped or something equally horrible… that’s why she did it. But I guess we’ll never know…”

Snape stared at the infants. A suicide, possible rape… Lucius hadn’t been that twisted in many, many years, but… it couldn’t possibly be…! Not Draco…! These babies were much too young… it simply couldn’t be Draco… “Get their last names down, at least…” he murmured. He couldn’t shake the firm belief that these two were Malfoy children.

“That’s just it, doctor. No one knows… it’s so sad, really… I wish I could take them in, but… I’m sure they’ll get good homes…” she shrugged.

“Another foster case…” he said with a bit of distaste. He was growing irritated with the damned muggle foster care system lately. “Have the police been contacted with the mother’s photo…?”

“Yes, they were here for several hours last night; they said it was a shame the girl didn’t come in to them instead of taking her own life… the babies will be here for a while, yet so maybe they’ll be able to track down the girl’s family. She’s downstairs in the morgue for now…”

“I understand.” He said thoughtfully. “Thank you, nurse Walker….”

“Are you sure you’re all right, Dr. Snape…?” she asked, worried. “They’re doing really well, considering how horribly they had to come into the world…”

“Yes, yes, I’m fine, thank you…” he assured quickly; he didn’t want anyone to pry into anything before he had a chance to see for himself. This had to be a simple coincidence… “Just… bad memories is all…” he said, watching the babies a long moment or two longer.

“Excuse me, doctor…” Nurse Walker said as an alarm began to chime on one of the other incubators. She hurried off to tend to that baby.

Snape stepped closer to the incubator, touching the baby girl’s hair tenderly. The baby squirmed slightly, trying to turn her face toward the touch she felt, clearly tenacious in her grip on life. Snape glanced over at the nurse, clearly occupied with the infant she was caring for at the moment, and then slipped out his wand. He set up protective spells over the two tiny lives before him. The boy, who had been sleeping fitfully, settled into a much calmer sleep; his sister seemed to calm as well.

Snape slipped his wand back into concealment as the nurse started his way. “I need a blood sample.”
He said.

“I hate taking blood from tiny ones… they’re so small; I’m afraid I’ll hurt them…” she made a face.

“These two are fighters.” Snape replied. “It’s for their own good…”

“Yes, I know that, but still…”

“Would you prefer I do the draw?” Snape asked.

“Oh, no, Dr. Snape, you have much more important things to attend to…” she smiled at him.

“Just a few drops will do.” Snape assured, and then watched as the nurse quickly slipped on gloves and performed the procedure on the tiny twins.

“Shall I take these down to the lab…?”

“No need; I’ll take them down myself.” Snape took the charts, signing off on them. “I’ll get the results much faster that way.” He smirked.

“Of course, doctor.” She smiled, handing them to him.

“Thank you.” He said as he turned away. She smiled and hurried to tend to the needs of another of her tiny charges in their little protective beds.

Severus turned and walked out of the nursery, pulling out his cell phone he punched in the phone number of Harry’s office. Potter should be in the office by now…

“Potter and Zabini Detective Agency, how my I help you?” A young secretary’s voice piped over the line.

“Put Potter on the line.” Severus said shortly.

“I’m sorry, sir; Harry Potter is not in the office today. May I take a message…?” she offered.

“No.” He said flatly and hung up without waiting for her response, scowling.

“Doctor Snape!” A nurse bustled toward him. “Dr. Snape, we’ve an emergency; this child is four years old, snake bite over an hour ago; we can’t find Dr. Asen anywhere and Dr. Bulle sent me to find you…” she said urgently.

“What room?” Snape slipped his phone away, following the nurse.

Lucius stared down at the parchment in his hands, rage boiling up inside him. How dare that bastard cheat on a Malfoy?! A sneer touched his lips. Finally, that beast had done something that would allow him to do what he wanted all along… “Well, there’s no choice now, is there? That marriage will finally be ended!” He snarled.

“Lucius…?” Narcissa looked over at him by the fireside with her fine needlework. “What is it, what’s wrong?”

“Potter has finally done the unforgivable; he has fathered a child with a muggle whore!” He snarled.

“But Lucius… Draco hasn’t been able to provide him with a child… it’s completely acceptable to take a mistress, if only to provide an heir for the bloodline…” she said reasonably in a soft tone.
He glared at her, angry that she was not supportive of his bid to rid his family of the Potter brat once and for all. “A child fathered by that Potter boy is NOT of Malfoy blood!” he said acidly. “It’s not Draco’s fault that Potter isn’t half man enough to have a child with our son! Why must you constantly take the side of that black-haired cur?”

“Draco loves him.” Narcissa answered simply. “And Harry not only loves, but he cherishes our son.”

“Not enough, it seems.” He said as he lowered his eyes to the paper that he had received from Wilkins by owl only a few moments ago. “If he loved and cherished our son as much as you claim he never would have done this to him. Draco will learn to love another… Harry Potter is simply NOT good enough for our son!”

“Harry may not be pureblood, love, but he is powerful and he does love Draco. That’s really all that matters to me.” Narcissa answered, unruffled by her husband’s unreasonable anger.

He looked disgusted. “And he has you completely taken in.” he said distastefully, and then glared at the house elf that appeared just clear of his elbow.

“Letter, Master, from the Ministry…” the elf held up a silver tray with a letter upon it.

“Fix me a drink.” He growled, snatching the letter off the tray, opening it up. Undoubtedly it was a letter and an official documentation of heredity…

“It’s a blessing, truthfully…” Narcissa began, trying to get her husband to understand the beauty and the joy of the situation. “Our family is growing; we finally have grandchildren…”

“Draco needs to remember his obligations to the Malfoy name.” He said as he unfolded the parchments to see the paternity form and the formal letter from the Ministry indicating that a child had been born to the Malfoy-Potter name. His scowl deepened as he scowled at the document. “We must have a proper heir!”

“Your drink, Master…” the elf squeaked.

“The little devious bastard…!” Lucius snarled, snatching the drink.

Narcissa sighed and left him to be on his own in the room; talking to him at this point in time would do neither of them any good. Well, a mistress was nothing unheard of and as far as she was concerned, this was a miracle to be celebrated…

Severus pulled out his cell phone and dialed Harry’s cell phone number. To his satisfaction, this time he did get hold of Harry.

“Potter here…”

“Potter, we need to talk.” Snape said.

“You did your share of talking last night. Out to accuse me more…”?

“I apologized this morning; I will do it no more.” He answered tersely. “This is important…”

“Something’s wrong..? Is it Angel…?”

“No, the child is doing quite well, but I need you to come down to Mercy.”

“Draco is out in the garden; I’ll just fetch him and…”
“No, Potter. Just you.”

“He’s still rather shaken about everything you said this morning…” Harry said, glancing out the window at his husband. “Will this take long? I’d rather stay by his side…”

“Not too long, but I do not wish Draco to be present for this… at least not yet.”

Harry frowned; he didn’t like the sound of this at all. “Very well; let me know I’m stepping out…” he said, then disconnected as he moved to the door to let Draco know he would be gone for a few minutes.

Holly smiled at Severus; she was the day nurse in the neonatal unit at Mercy. “Hello, Dr. Snape… that steroid you developed is working wonders… baby girl is already off the ventilator and they both have gained an ounce…” she said.

Severus smiled in satisfaction. The medication he had provided would not have harmed muggle babies, but would have had just this effect on children of power. There was no doubt now; they were wizarding children for certain. “Very good… thank you. We’ll leave them on it for a few more days to ensure their progress, then…” he advised.

Harry stepped into view outside the nursery, looking quite apprehensive. He’d come to the hospital and they had directed him to the neonatal intensive care unit… what the hell was going on? Did they find another child…?

Snape glanced over at him. “If you will excuse me…” Snape said, moving to Harry. “I’m glad you came…” he said, pulling a folded paper from an inside pocket.

“What’s all this about?” Harry asked, eyeing him suspiciously.

“Come. I need to show you something…” Snape opened the nursery door and Harry followed him with great trepidation to the back of the room where the twins lay sleeping. “Last evening, a young witch was brought in with child. She had tried to take her own life by slitting her wrists, but she was found by muggles… they brought her here to this hospital. We did not manage to save her, but her twins survived the event…”

Harry froze, staring down at the babies, tears glistening in his eyes. They looked so much like little Andie, the baby they just lost… so tiny, so delicate… “Merlin…” he whispered, his voice breaking slightly with emotion. “Who… was the mother…?”

“Rodolphus Lestrange’s youngest girl: Syrielle.”

“Lestrange…? But she’s… she couldn’t have been older than sixteen…!” Harry murmured, one hand moving to touch the cover of the unit the children lay in. Snape noticed that his hand was trembling.

“Indeed. In fact, she was only fifteen this past summer. She would have been sixteen this year. I thought that perhaps Lucius…” he began, and then offered Harry the parchment. “Here; read for yourself. These are the results of the paternity spell.” He said.

Harry took it and opened the parchment, frowning as he gazed at the archaic looking tree, with two unnamed children and branching up as their parents were Syrielle Lestrange and… He looked up at Severus with anger and pain in his eyes. “What the hell are you trying to do?! Haven’t we had enough of this shit lately? Enough is enough already!” He snapped. “First you accuse me of fathering Angel, and now this! Have you decided that Lucius is right and we ought to never have been a couple? Draco Malfoy is NOT the father of those babies! He wouldn’t! I refuse to believe any
of this!” He gazed back at the infants; the damning proof was there in their innocent faces for anyone to see.

“No, Harry. Draco would not.” Snape agreed quietly; to Harry’s surprise he was not accusing in the least. That didn’t soothe Harry’s anger at him in the least; he was sure as fuck quick to accuse Harry but instantly assumed Draco’s innocence in the exact same situation... “That is why I called you in and not Draco. We must discover how these children came to be... how Angel came to be. You are a detective, are you not, Harry? I want the truth. I want you to use the skills you’ve developed working with Damitri Zabini to find that truth. Draco loves you, Harry, and I have accepted that. No matter what my friendship is with Lucius, I would never harm my godson by helping him.”

Harry took a deep breath to try to calm down. “All right... you’re right; something really twisted is going on here...” he looked back at the paper.

“Indeed.” Snape agreed, gazing down at the infants. “The young mother was of a pureblood family, a dark family. Why would she kill herself? I could understand why, were she pregnant by a half-blood, or a muggle... with Bellatrix as her mother that sort of pregnancy would be nothing short of an instant death sentence for the infants...”

“But Malfoy is a strong, pureblooded line...” Harry murmured.

“But Malfoy is a strong, pureblooded line...” Harry murmured.

“Not all pregnancies are by the choice of the mother, Potter.” Snape reminded. “The police suspected rape...”

“It couldn’t be rape; we both know that.” Harry said firmly, glancing at the paper that clearly and without doubt named Draco as the father. “But you’re right; women can become pregnant against their will...”

“Who would do this? And why?”

Harry shook his head and sighed. “What will happen to these little ones...? The Lestranges won’t get them will they?”

“No. Draco is the father.”

“So... Draco gets them...?” He looked at Snape again, unsure.

“Draco has blood rights over them.” Snape nodded. “Even the Wizengamot cannot change that fact and truth.”

“We can’t tell Draco yet...” Harry said softly. “Let me look into what I can...” he suggested as his cell phone rang. He glanced at it, and then tapped the button to silence it; Ron’s call could be handled later. He’d call him back when he got done dealing with all of this... “So why don’t they have names? All the other babies at least have a last name...”

“The muggles could not identify her, and no family has come forward to claim her body.” Snape answered. “They have no names to give them.”

“Are you going to tell the Lestranges about her...?”

“Absolutely not...!” Snape answered firmly, leading Harry out of the nursery.

“I’d prefer they never find out.” Harry said softly, his mind already working on possible directions for research.
“How is Draco? His pregnancy…?” Snape asked. “Why did you not tell us sooner?”

“Severus, I just found out myself the day I came home…”

“I find it hard to believe that Draco didn’t tell you.” He commented.

“Really…?” Harry asked. “I understand it completely. After all the pain we’ve been through losing the babies, he didn’t want to bring any more pain to our relationship…” he answered. “His pregnancy is past the danger point; he tells me that he has been visiting regularly with a mediwizard who specializes in male pregnancies and the mediwizard tells him that the baby is strong and healthy…”

“We need to make sure he is calm; stress is not good for him…”

“This morning’s little scene wasn’t good for him.” Harry said with a flash of anger.

“I will make some potions for him to take daily to help mediate his stress.” Snape went on, ignoring the statement and the anger as justified. He couldn’t change what he’d done.

“I want him to be able to be happy about these children… I won’t tell him yet and I would prefer it if you didn’t as well… I want to find out the truth to tell him when I introduce him to them…” Harry said, and then sighed. “Thanks, Severus… for all your help.”

“I will arrange to transfer the twins to a private hospital as is fitting to a Malfoy-Potter. I will see to their care personally. I was also told to tell you that your daughter will be ready to come home by this weekend…”

“I’ll send Draco on a shopping trip for her; that will be good for him.” Harry smiled warmly. “Draco loves shopping…” He fell silent as his phone began to ring again.

“Your adoring public can’t seem to leave you alone for a moment, can they Potter?” Snape rolled his eyes, turning away.

Harry pulled the phone out, glancing at the number; Ron again. “Adoring..?” he snorted with laughter. “It’s Ronald Weasley.” He called after the ex-professor’s retreating back, and Snape pretended not to hear as he couldn’t have cared less. Harry opened his phone and turned, heading for the door as he answered the call. “Hey Ron…”

“Harry. Um… Hey… can I… can I come over and talk a while…?” he asked in an uncharacteristically hesitant tone.

“Now’s not too good a time… I’m at the hospital right now, mate…”

“Oh, Merlin…! Sorry mate, I didn’t know; is everything all right…? Draco…”

“Fine, no worries, Draco is just fine. I was talking to Snape… he’s a doctor here at the hospital. Why don’t you and Hermione come on over for dinner tonight…?”

“I’ll come, but… but Hermione is off on a convention for work; she’ll be gone until Monday… is it okay if I come by myself…?”

“Of course, mate. We’ll take care of you while ‘Monie is gone.” Harry chuckled.

“I know I can always count on you… thanks mate. I’m tired of eating out and being a burden on mum…”
“You’re always welcome, Ron; you oughta know that by now. Hell, Charlie and Blaise are over to eat at least once a week.”

“I just don’t wanna be in the way… you two act like newlyweds most of the time…”

Harry chuckled. “Believe me, Ron. I feel like a newlywed with Draco…. Hey. Tell you what. We’ll feed you, and you bring over the afters. Draco’s been really partial to white chocolate lately.”

“That sounds like a deal.” Ron agreed. “How about a white chocolate cheesecake…? I know a shop just down the way that sells ‘em and they’re absolutely smashing…”

“Sounds perfect.” Harry smiled.

“Raspberry white chocolate or cherries…?”

“Raspberry.”

“All right, mate. See you tonight…” Ron said, and then hung up. Harry sighed and slipped his phone away as he strolled out of the hospital.
Harry answered the door later that evening to find Ron, face wind and sunburned, his hair carefully combed to be presentable, wearing his best slacks and shirt. A large pink box was in his hands. “Hey Harry.” He smiled.

“Come on in, Ron. Lookin’ sharp there… trying to steal my husband?” he teased.

Ron blushed at the comment. “As if I could…! I gotta look sharp to fit in around here…” he said, strolling in. “Let me just go drop this off in the kitchen…”

“Grab me a beer while you’re in there, would ya…?”

“Sure, not a problem…” Ron said as he moved into the kitchen. Draco looked over at him and smiled, busy putting a pan into the oven. “Oh, hey there Ferret.” Ron greeted, easily reverting to the nicknames they had called each other in school; now the names had become more of a token of the friendship that had developed over the years. “I brought cheesecake for afters…”


“So did you get signed by the Cannons…? Blaise commented his coach was considering it…”

Ron flushed, happy and proud. “Just got the news today, signed the papers this afternoon… I’m starting this coming season. Got in just in time for practice…”

“They’re getting a good player. Maybe they can win with both you and Blaise on the team…” Draco said encouragingly.

“Come on now, they haven’t done so bad…! They made the semi-finals last year…” Ron smirked, opening the sides of the pink box to lift the cheesecake out. The confection was easily three inches high and had layer upon layer of white chocolate and cheesecake all swirled together. “There… think this’ll do…?” he grinned at Draco.

Draco looked at it and sighed. “Ohhh… that looks sinful…” he said longingly.

Ron laughed, turning to set it aside and the toppings he had bought there beside it. “You know, Dray, I never thought I’d be the one to tell you this… hell, I was sure I’d be the one YOU told this… maybe you should cut back a bit on the sweets, mate. You’re getting a bit thick about the middle…”

“That’s not fat, Ron.” Harry smirked, leaning on the doorway to the kitchen.

Ron looked at him, then back at Draco. “It’s not…?” he asked, and then realization dawned on his face. “You mean…? Really…? Finally…?” his eyes lit up and he looked delighted.

Draco smiled. “You’re going to finally be an uncle.”

“Hah!” He crowed. “I TOLD Hermione it would happen if you just gave it time, you didn’t need all that muggle claptrap…! I KNEW it would happen!!” he said, impulsively moving to Draco and hugging him tight. He instantly flushed and let go. “Oh… oh, sorry, there, got a bit carried away…”

“I forgive you; this once…” Draco smirked at him. “We’re rather excited ourselves… so how is Rosie? Why didn’t you bring her tonight?”

“Hermione’s out of town at another of those mad convention things… she ought to be back in three
or four more days. She’s supposed to call tonight. While she’s gone, Rosie’s staying with mum… after all, I had tryouts today and I’m in and out so much poor Rosie, she’s not old enough to be on her own yet…. Mum’s absolutely thrilled to have her.” Ron grinned.

“She could have stayed with us; we would have loved to have her.” Draco said as they moved into the living room.

“Rosie’s been absolutely enthralled lately with cleaning and cooking magic. Mum’s been teaching her for the past three months or so and says she’s like a natural…” Ron laughed softly.

“That’s a good thing… I know your wife can clean, but I’ve seen how you live when you’re on your own.” Draco smirked, moving to have a seat.

“Oh, do us all a favor and shut it, Ferret.” Ron mock-growled. “I promise to bring her next time… at least you don’t pick on me when she’s around.”

Harry sat down, his arm about Draco. “That’ll be brilliant, because by then she’ll have someone to play with…”

Ron smiled. “Really, now…? Come on, Harry, I’m not that thick. That baby of yours isn’t even here yet and even when it gets here, it’ll be much too little for Rosie to play with…”

“Well, Ron; there’s more good news. We have a little Angel coming to live with us.”

“What?” Draco looked at Harry, eyes wide. “Angel’s ours…?! Oh Harry!” He laughed, hugging Harry tight.

“An Angel…? You finally got an adoption…?” Ron asked.

“One that Lucius can do nothing about. She’s five years old, and as sweet as her name implies…”

“Brilliant..!” Ron grinned. “Absolutely brilliant…! I think this has got to be the best night I’ve had in a while… Merlin, you two needed all this so much… she is one really lucky little girl…”

“We have to go shopping and get a room ready for her; I must have mother over to help…!” Draco said, excited.

“Of course, love. Anything you wish.” Harry chuckled.

“Hey, you can count on me for anything I can do to pitch in…” Ron grinned, returning to the kitchen. He pulled out a beer for himself and Harry, and poured a tall glass of ice water with a bit of lemon in it for Draco. He was so happy to hear his mate was finally getting what he needed to have and deserved, for so many years… Harry was going to have a real family…

“You know, Harry, mother will insist we take one of the house elves now; she’s been after us for years to have one…”

“Perhaps it will be a good idea now, with the baby coming…”

Ron strolled back in, handing his friends their drinks. “So, when will you have your Angel here? Rosie is going to be absolutely thrilled; Angel will be a little younger but someone to play with will be fantastic for her…”

“Snape said I could bring her home by the weekend.”

Ron’s smile was even more joyous. “She’s got to be one of the luckiest girls in all of England to
have you two for parents… I know Rosie adores you both…”

Draco sipped his tea; he’d not expected Ron to get it and had been pleasantly surprised. “So Ron; how’s it been going for you and Hermione…? Any plans on giving Rosie a brother?”

The auburn-haired man sighed, his smile fading. “You know, I… I’d love to, but… hell, we hardly see each other. She’s always busy at the clinic it seems. She used to skive off work sometimes when I’d come home from a trip, but lately… when I get home; I swear she works late every night. I guess I talk a lot about Quidditch, but… she only wants to talk about the clinic. And I can’t talk about that because none of it makes a bit of sense to me…” he shrugged. “She was really upset that you two gave up; she was sure they could help you have a baby.”

“I just couldn’t go on…” Draco said softly. “Not after losing Andie… I just couldn’t.”

“I understand; I doubt I’d have kept going either.” Ron murmured softly, looking a bit troubled. He hadn’t sat down yet, and was scuffing his toe on the carpet, eyes on the off-colors it was making in the pattern. It was clear that he had something he wanted to talk about but didn’t know how to breach the subject. “Can’t blame you at all…”

Harry knew his friend would work himself into a dither if he didn’t help him get the subject started. After giving him a chance and seeing it wasn’t going to happen, Harry cleared his throat. “Ron; you said you needed to talk about something when you called me earlier.” He reminded, giving Ron an opening.

“Huh…? Oh, yes… I will… just…” he glanced at Draco, unsure.

Harry half-chuckled at his oldest friend’s hesitance to speak in front of Malfoy. “You know you can talk to me about anything in front of Dray, Ron… I tell him everything anyway…”

Ron sighed and cracked open his beer, taking a deep drink. “Yeah… It’s just… hell, Harry. Something weird is going on; something… and Hermione… she’s involved but… I dunno…” he said cryptically, moving to take a seat in the chair.

“What do you mean, Ron?” Harry asked, leaning forward. “Do you think she’s seeing someone?”

“No, no, nothing like that… Merlin… At least I don’t think it’s that simple.” Ron ran his fingers through his hair nervously. “It’s… well… you know I wasn’t making crap worth of money in the minors…. And with ‘Monie’s work at the clinic we were barely scraping by…”

“I know; I’ve told you time and again that I’d help you, Ron. You only need to ask…”

“That’s just it, Harry. I don’t need to ask. Everything is all taken care of…”

“What do you mean?” Draco asked, sipping his tea.

Ron sighed softly. “Well… eight months ago I come home from a fortnight on the road and Hermione has one of those fancy muggle cars parked in the driveway. One of the really pricey ones; I don’t know what it’s called, but… its the kind that the top folds down and it tells you where to go and turn… the bloody thing talks; it’s really freaky I’m telling you…” he took a drink again, and looked at his shoes. “I asked her about it and she said it was a bonus from work and that she earned it…”

“A car as a bonus? From a medical clinic…?” Harry frowned.

“I dunno anything ’bout it, really… She’s been there ten years, you know, and… well, its… I mean
it doesn’t make any sense that she should get something like that just now. And… well, she’s been getting other stuff too.” He said softly.

“Other things…?” Draco prompted

“I never noticed before, I don’t know how long things have been showing up but… Clothes, and jewelry, and stuff that we couldn’t get before are turning up in the house… After the car, I started looking… and I’ve found things that have kind of vanished since… rings and things that I didn’t buy for her and that I used to see her staring at in store windows… I mean, bloody hell, she always told me not to worry about the finances and stuff, and I’ve never really known how we’re doing; she always handled all that stuff. She told me not to worry about it, that the budgets were her job to attend to…”

Harry frowned softly in thought. “This really doesn’t sound good, Ron…”

“I know, but… but that’s not the worst of it. You see, my house payment is due at the end of every month… I knew the house payment was due today, and Hermione was gone, so I figured I’d do us all a favor and make sure the payment was made on time. I went down to Gringott’s this morning to pay the bill…” Ron’s hands shook slightly as he pressed on, peeling the label off the bottle.

“Yes…? And…?” Harry prompted.

“There is no mortgage.” Ron whispered.

“… No mortgage…?” Draco asked.

“Paid. In full, over two years ago.” He said softly, looking at them with worried, haunted eyes. “I… I don’t know what the hell she’s doing, and… I have no idea what to do about it… I really need your help this time Harry… hell… I think I could even pay your fee right now…”

Harry nodded. “I’ll help, mate, you know I will. I think I may need to talk to Damitri about this; he’s senior at the practice and has more experience. But I really don’t want to hear another word about any fee.”

“Thanks, Harry… I wish to Merlin I didn’t have to do this; I hate to dump this all on you, but… I just… I’m at my wit’s end. I don’t know what to do…” He murmured softly. “Hermione is all I have, her and Rosie… all these things… the money, the house… even the team doesn’t mean a thing to me if I lose my family… If ‘Monie is doing something illegal, I… I’ll lose it all…”

Harry reached out, putting his hand over his friend’s. “Ron; you’re not alone.” He said firmly, showing his support for his friend and giving his hand a firm squeeze. “If Hermione is doing something, it has to be stopped. You have to be strong for Rosie; she’ll need you now more than ever…”

“I’m not enough for Rosie… I know I can’t do it all by myself… What’ll I do, Harry…? Rosie is much too young to be left home alone…” he turned his hand to hold his friend’s, glad of the support, trying to keep his own hand from trembling. “I suppose, I… I’ll just go work at the Ministry with Dad… I’ll… I’ll just quit the league…”

“Don’t you dare…!” Draco said immediately and Ron looked at him in surprise, not expecting much support from the blonde. “You do that, Weasel, and you’re a much greater Prat than I ever thought possible…! You’ve worked too hard for this chance and you’ve finally made it…! You will NOT give that up! I am more than capable of watching her while you’re off; I would love to.”

Ron found his voice again. “But Draco, you’ll have your hands full with your own baby; it wouldn’t
be fair to you…”

“And you, Ronald Weasley, are Harry’s best mate. And your brother is married to MY best mate. Like it or not, we’re stuck with each other; we’re family now. You’re always spouting off about how family sticks together and support each other… Well, you need your family now, and we’ll do what we need to do to support you. So what’s the big deal…?” Draco replied.

“But it… it could be for weeks at a time… are you certain…?” Ron looked up at Draco, tears of relief in his eyes. “It’s more than I could have asked… I mean, I didn’t expect…”

“You’re family, Ron.” Harry repeated. “But you’re getting way ahead of yourself. We don’t know for sure Hermione is doing anything wrong at all. Nothing has happened yet; you’ve nothing to fear and nothing to fret over…”

“That’s right.” Draco said firmly, rising. “Now come on and eat. I made your favorite, Ron. And there’s more than plenty for even YOU to eat…”

Ron wiped at his eyes with a trembling hand. “Yeah, I… its just… it’s been eating at me all day, I…” he took a deep breath and sighed, taking a few moments to compose himself again. “I gotta admit, I am hungry… and it does smell beyond fantastic…” he said, rising as well.

“Of course it does; it’s your mum’s recipe. She copied her book for me.” Draco grinned.

“Smart man you married there, Harry; mum’s cooking is fantastic…” Ron smiled, trying to act as if he hadn’t been worried out of his mind all day. Draco moved to the kitchen as Harry and Ron sat at the counter.

“You want to crash here tonight, Ron? You know you’re welcome to…” Harry asked, looking at his friend with some worry. He could see the redhead was still shaken though he was trying to hide it.

“Yeah, I… I think that’s a good idea…” he agreed, polishing off the beer. “I get in that house and… well, my imagination runs wild with what could be going on… I don’t want Rosie to get involved in any of it; I would much rather she not even know there’s anything wrong at all…” he started, then rose with a frown. “Hey, what’re you doing, Draco…? You shouldn’t be lifting things in your condition…!” he said, hurrying over to prevent Draco from taking the pan out of the oven.

“You Gryffindors…!” Draco teased. “Always rushing to the rescue…” he commented as Ron took the pan out of the oven for him.

“You love it, Ferret, or you wouldn’t have married one of us.” Ron shot back. “Go on, sit down. You cooked it, I can serve it…”

“My, my…” Draco smiled. “I can see that Molly managed to beat some manners into at least one of you…” he teased as he strolled to the table.

“She had to… it didn’t work to try to teach George and Fred anything, the reprobates…” he chuckled as he served up the meal. He served Draco first, giving him a double portion of the meal. Draco looked with a bit of surprise at the amount of food on his plate; he’d never taken that much food at a single meal…! He then looked quizzically at Ron who shrugged. “You need to eat well. Gotta take care of that little cake in your cauldron…”

“I’m all right, Ron. Nothing to worry about…” Draco chuckled.

“I’m gonna be sure you eat well while I’m here, the baby needs every bit of nourishment you can give him. And the baby needs you to be strong too.” He said firmly.
Draco smirked at him. “Were you this bad when Hermione was carrying Rose…?”

“Oh, much, worse.” Ron smirked. “Besides, I fully intend to teach that baby how to play Quidditch… with you two as parents he ought to be an awesome seeker…”

Draco grinned and began to eat. “Charlie and Blaise came by the other day…” Harry said. “Blaise is excited to have you on the team…”

Ron smiled softly. “Charlie is really a lucky guy to have caught Blaise…” he said reminiscently. “I really ought to drop by and see them…”

Draco eyed the redhead, remembering what Harry had said the other day about Ron’s crush on Blaise back in school and wondering if he still had those feelings for his best mate. Very interesting… “When’s the last time you saw Blaise, Ron…? It’s been a while, hasn’t it?”

“Yes; quite a while… I was in the minor leagues, and he was in the major… our paths don’t cross very often. It’s been… bloody hell. A year…? Two…? It’s hard to be sure….” He frowned as he sat down to eat as well, his portion nearly as large as Draco’s. “Charlie came to my last game even if Blaise couldn’t make it; he said that Blaise was doing fine…”

“Blaise is the same sexy guy he always was, being what he is… You know, I think male Veela only get sexier as they get older.” Harry chuckled softly. “He let his hair grow a bit and he has this wicked tattoo on his back. Charlie told me he has another one, but he hasn’t shown us where THAT one is…”

Ron sighed, lowered his eyes, and applied himself to his meal. “Blaise has always been a great guy… I’m glad he’s happy with Charlie.” He said softly. A blush was barely visible under his sunburned cheeks as his mind dwelled on just where the hidden tattoo could be…

“Another beer, Ron…?” Harry asked, rising and moving to the fridge.

“Yeah… thanks, mate.” He smiled at him. “Just one more… Can’t afford to be drunk…”

“Oh? You got practice tomorrow?”

“Something much more important. Tomorrow I’m Rosie’s daddy and that’s all. I promised Rosie a trip to the museum and she loves it… damn place nearly puts me to sleep and if I’m hung over its torture…” he said with a smirk.

“Rosie will love that… I always did… kind of you not to go with a hangover…” Draco smirked.

“I’ll have practice daily starting in two days… Till then, since ‘Monie is out of town, I’m Rosie’s Daddy first and foremost; everything else has to take a backseat…” he said firmly.

“Everything will work out, Ron. You know I’ll get to the bottom of this, and I’ll make sure that everything is taken care of, okay…?” Harry said.

“Yeah, Okay… I believe in you, Harry; you’ve always been a hell of a guy. I just want to protect Rosie…” he said, taking another drink. “I don’t want her to be hurt by whatever is going on…”

“I understand, Ron.” Harry nodded as he finished his supper. “Baby, your cooking gets better every day…” he smiled, kissing Draco.

Ron hadn’t eaten very much but he supported the statement. “Yeah… it was really good…” he pushed away from the table as he rose to his feet. “Let me get you both some cheesecake…” he
suggested as he cleared the plates away to give them a moment which they took advantage of, kissing a long moment. The redhead set the dishes in the sink and fetched out plates for cheesecake, cut the slices and served it up with a drizzling of sauce and fresh berries on top. By the time he turned they were sitting close but they were done kissing for the moment. “Here we are; best damned cheesecake I’ve found in the whole city.” He grinned as he served it up.

Draco took his plate. “Thank you.” He smiled at him. Ron watched, bemused as Draco took a bite. His eyes closed in pure pleasure as he savored the taste. “Um… that is so-o-o good…” Draco moaned softly.

“You look like you’re having sex, Ferret.” Ron teased. “Stop that…”

Harry laughed. “And how would you know what he looks like when he’s having sex, Ron?” He teased.

Ron flushed and served Harry as he scolded with a laugh. “Oh, shut up Harry!” He took his seat and helped himself to a bite of his own of the creamy confection on his plate.

“Maybe he wants to find out.” Draco smirked teasingly.

“No, you two can keep that behind closed doors!” he chuckled, blushing clearly behind his sunburn. “I swear; such an exhibitionist… Gotta have an audience for everything…!”

“It’s Harry’s fault, really…” Draco said, going back to his cheesecake.

“Really, now…?” Ron grinned teasingly at his friend.

Harry simply grinned with mock innocence.

“Well, spill it…!” Ron urged.

“Spill what?” He asked innocently.

“C’mon, mate. I told you about ‘Monie and me at the Quidditch pitch… spill it already…!” he grinned, eating his cheesecake.

“Well the first time Draco and I were together was under a weeping cherry in Covington Park… every year on our anniversary we go back there…”

“You have sex with Draco every year in the middle of a muggle park…?” Ron laughed. “Ever been caught?”

“Our tree has strong anti-muggle and warding charms…” Harry grinned.

“True. But a few teenagers think it’s haunted…” Draco laughed.


“I don’t know.” Harry chuckled, placing his empty plate in the sink.

“Cut me another slice, love…” Draco asked, holding out his plate.

“An extra helping for the baby, eh…?” Ron said, rising also. “Give him extra raspberries, Harry.”

Harry smiled as he spooned the berries on. “Anything for you, Dray.”
Ron moved to the sink and pushed up his sleeves, beginning to do the dishes.

Draco watched him a moment, then laughed softly. “You know, Harry… perhaps we should just keep the Weasel… wouldn’t have to trouble mother for a house elf if he does this much work every day….” Draco teased.

Ron smirked at him over his shoulder. “Keep it up, Ferret, and there will be no more cheesecake for you!”
“Good morning, Mr. Potter.” Nancy smiled as she moved into his office, handing him a file folder.

“Has Damitri come in yet?” Harry asked, accepting the folder and eyeing it a moment or two.

“No sir, not yet. He called and said he would be here in about half an hour…”

“All right; would you please have him join me when he arrives…?”

“Will do, boss…” She smiled and moved out of his office to tend to her duties.

Before long, she was back at the door, showing Damitri Zabini into the office. He was a tall, trim dark-skinned man with flashing black eyes and an elegantly trimmed beard. His relation to Blaise was clear; though he was quite a bit older he still had the same finely boned good looks as his nephew, and he hadn’t lost a bit of the grace of his youth. Nancy slipped out of the door and closed it behind herself.

“Good morning, Harry…” the older wizard said with a smile.

Harry gazed at him and sighed softly. “Dimi, I’ve got a problem.”

Damitri’s smile faded to one of direct attention. Harry had been his partner for over ten years now and he rarely greeted him like this; something must really be wrong… He moved over and took a seat with an expression of concern. “Fill me in; you know we’ll figure it out…”

“Well it all started about six years ago…” Harry started.

-------------------FLASHBACK----------------------------------------------------------

Harry sat heavily down at the table, his eyes wet with tears. “Draco is so depressed, Hermione… Snape said he can’t use the potion after he lost the last baby… I think we may lose him. I don’t know what to do anymore…”

Hermione sat in the chair next to him at the table in their kitchen, pushing a cup of tea in front of her school friend. “You don’t have to go strictly the magical method, Harry…” Hermione said softly. “Muggles have come a long way with infertility treatments… I’ve been working with Pansy Parkinson on a new combination of muggle and wizarding healing magic… our goal is to help infertile wizarding families to conceive…”

Harry glanced at her, then wiped at his damp eyes. “It’s just so hard to believe that Parkinson became a Healer… she never wanted to do anything but help herself in school…” he mumbled. “And afterward, she didn’t seem like she’d ever change until after her trial before the Wizengamot at the Ministry…”

“You know, it’s strange… I never expected to like her or get along with her at all, but she’s really helped me out with my schooling to become a medic…” Hermione said softly; glad that she could at least get Harry to focus on something other than this most recent miscarriage.

“Yeah… she did a lot to help you get those scholarships…” Harry nodded.

She paused, worry etched on her face as she laid a hand over his. “You and Draco should come in and talk to our healers at the clinic, Harry… it really wouldn’t hurt…”

-------------------FLASHBACKEND----------------------------------------------------------
He bowed his head, though grateful for her touch. “We’ll see, Hermione…” Harry murmured.

“…so did you and Draco decide to go to this clinic…” Damitri asked.

“Yes, we did. Despite the fact that it originally was a muggle clinic, Draco was quite impressed with all the procedures and the science of the process and the blend of magical and muggle technologies that Hermione and Pansy had created... So we started all the tests; Merlin… it was beyond embarrassing…”

“What type of tests?” Damitri asked. “I’ve heard of such procedures but I’ve never looked into all the details of it…”

“It started with blood samples, tissue samples, sperm samples from both of us… tests of our magical levels, familial compatibility, blood type compatibility, muggle medications… It was a nightmare….”

Harry sighed.

“But did it work?”

“Not right away; it took three years of needles and potions and spells, and tests before finally… it looked as if we were finally having our family. Then, at 22 weeks…” Harry’s voice broke a moment; it was years ago but the memory of that tiny baby still tore his heart. “Well, we named her Andie. She lived for only two hours… we never set foot in that clinic again.”

“I remember when that happened... nightmarish time that was...” Damitri said softly. “So where does the problem come in...?”

Harry pulled two scrolls of parchment out of his inside pocket and passed them to Damitri across the desk without a word. He unrolled them, taking a moment to examine the names on each one of the genealogical trees; his was expression thoughtful and almost calculating. “So…. Just how much of your sperm did they collect, anyway?” he asked, looking at Harry again.

Harry sighed. “Over three years…? Plenty. From Draco as well.”

“How did you find out about these children?” He asked quietly.

“Draco met Angel in the park… she’s the five year old…” Harry answered, watching as Damitri turned to that sheet where he’d attached a photo of the little girl with the dark curls and emerald eyes. “She wasn’t being watched near a river in the park that Draco and I were at… she nearly drowned to death in the river. When they got us to the hospital, they assumed she was mine… turns out they were right. Severus Snape works as some type of doctor… a specialist, he said, at the muggle hospital… he’s the one who did the potion and spell for family links on Angel. Then he was confronted with the twins that look so much like Draco… he told me, but we haven’t told Draco and I don’t intend to until we have some of this sorted out…”

“I can understand that…” Damitri nodded, still quite thoughtful.

“Dami, what am I going to do…? Hermione seems to be involved in all this mess, and she’s my friend…”

“Hermione…?” Damitri looked up at the younger wizard. “Isn’t she the wife of your best friend…? How is she involved…?”

“I’m not sure, but Ron came over last night; he’s really worried. They really never had money, but
she’s managed to pay off the house and buy several new things including a new convertible car… Ron was just picked up by the Chudley Cannons this week; he won’t have gotten any of that money yet…”

“So; lots of income… and she works at this clinic where your sperm and Draco’s was taken and stored…” he frowned, shaking his head. “You know this doesn’t look good for her, Harry… This will eventually end up in front of the Ministry and probably a full Wizengamot, regardless of what we find. At first blush it seems as if she’s selling off your sperm and Draco’s to the highest bidder… We’ll need to do a thorough investigation of this clinic and what it is they’re doing… Hermione and the staff there will know your magical signature from all the testing you underwent, so you’re out to go undercover…”

“I couldn’t bring myself to go back in there anyway… that’s why I needed to bring you in on this one. I know I need your help. I certainly couldn’t take it on myself. I did consider pulling in the Weasley twins again…”

Damitri shook his head. “No… they wouldn’t be useful here. They’re single still, no reason to want to have kids. They were a big help on the Carneal case, but I don’t think they’d be given access to anything at a medical clinic, no matter how devious they are…”

“True…” Harry sighed.

“But how do we go about it…?” Damitri murmured, rising to his feet, the papers still in hand as he moved to the window, gazing out at the view without really seeing anything, wrapped in thought.

“Dimi…? Are you in here…?” A soft voice called.

Both wizards turned to see who had spoken; it was Damitri’s life-bonded partner Terry. Slim, short in build, long wavy hair that was blonde at the scalp and pale pink at the tips, bound back with pink ribbons in ponytails that curled down to frame either side the face. A delicate lacy white sundress with a miniskirt flattered pale skin, delicate heels that strapped up to the knee emphasized long shapely legs. Only a faint trace of makeup graced the finely boned face and highlighted the wide soulful eyes. “Hi Dimi…” the newcomer smiled. Harry had to remind himself every time he saw Terry that the pretty delicate and extremely feminine creature and he saw standing in the doorway was not a woman, but a man. And he wasn’t nearly as young as he appeared to be… everyone kept mistaking him for much younger than his twenty years of age.

“Terry, baby… what are you doing here…?” Damitri smiled.

“I wanted to show you what I got today… are you busy…? I’m sorry, I don’t mean to intrude…” he started to step back.

“Now you know I’m never too busy for you, Terry.” Damitri assured, holding his hand out and Terry moved over to join him.

Harry paused a moment, gazing from Damitri to Terry… they were a fantastic couple, and they had never been to the clinic… if they posed as a couple they could see just how far the clinic was willing to go… “It just might work…” Harry said softly.

Damitri looked over at him, then at Terry, who his arm rested about the waist of. “What…? Oh… yes, I see… yes, indeed it could…” he agreed, catching on to Harry’s train of thought quickly. “But only if Terry is willing. After all, you did say the procedures were invasive and embarrassing…”

“Willing to do what, Dimi…?” Terry asked, gazing up at him. He barely came up to his husband’s
shoulder in height, even in heels.

“How would you like to have a baby, Terry?” He asked.

“I can’t…” Terry said with a pout. “I’m not a magic man, like you… I’m just a squib…” he gazed up at him. “I can’t… can I…? How…”

“There’s a special clinic, Terry… they not only help you become pregnant, they can help you carry that baby to term.” Harry answered him in a soft tone. He really did want them to try; he wasn’t sure who else would be believable… but he wasn’t going to try to coerce his long-time business partner’s lover into anything. “It’s being done successfully every day, I understand…”

Terry’s eyes widened. “Really…? I can really be a mum…?” He gazed up at Damitri, excited now by the very prospect.

“It is possible.” He agreed, smiling at him. “I would love to have a child with you…” he stroked his husband’s cheek. “I’ll just get the address from Harry then, shall I…?”

“Oh, yes, Dimi!” Terry flung his arms about his husband and hugged him tightly.

Damitri kissed him tenderly. “Now, my sweet Terry… what is it you wished to show me…?”

Terry blushed; smiling shyly as he opened the bag he was carrying and brought out a fur-trimmed pink teddy with a long tail and a pair of cat ears.

“Merlin…!” Harry sighed. “I’d love to see Draco in that…”

Terry giggled softly at that. “I’d loan it to you but pink just isn’t Draco’s color…”

“That’s all right, Terry… I don’t think it would fit Draco right now anyway…” Harry chuckled.

“You know, Terry… if you’d like, you could help Draco and his mum shop for our baby…”

Terry looked over at Harry, curious. “Did you go to the clinic and get pregnant, Harry…?”

“No… I’m not pregnant. Draco is…” He smiled. “And we’ll be having a five-year old little girl move into our house by this weekend…”

“Oh wow…! How fun…!” he smiled. “Can I, Dimi…? Please…? It would be so fun to shop for a baby…” Terry turned back to Damitri.

“Of course, love…” he chuckled.

Harry moved to the desk and jotted down the address. “Here’s the information on the clinic…” he said, moving back and handing it to Damitri.

“I’ll get right on this… come along, Terry. Let’s have a quiet lunch and see just how much of a kitten you are…” he grinned at his bonded.

Terry hugged him, eyes sparkling. “All right, Dimi…”

The two moved out. “Nancy, we’re going to lunch… take all my calls, will you?” he asked as he strolled past the secretary’s desk.

“Of course, Mr. Zabini…”
Harry moved out just moments behind them. “I’ll be out a couple hours for lunch and other business as well…”

“I’ve got things well in hand here, Mr. Potter.” Nancy grinned at him.

“Naturally… that’s why we keep you on…” he chuckled.

“Draco…? Son, are you home…?” Narcissa called, glancing about.

“In here mother…” He called out from down the hall.

Narcissa followed his voice to one of the bedrooms that had recently been a study for the two young men. “Draco… what are you doing…?” she asked, looking about. The room had been completely stripped of all furniture and drop cloths covered the floor. Draco had a paintbrush in hand, a smudge of paint over the bridge of his nose and several splatters on his clothing. He gave her a warm, welcoming smile.

“Hello mother…” he said, moving to take her hand. Instead of hugging her as he usually did, he took her hand and placed it on the swell of his belly, his face glowing with happiness. “We’ve a surprise for you, mum; it’s a boy…”

Her eyes widened. “Oh Dragon…! Oh…!” she pulled him into a hug, overjoyed. “A baby of your own…! No medicines? No potions…?”

“No, nothing at all… just pure Harry…”

“Outstanding…! Oh, I knew it would happen for you… and a boy…! And you’re so far along…”

“I wanted to wait, mother, until the danger of losing him was past… I just told Harry a few days ago; it was so hard to hide from him…”

“I don’t care if I’m the last in the world to know…. Oh, a BABY…! We have so much to buy…and why in the world are you painting…?”

“Angel is coming home. I want it perfect for her…”

“Angel…? Oh, yes, Harry’s child… your father is furious about her…”

“Father can think whatever he likes; my Harry did not betray me.”

“Does she look like him, love?” She asked, clearly ready to accept whatever he stated as fact.

“Dark curly hair, and emerald eyes… mum, she’s beautiful.”

“You do know your father may never accept her…?”

“I don’t care what he says. He never approved of Harry so what’s the difference…?”

“I can’t wait to meet her.” She smiled, hugging him.

“I knew I could count on you mum…”

“Always…!” She said firmly. “And now, son, you WILL allow me to help you.”
“Grab a paint brush.” Draco laughed. “And then we can go shopping while it all dries…”

“All right…” she picked up the paint brush, eyeing it. “You know I’ve never done this before…”

“Its fun, really…” Draco moved back to the wall and his mother joined him, happily discussing how the room was to be decorated for little Angel.

Harry laughed as, about half an hour later, he walked into the room. “I never thought I’d see the day…” he commented, looking at his husband and mother, both splattered in paint.

Narcissa smiled at him. “Now, Harry; you know I’d do anything for my Dragon…”

“Did he tell you it’s a boy…?” Harry smiled. “We’re having a son…”

“And none too soon; a daughter too…” she moved to him, paint splatters and all, and hugged him. “Two blessings…”

Harry returned the embrace. “Are you two hungry? Get cleaned up and I’ll take us all out to lunch…”

“…and then we must go shopping…” Narcissa said firmly.

“Of course; we’ll need quite a few things for Angel. By the way, Terry would love to go with you… he’s very excited about the baby. He didn’t know that wizards could have babies…” Harry grinned.

“I would be more than happy to have Terry along… he is a lucky boy to capture Zabini’s heart. I should never have let him get away from me…” Narcissa smiled, putting the paint brush down in its tray.

“You, mother…? And Damitri Zabini…?” Draco asked with a grin. “I never would have imagined…”

“Oh, it was a very long time ago… but don’t tell your father.” Narcissa smiled, giving the boys a wink.

“Never.” He promised moving out. “I’m going to shower real quick…”

Narcissa used a quick spell to clean herself up, banishing the paint off of her clothing and skin with a murmured word. Harry watched a moment before he spoke. “Narcissa… while Draco is in the shower, I need to talk to you…” Harry said softly.

She looked up at him, brushing her gown to straighten it. “What is it, Harry…?”

Harry took a deep breath. “Angel isn’t the only child that Severus found.”

“You have more children…?” her eyes widened.

“They’re not mine, Cissa… Their mother committed suicide and was taken to a muggle hospital as she had no identification; they managed to save the twins. Severus did the hereditary spell and… well, they’re Draco’s children.”

“No one has been told…? Not even the ministry…?” Narcissa asked quietly. She was certain that Lucius would immediately take possession of any such children, had he known about them.

“No one. Severus isn’t required to tell of them as they have displayed no magical abilities, unlike Angel… We haven’t told Draco yet… I don’t want to put too much stress on him…”
“I agree… after losing the other babies… Draco needs to have this baby strong and healthy…” Narcissa murmured worriedly. “So only Severus and you know of them…?”

“And you, yes.” Harry said softly.

“Very intelligent of you to keep it quiet… she said, frowning slightly in thought. “It will be a couple of days before I can get away to see them…”

“I understand; it’s all right. Severus is watching over them and tending to their health needs. He can show them to you; he’s had them moved to a private hospital. They are so tiny… they could fit in the palm of your hand. He told me that they are doing quite well, despite their birth circumstances…”

“Have they names…?” She glanced toward the bedroom. Draco would be out any moment and she would not chance revealing anything that could harm her son.

Harry shook his head. “No… the mother died before she even saw them…”

“Poor little darlings…” Narcissa murmured softly.

“They need their Nana…” Harry smiled at her.

She looked at him and smiled back, feeling tears well in her eyes. “I feel like I’ve waited forever to be called that…”

“So, Harry, where are you taking us?” Draco asked as he moved out again, dressed in fresh robes.

“A new place… Damitri tells me the chef there prepares traditional French food with a modern twist…”

“Sounds lovely; let’s go…” Draco agreed.

“And after we will call Terry and head out to do some proper shopping… we must have the room ready for little Angel.” Narcissa said firmly.

--------------------------------------- Two Days Later --------------------------------------

Demitri sat led Terry into the inner waiting room of the clinic and sat down on the rather comfortable couch. So far, he was rather impressed with the overall look of the place. It didn’t have that chemical odor he had come to associate with muggle hospitals; nor was any of the waiting areas crowded or uncomfortable. They had made an appointment to come in, and had been shown to this room with lovely photos on the walls that included both tiny babies held in the large hands of their fathers to shots of mother’s tummies, round and ready to give birth.

Terry had gazed longingly at the photos, wishing it would be him soon having a round tummy like that, carrying a baby… He was standing beside one of a tiny baby, touching the glass while Damitri watched him. He jumped, blushing and hurrying to Damitri’s side when the door opened, admitting a young woman into the room in a pale blue scrub-like uniform.

“Good afternoon…” she smiled.

“Good afternoon, miss.” Damitri responded as Terry sat down beside him, cuddling close.

She smiled sweetly at them. “I’m Amber, and I’m very happy you’ve chosen our clinic; we have a long track record of successful assistances with pregnancy…” she said. “I’m sure you saw the wall of success on the way in…?”
“You helped make all those babies…?” Terry asked innocently, eyes wide.

“Yes, we did.” She chuckled softly. “So let me tell you what exactly you’re getting into here…” she said, then launched into a description of the procedure that would assist a muggle couple or even a witch and wizard to conceive, handing them various pamphlets as she explained the procedures involved in artificial insemination as well as intrauterine insemination, and in-vitro fertilization. Damitri listened patiently and Terry just looked confused, looking at the pictures of the babies on the covers and inside the booklets. “…does this sound like something you would be interested in, you and your young wife…?”

“Perhaps, if I had a wife, miss, these would be good options for us…” he rested an arm about Terry’s shoulders. “But I’m afraid none of these are possible. I can see you are confused as so many are… my sweet partner here is not my wife, he is my husband.” He clarified.

The girl’s eyes widened; clearly she’d believed that Terry was a woman. She was so feminine, and delicate of build… “Oh… oh my… I would never have guessed…! Well… you will need to see the specialist then…”

“Exactly so.” Damitri agreed with a smirk. Terry blushed, snuggling close to his husband.

“If you’ll just give me a moment…” she said, looking at Terry with eyes wide with clear amazement as she slipped out of the room.

“Dimi…? Are you sure this will work…?” Terry asked timidly.

“I want to see what you look like, Terry… all round with a baby…” he smiled at his husband, one hand caressing Terry’s flat stomach. Terry gazed up at him, eyes sparkling and his hand over Damitri’s.

“Good afternoon…” a woman with her brown hair pulled back into a neat bun at the nape of her neck moved into the room. “I’m Hermione Weasley. Amber tells me that you needed a specialist…” she asked, hesitating a moment. She looked to the north wall where a photo of a baby hung; the frame seemed to be glowing ever so faintly. Damitri realized it was a magic detector; he’d been looking for something of that sort in this room to tell staff that the occupants were of the magical community; her surreptitious glance had given the item away.

“That is what she said.” He agreed.

She smiled and turned to them, taking a seat. “I’m sure we can help you, we have special services available for wizards and their partners. Of course, the process is a bit different for two males than it is for a male and a female…”

“We understand this.” Damitri nodded. “We are willing to do anything that is necessary… I need an heir, and I am willing to spend what gold is needed. I need a magically strong child to carry on the Zabini name…”

“You do understand, Mr. Zabini, that it isn’t possible to use your husband’s seed for this…?”

“Because he is a Squib…?”

“Unfortunately, yes… If you wish a strong child you need to have a second donor to create the baby…”

“I don’t mind, Dimi, really…” Terry said worriedly, concerned that his lack of magical ability would prevent them from being able to go on with things.
“Don’t you worry, baby. No amount of money is too much to give you a child.” Damitri soothed him, and then looked back at Hermione. “I would, of course, require that the second donor be of pureblood lineage.”

“Do you have a donor in mind, sir…?” she asked.

“Not particularly… do you have any suggestions? I want to be able to peruse what you have available. I really would prefer someone with stronger magic…” Damitri commented.

He noticed her smile faltered a moment but she hid it quickly. “We really don’t have too many wizarding donors, sir…” she rose and went to a cabinet. “I’ll show you our list…” she riffled through the folders a moment, and then turned back to him with a small pamphlet. “Here you are; I’ll just…” she looked over at the doorway, her voice and smile faltering again. Framed in the window of the door was a slim blonde, gesturing urgently for her to come out. “Oh… will you excuse me a moment?” she asked, turning to answer the summons.

“Of course, my dear.” Damitri said, taking the booklet and opening it to study the options offered. She gave him the best smile she could and slipped out of the room. Damitri saw the description of several wizards, along with a strict statement that no family claims upon fortunes or even names of families could be made with the resultant offspring. None of them seemed to reflect either Harry or Draco…

“They just want a baby…” Hermione said softly.

“Don’t be a damned fool, Weasley. Don’t you know who that is…?” Pansy Parkinson asked, her eyes almost gleaming with greed. “That’s Damitri Zabini…! He’s got more than enough gold in just one of his Gringott’s vaults to pay for our special stores, time and time again…!”

Hermione looked at her with a sinking heart. “Pansy, no, I…”

The blonde turned on Hermione, eyes narrow, glinting dangerously. “Don’t you ever tell me no again; you WILL do it, Weasley. I’m certain he won’t want anything less than a pureblood. And that little fluff he has hanging on his every word looks enough like our blonde ‘donor’ that the resulting child should be quite to their liking. Try to talk them into donor number 1…”

“It should be their choice; Pansy, we need to stop…”

“Oh, no, Weasley; quite the contrary, actually… It’s time to expand. We’ve been playing the small market more than long enough.” She scowled at her, and then her expression changed in a heartbeat to sweet and calculating. “That husband of yours… he’s finally made the big leagues, hasn’t he…?” Her smile widened. “And he’s a reasonably strong wizard, with quite the strong, pure bloodline… if you aren’t willing to make babies with him, I know I can find more than one little witch out there who’s willing to have one… bring him in on Monday.”

Hermione looked horrified. “Pansy, I know he won’t do it…” she started, but she knew that she was just in too deep now. There was no way out for her… she was trapped in this mess…

“Oh, yes he will.” Pansy retorted, and then gestured at the door. “Go on, talk to our clients. You usually don’t prefer that I do the talking… that little fluff looks so delicate…” she commented, and then her tone took on a dangerous tone. “Or do I have to take matters into my own hands…?”

“No… no, I’ll talk to them…” Hermione assured quickly. She truly had no choice… she could be blamed for everything… every single thing… she lowered her eyes and took a moment to compose herself before she moved inside.
“Mrs. Weasley, is it…?” Damitri spoke up the moment she came into the room. “I’m afraid none of these will do… none have the power I seek, and I see several are of mixed blood.”

“There are… some others…” she said hesitantly, clearly unwilling to produce the other list. “But they are not easily accessible…”

“I want the best. You understand; I’m sure… I have my standards…”

“Yes, of course, Mr. Zabini…” she said softly, pulling up a chair and taking a seat. She was silent a moment, both of them looking at her. “We do have access to some… very powerful wizards. Old, pureblood families…” she glanced at the door and the blonde, still framed in its window, smiled charmingly and turned, strolling away. The young brunette sighed faintly. “Of course, sir, you must understand, these wizards would never want their identities to be revealed… the fact that they have even donated must be kept strictly and completely confidential…”

“Shall I send my Terry out while we discuss this?” Damitri asked with a smirk.

“No, no… that won’t be necessary… he will need to sign these documents as well…” she answered in a soft tone. “I know he is a squib, but it is necessary… the paperwork absolves the donor of the DNA of any responsibility for the child, and protects them against paternal suits…” she began.

“That is not a problem…” Damitri assured her, studying it a moment. He took the paper from her and studied it a long moment, reading through it. “Do you have a quill…?”

“Yes…” she produced a quill with distinct black and gold fletching. “Here you are, Mr. Zabini…” she said, passing it to him. He knew this quill was one commonly used to bind wizards to agreements and it was not an agreement that could be broken without the destruction of the document. The ink that was used was one’s own blood. Damitri paused only a moment, then signed his name, passing it to Terry who signed as well in a slow, awkward hand.

She checked it, and then sighed, relaxing a bit. “Thank you… I’m sorry for the formality, Mr. Zabini, but it vitally is important to protect the identity of our donors. Now; we do have several pureblood families to choose from who will never show on our common list. Their donations are much too expensive to show to common wizards…” she produced a paper from an inner pocket that listed eight additional donors. The list bore no names, but it gave detailed descriptions of the donors such as height, weight, hair color, age, and paternal ancestry to reflect the purity of the bloodlines.

“May I keep this…? I would like to have some time to consider this with my husband…”

“I’m sorry, but this list must remain here. Of course, you may have as much time as you wish to make up your mind; we don’t rush our customers…” she assured.

“I understand…” Damitri said. “Could I have some tea, perhaps…?” He asked.

“Of course; what type would you prefer? We have several teas from about the world, including Earl Gray, Darjeeling, Londonderry, White tea, even a Chinese Herbal…”

“Earl Gray will do quite well, thank you.” He said before she could go on. She smiled and opened a cabinet, producing an English tea set, warming the water with magic and adding the tea before she turned, serving it to them on the little coffee table in front of the couch. “Here you are…” she smiled warmly. “I’ll just go and let you discuss things…” she turned and headed for the door, taking the signed contracts with her.

“Just think, my love; soon you’ll have a baby of your own to love… now sit and I’ll tell you who we may choose from…”
Terry sat close beside him. “I don’t care what choice we make, as long as the baby is ours; yours and mine…”

Damitri poured each of them a glass of tea, and then rested his arm about Terry. “This baby will be ours, love… I promise no one will have claims on it…”

Terry smiled happily, eyes sparkling. “I can’t wait…”

Damitri kissed him, and then started to read off the list of names and lineage. Terry cuddled close, looking at the list only a moment. He preferred to cuddle close, listening to him. Damitri read through the paper twice before settling on one. “That one is all right, isn’t it lover…?”

“I told you… as long as it’s yours and its mine; I don’t care… should I go get that lady…?” Terry asked.

“Yes, love. Thank you. After we choose, we will set up the appointment…”

“It’s really going to happen, Dimi…? I’m really going to get a baby…?” Terry asked, excited, bouncing to his feet.

“Yes, love.” Damitri smiled. Terry kissed him, and then hurried out in search of Hermione. Before long, both of them returned to the room.

“You’ve made your choice…?” She asked as Terry returned to Damitri’s side.

“Yes, we have. Number three.” Damitri said, handing back the paper.

“Oh yes, very good… thank you.” She smiled, looking even more relaxed than before. “When do you wish to begin…?”

“Next Wednesday would be a good day to begin… it’s my Terry’s birthday. It could be my birthday present to him…”

Terry smiled shyly, taking Damitri’s hand.

“Excellent; I’ll take care of everything required personally for you. Shall we say, nine…?”

“Nine it is.” Damitri agreed, rising. “Good day to you, Ms. Weasley.”

“And to you…” she shook his hand with a genuine smile.

“Come, my love… how about supper at LaShays…”

“And dancing…” Terry asked.

“Of course…” He chuckled, while at the same time thinking about everything he would need to share with Harry. He already knew how he was going to get around the binding against speaking of the donors…
Harry walked into his office building early the next morning.

Nancy looked up from her desk and smiled. “Good morning, Mr. Potter.” She greeted, handing him a stack of notes.

“Good morning, Nancy… has Damitri come in yet…?”

“Yes, sir; he’s in his office and needs to see you.” She answered.

“Excellent… thanks Nancy.” Harry glanced through the messages as he went to Damitri’s office.

“Have a seat Harry…” Damitri said when he came in. “I can’t tell you what happened at the clinic; they’re quite thorough with their protective and binding spells down there…” he said as he pulled a digital recorder from his pocket. “But I can give you this…” he said with a smirk, passing it to Harry.

“Absolutely brilliant.” Harry grinned, taking a seat.

“Slytherin cunning does come in handy, Harry…” Damitri smiled. “I’ve chosen a Weasley for our donor, so I need to speak with them to get permission before next Wednesday. I will not be a thief and take what has not been willingly given…”

“Of course, I’d expect no less of you Damitri. I’m fairly certain it won’t be Ron; he’s hardly ever home. Could be Charlie, it might even be one of the twins. Bill is married, so I don’t believe it is him… and Percy is in Spain…”

“And I truly cannot see Arthur even visiting the clinic, despite his undying passion for all things muggle… that narrows the field to only those three.” Damitri said thoughtfully. “Truthfully though, Harry, there is more than one way to get a specimen. It doesn’t have to be a visit to the clinic. A date and a night of sex, and there you are…”

“That must be how they get most of their donations… I don’t see many wizards going down to be paid for sperm donations…”

“Doesn’t even have to be sex, come to think of it… a potion in a drink, and a spell… and the victim would never know…”

“It just doesn’t seem like anything that Hermione would do…” Harry said with a troubled expression. “Parkinson, yes… but not Hermione…”

“Hermione may not be the mastermind of this plot. Parkinson appears to be above Mrs. Weasley; from what I saw Mrs. Weasley seemed rather reluctant to give me the pureblood treatment. She only did so after Ms. Parkinson pulled her out of the room to speak to her…”

Harry looked pleasantly surprised at that news. “Well, that’s better than I expected, but somehow she’s still in pretty deeply. Hermione’s parents are muggle, you know, so I don’t understand why she’d be involved in a scheme to ‘purify’ wizarding families…”

“It’s not the bloodlines, Harry. Her focus seems to be the money from what you told me before.”

“True… did she give you a cost…?”

“No, but I told her that money was no object.”
“When do you take the next step?”

“Next week, on Terry’s birthday.”

“I’ll have an answer from the Weasley boys before then, no matter which one of them it happens to be.” Harry assured.

“Thank you… this is going to be an interesting case, Harry. I was getting rather bored until Mr. Weasley brought this case to your attention…”

“And if all goes well, you won’t have a moment to be bored… not with a baby on the way…” Harry smiled.

“How is Draco doing…?”

Harry laughed. “He and Cissa are remodeling the cottage and out buying everything in the mall…”

Damitri laughed as well. “Will you even be able to recognize the house once they’re done?”

“With Dray and his mother…? I just hope they don’t decide it’s too small…” Harry chuckled, rising. “I’ll take this and transcribe it… oh. By the way; the Peterson case is closed….”

“Oh…? Mr. Peterson was found…?”

“Yes; in bed with three birds... His wife is suing for divorce.”

“Somehow, I’m not surprised…” he smirked.

Harry laughed as he moved out of the office.

Damitri relaxed back, thoughtful but pleased with the current case. It was only natural that Harry wished that Hermione to be uninvolved or only on the fringes… but he believed somehow she was deeply involved in all this. Her reluctance and clear hesitance to proceed made it clear to him, however, that she might be ready to assist them and get out of the entire scheme, no matter what it cost her. That could be very useful…

Harry pulled out his cell phone, punching in a number. He only had to wait a few moments before the call was answered. “Hey Ron… how’s practice going?” He asked when his friend answered.

“Pretty tough…” he grinned, sounding winded. “But I love it. It’s an absolute blast…!”

“Hey. Can you get a hold of the twins and Charlie…? I want to meet them for drinks after work.”

“Yeah, sure… just them, eh?” he asked teasingly.

“No, Ron, you too. I wouldn’t leave my best mate out.”

“Cool… where do we meet?”

“Hole in the Wall.”

“All right… Rosie wants to go to your house tonight; she’s got some homemade cookies to bring over…”

“I love Rosie’s cookies; she can cook for me anytime…”
“Okay if I bring her by around seven…?”

“That’ll be great; Draco will love to see her…”

“She’s missed you too.” He chuckled. “See you at the Hole after work, mate… I gotta get back in
the air…”

“Give Blaise hell for me.” Harry chuckled.

“Give HIM hell…?” He laughed. “He’s giving ME hell, tryin to block his goals… there’s a reason
he made it in the majors, mate…”

“‘Until later…” Harry laughed and hung up, then applied himself to his job. He grinned at Damitri’s
resourcefulness; wizards rarely thought to look for muggle technology since most of them didn’t
understand it. He pushed the play button on the digital recorder and listened to the information,
typing it out himself to ensure the information was accurate, laying it out in table information to make
it all make sense. He listened through it twice, comparing it to what he had and adjusting the
information where he found any mistakes… satisfied, he hit the save and print button.

# |_#
Avl_|__Ht__|___Wt__|___BT__|__Race__|___Hair____|__HairType____|___Education______|____Occupation_____|_Male
Gen_|__Eyes___|___Hand___|___Skin Tone___|
1 |___8__|_5’10”|_139_|_O-___|__Cau___|__Blonde ___|__Straight ____|__Hogwarts
________|__N/A_____________|____8____|__Grey ___|__Right____|___Pale________|
2 |__97__|_6’2”|_190__|__A+ __|__Blk_____|__Black____|__Kinky
________|__Durmstrang____|__Unmentionable____|____6____|__Brown___|__Left____|___Dark_______|
3 |__40__|_6’5”|_201__|__A+ __|_Cau____|__Red _____|__Straight____|__Hogwarts
_______|__Businessman___|____8____|__Blue____|__Right____|___Pale________|
4 |__32__|_6’0”|_164__|_A-___|__Asn___|__Blk ______|__Straight____|__Other
________|__Ministry_______|____4____|__Brown ___|__Right____|___Olive-------|
5 |__74__|_5’6”|_130__|_B+___|__Mix
________|__Brown___|__Curly____|__Hogwarts____|__Self-
Empl_______|__5____|__Blue____|__Right____|___Lt Brn_______|
6 |__40__|_6’5”|_201__|__A+ __|__Cau____|__Red
_______|__Straight____|__Hogwarts______|__Businessman____|____7____|__Blue____|__Right____|
7 |__3__|_5’11”|_165__|__OB-___|__Cau____|__Black____|__Straight
______|__Hogwarts_______|__Private
Practice______|_5____|__Green____|__Right____|___Cream____|
8 |__29__|_5’10”|_170__|_AB+ __|__Cau____|__Blonde___|__Curly_______|__Beauxbaton
_____|__Instructor______|__4____|__Hazel____|__Left____|___Pale________|

He read over the list, thoughtful. Male gen… must stand for male generations of wizards, denoting
purity of bloodlines… Number seven… that was definitely him. The list stated that there were only 8
more available… well, that left him wondering how many total they had to begin with… number one
had nearly a hundred does available… Merlin. Who was that wizard…? Number one on the liist was
Draco. Eight samples left of him… Number three was certainly one of the Weasley boys… but who
were the others…?
Frowning in thought, he tapped his keyboard and pulled up a file he’d developed, a family tree compilation for several wizarding families… he’d begun it as a family tree for Draco, but it became a history of several wizarding families and had actually come in handy on several cases…. Six male generations for donor 1… That could be Rookwood, he was tall… could be Lestrange, as well… this list didn’t consider female purity, only male… it was clearly designed to appeal to wizards who sought pure children. Harry snorted at that thought. If they’d followed the maternal bloodline, he wouldn’t be on the chart at all, as his mother had been the daughter of two muggles.

Nancy tapped on the door. “Hey, boss man… you want me to pick you up some lunch…?”

Harry glanced at the time with surprise. He had no idea he’d been working on this for three hours already. “I hadn’t been paying attention to the time… yes; if you don’t mind, bring me something…?”

“Not a problem.” She grinned as she strolled out, moving over to Damitri’s office. He was rising from his desk as she moved in.

“No take out then, Mr. Zabini?” Nancy smiled.

“No, thank you… I’m going home for lunch.” He answered, reaching for his jacket.

“Tell Terry I said hi.” She smiled, turning to go.

“I will… don’t let Harry work too late…”

“I’ll chase him off about three or so…” she winked at him as they moved out of his office, strolling side by side as they moved out of the offices.

Draco sat down, glancing around with immense satisfaction. The room had been completely decorated for little Angel. There was a queen size four poster bed, draped with lacy white curtains and with a thick pink comforter stuffed with feather down over silken sheets and feather mattresses and pillows.

The walls were a bright blue, with light fluffy clouds painted on them all over, and magical paintings hung about the walls. One was of a young Unicorn, leaping and prancing about in its frame, another was a shy Demiguise, fading in and out of view; a third (the largest of the paintings) showed fairies flitting about a glen filled with beautiful flowers. The fourth painting was of a Kneazle kit, with a striped body and huge ears bearing spots, playing with a ball of twine. The furniture was in the classical style that the Malfoy family preferred, all in natural wood of a paler tone to keep the room light and airy looking. Shelves were against the walls, full of toys and books and things to occupy the time of a young child who had so recently come from the muggle world. Both Draco and his mother felt that it would be better to help her to merge gradually into the magical world once they saw how she adapted rather than dump everything on the child at once. The floor was shining wood now, with several soft carpets of white and cream placed about the floors.

Draco smiled at his mother, who laid the special doll they had purchased upon the pillows of the bed. “Well, mother…? What do you think…? Does it need anything else…?” he asked.

Narcissa seemed to think a long moment, then look slyly at her son. “A few house elves to help you would be appropriate.”

“One will be sufficient, mum. That will be just fine…” he smiled.

“One will do, to start…” she sighed. “So, what are you planning to name my grandson?”
“We’ve months yet, mum…” he laughed softly. “Harry and I haven’t even had time to make up our minds yet…”

“But what names do you like, son…?” she insisted. “And have you considered any girl names…? Those spells for detecting sex of children have been wrong before…”

“Girl names…? Well…” He shrugged. “No, I haven’t even considered it… but. I have long thought it would be wonderful to honor his mother and name our first girl Lilly or Lillian…”

“Lillian… I like that.” Narcissa smiled, taking a seat in the rocking chair.

“As for the name for a boy… Well, I’m not sure. I want to talk it over with Harry, but I would like to honor his father as well. I know father will go ballistic if I did that…”

“Your father will have to get over it… so you like the name James…? I always have… what was his middle name…?”

“Harold. That’s where Harry’s name came from.” Draco smiled.

“James it is, then…” Narcissa smiled. “How about some tea, love…?”

“And chocolate cake…” Draco agreed immediately. “I have a craving for chocolate cake…”

“Toodles…” Narcissa called and a little female house elf appeared instantly, gazing raptly up at Draco only a moment before looking to Mrs. Malfoy.

“Missy Malfoy needin’ Toodles…?”

“Yes. We would like some tea and chocolate cake.” She answered with a smile at her son.

“Right away, mistress…”

“And you will no longer working at Malfoy Manor….” Toodles gazed up at her, ears trembling, waiting. “You will stay here, and will serve my son Draco and his family.”

“Toodles gets to serve young Master…?” Her expression was one of joy and excitement, eyes as wide as saucers.

“Yes, Toodles… and soon you will have a little girl to care for as well…”

Her ears perked high and she literally trembled head to toe with excitement. “A little witch to tend…? Oh-h-h-h-h Toodles always wanted to tend little girl!” She bounced on her heels excitedly.

“Her name is Angel.” Draco told her. “And she may be shy at first; she has been living in a muggle household and she has never seen a house elf before…”

At his words, the elf’s ears drooped. “Toodles will not scare little witch-girl… Toodles hide, make her happy, makes her comfortable, taking care of little witch…”

“No, you won’t hide.” Draco corrected with a smile. “We will introduce her to you, and she will get used to you….”

“We will deal with that when she comes… now go on, Toodles, and fetch our tea.” Narcissa said, and the elf vanished instantaneously.

Draco chuckled. “You’re spoiling me, mother, to give me Toodles… She’s my favorite out of all the
elves in the Manor… Thank you, mum…”

“She’s always doted on you, son… she’ll be an excellent nanny for you and help you more than any of the others would dream of…”

“She was much more than just a house elf for me… It was lonely, growing up in the Manor all alone… I’m just happy that our son will have a big sister to run about and grow up with…”

“Harry always wanted a large family.” Narcissa smiled softly. “And you always wanted a little sister when you were a child…”

“A sister, a brother… I would have actually settled for a cat…”

“I’ll get you a cat for Christmas.” She smirked as Toodles arrived with the tea and cakes.

“Oh, thank you Toodles… I think I love you.” Draco sighed contentedly, pulling the cake before him.

Toodles giggled. “Master Draco being silly…”

“That’s something you’ll get accustomed to around here, Toodles.” Draco smiled at the little house elf, picking up his fork and taking a bite, eyes closing in enjoyment. “Mmm that’s good…”

That evening after work, Harry moved into the Hole in The Wall Pub, one of his and Ron’s favorite places to go grab a beer now and then and just enjoy the ambiance of the place. It catered to wizards and muggles alike, but had private booths where wizards who preferred not to mingle could have their drinks in peace.

Fred and George were at one of the common booths, as they personally couldn’t care less if they mingled with muggles or not. Fred waved him over, spotting him a moment before his twin did.

“Hey, little brother…!” he greeted, handing Harry a beer as he moved over to sit down.

“So how’s the Great Detective?” George asked.

“Keeping busy, what other way is there to live?” Harry responded, smiling at the two. They hadn’t changed much since Hogwarts; he doubted if they ever would… “What have you two been up to?”

“Managing the stores…” Fred replied.

“And developing new products, of course.” George added.

“So how’s your better half?”

“He’s as beautiful as ever…”

“Lucky dog…” Fred sighed, batting his eyes at Harry.

“You never had a chance, brother dear…” George smirked as Charlie moved up to join them.

“Didn’t bring Ron with you?” Fred asked.

“No, he’s on his way, though…. Practice ran long; Blaise called to let me know. So, Harry, what’s up?” Charlie asked.

“I want to wait until Ron gets here… there’s some serious shit going down, and I’d rather not have to repeat myself. Telling you all at once is the best way…”
“OUR family is involved in some kind of trouble?” Charlie asked.

“I swear we didn’t do anything to break the laws recently…” George said instantly.

“He said to wait for Ronnikins, George; it probably isn’t something we’ve done.” Fred smirked at his twin. “Never could be patient, could you?”

“As if you’re any better?”

“Oh shaddap and drink yer beer.”

They were on their second round when Blaise and Ron entered the bar. “Hey guys…” Ron said with a grin as Charlie rose, giving Blaise a kiss. Ron took up a beer, nudging his brother George. “Budge over, Georgie…” he said with a grin.

“Hey, Mr. I-finally-got-picked-up-by-the-big-league-big-shot… how did practice go…?” Fred asked with a smirk.

“Great… I had an absolute blast…!” Ron grinned.

“So Harry, what’s up…?” Charlie asked.

“Hold on…” Harry said, pulling his wand. He set up privacy spells around their table and area, and then did an extermination spell.

“What was that for?” George asked.

“In case of nosy beetles.” Harry answered cryptically.

Ron laughed while the others looked a bit confused. “We’ll explain that later…” he assured them, then his mirth began to fade as he looked at Harry. The protections, ensuring that reporters couldn’t eavesdrop nor could any of the other customers… “Harry… I… I take it this is about my visit with you the other night…? You have something already…?”

“Oh, yes, Ron.” Harry sighed, not sure how to break the news to his friend. Well, may as well just plow straight into the subject; after all, he didn’t have too much information and there was a lot more investigation that needed to be done… “Well, you were right, to a point… it seems that Hermione is involved in something quite deeply… something, if proven, could put her in Azkaban for a long time…”

Ron’s face lost all color. He swallowed hard, looking down at his beer. “I… Merlin… I was afraid of that…” he whispered.

“Hermione…” George repeated in surprise. “But she’s about as straight-laced…

“…and law-abiding as they come…” Fred added, his eyes as wide as his brother’s.

“What the bloody hell would SHE have gotten into?” George asked.

“The other day Draco and I were at Covington Park. I had just come home from a trip and we were enjoying the day. We found a little girl there who looked a lot like me. I didn’t think much about it until she fell into the river and I pulled her out; at the hospital they told us she was in foster care. We put in to adopt her…” Harry left off his story to take a drink of beer.

“Will you be able to?” Blaise asked. “I know you and Draco want a family…”
“I don’t need to adopt her.” Harry answered. “She’s my daughter.”

Ron bowed his head. Somehow, some way, this was all his fault… his wife had been selling Harry’s sperm, that’s the only possible answer for the entire situation… “Merlin… How could she…? Harry, I… I’m sorry…” he said softly.

George and Fred exchanged glances then looked back at Harry; the two then spoke in unison. “She’s using your sperm to make a whole army of little Harry’s…?” they asked.

“No, not just mine.” Harry said, rolling his eyes at that. Why the hell would anyone want an army of little copies of him? “Snape works at the hospital…” he pulled a photo from his pocket and laid it on the table; it showed the twins. “Draco doesn’t know about them, not yet. He’s expecting and I refuse to stress him out any more than he already has been…”

Charlie picked up the photo and gazed at it, then at Harry. “It doesn’t stop at the two of you either, does it…?” he asked pointedly.

“No… you always were the quick one.” He answered, laying a folder on the desk. “This is the special listing of sperm donors they offer that only includes pureblood and powerful old family stock…”

George snatched the folder up first, reading through it. “Holy… she’s got one hell of a stable here to choose from…” he murmured, laying it down so the others could see as well.

“Redhead, blue eyes… hey, that could be one of us…”

“We’re sure that number three is one of you guys… that’s why I asked you all here; I have no way of knowing precisely which of you that is…”

“Not me, I got mum’s green eyes.” Fred said loftily.

“Your eyes are blue, Fred.” George chuckled.

“Are they?”

“Since the day we were born.”

“I didn’t donate any sperm…!”

“Well I didn’t either… at least I don’t think so… I know I’ve never been in any clinic…”

“THE REASON I asked you all here….” Harry spoke loudly over the twins to get them to subside for a minute. “Was to ask your permission to use your um… well. For you to be the donor.”

“Are you trying to get preggers Harry?” George asked.

Fred hit him. “He’d use DRACO’s, not yours, idiot.”

“Shut up prat…!”

Harry rolled his eyes. “Merlin, give me patience… Guys…!” he interrupted and they looked at him again. “You all know my partner…”

“Of course we do, Harry. He’s my uncle.” Blaise answered, acting as if he hadn’t even heard the two begin their argument.
“Well he and Terry are posing as our couple in need… and Damitri wanted me to ask your permission to use your… samples… to proceed…”

“They want to have a baby…? Stellar!”

“And they want a redhead…?”

“Even better…”

“They’re a great couple and wonderful people… if its mine, I don’t mind it at all.” Charlie agreed, speaking loudly to be heard over the twins.

“Sure, mine too. What the hell, why not?” Fred shrugged.

“Same here… hey; I wonder how much I go for…”

“Two galleons and fifteen knuts!” Fred chuckled.

“…and you go for four silver sickles!” George shot back.

“I can’t believe you’re even wondering how much the charge is…!” Ron said, horrified at his brother’s nonchalant behavior about all this.

“Hey you think it could be Ronny’s…?” George eyed his younger brother.

“What…? No, not me…”

“Oh it could be…”

“She is your wife…”

“And you don’t have to be at a clinic to donate…”

“Had sex with ‘er recently mate…?”

Suddenly both twins cried out in pain. “OW! Bloody hell, Charlie…!” They complained, rubbing their shins that he had unceremoniously kicked under the table.

“Shut up, you twin tornadoes.” He warned.

Ron looked shaken but didn’t look up. “I don’t think it’s me… I… I can’t know but… I… if it is… I’m okay with helping Damitri and Terry… they’re nice folks…” he said quietly.

“Do you know how long she’s been at this…?” Charlie asked softly.

“Years…” Ron said softly before he downed the rest of his beer in one long draught.

“Angel is five… so at least six years.” Harry answered.

“Have you checked your Gringotts bank account, Ron…?” Blaise asked.

“Yes; you oughta be really well off…” George commented.

“Shut UP, George.” Charlie growled at his brother, who shot him a scowl but subsided for a moment.

“I never paid attention to it… hell, we never had a vault there; didn’t have enough money to have
one…” he said softly, staring at his empty glass. “Hermione handled all the money, I just… I just lived my life and enjoyed my job and my baby…” he mumbled. “I… I should have… I should have noticed years ago…”

“We need to keep this under cover; no talking to anyone about any of it, guys.” Charlie said firmly.

“I don’t know what we’re going to uncover, or how many may be involved. I know Parkinson is in on it. We don’t know what Hermione’s particular involvement is, or Parkinson’s… but someone is heading the operation…”

“Parkinson?” George repeated with a look of clear distaste.

“What would Hermione be doing working with that… that BITCH…?” Fred growled.

“Pansy works at the clinic… she… she helped Hermione get the grants to get her training and education at the muggle colleges…” Ron mumbled.

“Pansy is a healer at the clinic.” Harry confirmed.

“She’s a damned Death Eater!” Fred snarled.

“She was never marked, and the Wizengamot acquitted her of all charges…” Ron said softly. He’d had her over for dinner… and… Merlin… what had she done…? What had he done by being so damned blind…? This was all real; his greatest fears were coming true… he was going to lose his wife. He was going to lose his family… all that mattered to him…

Blaise watched Ron for a long moment, silent as the others debated Pansy’s responsibility for various crimes against different people. Blaise reached out, putting his hand over Ron’s and squeezing it gently. “I’m so sorry, Ronny…” he said softly. “I know you love her…”

Ron looked up at Blaise a moment, his eyes full of pain and worry. “Yeah, I… I love her so much, but… this is all wrong, so damned wrong…” he couldn’t look at any of them any longer.

“Maybe she’s being forced… anyone consider that…? Parkinson is pretty handy with an Imperious curse, I understand…”

“She took the money.” Ron mumbled. “Forced or not, she still took the money…”

“Do you know how much…?” Fred asked.

“Not a clue… I just know it’s been enough to pay off our house… and buy lots of expensive things. Even a muggle car…” he said, voice just above a mumble. “It’s my fault she got desperate for money… I didn’t provide for my family, I don’t earn enough; hell, even dad managed to get enough for all of us…”

“Stop that right now, Ron!” Harry said firmly. “It is not your fault. I would have given Hermione the money and she knew it…”

“We all would have, Ron…” George began, realizing just how much his brother was blaming himself and not liking it one bit. He glanced at Fred, who gave him a nod to show he agreed.

“We’re family, and family sticks together…” Fred said.

“You didn’t make her do any of this, Ron.” Blaise asserted as well; he had not relinquished his hold on Ron’s hand. “This was all done by her choice, not yours.”
“Yeah, I guess… but… Merlin, I wish I understood why…” he said, still clearly feeling that it was
his responsibility.

“I know… but whatever happens, we’re here for you…”

“Thanks… I have a horrible feeling I’ll be leaning on all of you a lot before this is all over…”

“So how do we help, Harry…?” George asked, his eyes on his younger brother who had not once
raised his eyes from his own hands. He didn’t like anyone making his brother that depressed.

“Nothing. Act like you know nothing that is happening…”

George shrugged. “Simple enough… I can do it. But Ronnie… I don’t think he can…” he said
softly.”

“I’ll do anything I have to, to protect Rosie.” Ron whispered, but his hands were trembling.

“You couldn’t act your way out of a wet paper bag, little brother…”

Harry sighed, picking up the papers and photo. “Well, that’s about all I have to tell you all right
now… I need to head home. Thanks guys…” he said, then rose and reached over to Ron, giving him
a brotherly hug. “We’ll get through this, mate… together…”

“Yeah, I… thanks mate…” he mumbled softly.

“Hey Harry, give Dray a kiss for me.” Blaise smiled. “Tell him we’ll see him Sunday for supper…”

“Will do…” He smiled softly, releasing the spells as he turned and walked off.

Ron didn’t even look up as Harry left, staring at his empty beer glass in silence, slumped slightly in
his chair. Blaise silently slipped his arm about Ron, giving him comfort without a word. Ron found
himself leaning against him.

“You know, Ron; you shouldn’t go home tonight.” Charlie said with a frown, looking at him with
clear concern.

“I have to… Rosie… I can’t…”

“We’ll go and pick her up. You can both stay with us tonight; we have that guest room and you
know it…”

“Okay, I… thanks…” he mumbled.

Blaise smiled. “Come on, Ron. We’ll take care of you. See you later, boys…” he winked at Fred and
George.

“Give Ronnikins a calming draught…” Fred started, looking at his brother in concern as well.

“…then put him to bed.” George finished for him, tossing some money on the table as they rose to
leave the pub as well.

“C’mon, baby bro.” Charlie said, hooking one hand under Ron’s arm.

Ron glanced at his brother, and then slowly rose to his feet, feeling like he was in shock… “Just
when I thought things were finally looking up… this happens. How am I going to explain all this to
Rosie…? She’s so young…”
“You don’t; not yet anyway…”

“But she’s smart… she’s got Hermione’s brains…. She’ll know. She’s only seven but she’ll know there’s something wrong, I can’t keep anything from her…” Ron said, clearly worried.

“She’s definitely going to pick up on the fact that you’re upset, unless we get you calmed…”

“I’m sorry… I’m just… I don’t want to lose her, I love her…” he whispered, tears dampening his eyes. “A calming draught… it will help… I’ll… I’ll be all right…” he said, struggling to control his fear and rising panic.

“Yes, you will be.” Blaise said firmly. “We’ll see to that, won’t we Charlie?” He stated as he and Charlie led Ron out of the bar.

The journey to their house was spent in relative silence, Ron growing more and more withdrawn and quiet. He allowed Blaise to lead him to the couch and sit him down, sitting on his right side. Charlie glanced at him worriedly and hurried to get the calming draught. He returned shortly with it, unstoppering it. Ron held out a trembling hand and Charlie helped him to drink the powerful calming draught.

The younger man slowly calmed, eyes closed, his hands steadying, the potion taking effect on him. He took a long, slow and slightly shaky breath. “I… thanks guys…” he murmured as Charlie sat on his left. “I’m sorry; it’s all… all just so much…”

Both Blaise and Charlie put their arms about him. “We’ll get through this…” Charlie soothed.

“And we’ll take care of you, Ronny…” Blaise said softly. “No matter what happens…”

“I can’t… you’ve got your own family. I don’t want to be in the way of you two…”

“You’re not in the way. This house gets awfully quiet some days…” Charlie assured.

Ron sighed, nodding, eyes downcast. “All right, for… for a day or two… okay. I just… I won’t come between you two…” he murmured, then flushed as he realized he’d said ‘come between them’… he couldn’t be with Blaise; he was married to his brother…! Spending the day laughing and flying with Blaise had brought back all those old feelings from school, and the beers at the bar hadn’t helped him to think straight either. “Um… I mean… you two are married and all…”

Blaise smiled and gave him a wink. “You’re always welcome between us, Ronny…” he said teasingly. Ron blushed deeply and Blaise chuckled softly.

“Ron, you are more than welcome to stay here with us.” Charlie smiled. “But we’re getting ahead of ourselves. Hermione hasn’t been found guilty of anything yet.”

“She will be… She’s been doing these awful things…” he said softly.

“I’ll be good, Charlie…” Blaise sighed. “I promise not to pounce until after the trial…”

“She…” Ron started, and then looked at Blaise. “You… you what…?” he said as the dark-skinned wizard’s words sank in.

“Well… you need to be here with me and Charlie.” Blaise said. “This is where you belong.”

“I just want all this to be over, so I can know… know what I have to deal with… know what I have to do…”

“...
“Ron, you can’t dwell on it like this. You’re going to get yourself all worked up again, and need another draught before we even get dinner made. You can’t let this control your life… you just got on the team. You have to live your life, Ron…” Charlie said firmly.

Ron pushed himself to his feet, arms folded tightly against his chest, moving to the window and out of the comfort of their arms that he felt that he didn’t deserve. He stared out of it, his back to them. “I dunno if I can even do it now…” he whispered. “I can’t focus on the team and on Quidditch, not with all this going on… I can’t…”

Blaise moved to him, wrapping his arms about him. “I’m not going to let you quit.” He said in a tone that allowed no argument. “Don’t let whatever Hermione has done destroy your life…”

Ron felt his pulse quicken at the embrace of his teammate… he swallowed, feeling somehow worse. “It just feels like everything is all falling apart… I don’t know… perhaps… perhaps it will all look better in the morning…”

“I’ll go and pick Rose up from school.” Charlie said. “Blaise, take care of him while I’m gone, eh?”

“Not a problem.” Blaise assured, still holding Ron in his arms.

“Merlin, I… thanks Charlie…” Ron murmured, feeling worse. He’d forgotten about Rosie, even for a moment…

Charlie grinned and moved out without another word. He’d pick up Rosie at school, then stop by Ron & Hermione’s place and get them some clothes for a day or so. Hermione ought to still be at work, from what Ron used to tell him… He’d just leave her a note telling her they were visiting for a day or two…

Ron hesitated, and then started to pull away. “I… I think I ought to… eat something…” he murmured.

Blaise reluctantly released his hold on him; he was quite enjoying holding his old school crush close in his arms. “All right… I’ll just get supper started… steak and potatoes was your favorite, wasn’t it…?”

“Yeah, I… thank you Blaise…” he said softly, giving the bar a longing look. Oh, to be drunk and not think at all anymore… “I… I’ll help…”

****Animal references are from “Fantastic Beasts & Where to Find Them” by Newt Scamander, published by Scholastic in 2001. ****
Narcissa followed Snape into the private nursery room at St. Mungo’s Hospital, feeling nervous somehow… she was about to see the babies for the first time. She moved to the bassinet side, eyes wide as she gazed down at the infants who lay quietly in their bed asleep, side by side, their little hands touching. “Oh… Severus…” she whispered softly.

“They are off all the muggle machinery, and with the potions I have provided for them they are developing a bit better than even I expected of them. They are feeding well, and have gained weight. The magic within them is quite strong, and it is working with the potions to help them to develop. They will need to be on potions daily for about a year, I believe; but they can be brought home and cared for by your private healer. Children always do better in a home environment…”

“Yes… I can take them home until Draco is ready for them… but… what will I tell Lucius…?”

“I thought he was out of town this week…” Severus asked with an arched eyebrow. “Narcissa, if it will cause a problem, or cause any risk to their health, I can certainly arrange for something else…”

“I don’t think Lucius would harm them. They’re what he always wanted, after all; babies of pure blood that bear the family resemblance…”

Severus snorted. “He’ll probably wish to claim them as his own, the arrogant fool…”

“I won’t allow that.” Narcissa said immediately. “You can prove that they are not. We need to register them as soon as we can as Draco’s offspring and NOT Lucius’…”

“I have already started the paperwork.” Snape nodded. “Have you found out what to name them…? I need something to put on the forms…”

“Surreptitiously, yes…” she smiled. “This sweet little girl will be Lillian Cassiopeia Malfoy Potter…” she carefully lifted up the delicate little baby girl, cradling her in her arm. She was barely larger than her hand, the poor little darling…

“And the boy…?”

“The only name I have for him is James…”

Severus chuckled “Oh, I really MUST be there when you inform Lucius that his first born grandson is named after James Harold Potter.” He said with a droll smirk.

“It is not Lucius’ choice.” She smiled at him. “These names were Draco’s choice… though he was unaware he was naming these two babies…”

“Perhaps he wishes to name his son with Harry with the name James…”

“Oh… yes… that does cause a problem. I’m sure he does… but this little fellow must have a name as well…”

“Well, you could honor the mutt – Harry’s godfather. Or even my wolf. Remus would be ecstatic…”

“Or honoring you, my dear friend?” She smiled at him. “Were it not for you, I’m sure these precious little ones would be long beyond our ability to ever reach…”

“Remus Severus Malfoy Potter. Hmmm… that does have a nice ring to it.” Snape smirked.
“It is perfect.” She smiled warmly at him. “Besides; I don’t think it truly matters what we name them, Lucius is bound to object to the male name…”

“If there are objections, the name can be changed at a later date.” Severus said.

Narcissa scoped up the tiny boy as well. “Hello, my sweet little grandson… welcome to the family…” she murmured. The baby gazed at her with sleepy unfocused eyes.

Severus held out his hands toward the girl and Narcissa passed her into his care. “And you little butterfly…” he said softly. “Welcome, Lilly… may your days forever be filled with smiles and laughter…” he kissed her brow tenderly. The baby gurgled, tiny hands grasping.

Narcissa laughed softly and kissed her grandson as well. “I think she likes you…”

“She is hardly more than a handful; neither of them is…” Severus said, turning with the child. “Come; let us take your grandchildren home.”

“Yes; I have the family crib I used for Draco set up in the nursery. I never took it down after he lost his last baby… it will suit them well for a few weeks at least…” she picked up the bag of things from the hospital.

“They will do better if kept in the same bed. It will give them comfort to sleep together.

“They’ll have more than enough love.” She smiled, almost glowing with happiness as they strolled out of the hospital at a relaxed pace. Severus led her out to his car and transfigured the muggle car seat in the back into a double-infant carrier. He applied charms on the carrier for their safety.

Narcissa ensured they were physically secured as well, and then turned to sit in the front seat. “It’s quite convenient, really, that you have this vehicle…”

“It is a little luxury of mine. And I do work in the muggle world; wouldn’t want unnecessary questions about how I arrive at work every day…”

“Very true… and it is quite a nice vehicle…” she observed.

Snape pulled out into traffic, driving with practiced ease. “I hate to think of what would have happened to those little miracles if they had remained in the hands of muggle medicine… if they survived their infancy at all, they would have been handicapped for life…”

“They don’t live in a muggle world, Severus. They are safe with me… and with you, of course, watching over them…” Narcissa reminded with a smile.

The drive to Malfoy Manor was uneventful. Narcissa glanced up at the house and noted the lights were on. “Oh Merlin… it looks as if Lucius is home…” she mused as Severus got the carrier out of the car.

“We’d best get these two inside.” Severus said, glancing skyward at the gathering threatening cloud cover. “It feels as if it’s going to rain soon, and it’s quite a walk to the manor from here…”

“Yes; thank you so much, Severus…” she said, draping a blanket over the carrier and lifting it up with a smile. “These babies are so tiny; they hardly weigh a thing…”

“Lilly was born 2 pounds, 13 ounces, and Remmy was 3 pounds, 1 ounce.” Severus said as he
opened the door for Narcissa.

“So tiny… they’re perfect…” she agreed, moving in with a smooth careful gait as to not disturb or jostle the sleeping babies in their blanket-covered basket carrier.

“Ah, Narcissa; Severus…” Lucius smiled as he spotted them; he had been halfway down the stairs when they moved in the door, a paper in his hand. “Cissa, I was just going over the financial reports… have you made your decision about the property in Italy…?” he asked. “I need to settle it by the end of the month…”

“Go ahead and close on the house in Italy.” She said, continuing directly past him on the stairs.

He looked at the basket carrier, a puzzled expression on his face. “What ever do you have in the basket, Cissa…? I told you I would not tolerate kittens or anything of that ilk in my house…” he reminded.

“It’s not kittens, Lucius.” She said dismissively, mounting the top of the stairs. “Come, Severus; we must get them settled…”

“Settle what? Severus? Cissa?! What is in the basket…?” Lucius moved to peer into the carrier, lifting the blanket. One of the babies mewled, whimpering and he dropped the blanket back into place, looking quite as if he had been hit on the back of the head by a bludger.

“Lucius, they must be fed immediately, changed, and set back to sleep.” She waved him off. “Come if you wish, but I WILL get them taken care of…” she proceeded onward without hesitation to the nursery.

Severus smirked at the stunned expression on his friend’s face. “But… how… where…?!” he stammered, following the others into the nursery.

“Be a dear and get the blanket off the bed, will you Lucius?” Narcissa asked, lifting little Lilly out of the carrier.

Lucius numbly flicked his wand and the blanket folded itself at the foot of the bed. “Where did they come from Cissa?” He whispered, reaching out to stroke the baby boy’s fine blonde hair. “Are they ours…?”

“I was only pregnant one time, Lucius… I wish they were mine, but they are not… at the same time, they are… in a way. They are our firstborn grandchildren…” she smiled softly. “This is Lillian Cassiopeia Malfoy Potter…” she said as she laid the sleeping infant girl down into the bed. “And this…” she turned to lift the boy out of the carrier. “This strapping young man is Remus Severus Malfoy Potter…”

“But… How…? These are not Potter’s children, they are Malfoys… look at them! There is not one bit of Potter in either of them…” he stammered, completely taken aback. His son had not been pregnant… he would have known if he had gotten a girl with child…!

“It is a long, complicated story, Lucius.” Severus said. “One we do not yet have all the answers to at this point in time…”

“They are Malfoy children.” Narcissa agreed, cradling the boy close to her chest to soothe him. “But Draco has no idea they exist yet.”

“How could he not?” Lucius demanded. “It seems that Potter is not the only unfaithful one…! That marriage should not stand…! It should never have been in the first place! I told you, Narcissa,
allowing them to wed was a mistake…!”

“He never even met the mother.” Severus snapped in a quiet tone.

“How in Merlin’s name could this happen?!?”

“Lucius, please…!” Narcissa hissed at him. “Be quiet!”

“When I have all the details, I promise to fill you in completely. All I know for certain at the moment is they are a result of muggle science and wizarding magic and potions…” Severus began.

The baby in Narcissa’s arms began to cry, upset by the strange noise and level of emotion in the room. A snarl touched Narcissa’s lips. “Lucius Abraxus Malfoy!” She growled in a dangerously quiet yet commanding tone that instantly had both men’s attention. Her wand was out in her hand, the tip glowing with magic ready to be unleashed. “Look what all of your overreacting and carrying on has done…You’ve upset the children! Get out! Go on, get out and go to your study! Go yell at each other in the hall! I don’t give a damn where you go and yell at each other, but you will not say another word in this room!” her voice never varied from the dangerous quiet tone, her eyes blazing angrily.

“But Cissa…” he started.

“Out!” The magic flared from her wand and Lucius found he could no longer see the babies, their crib, or his very angry wife. She had created an impenetrable shield about them all. The shield pulsed and both he and Severus were forced back and away from them. Severus did not fight it; he simply turned and walked back out into the hall.

“Cissa…! Cissa you can’t do this…!” Lucius said, growing angry as well; he drew his wand and tried to break through the shield or to at least make it transparent… his efforts met with no success.

“Lucius, you’ve been married to the woman over thirty years. You can’t tell when the battle has been lost…?” Severus asked with a smirk, standing now in the hall.

Lucius stood a moment more; wand gripped tightly in his hand, then whirled and stalked from the room to join Severus. “Why are they so small…? Where did they come from…?” he asked, focusing on his old school friend to give him what he wanted now. His wife clearly was not going to be any informational help whatsoever.

“They are twins, and nearly two months premature…” he answered, turning toward Lucius’ study.

“What are their names again…?” he asked, feeling as if he was waking from being slapped senseless.

“Cassiopeia Malfoy Potter and Remus Severus Malfoy Potter”. Severus answered, walking into the study, closing the door behind them.

“No! Absolutely not! These are Malfoy children, not Potters!” He insisted, anger and outrage bubbling up again.

Severus scowled at him. “Be reasonable, man! They are Draco’s children, do you really think that he will allow Potter’s name not to be part of their name…? He will not have them named any other way and you know it!”

“Then let them be Potter Malfoy!”

Severus rolled his eyes. “It’s all the same to me… that can be arranged.”
“And REMUS…? Really, now…!”

“That choice is not yours to make, Lucius.” Severus reminded.

“Well who is it that named them? Names like that; it had to be Potter, wasn’t it?!”

“No, actually, it was your wife.” Severus cut off his rant, moving to the bar to break out the fire whiskey. “But she actually wanted to name the boy James…”

“Why isn’t Draco with his children? He should be naming them, not Narcissa!”

Severus poured him a glass of fire whiskey and pushed it to him. “THAT, my friend, is why you must calm down, have a drink, and listen to me. I don’t wish to tell Draco about them just yet and there truly is a good reason for it…”

“Well how could he not know he fathered them…?” Lucius asked, impatient.

“I told you; he has never met the mother. These babies were not created in the traditional way, Lucius… Have you ever heard of a place Muggles call a Fertility Clinic…?”

“I have no use for muggles; much less what they call their insane places of business. What nonsense are you spouting, Severus? Muggles don’t do fertility potions anyway; they wouldn’t work on a muggle…!”

“No, a potion would not. But I am not discussing potions, my friend. They have their own methods of ensuring fertility; they use science to enable those of them who had not been able to conceive be successful in bearing children… you need to understand this before I can explain how these babies came to be.” Severus was sorely tempted to take on the tone he usually used when instructing a particularly thick student in potions, but he resisted the urge. He kept his tone level and calm; it seemed to be working to get Lucius to calm down as well and begin to think and reason.

“So explain this science.” Lucius said, moving to his chair beside the fireplace. He looked particularly put out and angry at the moment but was at least willing to listen.

Severus took the second chair, settling a moment before he began to speak. “The muggle method, basically, is to use medical implements to extract several eggs from the mother and apply sperm from the father. Once the egg has been fertilized it is reinserted into the mother’s womb. This method has helped thousands of couples to conceive and carry children to term…”

Lucius found himself vaguely intrigued by this. He had no idea Muggles could be so resourceful. “Really…? How many of these ‘eggs’ do they take out? And how do they do so…?”

“They give the muggle woman drugs that help her to produce more eggs. Once she has produced them, they use a needle to extract the eggs out of her ovary. They harvest as many as possible, ten to twenty minimum. Up to six fertilized eggs are implanted, for not all will survive…”

“Merlin…!” Lucius looked rather repulsed. “Muggle women breed like rabbits…! One nearly killed my Cissa…!”

“Most of the eggs die, Lucius. Most women will bear only one, perhaps two infants. The process is much the same for wizarding couples of opposing sexes…”

“But if this is how these twins were conceived, how is it that Draco has no knowledge of them? How did they come to have Draco’s… contribution…?” he chose the word carefully; speaking of eggs and sperm made it sound like some sordid type of farm…
“There is an investigation under way to determine that. And before I say another word, you must swear – the unbreakable oath – that you will not interfere with the investigation or hunt down those involved until they are in custody and sent to Azkaban…”

“Will they even reach Azkaban?” Lucius asked in a dangerous tone, sipping his drink. No one messed with the Malfoy bloodline…!

“They must. After they’ve arrived there…” Severus shrugged to indicate he could care less about what happened to them. “Give me your bond, Lucius. Else I am bound not to speak another word.”

Lucius scowled. “If I must…” He agreed in an irritated tone, holding out his hand. Severus took his hand and whispered the spell, setting the conditions which Lucius repeated in a sullen yet steady voice. The spell bound him from speaking of anything revealed to him including the children, or anything of the clinic or investigation until it was concluded and became public knowledge. The binding magic wrapped about their wrists, settling into Lucius’ very blood. He watched, scowling, as Severus slipped his wand away. “Go on.” He instructed shortly.

“You do know that Draco had gone to a clinic to try to get help conceiving a child…”

“Yes; I remember. Even your best potions couldn’t help Potter in his quest to get my son pregnant…” Lucius nodded. “That was very hard on my son…”

Severus sighed, but did not feel it was his place to reveal Draco’s pregnancy. Draco would do that when he was ready for it. “Not exactly, but we will get to that later… Back to what I was explaining. When two wizards are aided in conception, the egg from a witch is used but the chemical markers are removed…”

“The chemical what…?”

“Markers. Muggles have discovered the chemical makeup of the human gene… the basic building blocks of human tissue. For our purpose we will call them chemical markers. They remove the chemical markers of the witch and one wizard’s chemical markers are imposed before the egg is fertilized by the second wizard. This method has proven successful with many male wizarding couples…”

“Yes, including my Draco. That success resulted in a pregnancy that nearly destroyed my son completely.” Lucius scowled.

“Very true… it nearly destroyed them both.” Severus agreed in a quiet tone. “After the death of that child neither Draco nor Harry has ever returned to the clinic. The sperm that was stored there, though, has not remained stored as intended. It is being used, to create children without their knowledge or consent.”

Lucius’ eyes narrowed in fury and he leaned forward slightly in his chair. “I see a very simple solution to this entire fiasco; we destroy this ‘clinic’ and everyone in it...!” He snarled.

“Brilliant plan, Lucius. That will ensure that we lose the information on all the pureblood seed and the location of every child that they have created…” Severus commented dryly.

That stopped Lucius. “There are others…? Draco has more children…?” he asked.

“Not only Draco, my old friend.” He corrected. “Although at the moment we have no idea how many or even where to find them. I found the twins by chance through my work at the hospital; I was only brought in because of the skill I have demonstrated in maintaining the lives of children in horrible situations…”
“Who is suspected? You must have someone under observation…” Lucius attempted; he may have been bound against retribution himself but if other wizarding families were involved and having their… essence… sold as well without their consent, there would be others willing to take out any culprits involved…

“We do, but I will not reveal that to you. You’re much too resourceful a man to be held to a simple bond on yourself… you know how to get other people to get things done for you. Let us get our investigation done. We need all the chief suspects to remain ignorant of observation.”

Lucius scowled angrily. “I will not sit by while my son’s… ESSENCE… is stolen and sold to the highest bidder…!”

“I told you, we are working on this!” Severus retorted instantly.

“And why is my son not being informed of the existence of these twins?! Why is he being protected from this information? He should know of them, he should be here to name them…! In Merlin’s name, what the hell is going on, Severus!?” He demanded.

Severus sat back in his chair, sighing. “I am not at liberty to say. Let us just say there are extenuating circumstances involved concerning your son, and he is to be left out of such discussions for a time…”

“Extenuating circumstances… you mean Potter wants him left ignorant!” He snapped angrily.

“He knows of one child, Lucius. Young Angel was to move in with them today, I understand…” Severus said, forcing himself to calm back down. His own anger wasn’t going to help the situation no matter how satisfying it would be to get into a yelling match with Lucius.

“That child should NOT be moving in with my son…! She only belongs to Potter, and she has been raised by Muggles. She knows nothing of our world, of our traditions… let Potter raise the little beast on his own!”

“Draco would never allow that. He wanted to adopt Angel the moment he found she was in the Muggle foster child system, even before he knew she was of Potter’s blood or wizarding stock. Surely you saw the dates on the paperwork…?”

“You know I did.” He scowled, sitting back in his chair again. “She is purely Potter’s child, though. Perhaps Draco should come home for a while. Potter is always off at his work, and my son will be left alone at home with a child who knows nothing of her magic or our world… I’m unsure if he is capable of handling the situations that will come up with the girl…”

“Do you truly think your son will leave his home? The one he has made with his husband…?” Severus asked, sipping his drink.

“No.” He grumbled, scowling at the fire. “But Draco deserves better. He deserves someone who will give him a child, at least one to be his heir…” he began, sipping at his drink.

“Your anger and constant sniping at every little detail does more harm to your relationship with your son than it will ever do to the relationship between the two of them, Lucius. I’ve heard Draco talking and you do need to attempt civility toward Potter. Whether you like him or not, or you may drive your son from you completely…”

“You have a lot of advice for someone who has no children, Severus.” Lucius said acidly. Severus’ comments hit a nerve and he’d be damned if he wasn’t going to retaliate with his own barb.
“I’ve watched too many others make damned fools of themselves.” Severus set his drink aside, rising. The barb had indeed hit home with him but he refused to show Lucius that. He did want a child, but he was not willing to resort to any sort of magical or technological assistance. If it was meant to be, it would be so, someday. If not… well, he would continue helping the children of others. “I must go; I am due at the hospital for another round within the hour. I will keep you posted as I can on the investigation…”

“If there is anything I can do to assist, don’t hesitate to contact me.” Lucius said, rising as well.

A smirk touched Severus’ lips at that offer. Yes, he could just picture exactly how Lucius Malfoy would love to be given permission to ‘help’ with the investigation… the result of such assistance would have a very high body count. “I will contact you if we need you.” He assured. “You will have your hands full with the twins, for now…”

“They are barely a handful each…”

“Yes indeed, which means they will need constant care. If you are lucky, Cissa may even allow you to help…”

“She WILL let me help!” he snapped, setting his drink down hard enough to splash what was left in the glass onto the table, steaming as it settled into the wood. “I intend to go and rectify that situation this moment, as a matter of fact!”

Snape turned away with a grin. Cold, arrogant, haughty Lucius Malfoy was such a sucker for an infant with blonde hair and eyes of Malfoy grey…

Lucius made his way back to the nursery and paused a moment outside the door to compose himself. There was no point in blustering in; Narcissa had made it abundantly clear that excessive noise would not be tolerated… and she had been right. He tapped lightly on the door and tried it; he was greatly relieved to find not only was it open, it swung open without a sound.

The shield was gone, much to his relief. Narcissa sat with both babes in her arms, gently rocking and humming a soft, soothing lullaby. “Are we ready to be civil, now?” She asked him quietly. He noticed her wand was lying across her lap. She was quite prepared for him to be an arse once more.

“Cissa, I… Please. Forgive me.” He said in a quiet tone. “I was a little… taken aback… by the fact that I’m a grandfather when this morning I was not. It is a bit of a shock…”

“A shock…? A blessing you mean…” she said softly, leaning to kiss the downy soft blonde hair of the boy. “A double blessing…”

“May I… may I hold my grandson, Cissa…?” he asked, moving over to her.

“There are two of them, Lucius.” She reminded gently, offering him one of the children.

He took the babe, holding the sleeping infant in the crook of his arm. “Draco doesn’t need to know of these children, Severus says… perhaps he would rather we take over guardianship of them… it would simplify things for him…” he began reasonably.

“That is not our choice, Lucius.” She answered with a soft sigh. Already he was trying to take the children as his own, just as Severus had foreseen. “Little Remus won’t do much more than sleep for an hour or two; he’s just had a good feed…” she rose to her feet and moved to get a bottle of formula. “Lillian, though, has not eaten yet. She needs to be fed…”

“She’s a girl… she won’t like me.” He said, smiling as he studied the perfect cherubic face of his
sleeping grandson, slowly pacing the floor. The child slept peacefully.

“Nonsense. Come; I’ve fed Remmy, you can feed Lilly. You DO wish to help me care for them, do you not…?” she asked pointedly, offering the little girl and the bottle. The child was squirming and beginning to whimper.

“She’s a female, Cissa; they never take to me…” Lucius said.

“You will at least try.” She said firmly, moving to him and exchanging babies.

Lucius reluctantly gave in, sitting down in the rocking chair that Narcissa had just vacated. The baby in his arms whimpered, rooting against his chest. He nudged her mouth with the nipple of the bottle and she immediately latched on, whimpering as she greedily took the bottle. Her little eyes opened and she gazed at him as she nursed. “You just settle down, now… that’s no way to behave. You are a Malfoy, after all…” he admonished in a soft, gentle tone. The babe suckled a moment more, then released the nipple and cooed. Lucius’ face broke out in a smile. “My…aren’t you a charmer…” he murmured and the baby began to eat again.

Cissa watched her husband with a delighted smile. She couldn’t have asked for anything better than she was seeing right now, at this moment.

Lucius softly kissed the baby’s soft fuzzy head. “This is my granddaughter… and my grandson…” he gazed over at Narcissa, who still held the sleeping boy.

“Yes, my love.” She agreed, smiling, moving to him with her eyes sparkling.

“We have waited a long time for this…” he said, reaching to take her hand in his, kissing it as well. “Thank you, Cissa. For putting up with me…”

“It’s worth it…” she smiled affectionately at him.

“I want Draco to come home, Cissa. He needs to be here as well, where we can take care of him.”

“How can we do that? He can’t be told of these two yet…”

“I’m just worried about him. His husband is always away… what if something happens to him and he is alone…?”

“He’s consented to taking a house elf, love.”

“Finally…” he grunted softly, a bit sour. “But Cissa, is that enough…? Could the elf get help in time…? Would it even know how…?”

Narcissa smiled; she had not seen such concern for her son on her husband’s face in a long time. “I’ve given him Toodles. She knows what to do, and she loves him dearly. You know that she would move mountains to save our son…” she assured.

Lucius sighed. “All right, Cissa…” he sighed.

She gave him a tender kiss. The baby gurgled faintly, now only chewing on the nipple. Lucius chuckled softly, gazing down at her. “She has very strong magic…”

“They were born much too soon… their lungs weren’t developed, and from what I understand they both had problems with their hearts…”

“Severus’ potions have had an amazing effect; their lungs and all seem to be working just fine
now…”

“Yes, love... they are perfect, just small…” Narcissa agreed. He gazed down at the baby, finding his heart being stolen away by the tiny baby looking up at him with drowsy unfocused eyes.

Angel fidgeted at Ms. Masterson’s side, smoothing her dress nervously. In her little hand she clutched a small bouquet of flowers she’d picked just outside the hospital. She’d doggedly hung onto them all through the ride and now she stared up at the door of the little cottage, nervous and worried. Ms. Masterson had dressed her in this awful blue dress that the last Fosters had got for her… she didn’t think her new parents would like it. She’d wanted to wear the one with the flowers... and her hair wasn’t done pretty or anything… would they really truly want to keep her…? She glanced up at Ms. Masterson, who didn’t seem worried or flustered in the least…

Harry answered the door, smiling. “Hello… please; come in…”

“Hi…” Angel said shyly, still holding the flowers at her side, smiling up at Harry.

“Thank you… come along, Angel.” Ms. Masterson said, stepping in. She was carrying a large duffel bag on one shoulder. She smiled at Harry. “She’s been so excited; I really do hope this is her permanent home…”

“It is. I can guarantee you that she has come home for good.” Harry said firmly.

“Hello, my little Angel.” Draco smiled, moving into the room. “Would you like to see your new room…?”

“I… I have my OWN room…?” she asked, eyes wide, so excited and happy she was almost bouncing on her heels.

“Yes, Angel. All your own…” Draco smiled, holding out his hand to her. “Your father and I are very happy to have you home at last…”

She took his hand with a shy smile. “My home forever…? And a real daddy…?”

“Yes, your forever home. And you have two daddies. Is that all right…?”

She released his hand and flung her arms about his legs, hugging him. “Oh yes yes yes…!” she said happily.

Draco hugged her back, then took her hand again and led her to the room that he and his mother had worked so hard to paint and to furnish. Little Angel gazed about, eyes wide, then looked up at Draco. She had not let go of his hand. “This room is very pretty, but… but where’s my room, mister…?”

“This is your room, my Angel. We can change it if you don’t like it…”

“I… I’ve never had a room all to myself… and this room is so big…!” She murmured, gazing up at him with wide-eyed innocence.

“Well now you do.” Draco smiled at her, and led her into show her all her new things.

Harry had remained in the living room with Ms. Masterson, settling the final details of the paperwork with the social worker.
“And sigh here… and there…” she said, showing Harry where to sign. “That’s got it… it’s a very lovely gesture, Mr. Potter, taking little Angel in…” she smiled, gathering up the documents to slip them away.

“She’s an answer to my prayers…” Harry answered, giving her a smile. “I know how Angel feels, you see. I was orphaned at 18 months and placed in a home where I was considered a complete outsider; I was never welcome with my aunt’s family. I know how horrible it is to grow up on the outside and be alone. I’ve had my fill of that and I don’t want Angel to ever have to experience it; I want a family and I want her in it.”

“The world could use more kindhearted men like you.” She shook his hand and turned to go. Harry saw her to the door and closed it behind her, then turned to join his family.

Angel smiled up at him as he came in, holding out the wilted and rather battered wildflowers. “I got these for you…” she said, gazing at them a moment. The flowers seemed to heal themselves, damage undoing itself, until the flowers were whole and seemed to be freshly picked. “They told me you got me out of the river…”

“I was happy to have done it… thank you, sweetheart. They’re beautiful…” he smiled, and then smelled them. “Ummm… smells wonderful also…”

She beamed at him, and then paused, looking a little unsure. “C’n… Can I hug you…?” she asked timidly.

Harry scooped her up, hugging her close. “You can hug me and kiss me anytime you wish. I’m your daddy, and you are my little Angel, now and forever…”

The little girl hugged him tight with all the strength in her little body; she’d clearly longed to do that to someone for a long, long time. “Are you really my for real daddy…?”

“Yes, Angel… look at my eyes; see? We have the same eyes…”

She gazed at him, touching his cheek right under his eyes. “You have green eyes like me…!” she murmured.

“And you have my dark hair. And this paper here says that I am your for real daddy.” He pulled the family tree out of his pocket and showed it to her as well.

She gazed at it, and then hugged him again. “Thank you…” she whispered, eyes closed tight. “I wished and I wished every day for you to find me… Mummy told me if I wished hard enough for good things, that good things would happen… please… can I always stay here and call you daddy…? Please…”

“Yes, Angel. I would love for you to call me daddy.” Harry said with a soft chuckle. “What will you call Draco…?”

She looked at Draco, unsure. “Um… I don’t know. He’s pretty, daddy…” she said, and Draco, who was standing next to them, chuckled softly at her evaluation of him.

“Yes, he is, isn’t he? And guess what? He’s going to give us a little brother…”

“A brother…?” Her eyes were wide and a little confused. “He’s a mommy…?”

“Yes… it’s because he’s special, love. Just as you are special…”
“Am I…? I’m… I’m not evil…?” she asked in a small voice.

“You are a gift from the Goddess…” Draco smiled.

She looked at him, a bit confused. “You’re going to be a mommy, but… I don’t call you mommy, do I…?”

“How about you call me Papa?” Draco suggested.

“Papa… I like that…” she smiled at him. “Will you always be my daddy and Papa…?”

“Yes. No one can ever take you away from us.” Draco said firmly.

She hugged Harry again. “And I can really play with all these pretty toys and dollies…?” she asked.

“As much as you like, love. They’re your toys.”

“Play with me…? Please Daddy? Please Papa…?”

Draco and Harry smiled and settled down to play with the newest addition to their household. From the shadows next to the door, Toodles looked on, bouncing on her little elfin heels with excitement. A baby girl to tend, a baby girl…!
“Well, well, well! If it isn’t Ronald Weasley!” a sweet voice said, silky and smooth behind Ron. He turned to see Pansy Parkinson beaming up at him, looking very successful and attractive, wearing a deep blue suit today that flattered her skin and put blue highlights into her currently black hair. “Has the great Quidditch player finally decided to grace us with his presence?” she asked teasingly.

“Oh, um… hi Miss Parkinson.” He said lamely, giving her a faint smile. “I just came to get Hermione…”

“Miss Parkinson?” she repeated with a light laugh. “Why so formal, Ronald? We DID go to school together, remember?” she said, slipping her arm through his, her smile growing. “You MUST remember to call me Pansy, dear…”

He was seriously beginning to feel creeped out by her putting her hands on him. “Yeah, we did attend the same school, but we were in different houses. Look, I…”

“We NEVER get together and talk! You’re so busy all the time; I heard you made the big leagues, congratulations are in order!” she smiled winningly at him.

If he didn’t think she was more dangerous than a basilisk and responsible for everything that was going wrong in his life, he thought she might actually have managed to get his trust. Merlin she was smooth!

“Yeah; I just made the team. I…”

“We need to sit and have some tea and talk about old times.” she smiled at him.

“I can’t, I…”

“Of course you can, don’t be silly! What’s a few minutes spent between old schoolmates?” she asked, beginning to steer him toward one of the conference rooms at the back of the clinic.

Ron planted his feet firmly and pulled free of her grip. “I said NO.” He said without any rancor though he was disgusted to even have her touch him. “I have other plans, Miss Parkinson; I will not brush off my daughter for you or for anyone! She has a dance recital tonight and I will NOT be late because I’m hanging about here with you.”

For one long moment she looked offended by his statement and ready to tell him off for even daring to speak to her in such a manner and in a heartbeat her expression changed back to a pleasant smile. “Well, of course you should go to that; your child is very important, Ron dear. You’ll simply have to come by tomorrow, then.” she beamed at him.

“Ron…?” Hermione said, emerging from her office which the two were actually standing quite close to each other at the moment, frowning. Pansy wasn’t trying already was she?

“There you are, ’Mione, C’mon, we gotta go.” he said, stepping toward the brown-haired woman, reaching his hand out to her.

“Yes, all right, I’m done for the day.” she said, slipping her hand into his, giving Pansy a hesitant look.

“I take it you haven’t spoken to him yet, Hermione?” Pansy said, her sweet smile at his wife sending chills down Ron’s spine. Something was definitely going on.
“Come on, Ron. Let’s go.” Hermione turned and led him away quickly.

“Talked to me about what?” he asked her in a soft voice as they exited the building and crossed the parking lot.

“It’s nothing, Ron.” Hermione sighed, and then quickly made up a lie. “She wants me to volunteer extra time in the downtown clinic this weekend. I told her I couldn’t because you have a game and I have to tend Rosie.”

“Why in Merlin’s name was she trying to get all chummy with me? We haven’t spoken in weeks; months even. It’s really weird. She always ignored me every time I went in there before.” Ron said, glancing back at the building. Pansy was standing outside and when she saw him look back, she smiled and waved warmly at him. He didn’t wave back; he pretended he hadn’t seen her. “I think I prefer being ignored, honestly…” he mumbled.

“Perhaps she just wants season tickets to your games, now that you’re on the Canons.” Hermione said, unlocking the doors to the car and getting in behind the wheel. Seeing Pansy hanging on Ron like that had shaken her. If had managed to get Ron into the back room… There was no way that Ron knew anything of what was going on; he had no idea what she was…

“She was never interested in tickets before, and I’m sure as bloody hell not giving that woman any tickets. I only get three sets and I’ve already got plans for them.”

“I know, Ron.” she sighed, distracted, nodding her agreement.

He glanced back at the door as he settled into the seat. Pansy was still standing there in the door. How… creepy. He frowned and shut his door. “We’re going to be late.”

“No; we have time.” Hermione said, pulling out of the lot.

Ron relaxed back into his seat, sighing with a slight frown on his face. He was trying really hard not to think about the case that Harry was investigating, but it was really hard on him. He’d gone back home two nights ago but it wasn’t easy to act in a normal fashion toward his wife anymore. He loved her; Merlin knew he loved her so much… but she was doing things that were hurting their friends. She hadn’t said anything but he knew he was a lot more quiet and withdrawn than he normally had been with her. He shifted in his seat, sighing, a small clear plastic box in his hand.

“What’s that, Ron?” she asked him, glancing at him and seeing what was in his hand.

“Huh…? Oh, Rosie knows we’re coming. She told me since it’s her first real recital she wants to have flowers like the grown-up dancers have so I got her some tea roses.” he gazed down at the little pink tea rose corsage he had bought for his daughter.

“She’ll love it; you’re such a good father.” Hermione smiled fondly at him.

He gave her a bit of a smile, but didn’t answer, still gazing at the roses.

“Are you feeling all right, Ron?” she asked him for about the fiftieth time in the past three days.

“Yeah, I’ve just got a lot on mind. I’m okay…”

“Are Harry and Draco coming?”

“Draco will. Harry said it depends on what he has to do at work.” Ron answered, pulling his eyes away from the corsage.
“I really hope they do. I haven’t seen them in ages.”

“They had me over for dinner when you were at that convention thing; it was really great to see them.”

“I’m glad. I didn’t want you to be bored while I was away and Rosie loves Harry and Draco so much.” Hermione smiled.

“I could never be bored with Rosie around.” Ron smiled softly as well as they pulled into the parking lot. “Rosie said she’d have seats for us right up front; mums and dads get special seating.”

“Wonderful. You did remember to bring the camera, didn’t you?”

“Oh of course.” he pulled it out of an inside pocket. “Gotta get lots of photos.”

“See, I told you we’d get here in plenty of time.” Hermione said as they got out of the car.

“MIMI!!” a dark-haired blur collided with Hermione, nearly knocking her over, seizing her legs in a tight hold. “Mimi!! Mimi I missed you!” The child squealed with pure undisguised joy.

“And who’s this little cherub?”

Ron asked with a soft laugh.

Hermione looked down at the girl, who beamed up with her with a heartbreakingly familiar heart shaped face and vivid green eyes. “Angel! Oh my god…” she whispered, reaching to touch the girl’s cheek.

“Oh Mimi I missed you so much I want to do lessons again and I got my real daddy too and can you come and visit?” she asked, bouncing happily on her heels as she beamed up at Hermione.

“Angel!” Harry laughed, moving over to them.

Hermione’s face lost what little color it had when she saw Harry. “Oh Merlin…” she whispered.

“Come on, Angel. Papa Draco’s got us all seats.” Harry scooped her up, and the girl giggled and hugged his neck. “I see you’ve both met my daughter.” He commented, keeping his tone light and a smile on his face.

“That’s Mimi, daddy!” Angel said happily.

“You know her?” Ron asked his voice soft and unsure.

“Mimi is who put me in mummy’s belly.” Angel said confidently. “Mimi was mummy’s best friend, and Mimi gave me lessons and helped me to learn all kinds of neat stuff.”

“I…” Hermione felt weak. “Merlin, Ron… Harry…”

Ron glanced at Hermione. “Did she, now?” He said softly. “Well, I have a little girl too and my little girl is going to dance in the show tonight.” He spoke to the child, trying hard not to focus on what he’d just learned. Hermione had created this child without Harry’s permission but it wasn’t the girl’s fault. “You can see her, and meet her after she dances. Want to, Angel?” he offered.

“Will she be my friend?” Angel asked. “I’d really like that.”

“She’ll love you. By the way, my name is Ron. I’m your daddy’s best mate. You can call me Uncle Ron if you want.”
“You go with Uncle Ron now, Angel, and go find Papa.” Harry said, eyeing Hermione. He wouldn’t blow up, not in front of his daughter.

“I never had an uncle before.” Angel said happily, chattering away as Ron took her into his arms and turned, answering her animatedly as he carried her away.

Harry turned to face Ron’s wife. “So, Hermione. Do you have something to tell me?” he asked acidly.

Her face was milky pale and she swallowed, looking down. “It’s not… it’s not what you think, Harry.” She said softly. “Tara was a special person, very special. I knew her from muggle middle school, and she really had no hope of ever having a child without the clinic. I… I didn’t mean to hurt anyone…”

“You were my friend and I trusted you. How could you do this to me? You knew what Draco and I had gone through to have a family! How could you do this?”

“I didn’t do this to hurt you, Harry.” she started, tears in her eyes. “I’d have asked you, but you were out of town. I really didn’t think you would mind; she was so desperate.” she bowed her head. “I swear I didn’t do it to hurt you…”

“Why me? Why not Ron, why not some muggle donor?! Why me?! How much did she pay you?!” he demanded.

“Nothing! She didn’t pay me anything, Harry!” She answered instantly. “It wasn’t like that; she didn’t have the money to go through the clinic! Your donations aren’t tracked like the others; if I had used anyone else besides you or Draco, she would have had to pay hundreds of pounds for the clinic’s services. She barely had enough money to get by once she got pregnant. I only did it once, one time I swear it…”

“And why should I believe you?” he glared at her.

“Legimens me! Take my memory of it. I don’t have anything to hide about Angel, I swear it on my daughter’s life!” she whispered. “Tara was such a special person, so full of love and life and her partner Melissa loved her so much; they were so much like you and Draco. I knew that if it took, the child would be loved and cherished her whole life long.” she whispered. “Then Angel started displaying magical talents. I started going regularly to teach her to control them. I should have told you then, Harry, but you and Draco had just had your successful implantation. I couldn’t risk upsetting either of you; he’d lost those other babies and we were afraid he was so delicate… Then there was that horrible fire that took Tara’s life. The muggle social workers pulled her away from Melissa and Angel vanished. The fire was the day after you lost Andie and I couldn’t tell you, I just… I couldn’t…” Hermione’s voice shook as she spoke, forcing herself to tell Harry as much as she could and he would allow.

“I never want to see you again. You aren’t my friend, Hermione. I don’t know you.” Harry turned away from her.

Tears streamed down her cheeks unchecked now. “Harry; don’t do this, please…” she whispered, reaching toward him.

“Leave me and my family alone!” He snarled, magic crackling about him.

She shied back, weeping. “I’m sorry… I never meant… I’m sorry…”

“Sorry doesn’t cut it.” Harry stormed away from her, trying to calm down before joining Draco and
the others. Hermione did not follow him, crying harshly as she sank to a seat on the hood of her car.

Draco looked towards the door, worried about Harry.

“She really did do it.’ Ron murmured, miserable. How could she have done something like this?

“I’m sorry, Ron.” Draco said softly. “At least Angel is safe with us now and we’ll stop this from continuing.”

He scrubbed at his eyes, trying to stop the tears he felt welling up, nodding. “Yeah, it has to stop. And I’m glad you’ve got her; Angel is such a sweet little thing.”

“Where’s daddy, Papa?” Angel asked, standing on her chair to look back. “And where’s Mimi?”

“I’m sure they’ll be here soon, love.” Draco soothed her.

“But it’s about to start, Papa!” she looked at him, then back at the door again.

“Hey Angel, I have an idea. How about you help me to take pictures?” Ron asked, trying to focus himself on the child and distract her at the same time.

“Can I really? Oh thank you Uncle Ron!” she smiled.

Ron half chuckled at her enthusiasm and applied himself to showing her all about the wizarding camera and allowing her to take a few photos as the show began.

Harry slipped into his seat. “Sorry I’m late.” he whispered, giving Draco a soft kiss.

Draco took his hand. “Everything okay?” he asked.

“Daddy, look! Look at the girls dancing, it’s so pretty!” Angel said, excited.

“Yes, Angel aren’t they beautiful? He smiled at her, and then squeezed Draco’s hand gently, leaning close to speak to him privately. “I’ll survive, lover; I’m just hurt and angry.” he sighed.

Ron was silent, trying hard to focus on the performance but torn inside. He should have noticed all this years ago. He felt he was responsible for Harry’s pain, and whatever he had said to Hermione should have been said to him, too. Hermione never joined them, standing instead in the doorway to watch as the recital came to an end.

Rosie took her bow with the others, and then the children moved down the steps and into the audience to find their parents. Ron knelt, his arms held wide as she ran to him, breathless and excited. He gave her a big hug and kiss, and the flowers.

“Did you see me, daddy, did you see?” she asked, face glowing and beaming with happiness.

“You were absolutely beautiful, Rosebud.” he smiled fondly at her, stroking her cheek.

She pulled away and ran to Draco, hugging him, then Harry too. “Thank you for coming, Uncle Harry, Uncle Draco! I’m so happy you made it!

“Wild Thestrals couldn’t keep us away, kitten; you were the best dancer up there.”

“Oh, Uncle Harry; you always say that.” She giggled but looked even more pleased.
“It’s because it’s true.” Draco smiled.

“Could I learn to do that too, Daddy?” Angel asked.

“Who’s she, Uncle Harry?” Rosie asked, looking at the new girl.

“Rosie, this is Angel. She’s my little girl.”

“Yours? Really?” She smiled. “Then you’re my cousin!” Rosie reached for her without hesitation, hugging her warmly in welcome. “You’re so lucky! Uncle Harry and Uncle Draco are really great!”

“I know.” Angel grinned, slipping her hand into Draco’s.

“Oh dang it… daddy!” Rosie looked up at Ron. “I forgot the cookies I made. Can we take them over to Uncle Draco’s house later?”

“As long as they say it’s all right, love.” He agreed, giving her a kiss on the cheek.

“You’re always welcome.” Draco said immediately.

“Where’s mum? She couldn’t come?” Rosie said, looking around for her mother.

“She came, love. I’m sure she’s around here somewhere.” Ron said, glancing around. The crowd had begun to thin as parents and their children filed out the doors. Hermione still stood beside the door. She looked at Harry and bowed her head, turning and slipping out.

“I see her! She just went outside.” Rosie pulled at Ron’s hand. “Can I go give her a hug da?”

“Sure; go ahead, Rosebud.” he smiled softly.

“Hey Angel, why don’t we go and speak with the teacher and see if they have any classes available that you can join?” Draco smiled then kissed Harry. “We’ll see you outside.”

Harry nodded as he watched his husband leave. He turned his attention to his best mate, standing quietly watching his own daughter make her way through the crowd after her mother. “You gonna be okay, Ron?” he asked softly.

Ron’s smile faltered and he shrugged then looked down, nodding. “I have to be; for Rosie. She needs me.” he said softly.

These next few weeks are going to be really tough on you.” Harry sighed. “Just go on as if you know nothing about all this.”

“I’m trying but I don’t even know what to say to her anymore.” Ron said sadly.

“I don’t think that Angel was part of what ever is going on. She may have been telling the truth about that part. Hermione claimed she was just helping out a friend. It was wrong of her, but I wouldn’t give Angel up for anything.”

“I’m glad you’ve got her; she should have been with you a long time ago.”

“We’ll get through this Ron.” Harry said, giving his old friend a hug.

“Yeah; thanks mate.” He said softly. “And I’m sorry. I should have known, should have seen, somehow…”
“You had no control over any of it, Ron, and you’re not to blame at all.” Harry said firmly. “It’s okay; go on. I’ll see you and Rosie later tonight. I can’t wait to taste those cookies.”

“I’ll bring her by in about an hour.” he smiled faintly. “You should have seen it; she made a right mess out of the entire kitchen, making them.” his eye was caught by his daughter jumping up and down and waving at him from the doorway. “I think I’m being called; I’ve got to go. See you mate.” He said.

“Take it easy, Ron.” Harry said, turning to join Draco.

Ron moved to join his daughter, sweeping the child still in her dance costume up into his arms easily. “Ready to go, Rosie?” he asked, glancing at Hermione, whose face was blotchy and cheeks damp from tears and weeping.

“Yes daddy, I really like Angel; is she really my cousin? Will she be taking dance classes with me? That would be so much fun!” she said eagerly.

“I think she might; I bet she has a great room at Harry’s place. You can play a while with her tonight.”

“Oh! Oh Daddy can I stay the night there? Ple-e-e-e-ase…? I know Uncle Draco won’t mind!”

“If it’s all right with your mum and with them, I don’t mind much. I’ll just miss my Rosie tonight.” He agreed, kissing her cheek.

“I don’t care if she does, I… Ron, we really do need to talk. I need some time alone with you to talk.” Hermione began.

Ron didn’t seem to hear her comment because he did not react to it. “You can stay with them, Rosie. But you need to be on your absolute best behavior.” Ron said, walking with his girl in his arms and his wife at his side. “Draco is going to need all the help my clever little girl can give him. You see, he’s expecting a baby and he will need to rest. And we all know Uncle Draco is too stubborn for his own good sometimes.”

“Draco’s pregnant?” Hermione repeated with a tone of relief in her voice. “Oh thank Merlin.” she whispered, fresh tears in her eyes. She was so relieved, but at the same time deeply hurt. She would never get to see Harry’s child. She was no longer welcome. “Please, Ron, when you go be sure to tell him I said it’s wonderful and I wish him every blessing in the world.”

Ron glanced at her, opening the car door. “Why don’t you tell him yourself?” he asked, setting Rosie on her feet so she could clamber into the car.

“I’m not coming. I don’t think I should.” She said, avoiding his gaze completely as she got in the car.

“Well… that’s your choice, I guess.” he murmured, ensuring that Rosie was settled and secure before he sat down himself.

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Harry laid Angel down on her bed, smiling down at the girl who had fallen asleep in his arms on the way home. “This has been quite an exciting day for her; she’s completely worn out.” he smiled.

Draco wrapped his arms about Harry, smiling in pure contentment. “We’ve been blessed. I have never been happier than I am at this moment.”
Harry slipped his arms about his husband, smiling as well. “Yes. We finally have our family.”

Draco kissed him softly, and then smiled as he sighed. “Let me get your supper started.”

“Do you think Ron will be here for dinner?”

“I hope he comes; he needs to get away. He looked so depressed. I wish there was something I could do to help him.” Draco said, a bit worried. “He’s really not to blame for what the mudblood did.”

“She’s not welcome here anymore. If she comes tonight I don’t care what anyone says, I’ll hex the bitch; I’ve warned her. I’m done with her from now on.” Harry said as he and Draco walked out of the bedroom to let Angel doze, strolling to the kitchen.

“I’m sorry, love…” Draco said softly. “I know she was a friend to you for many years but I have to admit I’m glad. I never felt comfortable around her.”

“She won’t be coming around.” Harry assured.

Draco pulled out the fixings for supper. “We really should get around to telling father about the baby.”

“Yes, I know. I just don’t want him to upset you.”

“We’ll bring Angel; she’ll soften him up for us.” Draco chuckled softly.

“He hates me. I can just picture him being horrible to Angel. I don’t want him to treat her badly, since she’s my daughter and not of your blood.”

“If he does that we’ll just leave.” Draco shrugged. “It’s very simple if you ask me. The moment he starts up, no matter what he starts in about, we kiss mother and we simply walk out the door. I don’t need his approval anymore, Harry.” Draco gave his husband a warm smile. “I have you, and mother, and now Angel as well.”

“And don’t forget our son.” Harry smiled at him.

“Yes.” he smiled, his moving to his belly and giving his rounded tummy a gentle caress. “I can easily do without father if I must.” he said as he began to prepare things. Harry moved to help but Draco shooed him off, enjoying the preparations. He was just putting the chicken into the oven when the doorbell rang.

“That’ll be Ron; I’ll get it.” He said, rising. “Ron said Rosie made us cookies; got flour all over the place making them for us.”

Draco chuckled, remaining in the kitchen as Harry moved to the door, pulling it open. “Come on in R… oh.” His voice drifted off, his mirth and good humor vanishing in a heartbeat. “Oh… Lucius… Good evening; we… we weren’t expecting you…”

“Clearly not.” Lucius drawled, making a striking figure in his long and rather ornate wizard’s robes, white-blonde hair loose and flowing, standing casually with his hands resting on the silver snake’s head of the cane, its silver tip upon the top step. “Well, Potter? Are you going to invite me in or are you going to leave me standing upon the top step like an unwelcome peddler?” his tone dripped with sarcasm.

“Oh… sorry… Of course; come in.” he said, stepping back out of the doorway to allow the elder
Malfoy into the entryway.

“Is my son at home?” he asked aloofly, glancing about with a look of slight distaste.

“Yes, of course; he’s in the kitchen.” he said softly, glancing back up the hallway. He hoped that Angel would sleep at least until dinner was finished.

“Would you like a beer?” Draco asked, coming out of the kitchen, drying his hands on a towel. He halted, seeing that the guest was not Ron at all, but his very imposing father. “Oh. Father, I… Welcome to our home.” he said, rather startled.

“No, Draco, I do not believe that I will have any -- what is it you said? ‘Beer?’ Sounds dreadfully muggle.” He said sourly, moving into the room gracefully. His eyes scanned Draco out of habit to judge his general health and he stopped dead, his vision resting upon the clearly rounded belly. “Draco…” he whispered, his eyes wide. Draco’s hand stole over his stomach in an unconsciously protective gesture. “I… I was going to tell you, father…” he said softly.

“You… you’re with child…?” he asked quietly, and Draco bit his lip, nodding affirmative. Harry moved to his husband’s side, giving him comfort with his simple presence.

“So large… how far? When are you due?” Lucius asked, only giving Harry a brief yet dismissive glance as he strode to his son, his face revealing only concern. The last three pregnancies had been tragic, almost destroying his son and now he was pregnant again, what were these fools thinking?! “Why are you standing? Sit down! Sit down this minute, you shouldn’t be on your feet!” he glared at Harry with the last words.

“But I’m FINE, father” Draco protested as his father took him by the arm, one hand on his back, guiding him to the most cushioned chair he saw in the room.

“Nonsense! You should be sitting back and having your every need tended to! Whatever were you doing in the kitchen of all places?”

“What else would I be doing there? I was cooking dinner.” He answered with a bit of a smirk. He glared at Harry. “You make MY SON cook your DINNERS?!” he asked in disbelief.

“No, I…” Harry began.

“Are you calling my son a liar?!” Lucius answered in an offended tone.

Harry wasn’t getting anywhere. “No!”

“Stop it father!” Draco snapped and Lucius fell silent, looking at his son with more than a bit of surprise. “I was cooking US dinner because I ENJOY cooking dinner!” He said, and this time it was the son glaring at the father. “Don’t accuse Harry of things when you don’t know what’s going on!”

Lucius took a deep breath and slowly released it, but did not move from Draco’s side, keeping himself firmly between Draco and his husband. “All right, all right; perhaps I… overreacted…”

“Not an apology, but it will do for now.” Draco grumbled, looking apologetically past his father at Harry, who shrugged in acceptance. He was, after all, used to verbal abuse from Draco’s father.

“How far are you son? Why didn’t you TELL me?” he asked softly, forcing himself to ignore the presence of the person behind him, focusing only on his son.
“I’ve reached four and a half months.” He answered, relaxing a bit.

“And who is the father? Did you return to that clinic? Potter, after all, was unable to get you with child for so many years.”

“The father IS Harry.” Draco said firmly, cutting off the spew of hateful chatter coming from his father.

Lucius frowned in thought. “Potter? You’re certain?”

“Absolutely certain, father; beyond a shadow of a doubt. There has been no other, and no, I did not return to that clinic.” Draco said, giving his father a frown, pushing up to his feet again. “Harry is the father of our baby.”

“I see. And you; you’re healthy? No complications, no problems?” Lucius was not going to be put off that easily; he didn’t care to discuss Harry at this point.

“I’m in better health than I’ve ever been, according to my mediwizard. The baby is fine, his magic is strong, and he’s developing exactly as expected.”

“He? It’s a boy…?” Lucius looked as if he was the one who now needed to sit down. “A boy. You’re giving me a grandson.” he murmured, gazing at his son with undisguised pleasure. “This is such wonderful news! You should be sitting down, taking it easy, taking care of my grandson, Draco, not working like a lowly house servant.”

“I told you father, I enjoy cooking. I do it all the time, for myself and for Harry, and for our guests we often have over for dinner. I’m NOT helpless, father.” Draco gave his father a smirk.

Lucius opened his mouth to object, and then sighed, biting back what he wanted to say. This was all the more reason, in his mind, to get Draco to come home and away from this place, where he would be properly cared for during this most delicate time. Damn Severus, anyway. Why in the blazes had he not told Lucius last night?! Extenuating circumstances indeed!

“Would you like something to drink, Lucius?” Harry offered.

“Please; yes. Anything but that horrible sounding ‘beer’ concoction…” he accepted, gazing at Draco as he moved to take a seat.

Harry smirked and moved to the bar, pulling down a small round clay jar and pouring a shot of his special whiskey.

“Your mother would have come, Draco, but she is… well, a bit preoccupied at the moment.” he said as vaguely as possible.

“Can I get you something too, Dray?” Harry asked. “Tea, perhaps?”

“I think I’d rather have juice, if you don’t mind. Pineapple juice sounds heavenly.” Draco answered.

“Can I have some too, papa?” A soft voice asked from the end of the hall. Angel stood there, rubbing her eyes, drowsy but up for the evening.

“Of course, Angel.” Harry paused to hand Lucius his whiskey, and then he bustled off to the kitchen to get the juice for them both. Angel moved to Draco, leaning sleepily against him to give him a hug. Draco found himself apprehensively waiting for his father to explode, to sneer, to scowl, to do SOMETHING…!
Lucius’ face was stony and expressionless as he gazed at the sleepy-eyed girl, who turned, still leaning against Draco, comfortable with his arm resting across her little chest. She tilted her head to the side and gazed back at him with no fear in her eyes or her posture. She turned again and looked up at Draco. “He looks a lot like you, Papa. Is that man my Nonno…?” she asked softly. Lucius was rather surprised to hear a child use such an endearment; one did not often hear the Italian word for grandfather in England.

Harry moved over, setting one glass of juice on the table beside and handing the other to Dray. “He’s not really, Angel.” he started.

“And why in Merlin’s name would you tell the child that, Potter?” Lucius asked in a rather irritated tone.

Harry looked at him with a bit of surprise. “Well, you… I thought you wouldn’t want…”

Lucius interrupted him with a quick question. “Are you not married to my one and only son?”

“Happily.” He agreed.

“Then by marriage right, I am this child’s Nonno.” He answered, turning his attention to the child standing beside his son. “Che è il suo nome, poco un?” (What is your name, little one?) He asked the child in fluent Italian to see if she truly understood any of the language. That would be rather impressive, especially for a child raised by muggle creatures.

“Mi chiamo Angel, Nonno.” (My name is Angel, Grandfather) she answered, taking up her juice and sipping it.

“Ah… Angel.” He sat back, sipping his drink. Both Harry and Draco paused, watching the two. This was not how they had expected Lucius to behave toward the girl. It was fantastic that he wasn’t being a grouchy old bastard, but it was rather disconcerting.

Lucius found to his surprise that the glass of whiskey he had been given was empty already. “Potter; a bit more of this if you don’t mind.” He requested.

Harry moved to get him a refill, taking his cup. Angel put her glass down, taking a hesitant step toward him. “Nonno… my mama told me that someday I would meet her papa but I never did, and I wanted and wanted to have a Nonno and a Nona like all the other kids in day care but I never had one. Are you really and truly my Nonno?” she asked him in a hopeful voice, gazing at him in the chair.

Lucius was silent a long moment, then he reached out to draw the dark-haired little girl to his side. “I have always wanted a granddaughter to call my own. Of course I am your Nonno, child. Let no one ever tell you differently.” He said, shooting Harry a challenging look. “Lei è mia propria piccola nipote. (You are my own little granddaughter.)” He told her in a quiet tone that was so tender and loving that Harry never would have believed the man capable of speaking so.

Angel gave a happy cry and threw her little arms around her grandfather, hugging him tightly with childish abandon. “I always wanted a Nonno!”

“You must come visit my home soon with your papa, little Angel. Your Nona will simply adore you.” he smiled softly at her.

“I get a Nona too?” her eyes sparkled.

“Yes, a Nona too.” He chuckled softly. “We will, of course, go riding…”
“On a pony? A real pony?”

“Of course a real pony, little one. I have one in the stable who is just your size.”

“But… but Nonno, I don’t know how to ride a pony.”

“Then we must give you lessons, mustn’t we?”

“You’ll teach me, Nonno…?” she gazed up at him, her green eyes sparkling brightly.

“Of course I will little one.” He answered in a tone of easy confidence.

She laughed and hugged him once more. “Thank you, Nonno, thank you!”

Lucius accepted the drink from Harry, eyeing him with a slight frown. “So tell me, Potter. Just how long were you going to hide this little Angel from her Nonno?” he asked in a tone conveying disapproval.

“We just received custody of her today.” Harry answered, moving over to stand beside Draco once more. “Before that, we couldn’t just go and take her for visits. But she’s ours now, and here to stay.”

“As it should be. Now, then; although I do agree that she is an angelic little child, is her name a proper name for a Malfoy?” Lucius asked.

“She is a Malfoy-Potter, father; not only a Malfoy. Her name suits her.” Draco answered.

“You don’t like my name, Poppy?” Angel asked softly, gazing at him, a shadow of past hurt in her eyes.

Lucius gazed at her, a frown coming to his face. “I am not the first to say your name did not suit?”

“Nuh-uh. My last foster father wanted to change my name to Annie or something. He said I wasn’t good enough to be an angel. I tried to be good for him, I really did Nonno, but… but I couldn’t keep everything from happening when I was afraid.” she whispered. “I don’t care what you call me, I just don’t want to lose my family.”

“Forgive me for even saying it, my little one. I adore your name and I do think it suits you as a Potter-Malfoy.” He said, purposefully putting the Malfoy title in the place of power in her name. “What was this CREATURE’s name, my little one?” he asked in a tone that Draco recognized as calculating, his eyes hard.

“Mister Watson.” she said in a quiet, sober tone, looking sad. “He was two foster ago. He gave took back to the orphanage because he said I couldn’t ever be his little girl.”

“You have us now, Angel. You never have to see that man again.” Harry said soothingly.

“Indeed you do.” Lucius sipped the whiskey, gazing at the girl, whose mood had lightened at her father’s words. “This Watson. He is a muggle, is he not?”

She looked curious at the new word. “What’s a muggle?”

He smiled at her rather indulgently. “One who is not magical as we are.”

“I guess so.”

“I see. Well, I will take care of matters.” He smiled reassuringly.
“Now father, you mustn’t…” Draco began.

Lucius waved him to silence; that wasn’t to be discussed in front of the child. He ran his fingers through her tousled dark curls. “You do look so like James.” he said in a soft, fond voice. “You have his sweet smile and his hair as well.”

“Who’s James, Nonno?” she asked, smiling up at him once more.

“He was your father’s father.” He answered, glancing at Harry.

“He’s in heaven too, isn’t he?” She asked.

Lucius’ expression blanked again, revealing no emotion. “Yes, child; he is in heaven.” He answered, taking another drink of the curious whiskey Harry had given him. Angel hugged him again, sure he needed to be hugged but not sure why.

Harry looked almost startled as the doorbell rang again, looking round at the door. “Oh; that must be Ron. No, Dray, you stay there. I’ll get it.” he said, pausing to give Draco a kiss before he moved to answer the door.

Ron stood at the door dressed in a long sleeved white shirt and slacks. Rosie was at his side, clearly excited, her cheeks flushed as she held onto Ron’s hand with one hand, a box in her other hand.

“Uncle Harry! Uncle Harry can I stay over please, please, please, please, please?!”

Harry laughed, stepping back to let them in. “Well I suppose you may, if you really want to.” he said teasingly. Rosie squealed happily and ran to Harry, hugging him tight.

Ron chuckled fondly. “She’s been asking all evening.”

“She is always welcome here, Ron.” Harry assured as they moved into the living room. “Rosie, you remember Angel?”

“Yes, she’s my cousin!” she beamed at Harry, and then she noticed Lucius Malfoy. She gave a little curtsy to him as her father had taught her to do when greeting an elder wizard. “Hello, Mr. Draco’s Daddy, sir.” she said in as formal a tone as a six year old could muster.

“Good evening, young lady.” Lucius answered, eyeing the girl appraisingly. “I find it quite heartening that some of the wizards of your generation, Draco, have seen fit to teach their children proper manners.” he mused, feeling very mellowed at the moment.

“Mother would never forgive me if I raised a child with no manners. And mum isn’t one I’d care to cross.” Ron grinned faintly.

“Honestly, Mr. Weasley, neither would I.” Lucius smirked back at him, saluting him with the glass.

“Can we go play in my room, daddy?” Angel asked, straightening. “I want to show Rosie all my new toys”

“Of course, go on, both of you.” Harry smiled. The two girls took each other’s hands and hurried off down the hall, chattering happily to one another.
Lucius watched the girls as they skipped off down the hall together. Ron glanced at him and saw a look of faint longing on his face that was gone so quickly he thought he must have imagined it.

Draco pushed himself to his feet. “I need to go tend dinner…” he said.

“You should send the house elf.” Lucius grunted.

“I enjoy doing this, father…” he reminded.

“Well, I’ll come and help.” Ron said, and he headed to the kitchen after Draco. Harry watched them go, and then glanced at Lucius, who was gazing at his once again empty glass.

“Potter…?” He mused thoughtfully. “What the blazes is this you’re giving me to drink…? I’ve never tasted such a smooth whiskey… it IS a whiskey, correct…?”

“Yes, it’s called Tullamore Dew; it’s my favorite. It’s an Irish whiskey and you probably shouldn’t have too much more…”

“Don’t tell me that Muggles make this…”

“They do.” Harry half chuckled, getting a half glass for himself. “Even you have to admit, Lucius, that Muggles are capable of doing a thing or two right…”

“Perhaps…” he agreed with clear reluctance, pushing himself back to his feet. “Get me a bit more of this, Potter. Then I wish to see your study… you DO have a study, do you not…?”

“Our study and library have been combined so Angel could have a room.” Harry answered, getting the little clay jug and pouring some more in Lucius’ glass before he led him down the hall. From the study they could hear the children laughing as they played with puppets in Angel’s room; a heartwarming and joyful sound.

Lucius moved in, glancing about, eyes landing upon a picture that Harry had gotten from Hagrid; a photo of his father back in his school years at Hogwarts, flying and waving the snitch high at the end of a victorious game. He sighed softly, standing and gazing at the photo for a few long minutes.

Harry watched him, moving to take a seat in his favorite chair. Lucius reached up and touched the glass that protected the photo, then turned and moved to a chair, sinking into it with a slightly lost and grieved expression.

“Are you all right, Lucius…?” Harry asked softly.

The older man was silent several long moments. “I don’t know if I’ve ever been all right, Potter.” He said softly, eyes drawn back to the photo. “I’ve been… broken… for a long time…”

“Broken…? I… I don’t understand…” Harry murmured softly.

“This is all very difficult for me, Potter… I am not a very giving or sharing man. I was raised in all the traditions of my family… all of them. Good and bad…” he murmured, taking a sip of the whiskey again.

“I don’t expect anything from you sir…” He reassured.
Lucius looked at Harry over the top of the glass. He was definitely feeling drunk and knew it; it was a welcome feeling. He needed to say some things to Potter and doubted he would ever allow himself to do it were he sober. “Traditions of raising a child, Potter, in our family rarely involved loving care.” He said.

“I don’t understand what you mean…”

“You’ve seen Draco; you know his every scar and mark. He can tell you where each of them come from.” He said.

“Yes, of course. He’s my husband sir…”

“…and none of those marks were made by my hand.” Lucius said with no small amount of pride. “Not one of them.”

“Your father…? He abused you…?”

Lucius shrugged. “Often, yes… my father abused me with both mundane and magical means, as did his father. Usually it happened when things did not go right for him at work, or elsewhere… but the worst abuse I ever suffered I would have suffered through every day for the rest of my life if I could only have kept what I loved…”

“I… I did not know…”

“Of course you didn’t. It’s not exactly something I share with everyone I come in contact with, Potter. I haven’t told Draco; I never want him to know. I haven’t even told Cissa all about what my father did to me, though she has guessed by the scars I bear upon my body…”

“Why tell me…?” Harry asked after a moment, stunned by the revelation and the fact that this man who had shown him nothing but snarky dislike and had done everything in his power to take his husband out of his life forever.

“Because… I want you to understand why, at least once… remember this though, Potter. After today I won’t likely treat you much differently… I am a very selfish man. I love my son and cherish every moment with him… You make him smile…” Lucius said softly, looking down. “It has been a long time since I have seen him smile so much…”

“I love your son too.” Harry responded, sipping his whiskey. “I’d do anything to make him happy…”

“Draco is beautiful when he’s pregnant… absolutely beautiful…” Lucius murmured, eyes wandering to the photo again. “So was he…”

“My father…?” Harry looked at the photo again.

“Yes. He didn’t just glow… he was incandescent…” the smile on his lips was loving, full of regrets and pain. “Your father was beyond stunning when he was pregnant… I loved Jamie so…” He murmured softly.

“…what…?”

“Your father. James. Jamie… He was everything I ever desired and more…” he sighed softly, looking down again.

“You…”
“Yes, your father and I. It long ago, Harry… before he took up with that Evans woman. Before sixth year…”

“No one ever told me about that…”

“It was a scandal. It was quickly covered up. Memory charms can alter an amazing amount of memories…” he sighed softly. “I don’t think your grandfather had anything to do with the cover-up or what happened…”

“How is you two being in love a scandal…?”

“I had a wife chosen for me by father. My entire life arranged neatly and laid out before me, brick by brick… bar by bar… and I was following along like the good little pureblood heir should… until I met James. We were attracted to each other so strongly… his fifth year, we spent most of our time together… then it happened… James became pregnant. We were unwed, and he was expecting a child… it was unheard of. I wanted to bond with him, to give the child my name; I wanted the baby and James to be mine forever… then… James was spirited away…. The last month of school, he vanished. I didn’t hear a word from him all summer…”

“What happened to the baby?” Harry asked softly.

“I don’t know…” Lucius’ voice was faint, but he took a deep breath and forced himself to go on. “When James returned to school to begin his sixth year, he had no memory of being pregnant. No memory at all of the time we had spent together, of all the plans we had made… he never spoke to me again.”

“He started dating mum in his sixth year…”

Lucius nodded, drinking down the last bit of the Irish whiskey. “I don’t think she knew… she never paid any attention to him until that year. Honestly, the Evans woman seemed to dislike him in our fifth year; she spent a lot of time with Severus Snape. I was sure those two would make a go of it; Severus certainly doted on her every moment of the day…”

“Does Narcissa know about all this…? About my father…?”

“She knows everything. She’s highly resistant to memory charms, my sweet little Narcissa… she has been my friend since childhood. She has stood by me and supported me in everything… I found it difficult to accept, at first, that my father decided for some reason that she was the woman I must wed…” he murmured, gazing at the glass in his hand.

“I always thought Narcissa was a special person…” Harry said.

Lucius grunted. “That’s because for some reason she seems to care for you… its hard to see you with my son, Harry… hard because… because… what you have should have been mine. It was stolen from me when I was still in school… and I never had a chance to recapture that magic. And our child… the baby that he was carrying… I’m so certain she was a girl…” he whispered, looking over at the photo of James again. “My father made certain to arrange things so it seemed as she never existed…”

“Is she dead…?”

He shrugged. “I don’t know… I have little hope of ever finding out anything about her.” He sighed softly.

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Ron tossed the salad ingredients together, glancing back toward the doorway. “well, this ought to do
for a salad…” he said, reaching for his beer and taking another drink.

“If you feel guilty about leaving them together, you can always go on and see what’s going on…”
Draco told him.

“I don’t feel guilty…” he started.

“Then why is every vegetable in our salad chopped into pieces small and precise enough for potions
ingredients…?” the blonde wizard asked teasingly.

Ron looked at the salad and sighed. “I guess I must be…”

“Go and tell them dinner is ready. I promise my father won’t hex you. He hasn’t done anything like
that in quite a while.” He assured.

“Very funny.” Ron made a face at him and rose, moving out and down the hall.

Both Harry and Lucius looked round when Ron stuck his head into the room. “Dinner’s ready…
Draco’s got me rounding everyone up. I’ll get the girls…”

“All right… thanks Ron.” Harry said, rising to his feet. He stepped toward Lucius, unsure if he
would need assistance with walking. Tullamore Dew was a very powerful drink and snuck up on
you with its effects…

Lucius rose as well, a bit unsteady for a moment but that moment was all the weakness he revealed.
“Rather powerful drink, that whiskey of yours… are you certain you didn’t doctor it with some sort
of truth serum…?” he asked with a smirk.

Harry chuckled. “That was straight out of the jug, you saw me pour it yourself. And I drank from the
same jug…” he smirked.

Lucius grunted but led the way out of the room at a very measured, careful pace.

“Girls…? Time to come eat…” Ron smiled, moving into the bedroom.

“Oh great, I’m really hungry daddy…” Rosie said, rising.

“Uncle Ron…? Where is Mimi…? I really wanted to see Mimi and tell her what I’ve been doing and
how I’ve practiced everything she taught me…”

“Mimi… Hermione, that is, couldn’t come tonight, little one. She’s at home… she told me to tell you
she’s proud of you, angel…” Ron said softly, his smile fading somewhat.

“But why didn’t she come…? I’ve missed her…” Angel asked.

“I’ll tell her… maybe she can see you another night…”

“How do you know my mum…?” Rosie began chatting with Angel, leading Ron through the house
back toward the kitchen.

“Mimi used to come to my house every night and teach me stuff… she was really nice and always
played games with me…” Angel said as she and Rosie moved into the bathroom to wash up before
dinner. “I really miss her a bunch…”
“Maybe you can stay over at my house soon, and then you can tell her yourself.” Rosie suggested as they took their seats. Ron let the girls chat, moving to unpack the cheesecake he’d brought and place it in the serving crystal tray.

Lucius moved in as well, and Ron moved to help Draco bring the food to the table.

“This looks fantastic, Dray…” Harry smiled.

“Better than what I could get out at the corner deli…” Ron agreed. “After all, I only come over so you guys can feed me… I’d starve out there on my own…”

“Nah, you’d just spend all your money going out to eat…”

“I do that so Rosie won’t be tortured by my cooking or starve…” He smirked at Harry. “Besides, your cooking IS fantastic…”

“That is good to know…” Lucius said as he took his seat. “At least we will not be poisoned…” he drawled with a smile at Draco.

“This smells really yummy, Uncle Draco…” Rosie smiled as she and Angel moved into the kitchen, taking their seats.

“Have you two washed your hands…?”

“We did, in the bathroom… our faces, too!” Angel smiled at him, and then marched up to Harry to show him her hands and face for inspection.

“Fresh as a daisy.” He chuckled and kissed her nose.

She giggled and climbed into the chair next to him. Rose carefully stood in her chair and picked up a napkin, tucking it carefully into his collar and spreading it out across his chest. “There you go daddy… all ready to eat…” she giggled when Ron tweaked her nose.

Lucius looked on with a slight frown, but stood and began to carve the chicken to serve the girls their meal first. “So, young Mr. Weasley… your daughter is a charming young witch…” he said thoughtfully and Rosie smiled at him sweetly. “Have you placed her in a primary school or is she being home schooled before Hogwarts…?”

“Hmm…? Oh, I managed to get her into Mount Tananda Primary Wizarding school… she’s in first grade, sir…” he said, shaking off the slight funk he had sunk into as he spoke of his child with clear pride.

“Is this where you will send my Angel also, Draco…?” Lucius asked, looking at his son. “Is it a good school…?”

“Yes, it’s the best one in this entire part of the country… I was really lucky to get her in there. It’s been a bit of a financial struggle to keep her in at times, but I’ve managed to keep her in there… They have lots of extracurricular programs as well. Rose likes dance best of all, so far…”

“I would love to get her in, if they’ve openings.” Draco said, putting the drinks on the table and pouring them for the kids.

“I will research it, and if it is appropriate I will see to it personally.” Lucius said firmly. “Ballet is quite appropriate for young ladies, and I found that gymnastics is a good idea as well, helps with flexibility and posture… perhaps you should take gymnastics class, Potter…” he suggested, eyeing
his son’s husband.

Harry closed his eyes and sighed. No, nothing was going to change at all…

“Father, that’s enough…” Draco cautioned, frowning as his father finished carving the chicken.

“Just a suggestion, Draco, just a suggestion…”

“So what is mother up to?” Draco asked, changing the subject. “Why didn’t she come also tonight…?”

“Oh, she’s decided to stay home with her little foundlings…” he said, deliberately being completely vague.

“Foundlings…?”

“Your mother brought them home in a basket; I couldn’t deny her something so small that would occupy her time… she does so hate having idle hands…”

Draco gazed at his father in disbelief. “Kittens…? Don’t tell me you let mother bring kittens into the manor…!”

He shrugged innocently. “You’ve been so busy… she needed something to fill her time…”

“Are they Kneazle kits…?”

“Enough questions, son. You will see them, soon enough; for now I wish only to see YOU eat a proper meal.”

“He’s right, Uncle Draco; you have to eat or you can’t have any of my cookies.” Rosie teased.

The family began to eat, Harry finding himself spoken to very little by Lucius; in fact, the older Malfoy man spoke far more often to the children, asking them their ages and learning of their favorite things to do and to get. Ron was quietest of all at the table, not eating with any of his usual gusto. In fact, he hardly ate anything at all and Rosie began to get quiet as well as she constantly glanced at her father with worry clear on her face.

Lucius found he rather enjoyed having dinner with his son… if only it was just with his son and the children, he could have enjoyed it quite a bit… he simply ignored Harry’s presence, watching the girls carefully as they ate, pleased that they showed proper manners and ate silently.

Rose kept glancing at her father in concern, but she finished her own meal before she did anything. She finally set her fork down, stood up in her chair, crawled into his lap and hugged her father.

“Aw Rosie… I’m okay…” Ron murmured softly.

“It’ll be okay, daddy; I’ll always be here with you…”

Lucius watched, making an assumption on the spot. “Difficulties with the wife, Mr. Weasley…?”

“It’s nothing… really, Mr. Malfoy; I’m… I’m all right…” Ron assured, putting his façade back in place. He didn’t want Malfoy of all people to figure out what his wife had been up to…

“Well, how about those cookies, hmmm?” Draco asked, smiling.

“Oh…!” Rosie bounced out of the chair and hurried to the counter to get the tin of cookies she’d
brought. “Mum Weasley helped me to make them…” she said as she brought the tin over, taking the wrap off. There were at least two dozen six-inch cookies in the tin of varying types. “We made chocolate chip, and shortbread, and peanut butter and I burnt some but I didn’t bring those…”

“You’ve made all my favorites…” Draco smiled at her.

“I know, I meant to… Daddy told me…” she giggled.

“Gotta take care of our family.” Ron grinned softly.

“Have all you want, Uncle Draco, there’s lots and lots…”

“I couldn’t possibly eat all these…” Draco laughed. “I’d get as big as a house…”

“I’ll help you eat them, papa…!” Angel volunteered, and Rosie giggled.

“What’s your favorite? I like chocolate chip…”

“Peanut butter…” Angel smiled. “Nonno…? What do you like…?” she asked, gazing across the table at Lucius.

“I don’t often eat cookies, little one.”

“Oh, you must try this one…” Angel picked out a cookie and moved around the table to offer it to him. “This cookie is the bestest…”

“Is it, now…?” Lucius asked, smiling at the child, accepting the cookie she presented.

“Uh huh… you’ll really like it…”

“I’ll um… I’ll just get the milk…” Harry murmured, bemused. If this was the effect that Tullamore Dew had on his father-in-law, he’d certainly make sure to keep a good stock of it in the house and serve it every time he set foot in the house… he went to the shelf and pulled down glasses.

“Can I have chocolate milk, Uncle Harry…?” Rose asked.

“Of course… anyone else…?”

“Me too, daddy…?” Angel asked.

“I think I’ll pass.” Ron said with a smirk.

“Tell me, my Angel. What should I have with these cookies?” Lucius asked, running his fingers through her dark curls.

“Chocolate is the bestest, Nonno.” Angel said in a very serious tone, gazing up at him.

“Then it would not do for me to have anything less.” He said with equal gravity.

Harry tried not to smile as he filled the glasses for the girls and his father-in-law, and then brought them over.

“Thank you, Potter.” He said, and then took the cookie to sample it.

“No, no, Nonno, that’s not how you do it…you do it like this…!” Angel took her cookie and dipped it into the milk before she took a bite.
“Ah… you see, there are some things that you will need to teach me, little Angel, as there are things that I will be able to teach you…” he said, following her example. The taste was rather surprising, the cookie crunch and the milk a very interesting combination to his refined palate.

“See…? Isn’t it he bestest…?” she beamed up at him.

“It is indeed, my own…”

Ron watched them, nibbling on one cookie which he barely finished before he rose, giving Rosie a kiss on the head. “I’ll come get you tomorrow, Rosebud. I really should go…”

“Bye daddy… I’ll be a good girl and help Uncle Draco I promise…”

“Good girl…” he said, stroking her cheek.

“We’ll take good care of her, Ron…” Harry assured, walking him to the door.

“I know you will… I’m just… I’m really not looking forward to going home tonight.” He glanced at his watch. “I’m going to meet Charlie and Blaise for drinks tonight… things are really… well, awkward at home right now…”

“I understand. Go on and have some fun.”

“Thanks mate…” he said, moving out the door. “See you tomorrow…”

Harry turned to return to the kitchen to find that Lucius had risen to his feet as well. “I should go as well; I must return to Narcissa…”

“When can I meet my Nona…?” Angel asked, gazing up at him.

He knelt and took her face in his hands, kissing her on the forehead. “Soon, my dear… Soon.” He said, and then rose. “Be good for your papa, little Angel.”

Rosie waited, watching as Draco walked his father to the door, saying his farewells and closing the door behind him. She slipped up to him then, tugging at his sleeve timidly. “Uncle Draco…?” she asked softly.

Draco looked down at her, and then knelt to get to her level, seeing the child looked gravely worried about something. “What is it, love…?”

“It’s my daddy… I think he needs a potion…” she said softly, looking down and biting her lip.

“A potion…? What potion would he need…?”

“He’s sick, Uncle Draco… he doesn’t eat anymore and doesn’t even eat dessert or cookies and he and mum both tell me how clever you are with potions…” she said, looking up at him. Tears were faint in her eyes.

“Don’t worry, love; I’ll do whatever I can to help your father…”

“Okay… I’m just… he doesn’t even play with me anymore and he’s so sad… he doesn’t think I see it but I know he’s sad and he doesn’t talk to mommy anymore…”

Draco hugged the girl. “Don’t worry, Rosie… everything will be all right…” he assured.

“Thank you, Uncle Draco… you’re the best ever…” she said, hugging him tight, and then she
hurried off after Angel.

Harry pulled Draco into his arms. “That wasn’t so bad, you know… I think things are going to work out…”

“Finally… though Weasley seems to be having all the problems now; he wasn’t behaving normally at all at the table…” he said, a bit concerned.

“He’s having some problems, but it will get better, I hope…”

“Rosie asked me to make him a potion to help him…”

“Did she…? Why…?”

“She says her daddy isn’t playing with her, but what really has her worried is he isn’t eating…” Draco told him as they moved back into the kitchen.

Toodles popped into their path, her little arms folded. “Toodles do this… you go rest!” She insisted firmly. “Go on, masters, shoo!”

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Narcissa smiled as she laid the sleeping infant next to his sister in the cradle, setting comforting and monitoring spells over them. Sleep well, my loves…” she whispered to them. She sighed contentedly and turned to leave the room, her smile fading as she noticed she was no longer alone. Her husband stood in the doorway, his head bowed, half-leaning on the doorframe. “Lucius…?” she asked softly.

“She looks… so much like James…” he whispered, his eyes damp with tears.

“Oh Lucius…” she moved to him, drawing him into her arms to comfort him.

He held his wife close, trembling slightly with restrained grief. “She’s just like James, Cissa… so full of life, so beautiful…”

“But unlike James, love, she will always be here; she will always be your granddaughter, even if she is Harry’s daughter…”

“It’s so hard Cissa… I… I thought I had left all this behind me, so many years ago…” he whispered, shaken.

“Come, Lucius. Let’s get you into a hot bath and perhaps a drink…?” she kissed him.

“I have been so wrong, Cissa… I’ve treated my son the way my father treated me…”

“No.” she interrupted immediately. “You never drew one drop of your son’s blood purposefully. Your father did that to you.” She reminded.

“I was jealous of his relationship… I was jealous because I was denied my life with James and I took it out on my son… he loves Harry, just as much as I loved James…”

“That was your father’s worst mistake, not allowing you to bond with him…” Narcissa murmured, leading him onward.

“I hate not knowing what happened that summer… what did they do to him…? Why did he hate me
so when he returned…?

“There is no changing the past. We can only try to improve the future…” she soothed. “Tippy…?” she called

A house elf appeared, bowing. “Mistress is needing Tippy…?”

“Start a bath for Lucius…” she said. “And bring him a shot of Ogden’s, won’t you…?”

“No… I’ve had enough to drink, I think…” Lucius murmured softly. The house elf simply vanished to do as she was commanded. “If I only knew what happened, if our baby lived or if she was dead, I… I don’t think it would hurt so much if I only knew…” he said, allowing Narcissa to lead him to the bathing room. “Little Angel… Cissa, she looks as if she could be our own daughter, mine and James’… so beautiful and precious…”

Narcissa smiled as she undressed her husband. “You need to relax, Lucius…”

“You must meet her, Cissa…”

“I plan on it, love… I’m finally a Nona and I’m going to be a doting one to any child that comes our way…”

“She speaks Italian; you know… she called me Nonno right off… I’m hopelessly within the girl’s power…” he murmured, moving into the water.

“Isn’t that how it should be? It is our job to spoil the child rotten, and then send her home to her parents.

He settled into the warm bath with a sigh. “I don’t think she’s had much love in recent life, though someone had raised her with plenty of it… she’s so beautiful… I wish you had been there…”

“I wish I could have been too, but the kitlings needed me…” she began to wash him, her hands soft and soothing.

“There will be a room here for her, I plan to work on it immediately… only the best of toys, only the best of everything…” he said, and then looked up at her with a faint grin touching his lips. “And, by the way, Cissa… Draco thinks you have kittens.”

“I have kittens, do I…?” she laughed. “Well, they do have soft fuzzy hair like kittens, and they squeak like kittens…”

“And they do love their milk…” he added.

Narcissa laughed and kissed him. Lucius grinned and pulled her into the tub with him. She squealed in disbelief, laughing as she settled into the water with him. Lucius chuckled and banished her soggy clothing.
The Predator and the Pawn

Hermione stepped into Pansy’s office, feeling very apprehensive. She’d been avoiding Pansy for the past several days but the summons on her desk was unmistakable; if she didn’t respond this time, there would be consequences that could result in her arrest. It had been a full week since the recital and the revelation that Harry knew what she’d done for her friend… her life would be over if he found out what else she’d done.

She stifled a sigh as she closed the door behind her. “I really don’t have much time… the Zabini’s are due here at any moment…” she said quietly.

“Excellent…” Pansy was sitting behind her desk with its white marble top, dressed in one of her designer suits. “That’s going according to plan… so tell me, Hermione. Why haven’t I seen your husband yet…? He was never this rude in school; I invited him to come to tea and he hasn’t bothered to come…”

“He’s been very busy with the team… I’ve barely seen him since he began his practice with the Canons…”

“Get him here.” Pansy’s voice was dangerous, a sweet smile on her lips. “We need his donations to our stock; we need to expand our options for our clients…”

“He won’t come, Pansy…” Hermione said softly. “He hasn’t any reason to even want to donate… he has no reason to come here…”

“Give him a reason.” She growled, eyes narrowing slightly. “A national team representative would be a good seller…”

“Well, what about… what about Charlie’s husband Blaise…? He’s been on the team longer than Ron… I’d have a better chance of getting it from him than Ron; they have no children…”

“I want your husbands as well. If he won’t come in here, you WILL use the spell I’ve taught you. I want a minimum of twenty portions here by the end of the week…”

“Pansy, please… I can’t…” Hermione started.

“You will! Don’t you dare tell me you don’t have sex with your husband! You know how to extract it; you know how to preserve it! You will do that, or you will bring him in and I will take matters into my own hands!” she snapped in a tone that allowed no argument.

Hermione bit her lip. She couldn’t… she just couldn’t… but she had to say something or Pansy would follow through on her threats… She was about to subject her husband to the same thing she had done to everyone… he’d never trust her again… “Fine…” she whispered, defeated.

Pansy’s tone and manners changed instantly and she smiled warmly. “Good; that’s what I needed to hear. Now, can you handle the Zabini’s or do I need to go and take care of them while you pull yourself together…?” she asked in a clearly acidic tone.

“No… No I can… Terry is a squib; they’ll need special care…”

“Go on, then. And I expect to see an addition to our donor list by the morning.” She said with a sweet smile.
Hermione moved to the door, feeling that her life was crashing out of control. How in Merlin’s name was she going to get out of the mess she’d found herself in…? She managed to slip into her own office without talking to anyone, taking a few minutes to try to calm down. She had to take care of the Zabini couple; she didn’t want Pansy getting involved with them at all. She heard a knock on the door and she jumped at the sound then berated herself for reacting so; it wouldn’t be Pansy. Not after she’d just talked to her. She turned, taking a deep breath as she moved to answer.

“The Zabini couple is here, Mrs. Weasley…” the nurse named Amber said.

“Good – thank you. Please show them into Room 1… I will be with them in a few moments…” Hermione said, feigning calm. She wouldn’t be able to work like this… she waited until the nurse left, then she pulled open a filing cabinet and got out a calming draught, downing it quickly. She waited a moment more, to let it take effect, and then she strode to the door and headed out to meet them.

Terry looked up nervously as Hermione tapped on the door before entering. “Good morning… how are you today…?” Hermione asked, smiling at Terry.

“I’m nervous…” he admitted.

“I understand that, but you really don’t have to be… We’ve done this many times before. It’s a bit more complicated since you’re a squib, but it’s nothing that we can’t handle… There will be potions you will need to take throughout the pregnancy, and a bracelet you will wear to store the magic that is needed… but other than that, you’ll do fine…”

Damitri smiled softly at the way that Hermione was handling Terry. He appreciated the fact that she didn’t just plow through everything and leave little Terry confused and lost; she took the time to watch for Terry’s confusion and explain every little detail clearly until Terry’s worry began to fade. It was a shame, really, that she was involved in all this. This young woman had quite a talent for working with people and easing their fears…

“So let’s get started, shall we?” Hermione smiled. “The first potion will be a bit uncomfortable; it is to help your body create a womb for the baby… you can take a sleeping potion and nap right through it if you wish; the sleeping potion won’t have any negative effects and the first potion will take a few hours to complete its work…”

“I’ll stay right with you, love.” Damitri assured Terry when he looked up at him nervously.

“Well… okay…” he agreed.

Hermione smiled reassuringly at him. “It will enable you to be the mother you wish to be.” She said, gesturing to a rather comfortable-looking bed. Terry moved to it and sat down, testing its firmness as Damitri sat beside him. Hermione brought over two bottles, one was a solid earthenware bottle, the second a clear small bottle with a colorless liquid inside. “Here you are… this one…” she handed him the earthenware bottle. “This one you must drink completely. As I said, it will be rather uncomfortable. This second one…” she handed him the clear vial. “…take only if you wish to sleep.”

“All right… Terry took the first and unstoppered the bottle, then drank the contents down completely, making a face at its taste. “Can I… just keep this one if I need it…?” he asked timidly as he lay back upon the bed.

“Of course… and we have a house elf on the facility who will serve your needs while the potion takes effect…” she smiled warmly.
“Thank you.” Damitri said as he took Terry’s hand.

“My pleasure… please feel free to call if you need anything at all…” she smiled, moving out to let them have some privacy.

Damitri stretched out beside Terry on the bed and he cuddled close in his arms. “I don’t care how much it hurts, Dimi… I just want it to work…”

“That’s my brave little lover…” Damitri smiled, kissing him tenderly and relaxing to wait out the activation of the potion.

Two hours later, Hermione knocked softly and upon Damitri’s response, she moved into the room. “Let me just check on how you’re coming along, shall I…? Lie on your back, please…” she said, moving to the side of the bed. She produced her wand and murmured “Revlare…!” and the wand activated with a soft blue light. She held the wand out over Terry’s abdomen and an image in pale blue light appeared over his body, a reflection the organs directly under the wand in a reverse conical shape. “Ah, yes… very good. You’re almost done…” she smiled, drawing the wand away.

“What do we do next…?” Terry asked timidly.

“We need to get a sample you, Damitri, and that’s when we’ll do our part of the work here. Before your next appointment, we will take the donor essence and yours as well, Mr. Zabini, and merge them with the donor eggs. When you return in a fortnight, we will implant any viable embryos that result…”

Terry’s eyes grew wide, excitement clear. “I’ll have more than one…?”

“It’s a possibility.” Hermione nodded.

“If there’s only one, Terry, we can always do this again…” Damitri smiled.

“So if you will just supply the sample we need, I will get everything ready in the lab…”

Damitri smirked at her. “Just leave the specimen cups and give us some privacy; I don’t think getting you a ‘sample’ will be difficult.” He said and Terry giggled, blushing softly.

“Of course; I’ll lock the door and silence the room for you as well.” Hermione assured, producing the two specimen cups. “We’ll need as much as you can supply to ensure we get as many viable embryos as possible…” Damitri took the cups and settled back on the bed with Terry snuggled close to him.

Hermione slipped out and performed a silencing spell and a special locking charm on the door before she turned from the room. She then moved to the break room, pouring herself a strong cup of tea. She had to find a way out of this. She couldn’t bring Ron in… and Harry… she didn’t want him to hate her forever; she had never meant to hurt him… she had to find a way to fix things, there had to be a way…

“Miss Weasley…!” Amber smiled, moving into the room. “I never get to have my break with you… its good to see you’re actually taking one today…”

Hermione smiled faintly at Amber; she was a squib, but infinitely useful in the workings of the clinic. Pansy treated her like she was an idiot, but Amber had gone through twice the schooling that Pansy
had and Amber was actually quite intelligent. She’d definitely have been Ravenclaw if she’d been born with any magic at all. “I just have a little time today…” she told Amber.

“We have two more successful pregnancies…” Amber said, helping herself to some of the tea.

“That’s wonderful… who are they…?”

“Helena Bullock – she’s the one with the muggle husband who’s in a coma. And the other is the muggle girl Trudith Barstow. Trudy’s carrying twins…” her eyes sparkled as she moved to take a seat with Hermione.

“Brilliant… I know they’re excited…”

“Helena cried when I gave her the news… she’s so sure her husband is going to die… she’s still trying to get St. Mungo’s to accept her husband as a patient and get him out of the muggle hospital…”

“I’m glad we finally succeeded with her… It’s horrible what she has had to go through. I’m so happy she’s going to have a baby…”

“She’s hoping so hard for a boy. She’s not even out of her first trimester, it’s much too soon for muggle technology…”

“She’ll won’t be able to use the spell to reveal the baby’s gender until she reaches the second trimester; I’m afraid she’ll just have to be patient… I hope she gets her wish.” Hermione found her tea was already gone and she rose to her feet. “Well, I had better get back to work…”

“You need to sit and visit more…” Amber frowned, scolding her gently. “You work much too hard. Parkinson needs to leave you alone…”

“I have to pay for my schooling…” Hermione sighed, going to rinse out her cup.

“I don’t think I’ve ever seen you take a full break… we’re entitled to it, you know… You need to stop letting Pansy drive you so hard…”

“I have so much to do, Amber, I really don’t have the time…” Hermione gave her a smile and then moved out. Amber watched her go, then shrugged and relaxed back to enjoy her tea.

Hermione returned to work, feeling Pansy’s eyes on her every moment. She finished the work for the Zabini couple, setting them an appointment for two weeks in the morning. She gave Damitri a supply of potions to maintain and establish the magical womb in Terry’s abdomen, and specific instructions on dosage and timing. When she was sure even Terry understood what was to be done, she sent them on their way.

She turned and went back to her office. She hadn’t even opened her notepad to document her activities with them when Pansy descended upon her, excited, perching on the edge of Hermione’s desk. “Be very sparing with those samples, Hermione… Get them three, maybe four viable embryos then just keep the rest; you know the deal.” Her eyes gleamed as she spoke.

“I know what to do.” Hermione said softly, opening her book.

“And you know, Hermione; I think I’m working you much too hard. You should take the rest of the
day off…” she smiled at her suggestively. “Go and spend it with that husband of yours; I hear that it’s an off day from training for the Chudley Cannons… its’ your perfect chance…”

“I have classes today…”

“Oh, not for at least three or four more hours…” Pansy said, glancing at the time. “You know what I want, Hermione. You will go and make your husband happy.”

Hermione bowed her head. This was the last thing she wanted to do… “All right…” she mumbled, defeated.

“The lab work for Zabini will still be here when you come back in the morning; I know how you like to take a personal interest in these cases, but I really don’t understand why. Its only money… and if things fail, we get more money…” she said, coming to her feet.

Hermione didn’t answer, so Parkinson laughed and strolled out of the office. Hermione gathered her things and headed out to the car. She couldn’t do it… she couldn’t destroy Ron’s faith in her any more than she already had… she just couldn’t. She just… didn’t know what to do… there wasn’t any way out for her…

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Ron was relaxed in the living room, looking through a book on Quidditch teams of the world class level. He was having a lot of trouble focusing lately and the coach yesterday had warned him that he needed to get his mind back in the game or he stood a chance of sitting out the season on the bench. He’d decided that reading up a bit on the trademark moves of the various players he would have to be facing soon would help him get his mindset back; Rosie was off at school and Hermione at work, so he wouldn’t have any interruptions…

He heard the door open and looked up, rather surprised to see Hermione come in. “Monie…? Hi…” he said softly. “Is… is everything all right…?” he asked, closing the book and setting it aside.

“No, it isn’t…” she dropped her things in a chair, feeling like the weight of the entire world was on her shoulders. “I… Ron, I think… You need to go and stay with Charlie for a few days…”

“What…?” he frowned, moving to her side.

She stiffened, feeling his touch. Merlin, she loved him so… but she had to do this or all was lost. “You’ve got to… school… its school… I’m so stressed I’m at my wits’ end… I don’t think I’m going to make it…”

“You, Monie…? You were always brilliant in school…” he ran his hand over her shoulders, leaving his arm resting there.

With a herculean effort to stifle the pain she was causing herself for doing so, she shook his arm off and stepped away from him. “Between work and school, I can’t… I just can’t. Take Rosie, and go to Charlie’s…”

“But Monie, I make more money now… you could just quit that stupid clinic…” he said hopefully, his hand reaching for hers.

She saw and turned away, folding her arms to hide the fact that her hands were trembling. “I can’t…
I owe the clinic more than you will ever know… I can’t quit…”

He frowned and pursued her, taking her shoulders in his hands, gazing down at her bent head. “To bloody hell with every one of them, Hermione… I don’t need them and you don’t either. You could quit now, Hermione… you could be a real mom and get that teaching job you wanted, and…” This was it; she was done with the clinic and they could get out of all this shit with Harry’s help… hope welled in his heart.

Tears rolled down her cheeks and she averted her face from him, turning out of his hands and taking several steps from him to show him only her back. “Please Ronny… I… I just need some time…” she said, voice shaking slightly.

He stared at her, confused and feeling like he was completely missing something. His hope crashed down to his feet. “So you… you really want me to go…?” he asked softly.

“Yes… just for a while, Ronny. I love you, but…”

“But nothing…! You’re my wife…! We can fix anything together if we just…”

“You can’t help me with this, Ronny…! I just need to be alone for a while.” She interrupted him. “Just… just for a while…”

“I wish I knew what the hell I’ve done…” he said softly in a hoarse tone.

“Its not you…”

“It is or you wouldn’t be sending me away.” He said, turning away from her. “I’ll give you your time, Hermione… I’ll give you all the time you want. I just wish to hell you would talk to me…”

“It won’t be long… I promise I’ll figure something out…” She didn’t dare look at him… if she did she would break down and he would take her in his arms… and Pansy would get everything her greedy heart desired.

Ron glanced back at her, his own eyes wet with tears. “I don’t understand any of this… and I don’t know how much more of this I can take…” he left the room and went quickly to the bedroom. In minutes he had thrown a duffel bag together for himself and two bags for Rosie, using his wand with trembling hands. He was completely confused and his heart felt like it was breaking… what was he going to do…? Stay at Charlie’s a day or so but… but… she was throwing him out…

Hermione moved out the back door, sitting on the steps, knees pulled up tight and head bowed. She HAD to be strong, just a few minutes more… she had to do this…

Ron dropped his bags at the front door, and then went to the kitchen door as well, trying to find the words. He knew what was happening, and he wanted to help her… he wanted to keep his wife. “Monie… are… are you sure…? I can help you, we can work together; you know I’m better than I used to be at spells and charms…”

“No… Ronnie… please, just… just take the bags and go.” She whispered, sniffling and trying not to break down completely.

Ron stepped back as if slapped in the face, and then bowed his head. “I still love you Hermione… I always will…” he whispered. He turned and hurried to the front door, grabbed up the bags and was gone in moments. Hermione wrapped her arms about her legs and began to cry.
Blaise opened his door and was surprised to see Ron at the door. He had bags at his feet and stood with his head bowed and shoulders slumped, his hands shoved deep into his pockets. “Ron…” Blaise asked, instantly concerned.

“She… Hermione… she threw me out.” He said, his voice rough with emotion and withheld tears. “She told me to come here… take Rosie and come here…”

Blaise took the bags and tossed them inside the door, then turned to his friend, drawing him into a hug. “It’ll be okay, Ron…” he whispered softly. “You’ll stay here with us until we can work this out…”

“I feel… so lost…” he whispered, standing almost as if numb from the pain. “I… I don’t wanna be in your way, but… I’ve nowhere else… I…”

“You’ll never be in the way here.” Blaise soothed, leading him inside the house and shutting the door. “It’s all right…”

Ron began to tremble, the caring tone and simple friendly warmth exuded by his old school crush getting past the wall of pain he felt trapped behind. Suddenly the dam broke, and he began to weep harshly; he couldn’t keep any of it blocked up any longer… Blaise led him over to the couch, sitting down with him, whispering soft words of comfort to him and holding him, allowing him to cry until he could cry no more.

Slowly the tears stopped but Ron remained leaning against him, feeling both physically and emotionally drained and exhausted. “Merlin… I feel like… like everything has come to an end…” he whispered.

“Ron, you know I have no control over what happens between you and Hermione. But I want you to know this for certain; you and Rosie will always have a home, here with Charlie and me…” Blaise said reassuringly.

“Just for a while… I… I can’t thank you enough, Blaise… I can barely think right now, I hate all this…” he murmured softly. “Hell; I’d hardly seen you in four years and… and now, I’m moving in with you…”

Blaise smiled. “I don’t mind Ron…” he said, running his fingers through Ron’s tousled red hair. “Are you hungry? I can fix you something…”

“Merlin… I haven’t been eating much at all lately but… no. I can’t, I just… my stomach is all in knots…” he said, eyes downcast.

“How about some broth and crackers…? Something really simple; easy on your stomach… You need to eat, Ron.”

“I’ll… I’ll try.” He agreed, though he was sure he would throw it up. He raised his eyes and they fell on the clock. “Merlin, I can’t… I have to get Rosie soon…” a pained expression crossed his face again. “How will explain all of this to her…?” he whispered.

“Let me call Charlie; he can pick her up. Where is she?”

“Dance class… in the school gymnasium…”
“All right, then. You just relax, and I’ll tend to everything…” Blaise said firmly.

“I can’t ask you to do all of that… she’s my responsibility, I have to fetch her…”

“It’s no trouble, Ron, really. You know that Charlie adores her…”

He bowed his head and nodded. “Yeah, I… thanks…” He murmured, slumped back on the cushions of the couch.

Pansy sat glaring at the painting that hung on the wall opposite her desk in her office. It was of herself at seventeen seated in an opulent bedroom. The painted Pansy gazed back at her in worry, silently waiting for her to say something. Damn that Hermione anyway, little Gryffindor bitch…! She’d come to the office this morning empty handed, spouting some nonsense about a fight with her husband that had resulted in his leaving her along with their daughter. She’d checked into it, and it seemed she wasn’t lying, at least about the fact that her husband was now residing with Blaise… it was amazing what you could get house elves to tell you with the proper inspiration.

The only thing that had come positive of the entire mess was that losing her husband seemed to have improved her attitude with her lot in life… Hermione seemed to be content now to deal with her life as it was, and less likely to balk and go do something stupid. She seemed to be done with her ridiculous attempts to back out of things. She hadn’t said one word in resistance to her all morning… Well. She wasn’t ignorant of that little ploy; she had every intention of keeping a very close eye on her…

Hermione worked through the morning, quietly complying with every little demand of Pansy’s… to a point. Pansy had come into the lab while Hermione was preparing the eggs and she had told her to go ahead and fertilize them immediately to avoid having to wait to see how much would be remaining… Hermione had not done that. She’d continued with her careful preparation of the eggs, following every medical process she’d set in place herself for the procedure. She didn’t allow anyone else to assist her; she was certain this was the last set she would ever prepare to help a wizard gain children and she was determined this would be a success the first time around. Damitri Zabini and his sweet husband Terry deserved nothing less than her best effort.

She finally glanced at the time, rubbing her neck to relieve it of a strained muscle from so many hours with her head bent over her work. She rose and stretched, putting the eggs back into the storage tank before she moved past Pansy’s office and to her own to pull her phone out. She spelled the room for privacy and silence, and then dialed the number she knew so well.

“Potter here…” Harry said, not bothering to check the caller I.D. He immediately wished that he had.

“Please, don’t hang up on me Harry.” Hermione said quickly. “There’s a lot more to this whole mess than you could ever guess at… and… and I’m not asking you to help me for me; I’m asking you for Ron and for Rosie… please… I really need to see you…”

Harry was silent a few moments, considering. Finally he spoke. “I have an appointment at lunch, but
should be free afterward… if you wish to speak to me, you need to come to my office.”

“I’ll take a late lunch… thank you Harry…” she said softly.

Harry did not answer, hanging up the phone on her. He pushed away from his desk and rose, walking over to Damitri’s office. “Hey, boss…” he started.

Damintri looked up and chuckled softly. “After this many years in business together, I think ‘partner’ is more appropriate… come in, come in…”

Harry shrugged. “It’s more habit than anything else…” he admitted. “Hermione just called me… she said she wants to meet with me…”

“Did she…?” he said thoughtfully, reflecting on the behavior he had seen demonstrated by her on that first day and every time that she saw Pansy when they were in the clinic. “Well, we’ll listen to her of course. She doesn’t have any idea how much we already know. I’ll be sure to change the nameplate on the door and downstairs on my way out… will she floo over or drive?”

“She didn’t say… should I set up the recorder?”

“Yes. It doesn’t hurt to have recorded evidence as well as pensive evidence for the courts… so tell me, how did she react when she saw Angel with you? You mentioned that she was at the recital…”

“She broke down… started crying about how she never meant to hurt me, how she was only trying to help her friend and that she had never done anything like this before Angel… She claimed she would have told me when Angel’s mum died, but the fire that killed her mum happened right about the time that we lost Andie…”

“Just judging by her behavior that I’ve seen at the clinic, I believe that Parkinson is holding something over her. Parkinson has complete control over her actions. I don’t believe that Hermione has been a willing participant in what is going on for quite some time. Without a clear way out, though, it isn’t surprising that she has felt she had no choice but to continue…”

“That may be… but she’s the one who started it all… she started it with my Angel.” Harry said shortly, angered and betrayed by the thought.

“Yes… a little one who is a blessing to your home and family…” Damitri advised thoughtfully. “Hear her out. And use veritaserum on her, put it in her tea. Ensure that she is telling you the full truth. I have two bottles in stock, in the lockup…”

Harry sighed, frowning. “Am I wrong to be so angry, Damitri…? I trusted her; she was one of my closest friends…”

“No… I don’t think you’re wrong, Harry. I’d be furious were I in your shoes. But you need to deal with the anger eventually. Hearing the full story may help you to do that someday. You don’t have to do it today, not by any means, but it will need to be done in the future…”

“I just hope I don’t lose my temper at her today…” Harry muttered.

“I could stay… I could cast a glamour…”

“No… I don’t want you to blow your cover.” Harry said immediately. “You and Terry really do need a baby… I’ll be okay. I’ll just take a calming draught before she gets here with my tea…”

“All right… and you know, Harry… if I’m right about her, it won’t matter if you explode at her or
not. She’ll stay no matter what you do. If I’m wrong… well, she’ll run. But I’m sure she’ll just sit there and take anything you throw at her.”

“Okay, Damitri…” he sighed. I’ll go get the recorder set up…”

“And I’ll set the door plates…” he assured.

Harry moved back to his office, setting everything up for his meeting with Hermione. Damitri moved out to lunch early, leaving Harry and the secretary there. He changed all the signs to reflect Harry as the main investigator and Wentworth as his partner. He then called the chauffer to drive him to his planned lunch with Terry.

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Hermione walked into the office, her purse strap held tightly in her hand. She stopped at the reception desk. “I’m here to see Harry Potter, please…?”

“Who should I say is here?”

“Hermione Weasley…”

“Just a moment, please.” She smiled at her, touching the intercom on her desk. “Mr. Potter..? I have a Mrs. Weasley here to see you…”

“Send her in.”

“Follow me.” She smiled, rising to her feet. She led Hermione back to the office door and opened it, admitting Hermione in.

Hermione moved in, feeling nervous and nauseous and even terrified, but she was determined. It had to end… “Hi…” she murmured as the door closed behind her.

“Mrs. Weasley, have a seat.” He said in a detached, rather cold tone.

Hermione moved to the desk instead; she drew her wand, handle first, from her pocket and laid it on the desk before she turned and moved to a seat, sinking into the soft leather. “Thank you for seeing me, Mr. Potter…” she whispered, eyes lowered.

“Would you like something to drink?” he offered.

“I… yes… anything is fine…” she said, her hands tightly clasped in her lap.

Harry poured her some tea with the veritaserum in it, not trusting her to tell him one bit of truth without it. He set the glass beside her, and then returned to his seat.

She drank a bit, having to hold it with both hands to keep it from spilling. “Thank you…” she murmured out of habit, and then looked up at him. “I can’t keep doing this, I can’t do any of it anymore… I… I feel like its all eating at my heart and my soul… I can’t even look my daughter or my husband in the eye anymore…”

“What’s going on…?”

“It’s all a big scam…” she whispered, feeling tears well and roll down her cheeks. It didn’t matter;
she didn’t sob. She just let them fall. “None of our best donors even know they’re donors…” she
forced her voice to remain steady.

“If you want to come clean Mrs. Weasley, now is the time.” Harry said coolly. “I need to know
absolutely every detail. This is the only chance you may ever get.”

Hermione nodded, head bowing again. “There are eight wizards right now, who are donors and they
don’t know… but I think there may be nine after next week. Damitri Zabini will likely be added to
her list then…”

“How’s list?”

“Pansy Parkinson’s…” Hermione whispered.

“How did you get involved?”

“It was six years ago… you and Draco had started coming in for treatments… Tara and Melissa
came to me for help. We went to elementary school together, Tara and I; we were bet friends… she
asked for my help to have a baby. I sat down with her and tried everything I could to figure a way
she could afford the clinic, but I was barely scraping by at the time too… Ron was going through
that slump and with school… I couldn’t help her. I didn’t mean to do any wrong. I know that’s no
excuse, and I should never have, but… well, anyways, after it was done I got back to regular life…
My college class charges doubled, and we fell behind on our house payments…” she bowed her
head and drank another few sips of tea, gathering her courage to go on. “Pansy told me that she had
a plan to help me; the scholarships couldn’t suffice anymore no matter how many I applied for…”

Harry knew the more tea she drank the more she would be unable to lie to him. She didn’t seem to
be lying at all; even the little bit of veritaserum she’d gotten with those first couple of sips would
have made it difficult for her to lie to him. “And you trusted Pansy Parkinson?” Harry asked in a sour
tone.

“I was desperate.” She answered softly, staring at her hands. They had hurt so many people… “The
work I did at first was strictly lab work, after my regular hours… preparing the eggs, removing the
chemical markers and imposing those of the new father… basic lab work. I had no names of donors,
nor even the names of those receiving the embryos I was creating. I just thought it was extra work
that she had found for me to do, something to allow me to work overtime and earn the money I
needed. I’d come in early before the sun rose, and usually wouldn’t leave until after sunset…”

“I remember…” Harry said softly. “There were about six months when Ron was over all the time
with Rosie…”

She nodded, not looking up. “I was so busy I didn’t even see Rosie’s first steps…” she whispered.
“It was actually about eight months… The pool of selected donors was only three at that time; all I
ever saw was the sample number.” She said softly. “Then Pansy said I’d worked hard enough. She
insisted I come to a party at her house… It had been a long time since I’d done anything but work,
and since I saw Ron so rarely it would be nice to get out for a while… I accepted. I should have
known better…” her tone was bitter. “The party was at Parkinson Manor. Everyone invited was a
pureblood witch or wizard, and I was snubbed repeatedly and ignored as a mudblood, muggle
offspring… I stayed near Pansy and the snubs seemed to be less. She told me the party was a bore
and asked me to come with her to one of the sitting rooms for a while… I accepted. I should have
known better…” her tone was bitter. “The party was at Parkinson Manor. Everyone invited was a
pureblood witch or wizard, and I was snubbed repeatedly and ignored as a mudblood, muggle
offspring… I stayed near Pansy and the snubs seemed to be less. She told me the party was a bore
and asked me to come with her to one of the sitting rooms for a while… there was a wizard in the
sitting room when we entered. I almost left but she told me to stay…” her voice cracked a bit and she
cleared her throat. She took a moment, drinking a bit more, shaking and frightened but plowing on.
This had to be done…! To save her family, to save her husband and daughter she had to damn
herself… “It was Xanthus Balstrode, passed out on the settee… she used her own wand to cast a
spell to keep him asleep and lock the door… then she demanded my wand…”

“And you gave it to her?” Harry asked incredulously.

“She told me if I didn’t she’d just call the Aurors in… that she had three Aurors here at the party and she’d have me arrested. I was confused, I demanded to know what I’d done and she told me I’d been fertilizing eggs with stolen sperm for months…”

“You said you didn’t know whose they were…”

“I swear on Rosie’s life I didn’t know…”

“Why didn’t you come to me then?” Harry asked. “You had a choice. I would have given you the money; all you had to do was ask…”

“You were so busy with Draco, I didn’t… I was afraid to even ask… I didn’t want to put any stress on him; he’d just had that first miscarriage…” she whispered. “I would have jumped into a nest of Dementors to keep either of you from going through that grief and hell again… I absolutely was NOT going to be the one who caused him to lose another… I had no idea I was doing anything wrong, Harry… and Pansy paid me very well for the work I was doing. I didn’t see anything wrong with the money I was earning; I was putting in forty or fifty hours of overtime in every week… the money was good, but I was really working hard… Everything seemed to be on the up-and-up…” she said softly.

“What did Pansy do with your wand?” Harry asked.

“She used a spell… said it was a ‘harvesting’ charm… she used the spell to get sperm from Crabbe as he slept…” she said, head bowed. “I was trapped… I didn’t mean to hurt anyone…”

“You’re trying to tell me you didn’t think it was wrong…?!” Harry asked, flabbergasted. “Do you know how insane that sounds?! What’s not wrong about theft? About rape…?” Yes, Hermione, RAPE! Bulstrode was not willing…!

“The lab work… I meant the lab work…” she could barely see through her tears but she had to finish… she had to tell him. “I didn’t know it was yours and Draco’s sperm we were using… I didn’t know she was selling it to the highest bidder… I had no way to know… I know what… what was done to Bulstrode was wrong. Once she did that… with my wand… I was stuck… I knew I would go to Azkaban…” she whispered, head bowed.

“So what’s changed now, Mrs. Weasley?” Harry asked acidly, his anger roused. “Not getting enough money? Or do you have enough to retire comfortably?” he scowled at her, leaning back in his seat.

“It was never really about the money… at first I convinced myself I was helping people, helping them to have babies… it wasn’t until just last year when… when I realized that the pre-screening wasn’t being done on Pansy’s special donors… most of the money has gone into Gringott’s in an account locked to Rosie only. I paid off the house and the car… and when I realized… I returned what I could and put the money away… donated some… I just… I can’t bear it any longer… I’ve destroyed a relationship I held very dear… I hurt you, Harry…” she whispered. “I’m hurting my husband… and hurting my daughter. I’d rather go to Azkaban than continue to hurt those I love a moment longer…” she whispered. “I knew I would have to take the blame for all of it… Pansy uses my wand every time she ‘harvests’… she usually harvests by having sex with them; she says its their willing donations that are hers to use as she pleases, since they’re more than happy to leave it with her… but every time she uses the spell she takes my wand…”
“You know I have to report this.” Harry said, frowning at her.

“I know…I expect to be locked up for a very long time. It's all right, Har… Mr. Potter. Its all right…” she wiped at her cheeks with a trembling hand. “I can’t… she… she wants me to harvest Ron… I can’t… I sent Ron away…”

“So anyone else is fair game, but not your husband?” Harry sneered.

She flinched at his words, but would not counter anything he said. “I’m telling you everything, I swear it… I did the lab work… and used sperm left by donors… Pansy built the bank. She wanted me to start… harvesting… and start with Ron… she wanted me to harvest Ron, and Blaise as well.” Hermione’s voice trembled. “She was furious with me when I came in empty handed…” she explained. She knew he was right and she had no defense; she would not even offer one.

Harry sighed. “I need to call Tonks…” he grumbled, rising.

“Thank you.” She said softly. “I can’t do that…”

He paused, eyeing her again. “Why can’t you?”

She tried to answer but all that came out was a strangled gasp; her airway sounded as if it were being cut off at her attempt to speak. She bowed her head, trembling worsening. “I have to get out of this… I know my wand will damn me but I don’t care… I have to get out. Please… call them…”

Harry studied her a moment. “Are you bound in some way…”?

She tried to answer again, and then struggled to get her breath back, biting her lip. “I… I can’t… there are a lot of things I can’t talk about… especially to Aurors.” She said softly. “I’m surprised I could say all of this to you…”

Harry moved to the fireplace, tossing in some floo powder. “Ministry of Magic, Auror’s office… this is Harry Potter. I need to speak with Tonks.”

A few moments passed before Nymphadora Tonks’ face appeared in the coals. “Harry…! Long time no see, mate… you have trouble…?”

“Unfortunately… do you have a moment…? I need you here…”

“Sure… be right there…” she winked then her face vanished. The fireplace flared bright green.

Hermione didn’t even look up when Tonks stepped through. Harry moved back to his desk, sinking into his chair. “Have a seat Tonks… you know Mrs. Weasley…?”

“Ron’s wife, right? Yes, of course…” she agreed, frowning as she studied Hermione. The brown-haired woman’s hands shook slightly; she had them clasped together but the shaking was still visible.

“Would you like some tea, Dora…?” Harry asked.

“No, thank you Harry… so; what’s up?” she asked. Harry sighed, and then gave Tonks a brief outline of all that happened. She listened attentively, glancing at Hermione as Harry spoke. “I see… and why now? Why turn yourself in, Hermione?”

Hermione looked at her, her eyes and nose reddened from tears. She struggled to speak but could not; mouth working but only choking as she fought to get past what bound her. She finally stopped trying, gasping for air as she looked at Harry. “I can’t talk to her… I can’t…”
“You’ll have to talk to someone. If not, you’ll be in Azkaban before sunset.”

“I WANT to…!” she wept. “I can’t… I want to…”

“…but you’re magically bound not to; and bound not to even tell that you’ve been bound.” Tonks said.

Hermione nodded vigorously, looking greatly relieved. “Yes, that’s it…”

Tonks frowned thoughtfully. “We could use Legilimens to take the memories from her…”

“She’s given over her wand already.” Harry gestured to it on the desk. Hermione made no gesture to even think of retrieving it.

“Good; we'll need that to pull the spells off it for the trial as well… we’re going to have to do this at the office… take what evidence her mind gives and put it away for pensive testimony…”

“I’m sure Harry has an audio of everything I’ve said as well.” Hermione murmured. “I’ll do anything you ask of me.”

Tonks rose to her feet, taking up Hermione’s wand. “Coming, Harry…?”

“No. I’ll leave this one in your hands, Dora. I’ve obligations at home.”

“All right… I’ll have to see if I can roust old Shacklebolt out of bed… he’s bloody brilliant at breaking through magical bindings like I suspect you have, Mrs. Weasley…”

Hermione nodded mutely, afraid to even try to speak. She wouldn’t resist at all; she had to end it…

“Keep me posted.” Harry rose, taking Dora’s hand in a warm handshake. “And give Teddy and Remus a kiss for me… and give the old snake one while you’re at it…” Harry teased.

She laughed. “I will, Harry. And you make sure to keep my cousin Draco happy, eh?” she pulled him into a hug.

He returned it, smiling finally. “That is my one goal in life…”

“Tell him we’ll do dinner at our place this weekend.”

Harry nodded. “Will your mates be there…?”

“Remus will; Severus has to work late, but he’ll be home by eight…”

“We’ll wait for him. Draco does love spending time with his godfather.”

Hermione hated to break in, but she had to ask. “Mr. Potter… should I… should I call in…?” she asked softly. “I’m supposed to be at lunch…”

Tonks looked thoughtful and appreciative that Hermione had thought of that. “How much time do you have left…?”

Hermione glanced at the time, then at her watch. She kept her eyes on Harry and was able to speak. “I can take up to an hour more without raising any suspicions…” she said softly.

“It will do your case good, Mrs. Weasley, to work with us and uncover every detail of what’s been going on out at your clinic.” Harry answered her. “Discuss it with Tonks.”
“I…” she began, and then nodded, looking down again.

“I’ll get Shacklebolt. If you’re willing to work with us…” Tonks said.

Hermione looked relieved and nodded again.

Tonks moved to the floo, setting it only to link to the ministry until Hermione was in custody. “Step through.” She instructed. Hermione took a deep breath and stepped in; she was whirled away in green flames.

“I’m investigating this as well; Tonks… let me know if she says anything more than what I told you, would you?”

“Not a problem, Harry… I’ll send over a report.”

“You’re the best, Tonks. I’ll send you a transcript of everything she’s said here.”

“I better go…” Tonks grinned and released the lock on the floo before she stepped in.

Harry sighed. “What an absolute mess…”

Kingsley Shacklebolt arrived within twenty minutes of the call, dressed in a simple dark brown wizard’s robe. He had gone into a very early retirement following that final battle with Voldemort, forced into it by the mediwizards at St. Mungo’s who would never clear him for full time work again due to the injuries and permanent nerve damage he had incurred.

He greeted Tonks briefly then set directly to work on Hermione. Before long it was obvious that the spells that bound her were linked to a painful curse; each time he began to work she was put through excruciating pain. Hermione did not even attempt to complain, clinging white-knuckled to the arms of the chair, enduring every moment of the torture without a word and barely a sound.

“Interesting…” he grunted, sitting back to think a moment as she gasped for air, white-faced, slumping in her seat. He looked at Tonks. “Has she said how she was bound…? It would help in releasing her from this…”

“No, she seems to be forbidden to speak to Aurors at all.” Tonks answered.

He nodded, turning to open the bag he had brought along with him. He pulled out a potion and opened it, giving it to Hermione. “Drink this.” He instructed. She took it and held it in both shaking hands, drinking it all down, eyes closed.

“Your cooperation with us will help your case… I won’t promise that it will drop any charges at all, but it may reduce your stay…” Tonks told her. Hermione nodded to indicate her understanding yet she did not open her eyes, her cheeks wet with continued tears.

Kingsley scowled slightly. “Not only bound but linked to the Cruciatus curse… she is tortured every time she attempts to speak or to have the spell broken…” he grunted as he began his work again.

Hermione sat silently, not offering any resistance despite the pain which had been lessened by the potion. Nymphadora paced, watching impatiently. They only had a short time to work and get answers before people back at that clinic would get suspicious…
Hermione suddenly drew a sharp breath, eyes closing. “Oh… Merlin…” she whispered.

“Try to speak.” Kingsley said. “Look at me, and speak.”

She looked at him, fear clear in her eyes. She bit her lip a moment, but then opened her mouth to speak. “Thank you…” she said softly, then tears of relief welled in her eyes. “It’s gone… oh Merlin thank you, it’s gone…!”

Kingsley stood, stretching his back, satisfied with his own work. “You’re welcome.” He said smoothly.

“Now, Mrs. Weasley… can you tell me everything you know?” Tonks prompted.

Hermione launched immediately into an explanation of everything. She began with Harry and Draco’s attempts to have a child, then their success and failure. Her friend’s plea and her own use of seemingly unwanted sperm left for over a year in storage… then Pansy’s introduction of the new position and extra money. She then described the party of mostly death-eater and pureblood families, and how Pansy had taken her to the sitting room.

Tonks frowned. “Why would Dark Wizarding families want just Potter’s sperm…? He’s not even pureblood…”

“I don’t know; I never asked…” Hermione said, looking a little confused.

“Why wouldn’t they want him?” Shacklebolt asked, sitting at the table, looking quite weary. “Potter defeated the Dark Lord. There’s power in his blood; old family power. Malfoy’s too. I’m assuming theirs were the samples you were using…?”

“At first, but I didn’t know until the party when Pansy told me…” she said softly, looking down. “And then… Xanthus Bulstrode was in the sitting room…” she went on to explain how Pansy had spelled him to sleep, then used Hermione’s wand to extract sperm from the unconscious wizard. “She told me that I was bound from then on to do her bidding… that all the money I’d gotten was tainted, and… and that all the blame would be on me, because my wand is the only one that has ever been used to harvest…”

“Smart witch, that Pansy…” Shacklebolt said. “Tonks, I think that you will be needed to take over for Hermione at her work… we need to find out just what she’s been up to…”

“I have no problem with it, Shacklebolt, but I’m no medic…”

“I’ll do anything you want me to.” Hermione said immediately. “I want to cooperate as much as possible… this has to stop. I can take care of the patients; I have one in particular I want to ensure get to have a successful pregnancy… and I’ll switch out with you whenever you wish me to…”

“Is that patient buying their sample from the special stores…?” Tonks asked.

“Oh… oh Merlin…” Hermione looked pained. It was… she couldn’t help the Zabinis any longer… “I’ll look into that one, of course, but we will see if you can proceed…” Kingsley said thoughtfully.

“Yes, sir…” Hermione murmured.

“Maybe Harry will loan me his cloak; that would help…” Tonks mused.

“Good idea.” Shacklebolt pushed himself to his feet with a slight groan of pain. “Ah… I’m going to
leave you to it; I’m going back to my garden and blithely ignoring the world in my retirement…”

“Yeah, right... You’d die of boredom, old man…” Tonks laughed.

He chuckled in his deep voice. “Call me if you need me.” He winked at her, and then moved to the fire and floo’d away.

Tonks pulled out a bracelet and fixed it to Hermione’s wrist, sealing it with a touch of her wand. It was silver, twined and twisted metal, and quite attractive. “This is a tracker… you’re basically under house arrest until everything goes down. I’m also holding your wand. Anytime you use your wand, I will need to be present to monitor you directly. Do you work tomorrow…?”

“No, I have classes.”

“Okay; that will give me time to get with Harry about his cloak…”

“I should get back to work…” Hermione said softly. “I’m still doing the clinical part of the lab work; I won’t need my wand at all this afternoon…”

“Good. Try and stay away from Parkinson.”

“That’s easy enough… she hates to come into the lab.” She said, rising. She found she felt weak and exhausted after her ordeal of the last couple of hours. “And she’s not really expecting anything from me right now. I sent Ron and our child away to keep them safe…” she looked down. It hurt so bad to think she may never see them again…

“Call me if anything happens.” Tonks nodded.

“I will… I just want this to all end… I’m so tired of hurting people…” she murmured as she activated the floo.
Undercover Work

Several days passed with regular humdrum business, and Hermione saw no reason to contact Tonks again, though she did receive a message from her when at home to proceed with process for Zabini. She did so, applying herself with full concentration, intent upon ensuring that at least Damitri Zabini and his pretty little Terry would have reason to celebrate… it was the least she could do to make up for all the pain she had caused people lately.

She spent a very lonely weekend in her house alone, feeling horrible but not too sorry for herself. She was sure that she deserved all the misery she was feeling. She actually spent most of it partially drunk… though it really didn’t help. The more she drank, the more she missed her husband and wanted his touch… and she missed the happy lighthearted and carefree laughter of her husband and daughter playing all around the house. Even the backyard and garden weren’t any solace; she could almost see them playing keep-away as they flew about the yard on brooms, or working out in the garden… It was her husband and daughter that made this place a home. Without them, it felt like little more than an empty cave…

She was so relieved when Monday finally arrived that she went to work nearly three hours early. She didn’t think of her child or husband while she was working, she could focus on just what was in front of her. She stopped in her own office to check for mail and really wasn’t surprised to see a letter on her desk from Pansy. She hesitated, and then opened it to see what it was. The note inside was rather benign, telling her that they needed to meet this afternoon directly after lunch to discuss business. Hermione immediately jotted a quick note on it, and then sent it by owl to Tonks to let her know what was happening.

She buried herself in work until lunch, not paying attention to anything except trying to ensure that at least seven or eight eggs were prepared for the Zabini visit in two days. Four of the eggs had shown very positive results and had already begun cell division… Lunchtime arrived far too soon. She slipped out to the little Zen garden alone; very few people ever came out here at lunch. She sat on the bench hidden from the rest of the building to wait for Tonks to arrive.

She wasn’t waiting for very long; Tonks apparated into the garden close to her with Harry’s cloak draped over her arm. Hermione rose to her feet. “I’m to meet her in her office in about five more minutes. it’s at the end of the hall with the glass doors to the right.”

Tonks handed her the cloak. “Anything I should know? That only you would be privy to?”

“The name of Angel’s mother was Tara, and her bonded partner was Melissa. And we’re down to only two samples of Draco’s remaining, and three of Harry’s now.” she said, trying to think of what Pansy might discuss. “She wants more, but this time she wants it from Ron and Blaise too. And we have eight total donors at the moment in her special stock.”

Tonks slipped a small bud into her ear; once she had it settled in place it was invisible. She then handed one to Hermione. “Put this in your ear. With this you’ll be able to hear me and talk to me.”

She slipped a small box under her top, settling it between her breasts, hidden safely from sight. She handed a second one to Hermione, who looked at it, rather surprised.

Tonks grinned at her. “Harry’s not the only one taking advantage of muggle technology. I’ve a friend in America who’s a muggle Crime Scene Investigation agent; she’s very good and gives me all kinds of ideas. If we get hold of Pansy’s computer I may send for her to come and break into it.”

“Very clever.” Hermione smiled faintly. “Pansy depends almost totally upon wizarding tools; she
doesn't think much about muggle technology. She uses the computer, but that's about all… what is it you want me to do?"

Tonks considered a moment. “Put on the cloak and stay in the lab if you like; you know where you can be and not get bumped into, correct?” Hermione nodded, sweeping the cloak about her and vanishing from sight. Tonks assumed Hermione's form; her pink hair lengthened and turned into wavy brown hair, eyes changing, face morphing to be a reflection of Hermione's features. “There; how do I look?”

“Much too well rested.” came Hermione's voice from nowhere. “Other than that, it's like looking in a mirror.”

“Good. let's go.”

Hermione checked to ensure that not even her feet were showing outside the cloak then she slipped off her shoes and carried them to ensure that she made no noise as she hurried off after her.

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***Author's note: Anytime in the following chapters when Tonks is disguised as Hermione, this will be noted by naming her Tonks/Hermione to eliminate confusion.

Pansy was seated at her marble-topped desk in her opulent office, frowning in concentration when Tonks/Hermione came in. She glanced at her a moment then waved her to a seat as she continued to compose a letter. A large barn owl sat perched on the mantle, clicking its beak in irritation and impatience, its feathers fluffed out away from its body.

Tonks/Hermione sat down, crossing her legs, waiting for Pansy to finish. Parkinson affixed the note to the owl’s leg and the creature launched immediately off the mantle and out the open window. She sighed and looked at Tonks/Hermione with only a slight lessening of her frown. She gestured to the door and it closed, and she set a silencing as well as a locking spell upon the door before she began to speak. “Orders just keep coming in…” she said, and then scowled slightly at the brown-haired young woman. “You know, Hermione; I find it highly inconvenient that you picked this month to go and have a fight with your husband. If I didn’t know better, I’d say you planned it this way… I take it you still haven’t made up with him…?”

“No; he’s still staying with Charlie…” Tonks/Hermione answered simply. “I’m hoping he’ll come home soon; I really miss little Rose…”

“Go make up with him.” She suggested, voice a soft growl.

Tonks/Hermione responded with a pout on her face. “He won’t even speak to me; I’ve tried…”

“Try HARDER. Grovel at his feet if you must. Do whatever it takes, but make up with him. We need him. Play on his weaknesses; I know you can get to him through your daughter.” She said, her eyes narrow.

“I’ll try more tonight, but… well; he’s not even talking to me at all. He sends Blaise or Charlie to talk to me for him…”

“Lovely. Another question; do you see much of Draco and Potter…?” she asked, sitting back in her chair.

“Yes; I’m supposed to have dinner with them this weekend…”
“Oh, perfect. I just got five orders for Potter.” Pansy smirked.

*But we only have three samples…* Hermione told her in her earpiece and Tonks/Hermione immediately put that information to use. “But we only have three samples, Pansy…”

Her smile widened. “I know that much better than you do. And I’m tired of being the only one in our partnership who does the gathering of the samples. It’s your turn; YOU’RE going to get us some more.”

*What…?!*

Tonks/Hermione looked flabbergasted. “What…?”

“And you used to be the brightest witch in our year…” she said with a sneer. “Oh, come off it, Hermione. It’s not as if you’ve never harvested anything before. We NEED it; each sample is 50 thousand galleons, and there were hints of more orders coming…”

Tonks/Hermione shook her head slightly. “But… but Draco… I know he won’t… the loss of Andie…”

Pansy sighed, waving her hand dismissively. “I can’t change the past…” she sighed, leaving Tonks/Hermione guessing at what exactly that statement meant. She didn’t seem to intend to explain it at this time. “So… Your main job is to focus on Potter; we need to get him back in stock.”

“How exactly do you propose I do that? Harry and I haven’t ever been intimate.” Tonks/Hermione said.

*Harry has always been faithful to Draco…* Hermione assured.

“Really…? Humph. Guess all those rumors in Hogwarts were just trash… well, you could simply put him to sleep.” Pansy smiled sweetly. “You know the spell to use to collect…”

“I’ve never used it.” She responded. “I still don’t see how I’m supposed to get close to him… he loves Draco and Draco loves him…”

“You’re a clever witch, Hermione; I’m sure you can figure out a way to get close to them. You’re good at charms; put them to sleep with a spell. Use a sleeping potion in their drink. I don’t care what you do; drug them both if you must. We can always use more Malfoy. We’re nearly out of him as well…”

*She’s never suggested drugging them before…* Hermione told her, sounding worried. Pansy was escalating things…

“You have two weeks to deliver, Hermione… and just think; you’ll have more money than I’ve ever shared with you before…”

“Harry Potter can’t be the only one that the customers are interested in, surely…”

*We have eight all together.* Hermione reminded.

“…after all, we have seven others…”

“Ten.” Pansy corrected with a smirk, twirling her wand in her fingertips.

“Ten…? But how…? I haven’t gotten any…”
“If I depended upon you, Weasley, I’d never have had enough to even be in business.” She smirked. “I had myself a bit of a party last night.” She informed, looking like the cat that ate the canary. “They left me their ‘donations’ before they left… Your husband will be number eleven. We must keep a diverse pool for the customers to choose from.”

“But then… who…?”

“So interested in all the little details now, Hermione…? That’s rather refreshing… or I could say it’s rather disturbing. You didn’t want anything to do with any of this last week.” She said, eyeing her closely.

Tonks/Hermione looked away. “Well… I might be a single witch soon… The only income I’ll have is from this job, and it’s not half enough, even if Ron gets to keep Rosie… I figure I need to keep my options open…”

“You should have done that a long time ago… he gets you a kid and then jets off to go play… I know you used to think you cared for him, but seriously, Hermione. He’s just using you. It’s time you used him back.” She smiled wickedly.

“Maybe…” she said, looking back at her. “So who are our new donors…? Do I know them…?”

“You know, you sound like you’re a bit jealous, Hermione…” she laughed, becoming amused. “I’m beginning to think it might be interesting to invite you to the next party…”

“Well… if Ron does leave me for good, that sounds like it could be fun…”

Her smile widened. “And just how adventurous are you willing to be…?” she asked, eyeing her. “I take on two, usually, sometimes three or more…”

“Well… I’m willing to learn… if I’m losing Ron, I may as well be rich…”

“Well it’s about time you saw the light, my friend.” She smiled. “I can arrange another party… this will be sexual harvesting, of course… keeps them from any complaints of unwilling donations…”

“I understand… well… it could be fun, but… well, I may need a potion to help me… Ron was my only…”

“Oh, a bit of alcohol always helps…” she assured. “But I have plenty of oils and potions that can ensure you enjoy yourself. After all, we’re the ones that matter, aren’t we?” she asked, relaxing in her chair. “It’s about time you had some fun anyway. Ron’s interesting enough, but every girl needs some variety… Besides, I’ve had several of my party partners ask if you were available…” she grinned; her smile made Tonks/Hermione think of a predatory animal… like a crocodile.

“I’m just nervous… but I guess I’ll get over it…”

“So, how’s the Zabini case coming…?” she asked, getting back to the subject of work. “That is one seriously good looking man… too bad he settled for that little squib.” She sighed dramatically. “Although he is very pretty... I wonder what bedding him would be like…” she said with a wicked grin.

“Damitri Zabini hasn’t even glanced at anyone else here; and Terry stays right by his side; I doubt he’d be willing to stray even for fun…” Tonks/Hermione answered.

“Well it doesn’t hurt to fantasize. When will they be in again…?”
"They’ll be back on Wednesday to continue the procedures.” Tonks answered.

"Ah, good…” Pansy nodded. “Perhaps we should let the procedures fail… we could use someone like Zabini in our stables. He has a very impressive pedigree; over ten traceable generations of pure wizarding families, and none have been squibs. He’s even got Veela in his bloodline, I understand. I’m certain I could get at LEAST as much for his seed as I do for Malfoy…”

*I won’t do that, I absolutely refuse! He left more than we needed, but… oh Merlin, no…! Poor little Terry would be crushed… He did leave more than we needed… I was going to use it all up. If I did what Pansy wanted there’d be at least eight samples of him left after the fertilization…* Hermione said immediately, trying to think of a way to satiate Pansy’s desire for money.

“There will be at least four samples left… can’t we simply ask him for more samples…?” she asked softly.

*We could create more embryos and put them in cryo for them in the future…* Hermione suggested but Tonks/Hermione chose not to voice that. Pansy seemed much more interested in possible sales of samples than embryos.

“Hum… well, we can see how it goes…” Pansy mused thoughtfully. “After all, it’s easy enough to fix if it looks like they just want one… they’ll be in and out of the clinic for the entire pregnancy, since his little boy-toy is a squib. The right potion in his drink or an adjustment to the potions and they’ll be back; tearful but oh-so-willing to try again…”

“What…” Tonks/Hermione said softly. “We can’t just kill an innocent child…”

“It’s not a child until it’s viable. Life begins when the child can survive outside of the womb. Even muggle law recognizes that. Until then, it’s not much more than a parasite…” Pansy rolled her eyes. “It’s my fault, you know… Potter and Malfoy might even have returned here several times, had I not made that foolish decision…” she sighed, leaning on her desk. “I know; I really screwed up there…”

“What…” Tonks/Hermione asked, eyes narrow.

“I truly should have allowed that pregnancy to continue.” Pansy shrugged as if discussing whether to use bleach or not in the laundry. “They probably would have been back for more once that first baby was born… I underestimated how badly Potter wanted a big family…”

*She… she’s responsible for Andie dying…?!* Hermione murmured in shock and disbelief in Tonks/Hermione’s ear. *That… that unbelievable fucking BITCH…!*

“REALLY, Hermione… you’ve never had a head for the business end of things. Just don’t focus on it; that part is my job. I take care of it all, as I always have…” Pansy said.

“I suppose we’re both entitled to our opinion…”

“Naturally… well, I’ll get that party arranged, for tonight I think. You start focusing on how you can get close enough to Potter to harvest.” She said firmly.

“All right… I should go back to work…”

Pansy smiled. “Nonsense… why don’t you take a few hours off…? Go to the spa; pamper yourself, buy a new dress… and I’ll see whose free tonight and interested…” again she had the predatory grin that sent a shiver down Tonks/Hermione’s spine.
“Well, if you insist…”

“Absolutely, absolutely… and don’t worry about Ron, or Blaise. I’ll take care of the personally…”

Tonks/Hermione nodded and rose, moving out of the room. She closed the door behind her, and then made her way past the lab. She felt a brush on her hand and knew that the real Hermione had joined her.

*My car is in the parking lot…* Hermione whispered to her, thinking it would be better to remain in completely out of sight until they got out of range of the cameras in the facility.

“Let’s get the hell out of here…” Tonks/Hermione murmured, striding to the door. She felt the keys get slipped into her hand and mumbled something to the receptionist as she hurried out the door. She opened the passenger door of the car as if to drop her bag and coat in then moved to the driver’s side. No one moved to intercept her or tried to talk with her.

“I have to tell Harry…” Hermione whispered, tears on her cheeks, trembling with rage and grief. “Oh Merlin… how can I tell him…? How…?” she wept.

“I need to get back to headquarters. I want to get these memories copied and into a penseive…”

Hermione bowed her head. “It’s my fault too… oh, Merlin… it’s my fault she killed Andie… Harry will blame me for this, too… he’s right to hate me…” she whispered.

“Now you just need to stop that. You didn’t know about it, you didn’t do it, you couldn’t have stopped her from doing it. You didn’t control that situation, Hermione. She was the only one responsible. I wonder how many children she’s murdered…?” Tonks/Hermione half growled, driving through traffic with remarkable skill. As soon as they cleared the area, Tonks allowed her appearance to return to her own; her hair was deep red with her anger.

“I don’t… oh… oh Merlin…” Hermione pushed back the hood of the cloak to show her face was a mask of grief and shock. “I… there have been several miscarriages following successful implantation… usually they’re pureblood families… Dean Thomas… Seamus Finnegan… both have lost babies this month… I… I can look up others…”

Tonks nodded, thinking fast. “You can do that later… how does Pansy contact you…?”

“A cell phone…” Hermione murmured. “I keep it at home…”

“Now you’re not to tell Harry or anyone about the baby. We have to gather evidence to prove her guilt in this entire fiasco…” Tonks said firmly, switching herself into professional mode. Harry was her friend, and Draco her cousin but she could not allow personal relationships to affect her performance on the job. She simply disconnected emotionally as she had been trained to do. It was clear to her now that Hermione was little more than a pawn in all of this… and that it all went deeper than even Hermione knew. She wasn’t about to let Pansy Parkinson ooze out of any of this, not this time.

“But… I have to; he has every right to know…” Hermione whispered.

“He will, but not yet. I hear that Draco is expecting…”

Hermione bowed her head, bringing back memories of the night that Harry threatened her within an inch of her life if he ever saw her near his family again. “He is; I understand it’s a boy…” she agreed quietly.
“I won’t endanger that for anything. They’ve both suffered more than enough…” Tonks said firmly.

“Now, I need to get hold of her files…”

“The clinic uses computers. Her files are on her personal computer, and will be locked by password…” Hermione murmured.

“Any way you could get hold of that…?” Hermione frowned, trying to think through her rage and grief. “I don’t… I’m not sure… she has personal files on her computer that no one else could get access to…”

“Well I know my CSI friend could get past nearly any pass code… If we have to, I’ll get her to break into it.”

“Tonks… please tell me how I’m going to protect Ron… and Blaise, too…”

“Your only job, difficult though that is going to be, is to act as normally as possible. We’ve got Aurors watching Pansy all the time now…”

“I sent Ron to Charlie’s but if Pansy is after him…” Hermione said worriedly.

“I told you; we’ll know exactly where she is at all times…”

Hermione nodded, wiping at her eyes with her handkerchief. “I worked so hard… to keep Ronnie and Rosie out of this mess…”

“I think you’re worrying a bit too much. Ron’s not as dense as some people seem to think he is. He knows a poisonous viper when he sees one. Pansy is going to have to really work to get hold of him…”

“Ron hasn’t ever liked or trusted Pansy anyway… he was really unhappy when she became my boss… he almost made me quit…”

“So try not to worry about him too much.”

“It’s not easy, sitting in that big house all alone…” she murmured sadly. “It’s so empty…” she said, then sighed softly. “I’m… I’m not going to have to go meet Pansy tonight, am I…?”

“No, I’ll tend to that…” she assured. “I have no problem taking your place.”

“Thank you… but I meant what I said… I don’t care what I have to do to stop her… Pansy has got to be stopped…” she whispered as Tonks parked the car in her driveway. The two slipped out of the car and Hermione opened the door to allow them both inside.

She then went to retrieve the phone from her bedroom and she handed it to Tonks. Hermione turned to the bar to get a bottle of fire whiskey. Tonks sighed, watching her. “Getting drunk won’t help you, Hermione. Keep the earpiece on; Pansy might decide that she wants to stop by here tonight and I can give you a heads-up…”

“Getting drunk would help me be able to deal with all this… or maybe to forget a while…” she said, but she slipped the bottle back into the cabinet. “All right… I said I’d do anything, and I meant it. Anything to stop her… My life… it’s not worth much at this point, anyway…” she murmured.

Tonks looked over the cell phone then pocketed it. Hermione picked up her daughter’s stuffed bear and sat on the couch near the fireplace, depressed and grief-stricken. “I… can I get you some tea or
something…?” she offered out of habit.

“No, I’m fine. You on the other hand, need to take a calming potion and try not to worry about what’s happening. You’ve given us everything you know, and are cooperating with us fully. You’ve done everything we’ve asked and haven’t even poked your nose out of your house outside of your regular schedule… the court will take all of that into account…”

“I don’t even dare to hope.” She said, hugging the bear and staring into the dead fireplace. “Can I go to sleep or do you think you’ll need me…?”

“Go on, I think it’ll be safe enough for you to take a sleeping potion and just go to sleep… just sleep in your daughter’s room in case Pansy decides to come here. I can handle things…”

She pushed herself to her feet. “Come and get me if you need me…” she said, moving toward the bedroom.

“I will; don’t worry about it. You just get some rest.” Tonks said, moving out.

Tonks returned to her office and was able to get everything saved into the pensieve before she received the call from Pansy on the cell phone she had been given. Pansy’s directions were brief but clear; she was to meet her at the Soho Hotel in London in an hour and to dress in something appropriately low-cut and sexy.

“I’ll be there shortly.” Tonks replied, then hung up, moving to her room to dress. She took special care to prepare herself, choosing one of her simple black dresses to wear. It was a backless number that had halter top on the front. She hardly wore it because she didn’t like having her back exposed but it was good for undercover gigs. She took a bit of time ensuring her face and hair mirrored Hermione’s exactly; after all she wasn’t sure who Pansy had picked out for her to ‘harvest’. It could be someone from Hogwarts who had a crush on Hermione and had never had the guts to say anything… but she had a feeling it wouldn’t be anything that easy. Pansy would be choosing someone hard for her first time, to test her, see if she was really willing to go that extra step at this time.

The hotel was near the Royal Opera House, a place she knew well. She never would have thought that Severus had such an appetite for opera… they went at least once a month. She knew a safe place to apparate to and did so, stepping out of the little shadowed alcove to join the flow of people moving by.

She entered the lobby and glanced about; the place was quite busy with all types of people, muggle and wizard alike. She ignored them all, moving through the lobby to the entrance of the bar area and paused and spotted Pansy before the woman saw her; she was seated in a booth at the back of the bar with four men. There were at least a dozen empty glasses on the table, each of the type the men were drinking from; only one empty of Pansy's wine glass.

Tonks moved over, giving them all a rather nervous smile. “Hello Pansy... sorry if I'm late...”

“Nonsense, don’t worry about it, you're right on schedule...” Pansy smiled. She didn't seem to be drunk at all, but the four men at the table who leered at her clearly were. “See, fellows...? I told you she'd show up, just as I said she would...” she purred.
“The question I want answered is...” one spoke up, eyeing her with lust clear in his eyes. “... are you willing to go through with everything that Pansy promised...?” Tonks/Hermione recognized the man after only a moment... his name was Radivar Mulcider. He was eight or so years older than Hermione; Tonks remembered him because he had attended Hogwarts around the same time she had. He had been a decidedly distasteful person, tactless and ruthless in all his dealings. She had no idea how he hadn't been recruited right along with the rest of them to be Death Eaters, but he had stayed clear of the radar and even after the Dark Lord's demise he was free and clear.

“Why wouldn't I?” Tonks/Hermione asked, rolling her eyes. “Are you even going to offer me a seat...?” she asked with a bit of impatience. Wordlessly he gestured to the seat at his side and she sat beside him without any hesitation. Pansy pushed a drink to her across the table with a grin and a wink.

“So... your husband, I understand... Ronald, was it...?” Rodolfo Blackman commented, eyeing her. “He's just made it to the big leagues, hasn't he...? And you choose to share yourself NOW with other men...?” he grinned as he went on, not allowing her to answer. “Has he already done this to you? Slept with others...?”

“He's not with me now, is he...?” she asked in a bitter tone. “No. He's with that Veela bastard and Dragon tamer brother of his. So why shouldn't I stray?”

Radivar grinned and let out a cruel laugh. “I can't stand that self-important bastard Zabini either...” he said in agreement. “Every woman ought to have a little fun anyway...”

“This is all about enjoying ourselves...” Pansy said, finishing her glass of wine.

Tonks/Hermione smiled, pretending to sip at the drink. She didn’t know what Pansy had put in it and didn’t trust her for a moment. “Yes, indeed... that's all I'm here for...”

“I understand, Charles, that you have a room here in this hotel...?” Pansy asked, eyeing the older man. “This bar is much too public for what I have in mind.” She licked her lips sensuously.

Charles smiled and produced a room key. “Of course... only the best for you, my dear Pansy...” he grinned as he rose to his feet. Pansy took his hand and rose with fluid grace, tugging the key out of his hand.

Tonks/Hermione rose, holding out her hand to Mulcider, a smile on her face. He grinned back at her, rising to his feet and firmly taking her hand in his.

Before Pansy even managed to get they key in the lock, her would-be partners already had their hands upon her bum. She let them all into a lavish suite with two large beds, a private terrace, champagne chilling on a tray and red satin sheets upon the bed.

“So whatever shall we do with ourselves...?” Tonks/Hermione asked innocently.

“I only have one thing in mind.” Mulcider growled, pulling her against him.

“Shouldn't we get you more comfortable...?” she asked.

His smile grew. “Your fool of a husband must have been neglecting you, little witch... you're very eager to get started, I see...” he said.

“Let's just say he's better on a broom than in bed.”

He laughed, unbuttoning his shirt and casting it aside. “Well, I'll take care of you, pretty little
Hermione...” he assured. “Get rid of that dress and I will take care of both our needs...”

Tonks/Hermione glanced over at Pansy a moment before she began to undress. Pansy was already quite busy occupying the other three men on the bed with her body. It was very clear that Pansy had no trouble at all being used as a sexual plaything, allowing her partners to do whatever they wished with her, voicing only moans of pleasure and encouragements to her multiple lovers.

Mulcider clearly had no intention of joining that group; his eyes never strayed from the woman he saw as Hermione. She steeled herself and went on with the encounter with Mulcider.

Mulcider was a very cruel and almost violent lover, enjoying causing pain as he took what he wanted with no regard for her pleasure or her discomfort. If she cried out he only did what had caused the cry again and again, until he found another way to amuse himself...

A glance over at Pansy was no help; the woman was only dealing with one now; the other two were passed out dead asleep on the sheets. The one she was with grunted as he took his pleasure; when he released his eyes rolled up and he fell onto the bed as well. Pansy sat up and turned to watch Mulcider abuse and nearly rape Tonks/Hermione, grinning softly.

Mulcider snarled in pleasure as he climaxed, his fingernails biting into her flesh as he released himself... once he'd finished his face suddenly went completely blank. He collapsed onto the bed and on top of her. Tonks/Hermione shoved the man off her, shaking slightly. Never had she been so completely abused and used... “Merlin...” she groaned, sitting up slowly.

Pansy stretched languidly; her partners lay passed out on the bed beside her. “Well, you certainly made him happy...” she said with a grin, noticing every bruise and scratch upon Tonks/Hermione’s body. “Now; make me happy.” she produced several vials from a hidden pocket in her robe with a wave of her wand.

Tonks/Hermione took a shaky breath, trying to focus her mind. Merlin; she hurt all over... he’d bitten her on the back, she was sure there were teeth marks and perhaps he had even drawn blood... “What spell do you prefer I use...?”

“Samenraub. Really, Hermione, you’ve seen me use the spell a hundred times...!” she said, rolling her eyes. “I, of course, took the time to prepare and seal off my body from their sperm... all I need do is separate them...” she said.

“Sealed off your body...?” Tonks/Hermione repeated, unsure. She’d never heard of such a thing...!

Pansy began to laugh scornfully. “You don’t think I’d take the chance of becoming pregnant from any of these fools, do you? Even an anti-fertility spell can fail, you ought to know that...” she said as if talking to a child. She murmured “Aemtig...!” and the sperm deposited inside her body was drawn out and “Seperatus...!” and the thick white liquid separated into three distinct floating globules, each of which were bottled up in the vials, names of the owners inscribing upon the glass of the bottles themselves.

“That’s got to be the most disgusting thing I’ve ever seen...!” Tonks/Hermione muttered, watching in disbelief. “Why not just knock them out with a spell and take it from the source...? You’ve done it that way before, I’ve seen you...”

“I could, but you were just whining at me last month about how wrong that was...”

“It’s better than being used by animals like him.” she murmured, glaring down at Mulcider, barley resisting the urge to kick the unconscious man. “Why did he pass out...? Did you put something in
their drinks…? They shouldn’t be asleep, even after all those drinks…”

“I learned a long time ago to get them to do what you wish, a bit of inventiveness is needed…” she stretched and stood, straightening out her slip that they had not even bothered to remove from her body. “I learned a few tricks during my trip to Germany and Russia… it was very enlightening. It’s amazing what they’re doing with breeding and purebloods… I let them have what they want… and then they will give me what I want…” she smiled. “Go on, get your wand. You can do the honors tonight.” she said, gesturing to Hermione's clothing on the floor.

Tonks/Hermione picked her wand up, pointing it at Mulcider. She’d taken the time to study some of the pensieve memories that Hermione had submitted already, so she knew the proper hand gesture and wand movement to make the spell take effect. “Samenraub!” she said firmly and sperm was extracted from the unconscious man. Pansy smiled wickedly and used a spell to separate it into phials and label them appropriately. She made sure that Tonks/Hermione performed the spell twice on each of their partners as she herself got dressed, and then she allowed Tonks/Hermione to get dressed as well.

“You know, it's a good thing that you've decided that husband of yours isn't so special anymore... we need to get his seed as well.” she said, slipping the vials away into her bag. “I've already had an inquiry; a customer wants to make a purchase…”

Tonks/Hermione scowled. “Who...?”

Pansy laughed at her. “You're getting all defensive after you have sex and cheat on him...? Oh, how sickeningly sweet. A homebody like you, Hermione, wouldn't have any idea who she even is... her father teaches Dark Arts at Durmstrang...”

“Why would she want Ron...?”

She smiled, slipping the vials away into her bag. “Apparently she's quite a fan... asked specifically for him. And her dear sweet father can't resist granting every desire of his sweet little princess now, can he…?”

She sighed. “Great... I'll do what I can...” Tonks/Hermione murmured. “Can I go home now...?”

“Of course... go on home and give your hubby a fire call.” she suggested. “Make up with him. Maybe he'll come home to you tonight...” she said, watching Tonks/Hermione get dressed again.

“I doubt that...” she said flatly.

“Whatever did the two of you fight about, anyway?”

“It’s not something I really want to talk about...” she answered, slipping her wand away.

“Try for him anyway. And remember, the Zabini's will be in bright and early for their appointment on Wednesday...”

“I'll remember; they're due in at ten...”

“Get some rest.” she advised, grinning at her. “We'll do this again on Saturday...”

“Not with HIM, I'm not.” she shot her former partner a distasteful glare.

Pansy laughed. “He really IS a pig, isn't he...? But the money for him is good. You know, we really do need to get Potter back... we're down to only two and I've had at least five inquiries about him just
this evening...”

“Harry and I aren't on speaking terms right now...”

“Hmmm...” Pansy smirked. “I wonder where he goes to relax...? I can take any wizard down.”

“I haven't spent much time around them lately... at Blaise's house, I suppose...” she answered, her mind working quickly despite the abuse her body had just endured. Merlin; she ached all over... If Pansy thought she was setting a trap to capture more than one that she desired, she would walk directly into a trap set up to catch HER.

“And that's where your husband is as well...?” Greed lit in Pansy's eyes. “That could be interesting...”

“Could we talk about this tomorrow...? I want to wash all traces of him off of me...” she said with a shudder.

“I'll see you at work.” Pansy smirked as Tonks/Hermione hurried out.

Author’s Note: Rough translation of spells:

Samenraub = German for “Steal Semen”

Aemtig = Old Middle English for “Empty”

Separatus = Latin for “Separate”

**Author's Note: I know the translations aren't exact, but I am at the mercy of Internet Translation programs.

Lucius watched in silence as Severus checked up on the twins, using his wand to do a scan on each of the babies individually. “They are doing remarkably well...” Severus commented as he placed the infant boy, Remus Severus, back into his bed beside his dozing sister. “They have good lung function at this time, their hearts are strong, and they continue to gain weight...” he said in approval.

Malfoy moved over, scooping the still awake boy child up. “Of course they are... Narcissa is doing a wonderful job with my little angels...” he smiled, cradling the baby close in his arms.

“That's quite clear...” Severus said with a smile at the undisguised expression of love on his old friend's face, for the moment ignoring the vibration from his cell phone. “She's done remarkably well with them, much better than I had expected. As have you, Lucius. I know better than to think she has accomplished this all alone.”

“I do what I can.” He said self-deprecatingly, but he did smirk.

“We may be able to wean them off the potions much sooner than I had anticipated...”

“That is wonderful...” he smiled.

“Not yet, though. A week more, at least, doses in both morning and evening.” Severus advised.

“It will be done.” He assured then glanced at Severus out of the corner of his eye. “Have you made any progress on discovering how they came to be?” he asked slyly.
Snape couldn't help but smirk at his dogged attempt to get information from him in any manner possible. “Yes; but you know you will have to wait for the full details until the investigation has been completed...”

“I don't understand why they exist, or how they came to be... but they are perfect, aren't they...?” he said with fatherly pride.

“That they are, my friend...” he assured, touching the boy's tiny hand, barely big enough to wrap about his own slim finger.

“He's going to be a heartbreaker...” Lucius smirked. “I'll have to provide him bodyguards...”

“Your granddaughter will be just as beautiful...”

“Naturally... they will have the best of everything; I will see to that.” He said in clear pride. “Everything they could ever wish for...”

“I expected no less of you, my friend. But you must remember that Draco will soon be spoiling them as well...”

“He has Potter's brat. He can do without these two.” Lucius murmured in a clearly pouting grumble, gazing at the babies.

“They will always be your grandchildren, my friend...” He rested a hand on his shoulder reassuringly, feeling the vibration of his phone again. Who the blazes kept trying to call...?

“They have Malfoy blood; they will always be mine.” Lucius said, his smirk returning.

Severus rolled his eyes at his friend, and then pulled out his phone. “Yes...?”

“Sev... I'm sorry to bother you...” Remus said quietly on the phone. “I know you're busy but... I really do need you. Can you come home...?”

“What's wrong...?” Severus asked, worry tinting his voice. Remus never called except for emergencies... “Don't worry; I'm on my way...”

“Trouble...?” Lucius frowned slightly, cradling the baby carefully but clearly ready to assist.

“I'm not sure... Remus needs me at home.”

“Let me know if you need any help; I'm just a fire call away...” he said, moving to the rocking chair.

“I will, if the need arises...” he assured, then paused. “And Lucius...?”

“Hm...?” he looked up at him.

“Don't spoil them completely...” He smirked.

“Oh, just most of the way...” he smirked back, rocking his grandson.

Severus chuckled softly as he hurried out to floo back to his home.

“Remmy...?” he called, dusting himself off.
“Here, Sev...” he called from the bedroom, moving into view. He looked fine, just very worried. “I'm all right, no; I'm not hiding anything... It's Tonks. She came home and went directly into the bathroom; she didn't even stop to give me a kiss or a hug... She's been in the shower for over an hour and she won't come out. She won't talk to me, and... And her scent is all off...” he said, trying to explain what his werewolf senses allowed him to perceive but unable to really put it into words.

Severus patted his shoulder reassuringly. “Let me see what I can do...” he said, moving into the bedroom to the bathroom door. “Dora...?” he called softly, knocking. “Open the door, love...” he said in a soft, soothing tone.

“I'm fine...” she called back in a shaky voice. “Just... I've gotta get clean, I...”

“I'm coming in.” he said as he pulled his wand to unlock the door. It unlocked with a simple first year spell – Alohamora. He slipped in and closed the door behind him. Remus remained outside, worried but hopeful that Severus could get her to open up. Tonks stood in the steaming fall of water, her head bowed as she scrubbed at her already raw skin. She'd clearly been washing herself over and over, trying to get something off that was not there.

Severus calmly stepped into the hot water of the shower without bothering to undress, his arms enfolding his lover. She turned in his arms, holding him tight. “I'm sorry, I... I'm sorry...” she whispered, trembling in his arms.

“Shhh...” he soothed, holding her close. “It's all right, Dora... you're home, and you're safe...”

It took a while, but she did finally stop weeping and trembling. “I'm sorry... oh... Merlin... sometimes I hate my job...”

Severus kissed her brow. “Come, now. Remus is worried about you... let's get you dried off...”

“No, I... I have to get clean, I...”

“You've been in the shower long enough, and you're scrubbing your skin away... come on.” he said gently yet firmly.

Reluctantly, she allowed herself to be drawn out of the shower. Snape noticed several bruises on her body, on intimate parts of her body that could only have been gained by a violent attack upon her body. She even had a bit of bruising around her neck and three bites upon her back and shoulders. “I can't... I don't want Remus to see me like this...” she whispered. “It's so close to the full moon; he worries so much...” she covered her body quickly with her fluffy white terrycloth robe.

He moved to the medicine cabinet and drew out two potion vials. “Drink these; they will take care of the bruises...” he ordered. She drank them down without question, eyes closed. “You will tell me who has done this to you.” Snape said with more than a little anger. No one did this to his family...!

“It's... it's the case, Sev...” she murmured, not looking up, unable to meet his eyes. “I was undercover, in disguise... He thought he was doing all of that to Hermione Weasley...”

“Any wizard who thinks its all right to do that to his partner, regardless of who they are, deserves to be drawn and quartered...” he growled softly. “But I promise you, Dora... if he touches you again, I will personally dismember him and use him in my potions...!” he dried his robes off with a flick of his wand.

“I'll help you do it to...” she said softly, trembling slightly again. “Sev, I... I gotta get some distance from this... and I don't want Remus to know about... about all of this...”
“He knows you were upset love... We'll tell him, if he insists, that you've had a bad day at work. He may accept that simple fact...” He pushed another potion into her hand. She glanced at it, then uncorked it as well and drank it down.

“All right...” she agreed. She was still shaking slightly, but the calming draught Severus had just given her helped her to feel much calmer now. “Merlin I need a drink...”

“I'll fix us all one.” he assured. His arm rested about her as he led her out. Remus, who had taken a seat on the bed to wait, rose immediately when they emerged.

“Is everything all right...?” he asked worriedly.

Tonks hugged him. “Yeah, love... sorry... just a horrible day at work... I didn't mean to worry you...”

He glanced at Severus who gave him no visual clues at all, but he could tell that his lover was angered. He decided to simply let it go since that seemed to be what Tonks wanted him to do. He'd find out, eventually. “You're all right, and you're home with us. That's all that matters...”

“I just want a drink and then to get some sleep...”

“Sounds like the perfect plan.” he agreed, and then kissed her with gentle tenderness before turning toward the bar with her.

Severus undressed slipping his wand under his pillow and then relaxed against the headboard, watching his two lovers. He noticed that Lupin was watching Tonks very closely, noting how she behaved differently than normal, his worry increasing and turning to carefully suppressed anger.

Tonks dressed for bed and slipped in between her two lovers, wanting nothing more than their presence. Remus' arms slipped about her, pressing against her back as she rested against Severus.

“Sleep well, my love...” Severus kissed her hair tenderly, and then kissed Remus as well.

“Thanks for coming home so quickly...” Remus said softly.

“I was needed. You don’t call me for trivial things.” Sev smirked.

He stroked Tonks' hair tenderly; it was distinctly blue with black tints reflecting her true mood. “She wouldn't even talk to me... I needed you, and so did she...”

Snape stroked Remus' cheek, tracing his lips with his finger. “NO matter what, I will always be here for you both...”

“As will I...” he said softly, his brown eyes changing just for a moment to the golden of the werewolf within him. “And I'll tear anyone to shreds who harms either of you...” he growled.

Sev smirked, and then settled to sleep. He would deal with Remus tomorrow; and together they would settle matters with whoever had hurt their mate.

Remus lay awake for a long time, holding on to Tonks tenderly. He could smell the scent of another on her skin, no matter how much she had tried to wash it off. The scent of another man... the one who had touched her, caused all this upset... he battled with his wolfish side in silence. Tonks didn't want him hunting down this bastard or she'd have simply told him to go ahead and do as he wished... he'd done so before, and would do again. Anything for her... finally, he managed to quell his urges and drift off to sleep.
Angel smiled as she sat on Harry’s lap, eyes wide as she watched the medi-wizard run his wand over Draco’s belly.

“You’re doing quite well. The baby is formed, and all he needs to do is to grow. His magic is extremely strong. I do believe you may actually deliver sooner than expected.”

“Early…?” Draco repeated, a little worried. “He’ll still be all right, won’t he…?”

The mediwizard chuckled softly. “Nothing out of the ordinary, I assure you young man…” he smiled. “The thing with male pregnancies, Draco, is the magic creates the child. The baby is completely formed and his magic is allowing him to advance much quicker than if you had been a witch. Your little man will be here before you know it.”

Draco smiled happily at Harry, his hands resting on his stomach. “We really do need to choose a name for our son.”

“I think perhaps we should talk it over with Grandpa Lucius.” Harry smirked.

Angel perked up. “We’re going to go see Nonno?” she asked.

“Yes, love; I’m sure he’ll be thrilled to have you come visit his house.” Harry smiled, kissing her hair.

Angel giggled. “Come on, Papa!” She grabbed Draco’s hand. “Let’s hurry and go see Nonno!”

The mediwizard chuckled softly. “Your daughter is quite charming, Draco. it was a pleasure to meet you as well, Mr. Potter. I’ll see you again in two weeks; but you must call me sooner if you need to…”

“All right… thank you, doctor.” Draco said, leaning to the side to push himself up. He was amazed, gazing down at the size of his abdomen. He seemed to be getting more and more round by the day.

“Yes, thank you so much, doctor for making sure my brother is safe…” Angel said to him in a very sober tone that completely conflicted with the fact that she was bouncing in place excitedly in her eagerness to go. Harry laughed softly, helping Draco up from the table.

“You’re quite welcome, little lady.” The mediwizard chuckled at Angel, who then took one of Draco’s and one of Harry’s hands in hers, tugging on them. “Let’s go, let’s go, let’s go!” she said eagerly.

“All right, Angel, let’s go.” Draco chuckled as they walked out.

Lucius looked over at the fireplace as it activated; he’d only just come down out of the nursery.

“Nonno!” Angel squealed happily, disentangling herself from Draco’s robe and rushing to her grandfather, flinging her arms about him, her eyes shining.

“My little Angel!” Lucius scooped the girl up into a hug. “Whatever are you doing here?”

“We came to see YOU, Nonno!” She hugged him tight, arms about his neck. “Me and daddy and
“Have you, now?” he asked with a smile. “And why would you wish to see me?”

“So you can name my baby brother!” she grinned, her eyes sparkling as she gazed back at him.

“Me?” he was surprised at that news.

“He IS the firstborn Malfoy heir.” Draco answered as he and Harry moved over to join them.

“It has always been tradition that is true.” Lucius agreed. “But I thought… well, Potter…”

“Draco is my husband, that’s true. But he is still a Malfoy.” Harry answered.

Lucius glanced at Harry. “Sometimes I think you forget that.” He commented drolly.

“When I do, let me know and I’ll try to stop.” Harry shrugged innocently.

“Nonno? Do I get to meet my Nana today?” Angel asked hopefully.

“She has been waiting a long time to meet you, my cherub.” Lucius turned and strolled out with the child in his arms, leaving Draco and Harry behind.

Draco chuckled softly. “I think that he’s quite taken with our little girl.” he commented. “Shall we go see what mother is up to?”

“Not only is he taken with her; he’s spirited her off…” Harry chuckled. Draco linked his arm through Harry’s and they strolled after his father up the hallway.

“Cissa darling, we have visitors.” Lucius called.

“Oh… I’ll be just a moment more…” her voice came from the old nursery.

Angel bit her lip, a little nervous. “Do… do you think she’ll like me, Nonno?” she asked him softly.

“She will adore you, little blossom.” He said, tickling her, making her squeal and cling to him, laughing.

Narcissa came out of the room, shutting the door behind her. “Oh! And who do we have here, Lucius?” she asked as if she hadn’t a clue, smiling.

“This, Cissa, is our little Angel.” He said, moving to her side.

“Hello…” Angel said, feeling a little unsure. None of the women she had met since her mother had died had liked her much at all… Her last foster mother had been downright cruel to her most of the time, if she’d taken the time to notice her at all.

“Aren’t you simply precious?” Narcissa brushed the curls from the child’s vivid green eyes.

“Are you… are you my Nana…?” she asked softly.

“Oh, yes, I most certainly am.” She smiled. “And I’m very happy to meet you. Lucius has told me a lot about you.”

“Nonno said I have my own room here in your pretty house… is it true?”

“Not only is it true, little one, but your Nonno went shopping for your furniture himself, and ensured
everything was ready for your first visit here with us.”

She giggled. “My Nonno did that?”

“Yes I did.” He said firmly. “Would you like to see?”

“Yes, yes! Oh yes please, Nonno!” Her eyes sparkled, her arms about his neck, her fingers playing in his long hair.

He chuckled indulgently and continued to ignore the younger men as he turned to stroll down the hall a bit further to open a door. Light spilled out of the room and into the hallway. The room had windows that faced north and east, allowing in the early afternoon sunlight to brighten up every last inch of the room. He stepped inside, still carrying Angel.

“Oh… oh Nonno…” she whispered, eyes wide at all the frills and lace. “It’s so pretty!”

He set her down on her feet. “Go ahead and explore your room, little Angel.” She hugged him tight, then moved off to go look at everything.

“Father, you’re spoiling her.” Draco said with a smirk.

“Nonsense! The child needs a room like this; I’m sure she’s never had it before… besides; that’s what grandparents do, I’m told.” he answered aloofly.

“Of course it is.” Narcissa smiled. “We spoil them, and then send them home to their parents.”

Harry smiled, greatly pleased. He had no intention of stepping in the way at all; Angel was so happy. Lucius seemed to have forgotten he was there and that was just fine with him.

Angel halted, staring at the bed. Upon the lacy pillows lay a doll with vivid green eyes and long curly black hair. “Oh… Oh Nonno! A doll… and… and she looks just like me!” she murmured, climbing up onto the fluffy feather bed.

“Indeed. She is a special friend, just for my little Angel.”

She crawled to the doll, gazing at it but unsure. “Can…” she looked back at Lucius. “Is it all right if I touch her?”

“You may do more than simply touch her, my child.” He half-chuckled; quite amused by her innocent awe of all the things in her room. “You may play with her, and with anything in this room. It is, after all, all yours.”

She scooped up the doll and held it close, gazing at them with her eyes gleaming with joy. “Oh it’s all so… so pretty… oh daddy, papa, come and see!”

Harry chuckled as he moved over to his daughter. “She is beautiful, Angel.” he smiled, caressing the girl’s dark curls. “What do you say to your grandfather?”

Angel put the doll carefully down on the pillows once more, and then pounced on Lucius, flinging her arms about his neck, hugging him. “Thank you so much, Nonno!! Thank you!” she said, kissing him on the cheek.

He hugged her tenderly. “Of course, you’re welcome, my little angel.” he assured.

Draco, standing back with his mother near the door, grinned and leaned close to her. “She has him completely wrapped around her little finger.”
Narcissa smiled. “Oh, yes, she does at that.” she agreed.

“Mother?” Draco looked at her, remembering his father’s comments from a few days earlier. “Where are the kittens…?”

“Kittens?” she repeated, confused for a moment.

“Sleeping.” Lucius answered smoothly, arching an eyebrow at his wife. She suddenly remembered what he had told her that he had said to their son.

“Yes; cuddled up together, they are the sweetest things” Narcissa agreed.

“Oh… can I see them? I love kittens!” Angel said, excited. “May I see them please?”

“I have a better idea, my sweet.” he scooped the child up in his arms and strolled off with her. “How about we go to town and get you your very own kitten?” he said with a smirk toward Draco.

“Can I really?!” she asked, then looked back at Harry and Draco, her excitement fading a bit. “But we can’t, Nonno. Papa and Daddy need your help to name my baby brother.”

“The baby isn’t here, yet, is he Angel? We’ve plenty of time…” he reassured.

“Is it all right, daddy? Can I really have a kitty?” she asked in an almost pleading tone.

“Uh… Draco?” Harry said, deferring to his husband.

“Of course you may, Angel.” Draco assured, rolling his eyes at his father. “Just don’t keep her out long, she hasn’t had her dinner yet, father.”

“I haven’t forgotten about regular mealtimes for children or about their appetites.” he assured, strolling off with the girl.

Harry watched him leave with her, trying not to feel uneasy about the situation. He had not had very positive experiences with Lucius Malfoy and knew that Draco’s childhood had been far from flowery. It was hard to trust him with his little girl…

“She has him oh-so-totally-wrapped about her little finger.” Narcissa laughed. “Why don’t we go out to the garden for tea?”

“Brilliant idea, mother; then perhaps later the kittens will be awake and I can see them?” Draco attempted again.

“We will have to see…” she said as she led them outside, calling for the house elves to serve them.

Angel gazed at the variety of kittens, eyes wide. “Oh Nonno, there’s so many to pick from…” she murmured as she watched them frolic and play.

“Ask the kittens their name, Angel. Perhaps one of them will answer you.” Lucius encouraged her.

She looked at him, hesitant. “It’s… its okay to do that?”

“You are a witch, little Angel. Of course using magic is all right.” He said firmly. “In fact, I expect it of you.”
She blushed. “I just want you always to be happy with me, Nonno.” she said with a shy smile, hugging his neck.

“I don’t see how I could not be happy with you, my little love.” Lucius stroked her soft curls. He couldn’t help but think that the baby he and James would have had would have been just like little Angel, just as sweet.

She kissed him on the cheek, and then squirmed to get down. He set her on her feet and she glanced about a moment, looking at each type of cat. She let her feet and her feelings guide her… Lucius watched, amused as she slowly wandered past all of the muggle bred cats, moving onward to the pen that held the Kneazle kits. There were four in the pen, three spotted and one striped. They all stopped their play when Angel approached and stood at the side of the pen. One lashed its tail, walking away from her, its ears pinned back. The other three approached her.

“Careful, my own.. Don’t try to pick them up if they don’t wish to be.” Lucius cautioned.

“All right.” she agreed, and reached awkwardly pick up the kitten with the spots. “Hi kitty… what’s your name?” she asked softly. The kneazle mewed at her, and she hesitated, and then put the kitten down, reaching down for the first striped one. She asked each of the kits its name, then put them back, watching them as they sat and gazed back at her, tufted tails twitching almost in complete unison. Angel bit her lip, gazing at them, and then her face brightened. “Oh! Oh, hi kitty… I almost didn’t hear you.” she murmured, reaching for the one on the right and picking it up.

“What is her name, my Angel?” Lucius asked with a smile.

“She wants to be mine. Can I have her? Please?” she asked, turning to face Lucius. She had the kneazle held with both her hands wrapped around its chest, its front paws hanging over her arms and the legs dangling, large ears perked toward Lucius as if asking the same question the child was.

Lucius chuckled, and then waved to the clerk. “We will take this one.” He said. Angel squealed happily and hugged her new pet. The creature began to growl softly, ears dropping back against its skull.

“Well, well, well…! What a pretty little girl you have there, Lucius.” A cold voice stated from behind him. Angel looked at the one who had spoken. He was not quite as tall as Lucius, his body showing the clear signs of an easy life; his black hair liberally colored with silver streaks. His face bore two scars; one right across the bridge of his nose and the other on his left cheek marring his face into a permanent leer. Lucius knew the man; his name was Thorfin Rowle. “Is she yours?”

Lucius dropped one hand to touch Angel, and she shrank behind him, eyes wide. The kneazle continued to snarl, peering around Lucius’ legs. “Yes, she is mine.” Lucius answered without a whit of deceit. “Cissa and I always desired a large family.”

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“I’ve been considering expanding my family myself.” he gazed at Lucius a moment with a conspiratorial smile, and then looked back at the girl who was nearly invisible behind his robes.

Angel gazed back at the man, beginning to tremble in fear. The cages and racks about them began to vibrate, then to rattle.

“Easy, my angel,” he said soothingly. “No one here will harm you…” She gazed up at him with frightened green eyes. The Kneazle continued to snarl, reaching one claw to hook onto Lucius’ robes, glaring at the newcomer and baring its fangs.

“After all, I’ve been offered a young wife, younger than your son, I believe. Being of old wizarding
“It does.” Lucius agreed, suspicious of why Rowle would even approach him here.

“I see that Parkinson wasn’t lying after all.” he mused, returning his attention to Lucius. “How much did she cost?”

“…excuse me?” Lucius was taken aback by the statement, though none of his shock showed on his face. He could hide anything behind the Malfoy mask, if needed.

“It’s obvious that you used Potter to sire her… she feels as if she’s quite powerful for such a young little witch… has she learned control yet?”

“Her strength and ability to control is not any of your business.” He said, pausing a moment to disentangle the Kneazle’s claws from the back of his robes, then scooping the girl into his arms. His eyes never left Rowle for a moment, giving him a warning glare.

“I see I’ll have to speak with Parkinson… my bloodline could use strength like that.”

Angel hid her face against Lucius’ chest and the kneazle she held that now was cradled between her little body and Lucius peered out of her arms, its eyes glowing with clearly evident dislike, still growling, its tail lashing wildly. “Speak to her if you wish; I’ve long since been done with her. I’ve no time for witches of her ilk.” He said coolly, turning to the clerk, who was hesitating at his elbow. “Send the bill to my manor, will you? And add a month’s supply of the proper amenities to care for the creature.”

“Of course, Mr. Malfoy.” she answered, giving him a respectful bow. Lucius turned and walked out of the shop at a brisk pace. Rowle stood, watching them leave with a calculating smile.

“I don’t like that man, Nonno…” Angel whispered. “And neither does Tia.”

“You are a clever girl, my Angel.” Lucius answered her. “Now hold your kit; we are going home now…” he said and the world blurred as he apparated home.

Angel held her pet close in her arms as Lucius strode into the manor with her. “Moxie!” he called out. A house elf appeared almost instantly, bowing until its head touched the carpet. “Master is needing Moxie?”

“Where is Narcissa?” he asked in a slightly sharp tone.

“Mistress is in garden with Young Master and mate…”

“Come, Angel.” Lucius set the girl on her feet. “Let us show your father your new friend.” He put on a smile for the girl.

She smiled, feeling the fear that had gripped her in the presence of that stranger fading away. “All right Nonno.” she said, still holding the kneazle kit under its forepaws. “Do you see, Tia? This is Nonno’s house. He and Nona live here.” she said as she followed Lucius through the great hall then the lounge and out into the gardens.

“Oh, welcome home.” Cissa smiled.

“Potter. My den. Now.” Lucius said in short clipped words, eyes ice cold as he turned and walked
back into the manor.

Harry rose to his feet, looking at Draco with more than a little trepidation. “Oh… hell…” he murmured softly.

Angel moved over to them, watching as Harry moved into the house after his father-in-law.

“What happened, baby?” Draco asked her.

“I was good, I promise papa… it was the bad man… Tia didn’t like him and he made Nonno angry.” she said softly, hugging her kit with its big red bow about its neck.

Harry followed Lucius to his den, worried. What in the blazes could have happened to make his father-in-law so furious? He’d only gone to the pet store with Angel…

Lucius sealed and silenced the door, then moved to the liquor cabinet, opening the doors with a sharp gesture of his wand. He pulled out two glasses and poured drinks, then picked one up and took a drink. Harry watched him make all these preparations, unsure at all of what was going on.

Finally Lucius raised his eyes full of burning outrage on Harry. “How did she do it?” He demanded.

“She? How did who do what?” Harry asked, his confusion clear.

“Parkinson, you fool!” he snapped, greatly irritated. How could Potter be so daft as not to know what he had discovered?!

Harry sighed and picked up the other glass, moving to take a seat. “I did intend to tell you everything, Lucius, once we’d broken the case.” he said softly.

Lucius shot him a glare, beginning to pace up and down the length of his study, every muscle tense and body clearly showing his fury. “I was approached today in Madam Myrts Menangerie by Thorfin Rowle… he saw Angel and assumed, I surmise, that Angel was my child whom I had you father. He seemed surprised that Parkinson had told him the truth about something, and after seeing the child he decided that he was going to inquire to her about her services… he said he wanted your power and blood in his family.”

“How did they get your…” Lucius hesitated; he always had hated the muggle term for male seed. Semen… sounded like a muggle sailor…! “How did they get your ESSENCE?” he managed. “And how many have used your essence? And that of my son?”
“How many? We’re not sure yet. But we are not the only ones who have had our ‘essence’ harvested.” Harry told him quietly. “We’re working to find that out; that’s why no one has been arrested as of yet. We knew that Pansy was in the middle of it, though.”

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“Who else is involved?” Lucius demanded angrily.

“I can’t tell you that. We’re working to find everyone involved; one of them has turned over their wand and is doing everything they can to assist us in the search for information.” Harry answered evasively.

Lucius stalked to his favorite chair but did not sit; he was too angry to seat himself or even be still for more than a few moments. He drew himself up proudly. “Wizarding Law, Mr. Potter, states that a child belongs to its sire. Any child of the bloodline is the responsibility of the head of the family. Now you may be the head of the Potter line as you are the only male of age. But Draco is not the head of the Malfoy line, I am! Any child born of Malfoy blood is my responsibility and as such I have a right to know of each and every one of them!” he growled.

“Yes, I know, Mr. Malfoy. I do understand that…” he sighed softly. “You will know… but you and I must BOTH wait until we can know where ALL of them are, so we can take them and place them in their rightful homes.”

“How many other wizarding families are involved in this mess?” He demanded. “This should be in the hands of the Aurors, not a private detective!”

“I’m working with the head of the Auror department, sir. I have been all along.” Harry clarified.

Lucius grunted in acknowledgement of that fact, pacing once more. He wasn’t getting any answers that satisfied him at all from Potter. He glared at him as he stalked past him. He took another drink before he spoke again. “And exactly when were you going to introduce me to my grandchildren? The twins upstairs in my nursery?” he asked.

Harry blinked in surprise. “They’re here already? I thought they’d be at least a month in the incubators, they were so tiny…”

“ Spells and potions, Mr. Potter.” He said with a bit of a sneer. “We ARE wizards, are we not? Severus Snape is a master of potions. Both babies have developed full lung and bodily functions, and are gaining weight on a daily basis.” He added with clear pride.

“That’s really good to know.” Harry said softly, and then took a drink. “I just… they were so small, even smaller than Andie, and… and Andie…” he couldn’t finish the thought verbally. Andie didn’t survive.

Lucius glanced at him and saw the grief on Potter’s face as he mentioned his most recently lost child. He’d never known nor even cared how much that death had affected his son’s husband; all his focus had always been on his son. Now he could see that grief and it touched him, it reflected what he felt when he thought about his own daughter (he was sure it had been a girl) with James. “They are doing well, but you’re not worried about them, are you?”

Harry shook his head slightly. “Draco’s medi-wizard believes he will deliver early. I’m worried… about him, about our son…” he said softly, head bowed.

He took a deep breath, trying to quell his anger somewhat. Potter was not the cause of this mess. “This is different, much different, Potter. Andie was born much too soon, the doctors said so and even you must know that.” He said, and then realized sarcasm had slipped into his voice again. He
throttled down the impulse, just for a moment, to be snarky to the younger man.

“Yeah… I guess…”

“All pregnancies are different, and wizard pregnancies are the most varied of all. An average wizard’s pregnancy is around nine months, but the magic influences the growth and development of the child. You and Draco are far from average. A gifted wizard could deliver in as little as six months. I do believe Merlin delivered his own child in five; it was the shortest pregnancy in wizarding history.”

“Merlin was the most powerful wizard in history, so that makes sense.” Harry mumbled softly.

“But… Draco and I aren’t Merlin. He’s only a little over four months along.”

“And your worrying isn’t going to affect my son…? He’s a sensitive man, Potter. You have to be up front with him about everything; I told you that, years ago when you took him for a husband!”

“I know, and I am being honest with him. He knows I’m worried; that’s why he hid his pregnancy for so long. To spare us both…” Harry said softly.

Lucius hesitated, and then moved back to his chair. He slowly sank into it, finally allowing himself to relax somewhat. What he had on his mind wasn’t going to be easy to say; he still felt deep down inside that this child of Lilly Potter wasn’t nearly good enough for his son. But there were children now, and he did not want to be kept out of their lives due to the opinions that he had voiced over the years. As far as he was concerned, they were all true and remained so. It was only a fluke; a stroke of fate that Potter had finally managed to get his son pregnant and taken care of long enough to get this far in pregnancy. He wanted Draco here on a daily basis if he could manage it, just to ease his own mind. “Potter… I know that we have not exactly gotten along.” he began.

Harry glanced up at him, pushing away thoughts and memories of his lost child, allowing Lucius the luxury of time to get his wording the way he wanted it.

“I am forced to admit that I am a very selfish man. I did not believe that you and my son would ever provide me an heir. But you have done that.” he considered his glass a moment. “I wish to remain involved in the lives of my grandchildren and to be there for them as I was unable to with Draco.”

“I don’t mind you visiting with them at all.” Harry said softly. “Family is a precious thing. I really didn’t have one that cared for me at all. So I know the value of family more than most do.”

“What I’m trying to say is I’d like a fresh start. I’ve been told…” he said, thinking of Severus’ comments the day the babies had arrived at the manor. “…is that I’m driving my son from me. I do not want that to happen. I’m willing to at least make the attempt to be civil to you, Potter.”

Harry gazed at him, stunned, taking a moment to find his voice again. “How could I possibly say no to that, sir?” he asked, a smile stealing over his lips. Lucius Malfoy, in his arrogant aloof manner, had just apologized in a roundabout manner… and he recognized the apology without it having to be put into precise words. “I’d be glad to start over…”

“I still don’t think you’re the perfect match for him…” Lucius said immediately. “But… you will do.” He added with a smirk. He let Harry have a few moments to think before he began to speak again, eyeing the level of liquor left in his glass. “Do you think that Draco is up to being introduced to the ‘kittens’…?” he asked, giving Harry the chance to make the decision. Personally he thought it was a good idea to bring Draco in and let him see how much work was ahead of him with only one child, much less three tiny infants.
Harry frowned softly, thinking hard. “I… I don’t know. I’m not willing to do anything that will risk his health or that of our baby. The mediwizard said everything was fine, but…”

“The choice is yours.” Lucius sipped his drink. Harry did not seem to be willing to make such a decision at the moment. “Would you like to see them?” he offered after an extended silence.

“I’d love to, if it’s all right.” Harry said, setting the glass aside.

Lucius rose, setting his glass down as well in silent assent. Harry followed Lucius up to the nursery where the twins slept; a house elf sat in the room, clearly on guard duty. They both moved to the crib side and Harry gazed down at them, amazed. The babies were twice as large as he remembered them, nowhere near as frail; little arms and legs filled out instead of skinny and starved looking. “It’s just been what, a couple of weeks since I saw them last? They’re so much larger…” he murmured softly, impressed by their progress.

“Beautiful, aren’t they?” Lucius smiled proudly.

“Absolutely ravishing.” Harry murmured with a smile, straightening the blanket over them with gentle, tender hands.

“You know, Potter…” Lucius began. “You and my son will have your hands full, with him expecting as well as your Angel to tend. You don’t know how many more you will discover that you will be obliged to take in as head of your family. Cissa has been a wonderful mother to these two…” he said in his most persuasive tone, hoping that Harry would take the bait and let him keep them.

“I’m sure she has; you’ve got a wonderful wife in Narcissa.” Harry said softly. “But that choice is neither mine nor yours to make; they are Draco’s children. Where they stay and depends upon what he wishes to do about all of this.”

“I understand that…” he sighed with reluctant acceptance. He had so hoped… but he would have to wait until Draco was well and strong enough to make the decision himself.

Harry glanced at him and smiled. “Even if we do take them home, I’m sure you’ll still see them almost on a daily basis…”

“I certainly expect to. You are a busy man, and my son should not be left on his own in his delicate condition, whether he has received good reports from the mediwizard or not…”

“My feelings exactly…” Harry agreed in a soft voice.

Lucius glanced at him, surprised that they actually agreed on something. “Hm. Well; perhaps we should go join the others before they begin to believe that I murdered you in my den…”

Harry chuckled softly, giving the tiny babies one last look; they were so beautiful. Tiny reproductions of Draco, they were… fine blonde hair barely visible, tiny and perfect. “What are their names, Lucius?” Harry asked softly.

“Lillian Cassiopeia and Remus Severus.” He answered.

Harry smiled softly. “I think the names suit them; I think Draco will love their names as well… mum would love it I think. I just wish she and dad could see the kids…” he said as they turned and walked out of the nursery.

“James would love them.” Lucius said quietly as they walked. He was silent as they made their way to the balcony and down the grand staircase. He stopped at the foot of the stairs and Harry hesitated,
glancing at him. “You know, Potter; I think its time. I have something for you… go on and join the others in the garden. I will bring it out to you.”

“All right…” Harry said, curious but moving onward out the doors and into the bright sunlit garden. Angel ran to him with a happy squeal, little Tia bouncing along after her and swatting at the ties of her dress playfully. Harry knelt and hugged her gently.

“Are you okay, daddy…? Nonno was so mad…” she murmured, gazing at him worriedly. The kneazle at her side looked at him with her large ears perked, head tilted to the side as if questioning.

“He was upset, not angry little love… And certainly not angry at you or me… it’s all right now. We’ve talked it through and all is well now…”

Okay…” she said, kissing him upon his cheek before taking his hand. “Come on, daddy, there’s biscuits with jelly in the middle of them and they’re really good, almost as good as the ones Rosie made for Papa…” Harry allowed himself to be tugged to his feet and guided over to join the others at the table, the kneazle kit bounding along behind them.

Draco fixed Harry a cup of tea as he took his seat. “What did father want, Harry?” He asked, worried.

“Nothing to worry about. We talked, believe it or not… and then he asked if we could start over. Put the past behind us.” Harry said as he sat, Angel taking the seat at his left as Draco was seated at his right.

Narcissa looked greatly pleased by the answer. “He finally did? Good for him.”

“I’m willing to try.” Harry grinned softly.

“Should I get your biscuits, daddy?” Angel asked him.

“Go right ahead, love. You know which ones are the best.” he winked at her. Angel beamed at him, and then busied herself with picking out the cookies for her father.

Lucius strolled through the lounge and to the French doors that opened onto the garden only a few moments later. He stood in the doorway a moment, watching the domestic scene before him. His wife seemed to be glowing with happiness, as beautiful as the day he had married her. He had come to love her, despite the fact that their wedding had been one neither of them would have preferred. His son… Draco was incandescent. Smiling, open, relaxed. Lucius had rarely seen him behave as he was at this moment. Little Angel was cuddled in Harry’s lap, giggling as she watched her kneazle kit romp across the garden chasing a pixie it had spotted. A gentle breeze stirred the flowers and tiny motes of pollen drifted across the scene, sparkling in the afternoon sunlight.

There had been dozens, perhaps even hundreds of times when he had come to this door to see his family out in the garden. His wife and infant son, in the garden together. When he had assured himself that they were safe he had always turned and gone back inside to tend to business or other things. He had very rarely gone out to join them when his son was present and often he would leave Narcissa out there alone to mull through his own thoughts. It was time, now, to put all that behind him. They had more than enough to ensure their comfortable life, as well as his son’s and grandchildren’s. It was time to enjoy and become part of that scene of tranquil joy.

He stepped out the doors and into the sunlight, taking his time to stroll to the table where the others sat. Draco looked up at his father, the smile on his face warming Lucius’ heart. Telling Harry he
wanted to start over had been an excellent choice; clearly Potter had told them about that part of their conversation. “Potter… I have something that I have treasured for many, many years.” he said softly, one hand slipping into a pocket of his elegant wizard’s robes. “I have allowed Narcissa to view it, but no other has ever touched this stone.” he withdrew a small box from his pocket. “I do believe, though, that James would have wanted you to have this.” He handed the box to Harry.

Harry took it, glancing at both his husband and Narcissa. The witch smiled; she knew exactly what it was and she was proud that Lucius had passed it on. Draco watched curiously as Harry opened the box. Lying nestled among the deep green silk was a teardrop shaped crystal pendant upon a silver chain. “Oh… it’s… its beautiful Lucius.” Harry started, unsure. Why was Lucius giving him jewelry?

“…but you have absolutely no idea what it is, do you, Potter?” Lucius smirked, taking a seat beside his wife. She took his hand, leaning over to kiss his cheek tenderly.

“None whatsoever. I can feel that it has magic, but…”

“It’s a memory crystal, isn’t it father?” Draco asked, gazing at it. “It holds a memory. Like a pensieve, but you don’t need a bowl to view the memory.”

“Precisely.” He nodded.

“A memory crystal?” he gazed at it. This thumb-sized piece of crystal held a part of his father as a young man. “How do I activate it? How do I view the memory?”

“You simply speak the keyword.” Draco answered.

“And that keyword is Easter Break.” Lucius smiled softly. “I included another keyword; it’s on a slip of parchment underneath the silk. That will trigger a more… shall we say, PRIVATE memory…?” he said with a smirk.

“I’ll do that later.” Harry assured.

“Oh daddy, that’s so pretty.” Angel murmured softly, watching as her father slipped the chain over his neck.

“Isn’t it, love?” he smiled at her, stroking her cheek. He took the crystal in his hand and held it up, whispering the words. “Easter Break.”

The vision leapt up from the crystal, visible from all sides like a three-dimensional hologram. The scene was of a nineteen year old Lucius and a sixteen year old James seated together out by the lake sharing a picnic lunch together. Bright afternoon sunlight filtered through the trees and lit the scene with shafts of dancing light. James was playful and teasing, picking up bits of this and that and feeding them to his lover. Lucius smiled and teased him right back; it was clear the two were very comfortable with each other and quite smitten with each other… Harry was reminded of his little island in the muggle park that he loved to share with Draco.

Lucius produced a box tied with a bow and James grinned charmingly at him, and then opened it. He blushed, pulling out a pair of bunny ears. The vision faded after that and Harry found himself smiling softly.

“I’ve never seen that side of you, father…” Draco said softly. “You loved him… but…” he glanced at his mother.

She smiled at him. “Your father and I were the best of friends in school” she said, her hand resting in Lucius’ on the table. “He loved James very much, and I knew and was so happy for them… Your father still loves James. Our marriage, son, was arranged by our fathers against our wishes. But over
“I understand that, but…” Draco frowned. Why had his father married his best friend instead of the man he truly loved?

“No one has ever told me what happened.” Lucius said quietly, his smile gone now.

“I wish things had been different for you, Mr. Malfoy; but you can’t change the past.”

“No. And if it had been different, neither you nor Draco would be here now.”

“I’m glad daddy is here.” Angel said, hugging Harry and smiling over at Draco. “And my Papa too…”

“So am I, my own.” Lucius brushed off his melancholy thoughts and smiled at the little girl.

She slipped out of Harry’s arms and crawled up into his arms, cuddling up to him in pure contentment. The kneazle bounded over to them, mewling, stretching up to reach her then she began to climb up his pant leg. Lucius smirked and picked it up by the scruff, depositing it on Angel’s lap. She hugged the kitten happily.

“So, mother…” Draco mused thoughtfully. “Do you think your kittens are awake yet?”

“They are far too small to be played with, Draco.” Lucius said. “You see, their mother died and they need a lot of care.”

“I don’t want to play with them, father. I just want to look at them.” Draco retorted with a smirk.

“Their mommy died?” Angel asked eyes wide and sad as she gazed up at him. “That’s awful!”

“Yes, and they are very tiny and delicate.”

“They’ll be okay, Nonno. They have you and Nona to take care of them…” she said in a serious tone.

“Yes, they do indeed.” He smiled at her.

“Can I help take care of them? I’ll be very, very careful.”

“Once they get a bit larger, yes.” Narcissa smiled at her. She beamed proudly at the thought that she was going to be allowed to help.

Draco sat back in his chair, bemused by all that he had seen today. His father was not acting normally; had just meeting Angel changed him so much? He actually asked Harry if they could start over…and he was out in the garden, holding a child in his lap and doing all he could to simply make that girl smile. He’d never known the man he saw before him and found himself wishing that he could have.

“Have you seen your pony yet, my own?” Lucius asked.

“I get a pony too? Really?” she asked in awe.

“Of course! You are a Malfoy, after all.” he picked up the Kneazle and set it in Draco’s lap, then rose, scooping the girl up into his arms. He described the little pony with its yellow-gold pelt and black mane and tail as he strode away with her.
Draco watched them leave in complete bemusement. “Mother?”

“Yes, son?”

“Who is that man? And just what have you done with father?”

“That is the man I was friends with forever… and who I fell in love with, Draco.” she answered with a soft smile.

“Oh, he’s definitely Lucius.” Harry agreed with a soft smile, remembering the outbursts that he had endured from Lucius only a short while ago. “But he is trying.”

“I’ve never seen him this way.” Draco murmured softly.

“Well, my dragon…” she said softly, sipping her tea. “He sees what could have been his in Angel. Your father was so deeply in love. And he always wanted a daughter. He often told me that getting married to James and having a baby girl would make his life complete. He was ecstatic when he found out that James was carrying…”

“Father had a baby with James?” Draco murmured, almost shocked. His father had never mentioned… not even hinted… Oh Merlin. That explained so much… his father couldn’t have James so he was determined that Draco couldn’t or shouldn’t have Harry.

“Oh, no, Draco.” Narcissa said softly. “We never found out what happened to the child that James carried… Lucius was so sure that it was a girl, but he and James never went to a healer to find out. Then James vanished… and came back with no memory of any of the past year and a distinct dislike for Lucius. I always hoped that the baby had been allowed to be born and that it was sent to a family and not destroyed. Lucius looked; he searched all the records at the ministry that he could get his hands on, but he never found any mention of the baby at all. Since we don’t know where they spirited James away to, we have no idea where to look. Your father spent almost a year, searching; Russia, Japan, Italy… he searched every place he could but found nothing at all.”

Harry frowned softly. “I’ll see what I can find… I know Lucius looked, but maybe he didn’t look everywhere. And I have several connections that aren’t associated with the ministry.” he said thoughtfully.

“It would give Lucius some closure, just to know what became of her.” Narcissa said in a grateful tone.

“I’d like the chance to meet her anyway; just to see what my half-sister is like.”
Evidence and Provocation

***Author’s Note: The year of this story is set in 2011, 13 years after Harry and Draco’s 7th year at Hogwarts.

Hermione glanced nervously at the door, tapping in another attempt at the password to even open up the coded files on Pansy’s computer. She’d come in here every chance she’d been able to the past two days, determined to break into the computer and find the information locked inside. She’d tried every password she could, but nothing seemed to be what Pansy had used. What in the world…?! She sat back, frustrated again as the screen went black then popped up with the message box of “incorrect password”.

“Damn it, Pansy Parkinson!” she hissed through clenched teeth, powering down and restarting the computer once more. She waited again for it to boot up, glancing at the time every three seconds or so. Pansy should be back in less than fifteen minutes! She stared at the password box, hating that she couldn’t figure out what it could be. She wished to Merlin that she knew more about computers but she’d never had the time to study them. What in the blazes would she have used? Suddenly she had an idea, but… she wouldn’t use that phrase, would she? Hermione sat up and typed in the phrase ‘IAmAnEgocentric’ and to her shock the screen cleared and proceeded through the logon session. “That figures!” she grumbled, clicking to open the files.

To her frustration, each individual file had its own password. The names of the files led her to believe they held important information but she couldn’t open any of them. There were several files under two main folders. One folder was labeled ‘Standard’ and the files listed in that were:

AsianJoe
BagpipeBoy
BlackCannon
BrainBoy
Galleons
GreenJack
GoldMan
RedJoker
RedKeeper
SnitchMaster
WhiteDragon
WonderBoy
YellowEye
Zealot

The other folder was labeled ‘Special Projects’ and it included files labeled:

CharismaLure
DarkPrince
Galleons
LoverBoy
PieceMan
… all code names. WhiteDragon could be Draco, and RedJoker one of the twins. Was Galleons a price list, perhaps? The standard list made a weird sort of sense, but what the hell was Special Projects? Dark Prince? She glanced at the clock again. Merlin; this was taking too much time! She pulled a memory card out of her pocket and plugged it into the slot, quickly copying the coded files
over. Maybe Tonks could do something with them. She nervously chewed on a nail as she waited for the files to load. The meter telling how much had been completed was moving so incredibly slowly. Pansy was due back any moment! She jumped, hearing a noise at the door. She pulled the card and clicked close on the computer, then apparated out, her heart pounding.

Hermione sat at her computer in her office, trying to calm herself. She only had a few minutes until Zabini and his mate were due to arrive. She’d already used up all of the calming draught that she had brought to her office; she would have to go and buy more since she didn’t have time to brew it. She would never even consider going to Draco to ask for a resupply. She had made a personal vow not to go around their home until Harry told her it was alright to, and she was sure she’d be in Azkaban before he finally allowed her to. She just wanted to make certain that when she went that Pansy Parkinson went right along with her into that hellhole.

There was a tap on the door that made her jump slightly. She looked over to see Amber, standing in the doorway and gazing at her with a worried expression. “Hermione, your appointment is here, room three. Hey… are you all right?” she asked softly. “You look awfully pale…”

“Fine; I’m fine. I just skipped lunch is all.” she said as she mentally gathered herself. “I’ll be all right; I’ll get right to them…”

“Pansy’s telling everyone you split up with your husband. It’s not true, is it?”

Hermione looked down, feeling the pain swelling inside her again. “Yes. It’s true.” She said softly. “But… but he’s such a sweet guy and he’s so into you! He never even looks at anyone else; why in the world would you leave him?” She asked, surprised.

“It’s… I can’t explain. Really, Amber; I just don’t have the time or luxury to explain. It’s all… very confusing right now.” she said softly, rising to her feet.

Amber moved to her and to her surprise, pulled her into a tight hug. Hermione hugged her back, feeling guilty for accepting even this little bit of solace. Amber didn’t know what she’d been doing or she’d have slapped her like Harry wanted to, but the embrace felt so good.

“You need to talk to someone, Hermione Weasley. I may not be a witch or talented or even as sharp as you are, but I do understand human relationships… please. If you need to talk, about ANYTHING… please just let me know. I want to help.” Amber said softly.

Hermione gave her a weak smile. “It’ll be all right, you’ll see…” she reassured and felt Amber press something into her hand.

“You will DRINK this before you go and see the Zabini’s. And you need to eat an energy bar at least.” Amber said firmly.

Hermione looked to see a calming draught in her hand. She gave Amber a small hug once more, and then followed her instructions, drinking the potion down.

A quick visit to the lab to load things on a cart and back to the office to pick up the file, Hermione moved over and knocked softly on the door of room number three. At the call to come in, she opened the door, pushing the cart inside. Terry glanced at it nervously, seeing a tray covered by a cloth and several large strange looking containers.
“Hello Mr. Zabini.” Hermione smiled reassuringly, giving them both the formal bow. “Good morning Terry; how have you been feeling?”

“Kind of normal, really… just really nervous.” he smiled shyly at her.

“Don’t be; there’s no pain involved at all for you.” She assured, moving over to the bed that Terry sat perched on the edge of. “All you have to do is lay back and relax; I’ll take care of the rest.” She said.

“All right.” he said shyly, lying back on the bed. Damitri moved to his other side so that he would be out of the way, taking Terry’s hand in his.

Hermione opened the largest container and Terry jumped at the hissing sound it made, the seal broken on the unit. “There we go… its all right, nothing to worry about. This is just where I’ve stored the embryos. I have five of them prepared for you…”

“Five!” Terry murmured, looking shocked. “I can’t… not five!”

Hermione chuckled softly. “No, no; you don’t understand Terry. It’s quite all right; no one is expecting you to carry five babies. That’s too much to ask of anyone. We put in more than two because often something goes wrong with the embryo before it is strong enough to survive…”

The little blonde looked worried. “They… they die?”

“They can, and they do. It’s completely natural. It happens to witches as well as muggle women. So we try to beat those odds; you see if we implant only two, quite often the couple have to come back to have more implanted. To get success the first time, we implant more; five to seven is the common number. I took special care with your embryos.”

Terry gazed at her. “You did all that work yourself?”

“Every bit of it, Terry.” She said firmly. “With my own two hands. I want to see you happy and round with a baby too.” she gave him a soft, fond smile. “We can implant only two if you wish; it’s completely up to you.”

“Dimi…?” Terry gazed up at him, confused and unsure. “What should I do?”

“Go ahead with normal procedure, Miss Weasley.” Damitri told her with a smile. “All will be well, Terry. Don’t worry; I will take care of you and anyone else who happens to come along.” he assured, stroking his lover’s cheek.

“All right, Dimi.” he smiled, relaxing. If Damitri said it was all right, then everything would be fine.

Hermione smiled and nodded, turning back to her table. She opened the sealed container then carefully took out a small glass dish with a seal on top of it. “Here they are.” she said, turning to them. Terry gazed at the little dish with a tiny bit of liquid in it.

“But its just water…” He said softly, unsure.

“It looks like water because the embryos are still so small you can’t see them.” Hermione explained patiently. “Just relax now; let’s get you pregnant…” she said, using her wand to do another scan of Terry’s body. The newly created womb was quickly found and she held the dish directly over the area, then began to chant softly. Terry watched feeling a little tense and expecting pain no matter what he had been told.
Damitri watched, actually quite impressed with the process. It had probably taken years to figure out the spells and magic required to enable wizards to carry children when it could not occur naturally. It was too bad that this particular witch was going to be drug down with the others when it all was exposed. She was very good with Terry and patient as well, and ensured that every last detail was taken care of; she would probably have made a very good healer if she hadn’t fallen into all this mess. Damned shame, really.

Hermione walked out to her car that evening, tired and worried. She had to get what evidence she had to Harry or Tonks or someone… even if she had no bloody idea what it all was or what it meant. She slipped into her car and locked the doors, and then she pulled out her cell phone and dialed the only number she had on speed dial at the time.

“Potter here.”

“Harry; I have information for you. You’ll want this as quickly as I can get it to you.” she said in an urgent tone as she started her car, pulling out of the lot and away from the facility. “I finally managed to get into Pansy’s computer.”

“You did? What did you find?”

“Several files; I couldn’t break into each individual file so I copied them onto a memory stick. I’m headed home with this.”

“Has Tonks seen any of this yet?”

“No. I got the files this morning but was stuck at work all day; we had two couples lose babies today.” Hermione’s voice was pained. “It’s been a horrible day. Could you please call her for me? I’ll get my computer booted up if you will bring her over.”

“I should be there by the time you arrive.” Harry said quietly.

“All right… how’s Draco? He looked wonderful at the recital…”

“He’s all right; doing better than I could have hoped.” He answered.

“And Angel?”

“Don’t worry, everyone is fine.” He said, cutting off her attempt at casual conversation.

“I’m sorry, I just… please, Harry. Whatever you do, don’t let Pansy anywhere near Draco.” she said softly.

“No one is going to harm my Dragon.” He growled. “I’ll see you soon.”

“All right.” she hung up and focused on getting home as quickly as traffic would allow.

Harry kissed Draco. “I won’t be long; Angel, you take good care of papa for me.”
“I will daddy! We’re gonna make Nonno a cake.” She beamed at him.

He smiled softly, and then winked at Draco. “Have fun…” he said, heading for the door.

“Be careful, Harry.” Draco said. “Don’t be too long.”

“I’ll be careful.” He assured, closing the door behind him.

Harry apparated over to Hermione’s house to await her arrival. He wasn’t there longer than a couple of minutes before the car pulled up into the driveway. She wasted little time getting out of the car and into the house, looking nervously over her shoulder as she closed the door behind her. She didn’t notice that Harry was already in the living room.

“Hello Hermione.” he said, and Hermione jumped, clearly nervous.

“Oh! Oh; its you, Harry…” she murmured. Harry noted how she looked both pale and ill and somehow he thought with a vengeful thought that it served her right to be sick after all she’d done.

“Just me.” he agreed. “Dora should be here any moment.” he told her, moving to take a seat.

She nodded, moving to the desk and powering up the computer. It hadn’t even been on a moment or two before the floo activated a moment later, and Tonks stepped out, followed closely by Severus Snape.

“What do you have for us?” Dora asked, eyeing the muggle contraption. She’d never understood the blasted things, even when Severus showed her how they worked. And he’d tried multiple times before he finally gave up on teaching her anything about it.

“I’m not sure, honestly.” she said softly. “I got into Pansy’s computer today, and found these files. They’re encrypted, I don’t know what password she used or program that she used to seal them.”

“So we have no idea if they’re of any use at all.” Snape said coldly.

“I didn’t have to do this.” Hermione whispered, beginning to tremble. Snape was right; they could be totally useless files.

“Of course not, Mrs. Weasley, but don’t think I don’t see right through your reason for getting these files. You’re just trying to keep yourself out of Azkaban using any means possible.” He said with a clear sneer.

“I got them for Tonks!” she snapped at him immediately. “I KNOW I’m going to Azkaban! I KNOW I’ll never see my husband or my daughter again! I’m so happy that the knowledge of that gives you so bloody much amusement!” she pushed away from the desk and stalked away from him, trembling, trying her hardest not to cry, back to them all.

Snape smiled coldly and moved to sit down in the chair.

“Sev, she didn’t have to even give us any information. She never was under any kind of illusion that she was going to avoid Azkaban.” Tonks told him, but he ignored her, opening up the files on the memory stick.

“Standard and Special Projects, hum?” Snape mused, opening the Standard file first. He clicked on
‘WonderBoy’ to open the file and ran into the same stopping point Hermione had met. Try as he might, he could not get the file to open with any type of sense at all.

“GreenJack? WonderBoy?” Tonks murmured, gazing at the screen with a frown. “What the hell kind of file names are those?”

“They must mean something to Pansy.” Harry scowled, moving over to look as well.

Severus scowled, not being able to get anything more than random letters and characters. “Her encryption is too strong, and we don’t have the proper program to get past it.” He said, sitting back in his chair, shooting an accusing glare at Hermione.

“She didn’t have an encryption program on her computer that I could find or I’d have copied it too.” Hermione answered, not turning back to face them. She couldn’t bear to look at Harry.

“I may have an answer to this, hold on.” Tonks pulled out her cell phone and began quickly dialing a number. “I hope it’s not too early there.” she murmured softly. Harry glanced at her but she gestured for him to be patient, moving toward the kitchen as she spoke over the phone. “Yes… Abbie…? Hey. Yeah, its Tonks… yes, I know I said… aw, come on. Give me a break, I’m doing what I can on my end… Hey, listen, I have a real problem here… yeah. Computer files, I can’t do a bloody thing with them. Yes. Encryption we think… yes. Could you…? You are the absolute best; I owe you a dinner when I get back on your side of the pond…” Tonks began to smile. “Yes. Absolutely, anywhere you choose…” she agreed, and then laughed. “Well, I guess I’m at your mercy then. All right; we’ll send you one of the files if you can get the encryption done we can read the rest… Fantastical…! You are absolutely brilliant. See you…” she hung up the phone and turned back to Snape. “I need you to send one of those files over the net thing to…” she punched a few buttons on the phone and showed him an e-mail address. “…there.”

Snape opened the e-mail and sent the file onward without questioning her; he knew she would never cause possible endangerment to a case. “And now what?”

“Now we wait. If anyone can figure that out, Abbie can.” Tonks sighed.

“I’m heading out to the garden; I need some fresh air.” Harry said, rising and striding out. Hermione glanced after him, feeling more depressed and upset by the second. Severus was clearly enjoying every moment of her pain and she hated him for it. She needed to tell Harry what she had found out about Pansy and what she had done to her friends.

“So, Mrs. Weasley, this is quite a nice house…” Snape observed in an acidic tone. “Did you buy it with the money you earned with Miss Parkinson?”

Hermione closed her eyes against her tears. “Paid it off, yes.” She whispered. She knew she really had no defense for what she had done and none of it mattered. “I didn’t know that’s where the money was coming from. I didn’t know until eight or nine months ago; she gave me the details of who the donors were then. I simply can’t bear it anymore. I don’t care if they lock me up, it’ll be better than the hell I have to endure every day now…” she whispered, moving to the bar.

“You seem so sure of that fact. Have you actually visited Azkaban?” Snape probed at her mercilessly.

“Severus!” Tonks sighed. He was getting carried away again.

“Yes, I have!” Hermione turned to glare at him, tears on her cheeks. “I didn’t do any of this intending to cause pain! I didn’t set out to muck about in peoples lives! I was training to be a healer,
and wanted to help people like Harry and Draco who were having so much trouble having babies to have them, to get their families!"

“Oh, and you certainly did that, didn’t you?” He asked with a sneer. “You helped Potter and my godson to have a baby that Draco’s body was not ready to carry to term!”

“There was nothing wrong with the pregnancy! Draco was strong, and so was the baby! Andie would have lived if Pansy hadn’t killed her!” Hermione snapped at him furiously.

Harry, standing in the doorway upon his return from outside, froze at those words. He stared at Hermione. “What?”

Hermione’s fury drained away in a heartbeat as she met the eyes of her oldest school friend. “Pansy. She put a mild poison designed to cause a miscarriage into Draco’s tea.” she whispered, tears flowing freely now and not caring one bit.

“And… you knew?” Harry whispered in a pained voice.

“No. Harry I swear it on my life, on my parents’ lives, on Rosie! I thought it was a horrible tragedy; I hurt so badly for you. I didn’t know Pansy put something in his drink. It had to have been at the tea here at my house… Merlin, I swear if I’d have known I’d have used an unforgiveable curse on her that very evening.”

“She’s telling the truth, Harry.” Tonks told him softly, frowning at Hermione. She hadn’t wanted to expose Harry to this truth just yet; there were sure to be many more shocks coming today and he had enough to deal with. “I was disguised as Hermione when Pansy told me about it.”

“She’s considering doing the same to another client. I… I want to warn them but how can I without destroying the case?” Hermione whispered softly, turning back to the window. She couldn’t bear to think of Terry broken down by the loss of his babies as Draco had been.

“She won’t have the chance.” Tonks assured.

“Now is not the time for all of this.” Snape said sourly.

“If its not, when is the right time, Snape?!” Hermione demanded, not turning back. “Harry deserves to know everything, every little thing that I can find!”

Harry sank into a chair, shaken to his core. Pansy had killed… that unconscionable bitch had MURDERED his daughter!

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Tonks turned toward the bar but Hermione moved over quickly.

“No; let me, please…” she murmured, wanting to give Harry anything he wanted. She prepared him a drink with slightly trembling hands and brought it to him.

Harry glanced up at her then muttered his thanks, taking the drink. He couldn’t think straight. He felt plunged into that hell of grief all over again. His baby didn’t die, she was murdered and Pansy had done it. Snape and Tonks could pay attention and wait for the response; he didn’t particularly care right now.

Hermione hesitated, and then touched his shoulder softly in an attempt to comfort him; he glared at her hand wordlessly.

She bit her lip and drew it back as if burned. “I just… I just wanted you to know, you have the right
to know… Pansy is interested in getting more of your samples, and Draco’s too. She wants to get to you and Draco and I’ve been talking her round to waiting. I don’t want her anywhere near either of you, she’s already said she has ways of handling you, and… and Blaise too…”

Severus surveyed all of this with amusement. He’d had a rather bad day and watching Hermione suffer was giving him immense satisfaction. It was a bit of a pity that her suffering had to be at the expense of Potter; he was rather finding he liked the mate of his godson. Grainger, though, needed someone to jar her out of her endless spiral of self-pity and since she couldn’t really stand him in the first place, what harm would it make if he stepped in to shake her out of it? After all, she had brought all of this on herself by her own actions.

“If she comes near Draco I will tear her apart.” Harry growled. “And I won’t need my wand to do it!”

“It makes me so sick to even be around her, now that I know that she… she’s killed children…” she moved away to get his distance.

Harry took a deep drink, trying to calm his anger. He was barely restraining himself from going to hunt down Parkinson this very moment. Somehow, through his anger and fury, he heard that last word that Hermione said, very clearly. “Wait… children?”

“She’s done it to others, Harry.” Tonks said as she got herself and Snape drinks as well. “She said she did it to make the ‘donor’ she needed return… she didn’t mention any names.”

“But I know who’s lost their babies.” Hermione sank into a chair, staring at the empty fireplace.

It seemed to take forever for the response to come through from Tonks’ friend. Hermione had long since fallen silent and sat curled in her chair by the cold fireplace. The computer beep made her jump and look over at the computer.

“Well let’s see what Abbie’s got for us, shall we?” Tonks said, moving over to the computer, only half a step behind Severus. He sat down in the chair and reactivated the computer, opening his email to retrieve the file. The file was attached, as well as another that was named in all caps ‘DECODER PROGRAM’.

The note that accompanied these stated simply: ‘Here you are, my friend. Don’t you forget about dinner or else! And by the way, it was a real pain to get this decoder program, so you owe me a night at the club too! Love ya… Abbie.’

Tonks read it and laughed softly. “Well, she’s got what it takes to get what we need. I can always depend on Abbie…” she said, watching as Snape first opened and downloaded the decoding program.

“Does she even know you’re married, Dora?” Snape asked her with a soft smirk.

“She knows… doesn’t much care, though.” She shrugged, and then shot him a scowl. “Its dinner, not a hotel room, Severus!” she said.

His smirk grew. “You forgot dancing at the club.” he teased.

“She said club, she didn’t say dancing. Now pay attention to what we’re supposed to be doing. Open that other file!” She said in a scolding tone but she couldn’t help but grin at him.
He returned his attention to the screen and opened the file that had been sent back decoded. The file was ‘Galleons’ out of the ‘Standard’ file. What opened was a table with names, numbers, and what seemed to be…

“Prices. ‘Galleons’ is a price list.” Tonks said immediately.

“You donated your husband’s sperm to the effort, did you?” Severus asked Hermione, who looked over at him glaring. Severus met her stare with narrowed eyes. “RedKeeper is most likely him.”

“I did no such thing! And he’s never been to the clinic, he never…! I didn’t…! She kept asking me to… I did NOT do that!”

“She’s already taken down payments on two of his ‘samples’.” Tonks commented, reading the chart. “Small wonder she’s been insisting that we get a move on and collect his semen as quickly as possible.”

“She… she what?” Hermione looked like she was in shock; she was pale and ill and her eyes red from her constant tears. “No… No, I sent him to Charlie’s… I couldn’t let him be hurt…”

“She knows where he is.” Tonks said, straightening. “And she plans to pursue him.”

“Ron won’t go anywhere near her.” she shook her head.

“It’s a good thing that we have watch on her every moment of the day.” Tonks said.

Severus set the encryption program that was now fully loaded to working on translation of the other files in the background. “Amazing how much a pureblood goes for these days.” he said in a droll tone.

“How much?” Tonks asked.

“It varies, actually. For Potter? Fifty thousand galleons. My, my, my; aren’t you popular, Potter? Ten orders already pre-paid…”

“Ten?” he looked over, feeling a little numb from the news.

“She doesn’t have that many.” Tonks commented with a smirk. “Though she is plotting on how to get hold of it.”

Snape smirked and opened the ‘BoyWonder’ file. It was a table that read:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FAMILY</th>
<th>IMPLANT</th>
<th>GENDER</th>
<th>DUE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Avery</em></td>
<td>05/30/09</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>03/31/10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Yaxley</em></td>
<td>11/03/07</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>07/15/07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Gibbon</em></td>
<td>02/16/08</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>06/03/08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Gibbon</em></td>
<td>09/16/08</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>12/24/08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Carrow</em></td>
<td>10/28/10</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>03/01/10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Carrow</em></td>
<td>05/31/10</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>10/08/10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Tonks stared at the screen. “Merlin!” She murmured softly. “These are all Death Eater families! They’ve all lost family in the war…” she said, then pointed at the screen at the word ‘destroyed’.
“What does that mean?” She began to wonder aloud, glancing at Harry.

“Destroyed.” Snape said quietly. “It appears that all the female children were killed once they discovered their gender... though some continued to make the attempt until they were successful at breeding a male.”

Harry looked over, grief warring with rage on his face, magic crackling around him. “I’ll kill them all! Every bloody one of them who killed my daughters!” he snarled as he surged to his feet and moved over to stare over Severus’ shoulder at the screen.

“We’ll get them all, Harry; this list damns each and every one of them, and we can rescue those they did not kill.” Tonks said firmly. “Hermione; I couldn’t have asked for better information. She has listed the owner of each sample here and who bought and implanted each of the samples.”

Hermione didn’t respond, still curled up in her chair. It didn’t matter what she got for them; Snape was right. She would be lucky not to get the Dementor’s Kiss, and if that didn’t happen she’d suffer for the rest of her life in Azkaban.

Snape opened another file; the one labeled ‘WhiteDragon’ and found another table. Snape studied it a moment then touched the screen. “There are the twins…” he said.

Harry growled, a snarl on his lips. Seeing Pansy’s name listed twice was just too much for him; she had tried two times to impregnate herself with his husband’s seed. That greedy, arrogant, self-centered bitch!

“Potter, you will control yourself this instant!” Snape snapped.

“She tried to take our kids! She tried to take them for herself!” Harry snarled back at him.
“You will control yourself or you will leave!” Snape glared at him, and for a long moment Harry glared back, refusing to back down. Finally, though, Harry averted his eyes. He did not want to leave, not yet…

“Do these customers always know who the donor is?” Severus asked Hermione, choosing to leave Harry out of things altogether.

“Not always.” Hermione answered.

“How can that be? They have to choose who they’re using.” Snape countered.

“I went to school with Kelsey Baddock.” Tonks said. “You couldn’t meet a sweeter or more tractable young woman; she wouldn’t hurt a fly. I can’t believe that she would engage in dark practices to get a child. Do you know if she knew, Hermione?”

“No, she didn’t. Some of them had no idea at all; they thought they were just producing the heir their father wanted so they could live their lives as they chose. But some, like Aralias Lestrange… they found out what was going on. Aralias… they said she… she…”

“ Took her own life.” Snape finished for her.

“Her father arranged everything; ensured that she came to every appointment, chose the donor, paid for all of it.” she said softly, voices shaking.

“Merlin… this is all such an insane fucking nightmare.” Harry murmured softly.

“I should have come to you sooner.” Hermione said softly, head bowed, taking all the blame without complaint. “I should have…”

“I’m going to need a copy of all this, Hermione.” Tonks said, straightening.

“Take the memory card; I don’t want it.” She whispered.

“It’s a very good start, and I appreciate your work, Hermione. But we will need more to hold up before the Wizengamot. I need to interrogate Parkinson.”

“If you caught her in the act of raping a wizard, no one on that entire panel would condone that act. Not even the ones who are secretly in support of it all.” Snape said.

“I’ll do it.” Harry said. “I can’t risk her getting anywhere near Draco; she wants me, anyway.”

“She was practically orgasmic over the thought of catching Ron, Blaise and you together to harvest all of you together.” Tonks said, stretching her back. This could work…

“I’ll talk to them, but cooperating will be their choice.” Harry volunteered.

“No… please, leave Ron out of this…” Hermione said, gazing pleadingly at them.

“You can’t keep this from him. He has a right to know what crimes his wife has committed.” Snape sneered at her.

Hermione flinched at his words, her tears flowing again. “He’s going to find out. I just don’t want him to… don’t involve him…”

“It’s not your choice anymore!” Tonks snapped at her and she fell silent, trembling and bowing her head. “The choice to be involved or not will be his now, not yours.”
Harry sighed, turning from the computer. “I’ve seen all I want to tonight… I’ll talk to Ron and Blaise tomorrow.”

“Good plan.” Tonks nodded. Harry gave her a faint smile before he apparated home.

“I don’t know how much longer I can do all of this…” Hermione whispered.

“Again, you don’t have a choice.” Snape snarled at her. “You WILL continue with what we tell you to do until we have EVERYONE involved in custody!” he said coldly.

Hermione turned tortured eyes on him, a snarl on her lips as she came to her feet. “Get the hell out of my house, Severus Snape!” she demanded in a pained tone. “I never invited you, get the fuck out!!”

He gave her a cold look but Tonks tugged his sleeve. “We have all we came for now, anyway, Sev… let’s go.” She said softly, irritated and angry at Snape for being so harsh.

“As you wish, Dora.” He said, moving with her.

Hermione glared at them until they were gone, then she collapsed in harsh sobs on the couch.
Dealing with the Facts

Harry apparated back to his home but not to his front porch as he usually did. Instead, he chose the garden in the back of the house as the place to travel to. He walked slowly through it, down the paths so carefully cultivated by Draco that wound about the patches of different herbs and flowers and plants used in his potions. Late spring gave so much warmth and life to the garden. It was all very pleasant to look at but he wasn’t looking at any of it at all.

He moved to a small and lovingly tended patch of grass in the back of the yard where a small cherub angel statue stood with a smile on its face, holding her hands skyward with her wings flared as if taking off in joy. At the base of the statue was a plaque of black marble, and carved in it were the words:

IN MEMORY OF ANDIE POTTER-MALFOY
TOO SOON YOU FLEW FROM OUR ARMS…
BUT YOU WILL NEVER CEASE BEING LOVED.

He sighed softly as he sank to a seat beside the small statue in the garden. He gazed at the words a long time before he reached to touch the stone, his fingers lightly drifting across the engraved words. “She’ll pay, Andie, I swear it… she’ll pay for taking you from us…” he murmured.

The sound of simple happiness broke through the miasma of pain and grief he was feeling; he could hear giggling and his eyes were drawn to Angel, bounding about after her Kneazle through the flowerbeds, running and squealing with the unbridled joy of innocent childhood. He couldn’t help but smile at her antics. Yes, there was grief and pain in his life; but there was joy and love as well.

“Hey, baby…” Draco moved over to sit beside him and Harry took his hand and kissed it softly. Draco then slipped his arms about his husband, worried about him. He hardly ever came back here to the little memorial they had put up for their baby girl. “Are you all right?”

Harry took a moment to compose himself; he knew he had to tell Draco but was highly reluctant to do so. “Ron and Hermione are having problems.” Harry murmured as an excuse for his mood, holding Draco close. “Ron is so torn up…”

Draco returned the embrace warmly, soothing his husband with his touch. “I knew something more was going on than what he came to talk to us about… have you gotten anywhere on that case?”

“Still working on it…” he sighed.

“You don’t think they’re going to split up do you? Even Rosie has noticed something is wrong; she asked me to make a potion to help her daddy get back to his normal self. There has to be something we can do.”

“I’m doing what I can, but in the end I don’t think they’ll pull through and stay together.” He said softly. “Hermione’s going to Azkaban and I’ll be the one who sends her there.”

“Azkaban?! What in Merlin’s name has she done?”

“Angel isn’t the only child she created from stolen sperm.”

Draco was stunned by this news. Hermione never seemed to be the type to even get into the slightest bit of trouble, once Voldemort was gone anyway. “She did it more than once? How many, do you know?”
“No, we’re not completely sure yet; but Pansy is definitely the mastermind behind it.”

Now everything made sense. Of course Pansy, that conniving and manipulative wench was pulling the strings. “That makes more sense. I can’t see Hermione deciding to do that, but Pansy, most definitely. I could even see her managing a way to blackmail Hermione into it all. Even in school Pansy was manipulating people and trying to get the world arranged as she wished it to be. She almost convinced father once that we should be wed.”

“From what we’ve seen so far of the case, she’s hidden her involvement in most everything, and she’s managed to arrange things so that Hermione will be hit with all of the blame once its uncovered.” Harry answered in a quiet tone. “She’s the one who is behind it all; and I will kill her. I’m going to kill her if it’s the last thing I do.” Harry said in a cold, furious tone.

Draco gazed at Harry questioningly. “Pansy’s done more than steal sperm to make babies? What else has she done?”

Harry could not meet Draco’s eyes. “She’s a murderer. Worse than Voldemort ever was…” He whispered.

“Murder? Oh Merlin… she’s killed babies?” Draco murmured.

“Apparently the Death Eaters didn’t want to have any little witches.”

“She killed your daughters?! That unholy bitch!” Draco’s eyes darkened with anger and grief.

“She’s done much more than that.” Harry’s hand touched the stone again, tears brimming in his eyes. “She killed our Andie.”

“…What?”

“She killed her because she thought we would continue to go to the clinic; she could get more samples from us so that she could sell them and get richer.”

“She… but how? How could she have…? The doctors said…” Draco was stunned; the news was all too much at once.

“A potion or a poison. I don’t know what it was, but she told Tonks she did it; Tonks was posing as Hermione at the time.”

Tears ran down Draco’s cheeks. “She’s bragging of killing our Andy… for what, money?” Draco was tense with restrained anger and grief.

Harry held him close. “I’ve got to stop her,” he whispered. “I want you to go and stay with your father, both you and Angel. I want you safe.”

“All right, but… but what about you? We all need to have you with us…”

“I’m not going anywhere, baby.” Harry kissed him softly. “But I’m not taking any chances with you and our son.”

“I’ll stay clear of it all, I promise. But you aren’t staying here at the house without me.”

“Do you think your father will allow me to stay with you at the Manor?”

Draco gave him a faint grin, trying to put his anger behind him. He needed to be calm to help Harry to get back on his feet again. “If Angel asks him, he’ll almost beg you to come stay with us. He’ll do
“anything that she wants him to.” he told his husband in a soft tone, but then he let the silence fall between them.

Harry was content at this moment to just hold Draco close, one hand drifting to rest on Draco’s stomach. Could feel their son move under his hands; that precious life that meant so much to both of them. “No one can take him from us, love...” Draco said softly, his own hand moving to slip over Harry’s.

Harry kissed his neck. “I can’t wait to hold him… I love you, my Dragon. More than anything in the world.”

“Mommy used to say that all the time to MamaMelli.” an innocent young voice piped up beside them. They both looked to see Angel, smiling happily at them, her cheeks flushed and green eyes sparkling. She’d come up behind them when they were talking and now threw her arms about both of them, hugging their necks.

“I’m sure she meant every word she spoke.” Harry said, moving his arm to include her in the embrace and giving her a soft kiss on top of her head.

“I miss them, but I’m happy to have you and Papa.” she beamed.

“And we are happy you’re here with us.” Draco smiled.

“Angel; would you like to stay with Nonno and Nona?” Harry asked her.

Her reaction was not nearly what he expected. Her face fell, worry and grief touching her face. “Are… are you sending me away already?” she asked sadly.

“What? Oh, no! Never! Oh Merlin, Angel; you are yours forever. We’ll be going with you to the Manor.”

Her joy instantly returned. “Really? Oh I’d love it Daddy! You can sleep in my bed and I’ll use the couch it’s really big and comfy and its right there I don’t mind at all…!”

Draco laughed softly. “Don’t you worry; we’ll have a room quite near yours at the manor; mother wouldn’t have it any other way.”

“It’d be fun to have a sleepover in the same room.” Angel giggled.

“Come on, and then let’s go pack a few things.” Draco suggested.

“Okay!” She gave each of them a loud and rather damp kiss, and then skipped off with the kneazle kit romping after her, batting at her heels.

Draco turned and kissed Harry. “It’s going to be all right, Harry. We’ll make it through this as long as we’re together we can handle anything.”

“All right, Dray…” he said, giving the statue one last look. “We’d better go help Angel pack.” He said, rising, helping Draco to his feet. They followed the dark-haired girl and her pet into the house.

Angel chatted away about all the fun that they were going to have at the Mansion.

“Should you call and speak to Lucius first?” Harry asked.

“I wish we could surprise Nonno with cookies like Rosie brought over… Papa, do you think Rosie could make cookies for us to take over?”
“Not this time, but she may visit as well.” Harry smiled softly at her.

“I’ll give father a call.” Draco said with a chuckle.

This had certainly been a long day. Lucius had been in and out of the nursery all day, soothing and cuddling little Remus Severus. He was worried; but Narcissa told him that she had seen this with Draco and it was something called colic. He wanted to call Severus but she’d told him that she could take care of this; nevertheless he had insisted on doing most of the walking with the boy. It seemed to be the only way he could rest was if he was being held. He was back in the nursery for the tenth time today, his tiny grandson held against his chest as he hummed softly, walking back and forth to try to soothe the colicky infant.

He saw the fire flare, then his son’s face appear in the coals. Lucius turned and moved quickly out of the room, setting the still whimpering infant in his crib before he returned to the room, moving to answer the call. “Good evening Draco.”

“I wasn’t sure if you were home. Are you having a good day, father?”

“He’s a lot to ask, father, but could you spare a room or two for the night?”

He frowned in concern. “That isn’t a problem at all, it never is. Draco, what’s happened? Is Angel all right? Where is Potter?”

Draco smiled reassuringly at his father. “We’ll explain it when we arrive; everyone is well. It will just be… safer… if we are there.” he said vaguely.

Lucius’ expression did not change; something was definitely wrong. “Safer, hmm? Well. I shall have the house elves freshen your rooms immediately and inform them you shall be joining us for dinner.”

“Thank you... we’ll see you soon.”

“All right, Draco.” Lucius smiled and the call ended.

“I’ll get my bags, come on Tia, hurry!” Angel said excitedly.

Draco moved to Harry. “Are we ready, love?”

Harry gave his husband a wry grin. “I suppose I’m as ready as I’ll ever be...” he answered. “Though it does sound mighty odd... I’m going to stay at Malfoy Manor.”

Angel bounced on her heels beside them; she’d dragged her bag down the hall to them, rumpling the runner carpet on her way in her eagerness to get back to them. “But it’ll be FUN, daddy! We can make cookies for Nonno tomorrow... will you help me?”

Draco chuckled and drew his wand, the carpet straightening itself with a flick of his wrist. “Yes, of course we can do that... it will be lots of fun. Perhaps you can ride your pony tomorrow.”

“Could I really? I haven’t ridden her yet but she likes carrots and sugar cubes and she really likes
Tonks stepped out of the green flames in the fireplace of her own home, returning a full two hours after Snape had. Before even considering returning home, she had gone on to the ministry and documented everything she had received as well as the information that her friend across the pond had helped to decipher.

The living room was empty; they must be in the Severus’ favorite room, the study. She shucked off her shoes and stretched wearily, moving to the bar to fix herself a light fruit drink, tipping in a bit of alcohol just to take the edge off the day she’d had so far. She moved out of the room; she needed to go find Severus and have a little talk about his behavior at the Weasley house today.

Severus looked up from his book as his female love moved into the room. He looked quite content with a rare soft smile on his lips; sitting there with Remus sprawled on the couch and his head resting in his lover’s lap. Sev’s long, slim fingers were slowly combing through the wolf’s sandy blonde hair, and Remus looked so relaxed he seemed to be sleeping.

She hated to disturb this scene; these two were close like this only once in a great while. Remus loved to cuddle but Severus was always so standoffish, at least while she was around. Still, his behavior had been outrageous and she had to say something about it. “Severus, you know that you really did go too far with Hermione today.” she said bluntly in a disapproving tone as she moved to her favorite seat, switching her own lamp on.

“What did you do?” Remus asked in a drowsy tone without bothering to open his eyes even a bit, so very content. “Severus, are you being a bastard again?”

Severus’ lips twitched, settling into a soft smirk. “I did what I had to do. Hermione Weasley isn’t guilty of any great crime, but she thinks she should be sent to Azkaban and presented directly to the Dementors for torture or even for the Dementor’s Kiss. It’s nauseating to be around her; she’s drowning completely in self-pity. She’s through and through a typical Gryffindor.”

“I resemble that remark, Sev.” Remus cautioned, cracking open one eyelid to gaze up at the dark-haired man.

Snape gave Remus’ hair a soft tug instead of a stroke. “It’s true; you often get that way when you think you’ve done wrong.” He reminded. “Have patience and hear me out.”

Remus subsided and through heavy-lidded eyes awaited the promised explanation.

“Mrs. Weasley has discovered she’s involved in dark dealings and suddenly her mind, which is normally extremely sharp, turns to… oh, what is that awful translucent stuff muggles eat again? Oh yes; Jell-O. Although it is true, she has owned up to the fact that she is involved, she’s vastly overstating her involvement in the crime.”

“She’s done quite a bit to help us investigate, Sev.” Tonks interjected.

“She has helped, that is very true; but she is a very intelligent and resourceful witch, Dora.” Severus interrupted. “Self-pity does not suit her and it actually gets in the way of her thinking. She needed a
good dose of Slytherin snarkiness to get her Gryffindor blood flowing back to her brain. Once she gets good and angry, she’ll be of much greater use to you. Being angry or offended has always worked to get her in top form in the past. If you don’t believe me simply ask Potter; he knows this is true.”

“She didn’t need quite that MUCH snarking.” Tonks responded, sipping her juice, curling her legs up under her on the cushion. “You were a real ass, Severus. And then you went past being an asshole to being an absolute bastard.”

Severus chuckled. “Oh, yes, I was, wasn’t I?” he said in clearly amused tone. “I was truly in rare form today…”

Remus reached up and swatted him. “You should be punished.” He said in a drowsy tone, opening his eyes fully now.

Dora watched them with a soft grin. “If it doesn’t get her ‘motivated’, Severus, I’m going to force you to apologize to her. You know that, don’t you?”

“Agreed.” Severus said aloofly. “But you’ll see; I’m not wrong about this. And I won’t have to apologize for anything. She’ll be thanking me, and so will you, Dora.”

“You’re horrid, Severus!” she accused, but could not help a bit of a smile. She wadded up a piece of paper and threw it at him; he allowed it to bounce off his nose without flinching, his smirk only growing. “I think I just may make you apologize to her anyway!”

Severus merely smiled at her and returned to reading his book, his fingers resuming their slow caress of Remus’ hair, making him sigh in contentment, eyes closing once more.

Angel ran forward to fling her arms about the neck of her waiting grandfather, who knelt down on one knee and held his arms open for her, hugging her warmly in welcome. Draco stepped aside from the hearth to let Harry come in as well. He appeared in the flare of green flame and stumbled out, unsteady on his feet.

“Graceful as ever, Potter?” Lucius smirked.

“One of my endearing charms, I suppose.” Harry sighed, dusting off. “It has been a very trying day.”

“Not that I’m complaining, mind you, but what has brought about this visit?” Lucius asked, straightening. Angel clung to his hand, smiling up at him adoringly.

“It’s for their protection, plain and simple.” Harry said softly.

“Come along, Angel, let’s get you and Tia settled in your room.” Draco said, knowing that Harry needed to explain to his father and that Angel did not need to be involved.

“Okay Papa!” she smiled, taking his hand and allowing her to lead him away, curls bouncing as she skipped. “I’ll see you later, Nonno!”

“Good night, my dear.” Lucius smiled after her, and then he moved to the bar to pour a drink. He
waited until Angel had not only left the room, but was clearly out of hearing range before he spoke again. “So what is it that has you convinced that there is danger to my son and grandchildren?” he asked quietly, gesturing to Harry to have a seat as he himself sat on one of the plush barstools.

Harry took a deep breath, sitting on another of the stools clad in deep green leather and trimmed in silver. “We’re getting close to closing the investigation…” he began. He had to explain this without telling every detail, but how? “And… in the process of the investigation we found that our loss of Andie was no accident.”

Cold fury flashed in his father-in-law’s eyes, turning them steely grey. “Who killed my grandchild?!” he snarled, his voice as cold and hard as a glacier.

“Andie was not the only child who was killed; several others were as well.” Harry said softly. “Angel is the only girl who was allowed to live. I’m fairly sure that the reason for her health is because the ones doing the killing didn’t know about her existence.”

“You will tell me WHO, Potter.” He said again, his voice steady and sounding calm, but with deadly, poisonous undertones.

Harry’s eyes met Lucius’; more filled with fury and hatred than the older wizard had ever seen. “She is not yours to kill, Lucius. She is MINE.” He growled in a dangerous tone.

Lucius paused a moment, meeting that gaze with his own, then he handed his drink to his son-in-law. “Indeed, Harry; it is your right.” He agreed, calling Harry by his first name was an extremely rare occurrence. “But we must do this in the proper manner, following the legal channels for just such occasions; we don’t want you to end up in Azkaban. Your children and my son need you to remain a free man.”

Harry looked at him through narrowed eyes. “You’re telling me there’s a way to legally hunt down and destroy this bitch?”

“Oh, of course; it’s quite possible. You would know of this had you been raised in a proper wizarding family, but we can’t undo Dumbledore’s foolish choices for your youth. You must file blood-feud at the Ministry.”

“Blood-feud?” Harry repeated questioningly.

“Yes. You register exactly what offenses have been done against your family and almost any means of hunting them down and anything used in a duel is excusable.” Lucius explained cooly.

Harry gave him a cold, calculating “I could hunt her down and make sure she pays for every death without worrying about any consequences.”

“Her and all of her kin.” Lucius agreed with a wicked smirk. “All who were involved -- because I can assure you, someone else was pulling her strings.”

“I suppose it’s possible, but she has profited greatly from her actions… and there are several who had a hand in the death of the children… it will be quite a list when I’m through.”

“I will need the names of those who were involved, and I will be assisting you in the destruction of those involved. I fully intend to file my own Blood Feud against them as well.”

“I don’t have all the names yet.” Harry admitted, much to Lucius’ disappointment. “I’m working with an auror and my partner Damitri Zabini; hopefully we can we will wrap all of this up in the next week or so. That’s why I wanted to ensure that Draco and Angel were somewhere that I knew they
would be completely protected.”

“They will need to stay longer than a few days.” Lucius poured himself another drink. “Blood feuds are not things that are settled in only a few days. We need to bring all the other children home as well.” he glanced at Harry out of the corner of his eye. “How many are there?”

“Draco has four, not counting the twins; two girls and two boys. I have four boys, and one on the way. No daughters.”

“No girls?”

“None. They were all destroyed when they found they were female.” Harry said in an angered tone. “Other wizards had been targeted as well; there are several Weasley children.”

“Weasley? She used her own husband?”

Harry took a deep drink, and then sighed softly, shaking his head. “No. Ron’s was never collected, though I hear that Pansy had already sold it, the greedy bitch.” he glanced at Lucius. “I won’t deny that Hermione is involved, as you’ve so clearly figured out. But she’s our insider. She’s surrendered her wand and she’s doing everything we ask, and risking herself to dig up information she’s not required to get. She’s providing a lot more than we expected of her, to be honest; I really don’t believe that she knew what was done to kill Andie until she heard it from Pansy’s own mouth. The grief she showed… I know she didn’t have any part in it.” he said in a soft tone. He was beginning to accept Hermione’s story that night at the dance recital as the actual truth.

Lucius nodded thoughtfully, swirling his drink in his glass, watching the liquid’s movement. “Then I shall leave her fate in the hands of the courts and the Aurors. Tell me; how did Draco take the news? He seemed calm enough when he arrived.”

“I only told him of the murder of Andie. He’s holding up a lot better than I did.” Harry admitted. “I couldn’t keep it from him.”

That put a smile on Lucius’ face. “Then I believe he’s strong enough to meet the kittens.”

Harry nodded, taking another drink. “He knows that I have kids out there; but I don’t think he knows that he does, as well. He needs to know before we bring the rest of them home.” He agreed.

“Shall we?” Lucius smiled, leaving his glass on the bar as he rose smoothly to his feet with his typical liquid grace. “I need to get back to the nursery; little Remus Severus is so restless…”

“Sounds like a good idea.” Harry agreed, setting the glass aside.

Draco was kneeling on the floor, Angel standing with her back to him as he buttoned up her new nightgown. He knew his father must have come into the room because suddenly the task got a lot harder as Angel began bouncing with delight. “Nonno and daddy are here, Papa!” she said happily.

“All settled in, my own?” Lucius asked as he held out his arms to the girl.

She ran to him, hugging him with all her strength. “Good night, Nonno. Thank you so much for letting us stay over!” she said, her eyes sparkling.

“You need to learn that you never really need to ask to stay over here. You see, my sweet, this will always be your home.” He said, scooping her up into his arms, causing her to squeal and giggle in delight. He gave her a kiss as he strolled to the bed to and set her down upon the sheets. “You are always welcome in this house. Never doubt that for a moment.”
She giggled and squirmed as he pulled up the blankets, tucking her in gently, but she finally settled. “Good night Papa, goodnight, Daddy.” she said, smiling at her fathers. The stuffed dragon toy she’d found at Draco’s home was held tightly in her arms.

Lucius smiled at the girl. “Sweet dreams my own… if you need anything, just call. We will hear you wherever we are.”

She sighed happily and closed her eyes. Harry kissed her cheek and then slipped his arm about Draco. “Come on, love; we’ve something we want to show you.”

“Where’s mother?” Draco asked as they moved out of the room.

“She’s tending the kittens.” Lucius replied.

“So I finally get to see them?”

“It is time.” Lucius agreed, leading them down the hall to the nursery. “You really do need to meet them.”

Narcissa was seated in the rocking chair with a pale yellow blanket over her lap, wearing her white silk nightdress with a lacy almost veil-thin robe over her shoulders. She held a baby in each arm as she crooned softly to them to try to soothe them; one of them was whimpering. She looked over at them in surprise. “Oh… Draco…” she murmured, looking questioningly at Lucius.

Draco stopped, shock on his face. “Mother…? Merlin, mother! Why didn’t you tell me you were expecting?” he murmured, jumping to the wrong conclusion.

“I wasn’t expecting, Draco.” She interrupted him in a soft tone, a smile on her lips.

“I’d have told everyone in the wizarding world if I had had twins, son.” Lucius said with a soft chuckle.

“But…” he frowned, confused now. “They’re so… I mean… aren’t they Malfoys? They have the coloring, the look…”

“Oh, yes, most certainly they are Malfoys.” Lucius said firmly.

Draco moved to his mother, kneeling at her feet, gazing at the twins. “But… how?”

“Want to hold one of them?” Narcissa offered in a soft voice.

“May I?” Draco held up his hands and his mother passed him the tiny girl, who had drifted peacefully to sleep. Draco brought the baby closer, gazing at her.

“These are your children, Draco.” Harry told him softly. “They were created the same way that Angel was.”

“Mine?” he whispered, tears in his eyes. “But… how did you find them?”

“Severus found them in the hospital; they had been orphaned.”

“Their mother; she died in childbirth?”

“No. Suicide.”

“But why?” Draco asked in a pained voice.
“I don’t think she wanted to take your children from you, and she didn’t want her father to get hold of them.” Harry answered.

Narcissa touched his shoulder with a gentle hand. “They have you, my son. And they have us.”

“They’re beautiful…” Draco whispered. “Who was the mother?”

“Lestrange’s youngest girl.”

“But she was only a child herself…! What, was she fifteen?”

“We know she was much too young, but it clearly didn’t matter to her father.”

“I’ve given them names until you could meet them. It’s perfectly fine if you wish to rename them, love.” she said in a tender tone.

“What are they?” he asked, sitting comfortably at his mother’s feet, gazing down at the sweet girl in his arms.

“You’re holding your daughter Lillian, and this…” Lucius moved to his wife, relieving her of the boy as well and giving her a soft kiss. “This is your son.”

“Remus Severus.” Narcissa added. “He’s been a bit fussy today; colic, I think.”

“I still think we should call Severus.” Lucius grumbled softly.

“A boy and a girl…” Draco said softly, stroking his daughter’s delicate cheek.

Harry smiled as he watched his husband. The scene was so beautiful; his husband sitting at his mother’s feet, both of them gazing down at the babe in his arms with love and adoration on their faces, lit only by soft nightlights in the dusky dark of the room. “Your kittens are absolutely beautiful, love.” he said with a teasing smile.

Draco looked up at him with a soft smile. “I know; they’re stunning… but why not tell me of them?”

“None of us wished to do anything that would endanger you or our grandson. We would not risk it this time.” Narcissa stroked his hair.

He gazed up at her. “He’s a strong child, mother; nothing will stop him from coming into our lives now. Even if he were born today, he is full formed and could survive.”

“Well, my dragon, we wished to be certain before we told you. And the little one needed so much care; they were so frail and delicate when they arrived here.”

“And why did you tell me they were kittens?”

She laughed softly. “That is your father’s fabrication. That is what your father thought that I had brought home the first night.” she explained.

“They did sound like kittens; they were making little mewling sounds.” Lucius chuckled softly. “And she brought them in a little basket, not a proper carrying bed.”

“They were simply hungry.” she said with a smile.

“So they’re why you were asking me about baby names… Lilly, after Harry’s mum…”
“They needed to be called something, son.” Lucius said.

“Yes, they do… but… Remus Severus?” he looked up at his father, surprised that his father would approve of such a name.

“Severus named him.” Narcissa chuckled.

Draco laughed softly “That figures… he does have a bit of a narcissistic bent.”

“Well can you blame him? He has no children.” Lucius reminded.

“But they have Teddy…”

“Remus and Nymphadora had Teddy. Severus has fathered no children.” Narcissa corrected.

“I like it, anyway. Uncle Severus has always been good to us.” Draco decided.

“We thought perhaps you’d prefer the use name James for the son you are about to bear.” Lucius answered in a cool tone, considering the face of his grandson as he spoke.

He gazed up at his father. “Really? You will allow me to name him James?”

Lucius smiled softly at his son, meeting his gaze. “Yes, I will allow it. But you must choose a proper middle name for him.”

“I will, I promise father.” Draco smiled.

“Severus saved their lives. He’s the one who found them at the hospital.” Harry agreed, moving over to touch the baby’s fuzzy hair. “Without his potions they never would have survived at that muggle hospital…”

“Why were they in a muggle hospital? Their mother was young but she was definitely a witch.” Draco asked, confused.

“She must have run away from home; she was nowhere near a wizarding community when she took her life. She was found by muggles, and they tried to save her; they rushed her to the hospital in an ambulance. They tried to save her, but it just wasn’t enough.” Harry explained.

“I owe Severus a great debt for saving them.” he found his eyes drawn back to the face of the baby in his arms. She squirmed slightly, opening her eyes, gazing up at him. A smile graced his face. “Oh… her eyes are so blue!” he murmured, clearly falling in love with the baby.

“They may change over time… I hope they’re like yours.” Harry said. “We’re going to have our hands full.”

“And a house full…” he smiled at Harry. “We’ve finally got our family!”

“You know what they say, Draco… Be careful what you ask for; you just might get it.”

“I don’t care; our house has been too empty for too long. Its like the house has been simply waiting for them. I can’t wait to hear it full of the voices of children…”

Harry kissed him. “It seems like we’ve been waiting a lifetime.” he agreed.

Draco returned the kiss, and then looked back down at the baby, his smile fading somewhat as a realization of the truth dawned on him. He lifted his eyes back up and gazed at Harry, his eyes full of
questions and worry. “These two aren’t all of them, are they?” He asked softly. “There’s more than just them and Angel, surely…”

Harry nodded; there was no use in hiding the truth any longer. “You’re right; there are more. I’m hoping we can find them all. And we were not the only ones used in this scheme; there are other fathers out there who have no idea they have offspring.”

“Oh Merlin.” Draco murmured. “Let me guess. All pureblood wizards?”

“Yes. Traced back by paternal lines only, I understand.”

“Four is going to be quite enough to handle; how are we going to deal with more? How can we care for all of them properly?”

“You know, Draco…” Lucius started. “Your mother and I are more than capable of raising these two; in fact, even Severus himself has said that we’ve done quite an impressive job with them…” He couldn’t help but put in his bid to keep the babies.

“Lucius!” Narcissa interrupted him.

“It IS true, Cissa!” he defended.

“Fallen in love with them, have you father?” Draco smiled softly.

“How can I not, son? They look so much like you.”

“They are beautiful.” he sighed contentedly and his father agreed.

“No decision has to be made immediately anyway; we will be here for a few days, at least.” Harry said.

Lucius looked at his son. “There will be no debating this subject; you and Angel at the very least will be remaining under my personal protection until this is all settled. And of course, you can stay as well Potter.” He added with a smirk.

“Thank you father.”

“Yes, Lucius. Thank you. I’ll feel much better knowing they are safe.”

Narcissa rose to her feet gracefully. “Come now, my handsome men. It is time the kittens were laid down to rest.” she smiled at her husband and son.

“They’re so sleepy.” Draco smiled.

“And little Sev has calmed; perhaps he can finally get sleep now.” Lucius said, moving to delicately lay his grandson in his bed.

Harry rose and helped Draco up, following him to the crib where he laid Lillian beside her brother. Draco touched each as if still convincing himself that they were real, and then he drew his hand away with clear reluctance to allow them to rest.

“Angel is going to be so excited.” Harry smiled.

“Yes; she’ll be a wonderful big sister.”

“Have you two eaten yet?” Narissa asked, turning to lead them out. “We tend to alter our schedules
about the children’s meals and naptimes now.”

Draco shook his head. “No, we haven’t; I was waiting for Harry. I did feed Angel her supper hours ago.”

“Come along then, and dine with us.” She offered. Harry slipped his arm about Draco as they followed Narcissa to the door.

“Coming, father?” Draco asked.

“In a moment, son.” he said. He was only half paying attention to Draco, adjusting the blankets over the babies with obsessive fussiness.

“He’s grown quite attached to them in these past days…” Narcissa said as they moved through the mansion to the dining room.

Draco chuckled softly. “It’s easy to get attached to little babies… Was he like this when I was a baby? I don’t remember much of him when I was a child.”

Narcissa sighed softly. “He does not speak of his own childhood, but I know it was not pleasant. I think he tried to stay away as much as he could so he would not repeat the things that happened to him. He was away quite a bit when you were a baby. He missed so much of your youth I think he regrets it now.”

“He missed it all?”

“Quite a bit of it, yes, and our home felt so lonesome and empty before the kittens came.”

“It must be very lonely in this big place.” Harry said softly. “Like you’re the only living thing on earth…”

“It’s not so bad at night, when you’re in your own room. It’s good to feel that way when you’re lying down to rest. But during the day…” she sighed.

“I’d go crazy in a big place like this.”

“I made do chasing the house elves about the place.” Draco grinned softly.

“Oh, it’s not so bad at all when there are children in it… why do you think I love it so much when Draco comes to visit?” she smiled.

A house elf popped into view the moment they stepped into the dining room. “Shall I serve, Missus?” it asked.

“Yes. But hold Lucius’ until he comes to join us.” She nodded.

“Master is with young master.” the elf replied. “Young master is being very cranky all day long.”

“Yes, and check in on little Angel as well.” She instructed. “Take her some warm milk if she’s having trouble sleeping, and come tell us if she is still awake.”

“Yes mistress!” The elf piped in its squeaky voice, bowed, then popped out of view. Dinner appeared upon the table on fine silver dishes; a lovely spread of roast beef, potatoes, vegetables, soup and salad with fresh bread and butter.

“Come, son, that child you carry must be ravenous by now…”
“This looks absolutely wonderful.” he sighed, picking up his fork as he took a seat.

“Eat all you wish my dear.” she smiled warmly.

Draco looked up, pausing before he put the first forkful of roast beef in his mouth. “What’s for pudding?”

She laughed softly. “Anything you wish, of course.”

Draco smiled happily. “Um; something rich and decadently creamy.”

“He’s had a penchant for cheesecake lately.” Harry chuckled.

“Then that is what he shall have.”

“I’d noticed your friend Ronald Weasley brought that to dinner the other night.” Lucius commented as he strolled into the dining room to join them at the table.

“Oh yes; that was delicious!” Draco agreed. “We need to find out where he bought it, Harry… I’d love more of that.”

“It was rather tasty, but I must admit; I did enjoy the cookies more.” Lucius commented in a slightly aloof tone as he moved to a seat.

“Cookies, Lucius?” Narcissa asked curiously.

“Angel wishes to make some for you, you know.” Draco smiled at his father.

“I’m sure they’ll be delicious.”

“She talks about you all the time.” Draco told him. “She tells all her dolls and plushies about her wonderful Nonno.”

“Of course; the girl is very astute and clever…” Lucius said, unabashed.

“…and knows when she has someone who loves her.” Narcissa added with a smile.

Harry smiled softly, listening to the conversation about his daughter and felt he had to speak up.

“Thank you, Lucius and Narcissa.” he said.

“For?” Lucius prompted, lifting an eyebrow at him questioningly.

“You’ve given Angel something I have never had. A family that loves her.”

“No need for thanks regarding Angel; she’s given me something I never had, and never realized I needed.” Lucius assured, eating lightly. “She will never be wanting for anything in her life if I have anything to do with it.”

Hermione paced in her living room, fury bubbling in the depths of her soul. She snarled and growled, voicing every curse and epithet she knew and directing every ounce of her venom at
Severus Snape. How dare he tell her she was being useless…? She went out of her way to get those files today, put herself in danger, put the whole case in danger of being blown, and he was telling her that it wasn’t enough?! That self-righteous bastard; he didn’t exactly have a clean slate behind him either! He hadn’t done that much in her eyes to help the cause of the Order of the Phoenix, but he wasn’t looked down upon.

She stopped, frowning as the fury suddenly drained out of her, something dawning in her mind. “Oh. Wait…” She murmured, then turned and snatched a notepad off the desk, then moved to sit at the bar, frowning in thought. Something simply didn’t add up… oh Merlin. Why hadn’t she ever noticed before?

She knew how much was put into each ‘sample’ that was set aside for each attempt at pregnancy. For each donor who wished to become a parent, male donations were encouraged to be twenty samples or more. Each attempt at implantation would now involve five to seven embryos… She knew that she had placed thirty-five samples into storage; she had used one for her friend and Angel had been the result. That meant thirty-four should be remaining.

Damn it, why hadn’t she gotten up to look at that stupid screen? She needed to know exactly how many attempts had been made with Harry’s donation and she hadn’t saved those files on her computer. She remembered using Harry’s, but the donor list showed they had only two samples left. Where were they all going? Draco’s as well… there couldn’t be that many babies out there, and she hadn’t been cranking out babies like some kind of baby mill. It simply didn’t add up!

Something else was going on. She started making the special donor babies the year that Angel had been born; that was five years ago. They hadn’t had success right away but there had only been a few children; no more than two or three a year at most with all of the samples. The amount of samples that were missing was a huge red flag. She scowled, angry at herself for not seeing it. Pansy probably thought it was funny that she was in the dark about it, too. That harpy! Well; she’d just have to turn on the light, wouldn’t she? She set her jaw determinedly, then paused a moment as another thought crashed into her reality and thoughts.

Ron. She was going to have to do something about Ron…

Once she had everything squared away, then she could dive into this mess and find out exactly what it was that Pansy was really hiding; maybe even whom she was working with. It wouldn’t matter too much if she were hurt or killed in the attempt; she knew what she had to do now. And she was the only one who could do it. She glanced at the magical tracing device on her wrist; she felt like she was under house arrest but it would be safe enough to go to the Ministry. She knew she had to protect Ron and there was only one way she could think of to do it. She went to clean up, and then went to floo to the Ministry.

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Ron opened the door. “Oh… Hermione!” he murmured, stepping back to allow her inside Charlie’s house. “Come in…” he said, unsure of her reason to visit.

“Oh, Ron…!” she moved to give him a brief hug but he held onto her, holding her close. She relaxed in his arms a moment. “I’ve missed you… how have you been?” she murmured.

He breathed in the scent of her, sighing softly. Merlin he’d missed her! “I’ve been worried, really worried.” he admitted in a soft voice. He felt her push at him and with extreme reluctance he let her
go. She moved inside and he closed the door, following her.

“How is Rose?”

“She misses you horribly. She keeps asking me what she did wrong to make you leave us and I’m kind of wondering the same thing myself. She’s out tonight at her friend Arianda’s house. They’re practicing for a school play and is going to stay over, since there’s a teacher’s holiday tomorrow.” he followed her into the sitting room. “So what brings you? It’s been days… when can I come back home? You said it was only going to be for a little while.”

Hermione sat down slowly with an expression on her face Ron just could not read. She waited until Ron ran down in his questions and quieted to listen to her answers. “I’m in a lot of trouble, Ron; I’ve hurt a lot of people. I… I’m really not sure how I got mixed up in it all.”

“I wish I knew.” He answered softly. He needed her to understand he knew about it all. He took a seat in the chair beside hers, so he could reach her and touch her.

“I’ve destroyed my relationship with Harry; he hates me. And he has every right to.” she said quietly. “I love you Ron. I never meant to hurt you and Rose.” her eyes were moist with tears but she did not – would not – let them come.

“What made you decide enough was enough?” Ron asked, leaning forward with his elbows on his knees, clasping his hands together to keep them from shaking.

“Pansy. She wants you.” She said softly.

He looked confused. “What? Why the hell would she want me?” he asked.

“She wanted me to harvest you. To get your sperm like she harvests other people… to sell… she’d already sold some, in fact.”

“And that’s what made you stop? You refused to harvest me? What makes me so different from anyone else?” he asked, frowning.

“I never harvested any, Ron, not one drop; except at the clinic, in normal operations. And there she’d use the sperm that was left after the successful pregnancies. I never harvested to use for… for sale like that.” she answered. Ron slipped one hand up on her shoulder, his touch warm and comforting. Hermione took a shaky breath and reached into her bag, pulling out some papers. “This isn’t going to end well, Ron. I… I’m going to go to Azkaban. I don’t know for how long; all you need to do is sign these and everything is yours, and Rosie’s. There are two vaults at Gringott’s, and…”

“What are those papers?” Ron asked, eyeing the papers, sitting up slightly.

“Divorce papers.” She whispered.

Ron snatched them from her hand and immediately threw them aside is if they were poison. “No…! No, I won’t do that! Damn it I love you!”

Hermione felt the tears welling again and she fought them. “Ron, you don’t understand! I’m going to prison. I don’t know if I’ll ever get out but I want to know that you’re free… I want to let you go; please…”

“I didn’t spend thirteen years as your husband to just drop it all because something bad comes up. For better or for worse, that’s what I said at our wedding. I didn’t say it casually, that was my binding vow! I’m not going to give you up. You are my wife, no matter what!”
She trembled, but did not look at him; she couldn’t bring herself to. “It’s the only way. I don’t want you and Rosie dragged through all this. You have to think about Rosie; we have to protect her. And you deserve to be happy; to have a life without me… please… sign the damned papers…”

“I’m already involved in this mess. You told me Pansy’s after me for my sperm, you think she’s going to give up and not have a go at me? She will, sometime or another. Signing those papers isn’t going to free me from our marriage, Hermione, and it won’t get me out of this situation, no matter what you say!” Ron said, pointing an accusing finger at the pile of papers lying next to the fireplace.

Hermione took a shaky breath. “…But it will save you both from the legal entanglements…”

“No.”

“But I want to…”

“No!” Ron said, scowling at her, looking betrayed. “You’re my wife! Damn it, Hermione, I didn’t marry you on a whim. You want to let me go because you LOVE me? What kind of Hippogriff shit is that? If you loved me half as much as you say you’d let ME make this decision!” he said in an accusing tone.

“The old saying is ‘if you love something let it go…’” she began.

“…and if it loves you, it will return. Well damn it I don’t bloody want to be let go!” he snapped.

She bowed her head, silent for several long moments. Ron rose from his chair and paced away a few steps restlessly, trying to wait for her to decide what to do. “You… you don’t understand what I’m involved in…” she said softly.

“I do so. Some of it, anyway. Tell me the truth Hermione. Did you hurt Harry on purpose? Were you trying to torture him and Draco?”

She looked horrified. “No!”

“Did you mean to make kids that no one knew they were fathering?”

“I didn’t, not at first… well, all but Angel, but…”

“Then I don’t care. You’re my wife. You’re brilliant, you always have been. I don’t know why you’re acting so thick right now. Are you going to let ME make my own decisions or not?”

Hermione hesitated a moment more, then looked at him with tortured eyes. “What do you want to do, Ron?” she asked softly.

He bent and snatched the papers up off the floor, turned his back on her and threw them directly into the flames. He watched them burn for a long moment before he spoke. “I’m your husband. Our marriage isn’t defined by any stupid license or piece of paper. No paper drawn up by a lawyer or any other legal idiot is going to change the fact that I’m married to you. You’re not going to shove me away to protect me.” He said firmly.

She sighed softly. “All right, all right…” she agreed in a soft tone. “But you have to agree to something as well.”

“Agree to what?”

This was going to be horribly hard for her to ask of him, and harder for him to accept. “I don’t want
you to wait for me.”

He looked her, shocked and surprised. “What?”

“I don’t want you to hold yourself to me… I told you. I’m going to end up paying for all I’ve done, and some pretty powerful families have been manipulated in all of this. I don’t want you to wait for me. Find someone else while I’m gone…”

He shook his head. “I can’t do that, I…”

“You can and you must. I know how you are, Ronnie.” she looked up at him and even now, through the shock and disbelief in his eyes she could see his need for her. “You need to be loved. You need to be taken care of. You’re not happy if you’re not, and I need you to be happy so Rosie can be happy.”

“You don’t know what you’re asking of me!”

“I know exactly what I’m asking.” She answered. “Don’t think this is easy for me; I have been just as loyal to you as you have been to me… well… except for Viktor. But that was only once, and before we were married.”

“Did you have to bring him into it?” Ron said, turning his back for a moment, very confused. She WANTED him to find a lover?

“I’m sorry, I shouldn’t have mentioned him.” She sighed. “But I still want you to find someone else.” Hermione said, her eyes moving to the mantle just behind Ron.

A painting of Blaise with his arm about Charlie was on the mantle; she had long known of the feelings that the dark-skinned wizard had held for her husband and knew that it had been only chance that had landed her as Ron’s chosen partner and not Blaise.

“Who?” Ron mumbled. “I’m not exactly LOOKING for anyone else!”

“Someone will come. Someone will be there to catch you when you fall. I know someone who would probably love to comfort you, if you will just… let them. Don’t be blind to them. Be open. And they may be closer than you think.” she said softly. The painted image of Blaise grinned and winked at her.

“Who?” he demanded of her, turning back to face her fully, looking confused. “I don’t know of anyone…”

“You’ve always thought he was interesting; and I don’t mind Ron. I really don’t…”

He hesitated, and then glanced at the painting which grinned more broadly and winked again. “You don’t mean Blaise?”

She shrugged. “Just… listen. And be open. I will not have you lonesome, Ronald… I need to know you’re taken care of.”

Ron sighed, turning back to her. “I’ll try, okay? I can’t promise. I don’t want anyone else. I want you.”

“And I’ll be gone for years.” She said in response, looking up at him. “I’m asking you; I’m TELLING you to find someone to make you happy while I’m gone.”
“I’ll try… As long as I can be here for you when you come home.” He said softly, nodding in reluctant agreement. “I’ll try, that’s all I can say. I’ll manage somehow.”

She pushed herself out of the chair and back to her feet. “I… I should go… I have things to do.”

“I’d much rather you stay tonight.” He said softly, reaching to touch her.

She stepped back; she couldn’t use the time, not even to reconcile with her husband. “I can’t. I don’t have any time left…”

“More secrets?” he asked, reluctantly allowing her to move away from him for a moment.

“No. I swear to you, Ron; I’ll tell you absolutely everything, every last detail. But I need to do this alone.” She said, taking a deep breath. “Tonks is working with me, and so is Harry. If I really need you I know I can count on you.”

“Bloody well right.” He said firmly, and then moved to her and pulled her into his arms, holding her tight. “You be careful, Hermione; I know some of what you’re involved in and I don’t want you getting yourself hurt.”

“I can’t promise I won’t get hurt, but I can promise you I’ll make things right.” Hermione said, feeling worlds better. She wasn’t losing everything. Ron tilted her face up and pressed his lips to hers in a soft, loving kiss.

She returned it a moment, and then reluctantly pushed free, slipping out of his arms. “No… Ron, if you start that I don’t think I’ll be able to leave. I have to go.” She said, glancing at the time. “Tell Rosie that I love her… I don’t know if I’ll be able to get back to tell her myself.” She said, starting for the door.

“All right…” he murmured in a husky tone. “I love you Hermione; don’t you ever forget that.”

“I won’t…” she said, hurrying out though her body ached to have him hold her, just for a few moments more… she couldn’t stay. She had to get to work and figure this thing out.

Hermione pulled into the parking lot of the medical clinic; it was nearly empty at this hour. Third shift personnel would be here, tending to the newborn babies in the clinic wing. That wasn’t where she was headed. She might have to deal with a security guard or two, but nothing she could not handle. Out of habit she reached to where her wand normally rested, remembering that she did not have it any longer since she had surrendered it. Well, there was nothing for it; she would just have to be clever enough to muddle through without it.

She moved to the building, sliding her pass card through the access slot on the door; the little light flashed then went steady green and she pulled the door open, moving inside. As she expected, there was a security guard at the desk… what was his name, Tony? No; it was Antonio.

“Good evening, Mrs. Weasley. You’re working late again?” Antonio, an aging muggle security guard, smiled at her good-naturedly. “You know, you shouldn’t oughta work so damned much. Not good for ya…” he advised.
“I know… but I couldn’t sleep. I have far too much on my mind.” she gave him a fond smile. “I may as well be here working rather than pacing about my own room.”

“I suppose… should I bring you some coffee in about an hour?”

“No, don’t bother about me. Just do your regular shift. I won’t be in your way.” She assured, moving on past the desk.

“You never are.” He sighed a little melodramatically.

Hermione moved on into her office first, pulling out the little pamphlet that Pansy updated each time a sample was used or a donation added. She scowled to see Zabini’s information there now, ready to sell to the next customer. She wanted this to end before Pansy could manage to profit from THAT attempt.

She’d remembered right; Harry’s said he had two samples left, and Draco only eight. She slipped into Pansy’s office, using her access keys with a new memory stick in hand; she copied over the files one more time then slipped out again leaving the office precisely how she’d found it. She’d check the numbers once she got home to verify her theory, but she was already sure what she’d find. Ten to fifteen samples gone from each.

She flipped on the lights in the lab, moving into the silent room. She took up a notepad and began to do a simple basic inventory of every single vial of liquid or powder, every potion, chemical and other item that was in stock in the cabinets. Antonio came by to visit with her but she doggedly continued to work, making notes and he finally grew bored and wandered off to flirt with the nurses over in the clinic.

When Blaise returned a few hours later to his home, he found the house seemingly empty. Charlie wasn’t due in for hours; he was working a late shift. “Ron?” he called, moving through the house. He found Ron upstairs, dead asleep, a sleeping potion on the table beside him. There was also a note, telling Blaise and Charlie that Rosie was staying at a friend’s house tonight.

He sighed softly, wondering what the hell had happened to make him dose himself again… he started to tuck him in then saw he was still wearing his shoes. With a soft grin, he moved to take his shoes and socks off, undressing him like he would a child, tugging his slacks off but leaving him in his shirt to sleep. He then covered him up with the blanket and gave him a soft chaste kiss on the cheek. “Sleep well, Ronnie.” he said softly. He took a moment to stroke his cheek and run his fingers through that thick red hair. He turned away and sighed, shutting out the light on his way out. He would never take advantage of him, and Ron was so loyal he’d never have a chance with him.

Blaise went about his normal bedtime routine, showering, brushing out his hair and brushing his teeth, and he was about to climb between his sheets when he heard the phone ring. He answered it, a little cross for the call coming in so late. “Hello?”

“Oh, good; its you… Blaise, is Ron still awake?”

Blaise recognized Hermione’s voice and his ire grew. She had to have done something or said something to make Ron upset. “No, he’s used a potion to make himself unconscious. What the hell happened?”
“I happened. It’s quite complicated; can I come over and explain?”

“I suppose…”

“I’ll floo over; I still don’t have my wand. I’ll just be a few moments…” she said then hung up quickly.

Blaise slipped back to the guest room to check on Ron; he was still sleeping soundly. He then trotted down the stairs, pulling on a short robe over his bare chest and sleeping pants. He arrived in the living room just as Hermione stepped out of the green flames.

She looked exhausted but invigorated at the same time and worried as well. “Is he all right?”

“Sound asleep, looks like he drank a bit before he went to bed too.” he scowled, folding his arms. He’d give her a chance; he’d at least listen. “You came to explain, so explain.”

“I did a stupid thing and he wouldn’t let me go through with it, but I may need to go ahead and do it anyway. Actually, I came to ask a favor of you…” she said, looking down.

“A favor…? What kind of a favor?” Blaise asked, unsure of her intentions. “What could you want of me?”

“I’m going to be gone for a long time… I know you cared deeply for Ron back in school and I have a feeling you still do. I want you to take care of him for me.” She said softly.

“I… what?” he asked, startled. She couldn’t possibly be asking him what he thought she was!

“You and Charlie have always had an open relationship… I mean… Well, Harry and Draco told me that Charlie doesn’t mind you having other partners. Please Blaise; Ronny will go mental if he’s all alone. He needs to be taken care of…” she said, gazing up at him.

“You want me to… but… you’ve never had an open relationship. You don’t know what you’re asking of me…”

“I know precisely what I’m asking. This is the first time I feel like I’ve been clearheaded in months. You and I both know I won’t be able to take care of him; I need someone to. Please, Blaise. I want to have everything squared away before I’m put away; Ron won’t consider a divorce, I’ve asked him and he was furious with me…”

“I’m not going to seduce your husband! Ron would never cheat on you!”

“Its not seduction; I know he still thinks you’re gorgeous. And its not cheating on me either, if I’m asking… begging you, really… to keep him happy for me.” she said softly. “I couldn’t bear thinking of him all alone for years.”

Blaise sighed. “You’ll have to tell him; I’m not going to. He’ll think I’m trying to steal him from you.”

“Loyal and true, that’s my Ron.” she smiled ever so faintly, and then sighed. “I’ve already told him to look for someone else. I even tried to point him in your direction. Just… make it clear that you’re interested. You’ll have to be REALLY clear; he’s a little thick about relationships and sexual things… and… well, let nature take its course I suppose…”

“He’ll always be welcome with Charlie and me, but I won’t come between you. It will have to be his choice.”
“Of course. Besides, it would be more of a sharing than interfering. If I know Ron he won’t ever be with Charlie; he’s his brother. And he’d never want to end up interfering between you two either.”

“Charlie’s usually too tired to even think of anyone else when I get through with him.” Blaise grinned. “No worries there, I take good care of my dragon-tamer.”

Hermione looked curious for a moment, then nodded thoughtfully. “I forget about your Veela blood; you don’t look Veela at all…” she said.

He chuckled. “You haven’t seen me when someone threatens my Charlie.” He returned.

“True.” she agreed, glancing at the time. Nearly midnight already! “If I get to return, we could even continue to share. He’s off so often with his tournaments and you’ll be with him… he wears me out when he returns from his trips sometimes.” she said with a wan smile.

“I’d like that.” Blaise smiled at her. “And Hermione? Keep strong. You can get through this. You just have to keep your head up and stay strong. Don’t let anyone get the best of you.”

“That’s really hard to do, Blaise…” she admitted, turning back toward the fireplace.

“You’re a damned clever witch. Use your mind.” He said firmly, following her to the fireplace and watching as she activated the floo.

“I’m working on that; thank you so much, Blaise.” She said, and then was gone in a flare of green flames.
Lucius settled down in the den after everyone at back at the manor had settled for the night. He joined Severus Snape and his partner Tonks and relaxed with a drink in his hand. “So, Severus…” he said in a thoughtful tone. “Do you think we have enough to arrest Parkinson?”

Severus glanced at him and smirked at the perseverance of his old friend. Despite the little snippets of information he was grudgingly given, he had clearly discovered who they believed to be behind it all. It had only been a matter of time; the head of the Malfoy family was not, after all, a fool. “I believe there is enough to arrest.”

“Arrest, yes: but not enough to convict.” Tonks sighed softly. “She has been quite clever in her manipulations. She’s been careful to use only Hermione’s wand when she’s done the most criminal acts; that way she will be held completely responsible for everything that has been done, unless we can gain proof of the fact that Pansy was the one actually performing the magic. Even evidence presented by pensieve can be tampered with, after all.”

“Very true.” Lucius agreed.

“Dora believes, as do I, that the best method to prove who is truly behind this is to get Parkinson to show her hand; to catch her red-handed harvesting ‘donations’ from unconsenting wizards.”

“Makes sense.” Lucius said, nodding. “What is to be done about all of the children? Potter’s offspring and the Malfoy children, of course… do we remove them from the people who purchased them?”

Nymphadora sipped her juice. “Temporarily, all will be taken from their families.” She said plainly. “It’s the only plan of action that will ensure we get them all. If we get proof of the innocence of the mothers and the proper rearing of the children, the children will be returned to their families.”

“Of course, all documentation must be examined, and signatures analyzed, and there will of course be testimony by veritaserum. Each of the children must be individually examined to ensure they are not being abused before they can be returned.” Snape answered.

“It must be done all at once; we’ve got to get every one of the Potter babies at the same time or they’ll vanish.” Lucius said softly.

She smirked at his comment. “We’ve thought of that already; we’ve got the addresses of each of the children. We’ve even got a plan to remove each and every one of the babies generated by this scheme at the same moment; including the mothers who are still carrying children.” Nymphadora answered.

Lucius eyed her. She may have been in Hufflepuff, but there was quite a sharp mind under that insane shock of pink hair. That was probably what attracted Snape to her; he seriously doubted it was her penchant for odd clothing and the color pink. “I assume you have a plan to get Parkinson to show her hand?” he asked, sipping at his drink. He’d taken the time to track down the brand of whiskey that Harry had served him, Tullamore Dew. Rather difficult to find in the regular muggle shops; they’d had to order it in for him. He had brought a bottle over to Severus this evening but he was being much more careful about the amount he consumed tonight.

“Naturally. We’re setting it all in motion tonight, if Harry gives us the go-ahead. I’m sure you have all the potions I’ll need to get the information I need, Sev?” Nymphadora asked.
I’ve been brewing and stockpiling veritaserum since all this began.” He said calmly.

Tonks smiled warmly at him. “I knew I could count on you, Sev.”

“There should never even be a shadow of a doubt.” He agreed calmly.

She gazed over at Snape, still seated in her favorite squishy chair. “It won’t be until after we take Parkinson into custody that we take Mrs. Weasley into custody.”

“I have been told by a contact at the Ministry that she has filed for a divorce; she bears close watching. Waiting may be a mistake; she may become a flight risk.” Lucius informed her.

Nymphadora shrugged, completely unconcerned with the possible threat of an attempted run by the younger witch. “I really doubt it, considering the amount of work she’s done to help us. Besides, it doesn’t matter what paperwork she does; she has one of my trackers on. I’ll be able to find her anywhere she goes; so she won’t get far.”

He arched an eyebrow at her. “And she put this on willingly?”

“Yes. She’s done everything we’ve asked.” She said firmly.

Lucius looked thoughtful. “Hm. and when will all of this happen?”

“By the end of the week; I can’t be more specific than that. I really do want to get all this over with.” Tonks answered in a weary tone.

Severus sipped the whiskey delicately. “And this plan you discussed with Potter last night?”

She shrugged. “Not sure if that’s going to happen at all. Harry needs to talk to the other two ‘targets’ first and see if they’re willing to cooperate.”

He wasn’t about to let it rest at that. “And you? Tell me she doesn’t have another night like you spent with her planned.” Snape eyed her. It had taken her days to return to her normal self, and he did NOT want her exposed to that again. He would have to personally kill whoever hurt her like that ever again.

Tonks made a disgusted noise at that thought. “Gads, no. She hasn’t scheduled anything. And I’m not going if she does.”

“Good. I wouldn’t allow you to go, anyway.” He grumbled.

“I’m glad Remus brought you into our lives.” she gave him a soft smile. “You’ve been very good for us.” she unwound herself from her chair, rose and moved over to him, plopping down on the couch beside him and snuggling close as she slipped her arms about him. Lucius smirked, watching them.

Severus still felt rather odd about his relationship with her, but he did not draw away from her. “You and Remus have been very good for me as well. I’m certain I would never have survived without you. Things were out of control for a long while there.”

“Yes, but together, we got by.”

“True…” he said, resting one arm about her.

Hermione gazed at the list she had of potions. She knew the purpose of most of them in the lab:
Fertility potions, strengthening solutions, blood-replenishing potions, calming draughts, magical cleaning solutions, pepper-up potions; these all made sense in the day to day operations of the clinic. But she saw no practical purpose in having a large multiple-dose bottle of Gregory’s Unctuous Unction. That stuff was only used to force people to like you. Was that what Pansy was using to get people to trust her? That was one thing that could work to help her get close to Ron. She had to tell Nymphadora about that. There was one other potion she had never seen before; stored behind all the others and sealed in an almost hidden compartment.

She donned gloves before touching the compartment and pulled out the potion bottle, frowning at it. What was this? She’d never seen a potion quite this shade of crystalline blue with a faint opalescent sheen on the top. She took the bottle and poured a tiny dollop, just enough for analysis, into another vial. She took that to her desk and pulled out the glass beaker that served as her cauldron while at work. Before long she had an identification potion brewing that even Professor Snape would have approved of. She began to identify each of the items that made up the unknown potion. As the list developed, she thought at first it was one she knew how to brew herself; the Strengthening Solution. But the ingredient of Salamander blood never surfaced. Instead, one she knew was actually harmful was identified. “Kreshweed Fibers…?” she murmured, looking at the tiny shreds that had given the potion its opalescent sheen.

The properties of that particular plant fiber were not desired in any potion that would be given to any wizard or witch; especially a pregnant one. The main purpose of THAT plant was to drain a magical person of their power. As a wizard’s pregnancy was maintained by his own magic, it was very possible that a good dose of this could have been used to force the miscarriage. It would not be something that anyone would think to look for either. “Pansy, you’re such a devious heartless bitch!” she whispered. She carefully took the bottle that had levels lower than the others and slipped it into a baggie then into her bag. There might be trace evidence on it to indicate who had actually handled the item. She bit her lip, thinking hard. The missing samples had to have gone somewhere. Oh…! Oh, Merlin… she turned her eyes to the personal workstation of the only full-time and permanent lab technicians here in the center. August Bebel.

He was a squib that Pansy’s father had taken a particular interest in. A ‘charity case’, Pansy called him with a particularly nasty sneer. She never had treated him with any sort of respect behind his back, but was quite standoffish and basically ignored him when he was around.

He had been attending specialized classes in various countries; Switzerland, Japan, Germany, America and even here in Britain. Hermione had been taking many of the same classes but had not begun her overseas classes as of yet. With her daughter she had been unable to take advantage of those, but he had done it all and was at least four years ahead of her in studies. And he was the only other one that had any knowledge about the process of fertilization and gene replacement within the clinic. He was the one performing the “special” processes; he had to be! She’d never thought about what he did here; he was always assisting everyone and put out as much work as everyone else. He never talked to anyone and was always quietly working away.

Besides, the main spell that Pansy used for thieving the sperm was a German spell, she was certain of that; and where else would she have learned of that? Probably picked it up on the same trip with her father about five years ago that had resulted in the arrival of Bebel and his immediate appointment at the clinic.

She moved to his station and turned on his computer, only now realizing just how much specialized equipment he had: his own cryogenics freezer; several sets of Petri dishes and other tools, all of the absolute highest quality; a computer system of a much higher capacity than hers, oh yes. Pansy might
look down at him but it was clear someone… Pansy’s father…? It had to be. He had to be the one behind all of this, somehow; but what the hell were they up to? She used her administrative password to open the system and access his files.

She pulled up file after file, reading the complex and cryptic notes that she doubted anyone else could understand. She didn’t spend the time needed to read them; she knew that August usually came in early and it was already past four. She began printing off file after file.

While the files were printing, she began inventorying everything in his personal storage, feeling that she had to get this done as quickly as possible and leave little or no trace of her having done so. She didn’t know when they were going to get Pansy or when they were going to close down the lab and she didn’t want to alert anyone to the fact that she was figuring out what was REALLY going on.

In the cryo freezer she found several samples with coded identifications; they were eggs, and at least two dozen embryos. Whatever he was working on was an ongoing project. The information she needed was in those blasted files. She glanced at the printer. Nearly out of paper! She moved over quickly and refilled the printer, then glanced at some of the printouts. What she read was disturbing. Complete removal of the female DNA; that she knew how to do. But complete erasure of any DNA? Hermione suddenly snatched up all her papers and stuffed them in the rucksack she’d brought along; she had to study all this and make sure of what she thought she was seeing, then she needed to contact Tonks. If it was what she thought they were trying to do, the entire Wizarding World was in greater danger than if Voldemort had survived!

Draco moved down the hallway early the next morning; he wanted to have another glimpse of those precious little blonde babies. The room they had converted into a nursery was once Narcissa’s sitting room; she had moved her things to another room farther down the hall so they could have a room with a door directly connecting to their bedroom the better to monitor the babies. He came round the edge of the door and stepped into the early morning sunlight spilling from the room and stopped.

Lucius Malfoy was already in the room, and Draco could see he was in the middle of tending to one of the babies. His father was dressed in his pajamas, wearing a robe left untied and open. His hair was drawn back and bound by a black ribbon at the nape of his neck, and he was… oh Merlin. He was changing the baby. He was actually changing his nappy himself!

Draco watched as his father tended to the baby, dropping the used nappy in a basket without ever losing physical contact with the infant. He spoke in a soft and tender mumble to the child; not the imitation baby-talk that most grownups seemed to use when talking to infants, but a soft dialogue, treating the child as if it could understand every word he spoke. The baby began to whimper and Lucius whispered “Hush now, little one… I’m here…” he said as he scooped up the baby and held her in his arms, cradling her closely in one elbow as he walked slowly from one side of the nursery to the other. He began to hum a soft soothing song as he picked up a bottle and began to feed the tiny girl.

Draco was sure he’d never seen his father so enamored of anything; he was clearly smitten with these little ones. He glanced about as he felt Harry’s arms slip about him, giving Harry a soft smile. “Morning baby.” Harry whispered, kissing Draco’s neck.

“Morning love.” Draco answered, snuggling back against him, his eyes going immediately back to his father in fascination.

“We’re watching your father?” Harry murmured softly.
“Yes; I’ve never seen him so focused on anything.” Draco murmured. “Even when I was little, I rarely saw any kind of attention from him.” he said softly. Harry held him, letting Draco work his way through what he was thinking. “Harry… I don’t want you to be angry with me…” he began.

The question rather surprised Harry. “Whatever would I be angry with you about?”

“Father needs a second chance.” He said softly.

“You mean…?”

“He loves them so; I’ve only met them. They’re so precious; such tiny things. Look how amazing he is with them…” he said in a quiet tone. “Both he and mum… the children need my parents as much as my parents need the children. They’ve given them new life, a purpose. We have Angel, and we have our son, and we’ll have more to fill our home before the month is out.”

“Where the twins live and who care for them is, as it always has been, your choice my dragon. I told Lucius that before. I meant it. So whatever decision you make, I will stand by you.”

“Thank you, Harry.” Draco smiled, contented.

Draco heard Harry laugh softly against his ear, his breath warming his neck. “You know, dragon; I never would have believed he was such an old softie. If I’d have known how deeply a baby would touch him, I’d have found a baby for him years ago.”

“Harry…!” Draco scolded with a soft laugh.

Lucius heard his son’s laughter and looked over, raising an eyebrow. “Something amuses you, son?” He asked, though most of his attention clearly remained on the baby.

“Not amusing; fascinating. I’ve never seen you with a baby before, father.”

He smirked at the comment. “Well, I have had practice.”

“You and Narcissa have done a fantastic job with them.” Harry smiled. Lucius settled the baby on his shoulder, patting her back to encourage her to burp.

“Have you fed them both already?” Draco asked, moving in.

“Yes; fed, bathed, and changed. I couldn’t sleep.” He shrugged.

Draco lifted the other baby into his arms. “They’re such sweet little things; barely a handful.”

His father laughed softly. “Oh, yes; very delicate and sweet… just remind yourself of that when it’s three in the morning and they’re both screaming their little lungs out, demanding to be fed.”

“I know it won’t be easy; I’ve never thought it would be, father.” Draco chuckled softly.

“It’s well worth all the work, though.” Harry added without hesitation.

“Indeed.” Lucius kissed the baby, who was drowsing after a healthy burp. “They are worth more than anything that money or power can buy.”

“Have you plans for today, Harry?” Draco asked, looking over at him.

He nodded after a moment. “I need to talk to Blaise and Ron too, later.”
“All right, but until then you’re all ours.”

“Daddy?” Angel murmured, moving up to join them, rubbing one eye sleepily. She stopped, staring at Lucius and Draco holding the tiny infants. Her face lit up with joy and she jumped up and down. “Oh Daddy, look! Daddy, Papa had TWO babies!” she squealed with delight.

Draco laughed. “No, honey; see?” he rubbed his round belly. “Look; your brother is still snug inside my tummy. These babies…” Draco glanced at his father. “These babies belong with Nonno and Nona.” he finished in a soft tone.

Lucius looked startled, then more pleased than his son had ever seen him before. “Son…” he said in a deeply heartfelt tone of gratitude and happiness. His son trusted him enough to give him a chance with these two.

“Nonno has babies?” she asked, running over to him. “Oh, Nonno! Can I see, please?”

Lucius moved over and sat in the rocking chair. “Come up, my own.” he smiled. She moved to him and clambered up onto his lap, gazing at the baby in rapt fascination as she sat down. He slipped a supporting arm about her. “You must meet my kittens.”

“But they’re not kittens, Nonno!” she giggled softly.

“Sometimes when they cry it sounds like a kitten.” he said, chuckling. “This one is a girl, and her name is Lillian Cassiopeia; and the little boy that your papa is holding is Remus Severus.”

“Oh I like their names, they’re very nice Nonno. Can I hold them please?”

Lucius helped her to hold the baby, his own arm around her and supporting them both. “There you are… see? Isn’t her hair fuzzy like a kitten?”

She stroked his head, eyes sparkling. “Oh… yes, it’s fuzzy but silky too. Like your hair, and Papa’s, Nonno.” she answered. “Can I please help you take care of them?”

Lucius smiled as he cuddled the children. “Yes, my own. You may help me care for them, but you must never pick them up by yourself… agreed?”

“Yes, Nonno, I promise; I know about babies. I promise I’ll be extra super careful and be really good.”

“And how did you get so smart, knowing about how to care for babies?”

She turned her pretty leaf-green eyes to the baby, stroking his hair gently. “I used to get in trouble if I touched any of the babies. They’d yell and scream so much at me.”

“The babies?” he asked, a bit confused about what the child was talking about.

“No, not the babies, the foster parents. The second family, the third and the fifth all had babies… I was never allowed to touch the babies but I still got to help. I fetched washrags and towels and they let me help take out the dirty nappies and clean up after the babies. Sometimes I even got to pick out what the babies would get to wear.” she said, smiling, and then her smile faded a bit. “I didn’t mean to be bad, but I couldn’t help it; I just wanted to touch them and show them I loved them too. Babies are so pretty Nonno…”

“She was in several foster homes since she entered the system.” Harry told his father-in-law in a soft tone.
“I see.” He answered, quite taken aback that anyone would make a child of four or five do all that work to assist in tending to infants. “Well, my Angel, you’re in my home now. You may touch the kittens all you like; it is a very good thing for them to know they are loved. And when they are bigger, you can all play together.”

“When will that be? Will they really want to play with me?” she looked up at him, her eyes sparkling.

“Of course they will, but they have much growing to do first.”

“Okay Nonno.” she said, looking back at the baby with pure love on her face. She leaned over and kissed the infant’s soft fuzzy head with delicate care. “I love you baby.” she said softly.

“Come, Angel. Let’s go get you some breakfast.” Draco said.

“Can’t I stay and help a little while with the babies, Papa?”

Lucius chuckled softly. “Now, Angel, I’ve fed and changed and bathed them already; they are ready to be laid down for a nap now. You will most certainly help me with them when they wake.”

“Promise, Nonno…? Promise for real…?” she said, eyes pleading for the truth.

“I give you my word, Angel. Upon my name and honor as a Malfoy. I will fetch you myself when they are due to be fed next time. Agreed?” he smiled reassuringly.

“Okay,” she handed the baby back with infinite care, then slipped down and moved to her father. Lucius’ smile faded a bit. The poor thing; so used to being lied to, to being betrayed… well she’d never have to worry about that from him. He would never tell this little girl a lie.

“Let’s get you ready for the day, shall we?” Harry smiled at her.

“Okay Daddy…” she slipped her hand into his. Harry and Draco moved off as Lucius gave his new son a kiss, placing him in the bed beside his sister.

Blaise couldn’t help but notice the mood that had hung about Ron all day long. He was much more withdrawn than normal when they arrived home from practice later that afternoon, though he had put an incredible amount of effort into his workout for the day. His efforts had greatly impressed the coach, and were noticed by everyone on the team. Positive comments and praise given to him for the work was just met with an offhanded shrug and a mumble; something was definitely bothering him.

“Would you like some tea, Ron?” Blaise offered. “I can put the kettle on…”

“Yeah… sure… thanks, mate. I gotta put my gear up…” He said softly then turned away to go to his borrowed room. He took an inordinate amount of time putting his gear away, taking time to clean each item before he placed it where it belonged. He then ensured that the entire room was put to rights; bed made and room spotless before he returned to the kitchen.

Blaise had waited for him, and had prepared a plate of small sandwiches and cookies, setting them on the table. Ron glanced at the food and sighed, finding he had little appetite. “Good practice today, eh?” he asked, attempting a harmless conversation as he poured some tea.

“Yes; I think we’ll actually have a shot at the cup this year.” Blaise agreed, frowning ever so slightly. He didn’t like that Ron had hardly eaten anything in nearly a week.
“Yeah.” Ron agreed, and then grinned faintly. “You know, Blaise, this is the closest I’ll have been to the World Cup since I watched it that third year of Hogwarts.” he said, eyes on his tea as he stirred in the milk and sugar he had added.

Blaise smiled at the memory. “I remember that game; I went with Draco.”

“I was so bloody excited about that stupid game. I must have been mad to obsess so much over Viktor Krum. All I wanted to do was watch him fly; I didn’t even really pay attention to the game. I didn’t even mind that the Irish beat the Bulgarians.” he admitted with a faint smile. “I remember seeing Draco; he said something or another that was typically suited to the prat he was at the time… I don’t remember seeing you there.”

“I saw you.” Blaise said, sipping his tea. “You were three levels above the Minister’s box, and three full sections east.”

“Yeah… I think you’re right. I really wasn’t paying attention…” he admitted.

“I think I watched you more than I watched the game.”

Ron looked at him, surprised. “You… what?”

Blaise smiled. “You were beautiful. You still are.”

“I’m really nothing special.” he said, blushing and looking confused… and something else. The redhead wizard laughed softly. “Compared to Harry and Draco, I’m really nothing to look at, you know.” he said softly, staring back at his cup of tea. “You’re the one who’s drop-dead gorgeous; and you’ve only gotten better looking over the years.” he said softly.

The dark-skinned wizard interrupted his self-deprecating diatribe. “Ron; I liked you from the first moment I saw you on the train to Hogwarts. Just because you don’t see it doesn’t mean that everyone around you can’t.”

“You did? I… thought you were really interesting too…” Ron admitted quietly. “But…” he shrugged and sighed. “It doesn’t matter. None of it does. You’re married, and you’re family.” he said, although Hermione’s words began to ring in his head. 'Keep your mind open, Ron. The one to get you through is closer than you think…'

Blaise slipped his hand over Ron’s. “Charlie would welcome you into our bedroom, Ron. You may not realize it, but you’ve always had a place with us.”

Ron gazed at the hand over his, his heart skipping a beat. “I… but… but Blaise, I can’t… I won’t… Charlie’s my brother…” he murmured, his face flushing.

“And why not?” A third voice spoke up, and Ron looked about sharply to see that Charlie had arrived home and had been listening to their conversation, leaning casually on the doorframe of the kitchen with a clear grin on his face.

Ron pulled his hand out from under Blaise’s, his blush deepening. “I… he’s yours, Charlie, he’s your husband!” He stammered, behaving as if he had been caught cheating, snogging or more right there on the kitchen table.

Charlie moved over to his brother. “You know, Ron…” he said, picking up a cookie and sitting down beside his brother at the table. “Let me tell you something about my chaser here. Blaise’s mum was a full-blooded Veela, and she put seven husbands in the ground. Just plumb wore them all out. And I’ll tell you that every one of them died a happy man.” he said with a fond grin at Blaise, who
winked and licked some nut spread off his finger. “My husband takes after her and I tell you, he’s more than I can handle most of the time.” He said conversationally, smirking slightly at how much his brother was blushing to hear such things.

“Well, I… I knew he had Veela in him.” he mumbled.

“And Veela are very demanding, extremely sexual beings.” Charlie went on. “That’s why we have such an open relationship, Blaise and I… because he’s just too much for this old Dragon-Tamer to handle. I wouldn’t mind a bit of help, keeping him happy.”

“You… you’re okay if we…?” he asked, looking slightly dazed and unsure about everything.

Charlie chuckled. “Okay with it? Merlin! When he comes home after two weeks on the road playing Quidditch, I have to take three days off work just to recover!”

Ron finally looked up at Blaise, who could see the shadow of desire in his eyes, greatly restrained. He was clearly unsure of the entire situation and how it would look to everyone. He attempted to quash it, lowering his eyes again. “But what about Mum and dad? I couldn’t, it wouldn’t be right, I…”

To his surprise, Charlie outright laughed. Ron looked up at Charlie, confused worse than before. “Mum and dad?” Charlie repeated, chortling.

“Well, yeah… you ARE my brother!”

“THEY’re the ones who suggested I have an open relationship!” his elder brother answered, taking a big bite of the cookie. “Bloody hell, Ron! I went to them in my first year of marriage to Blaise, hoping they’d have an answer to help me figure out how to keep up with him, what to do…”

“I didn’t realize I was wearing him out.” Blaise grinned sheepishly.

“It was mum who sat us down and talked to us both. She heard us both out, and then recommended we find another partner for Blaise, to help him to stay… well, sexually satisfied.”

He looked shocked by the revelation. “… mum?!”

“Yes, Mum. She’s taken every bit of our families and relationships without even a hiccup; dad had a little more trouble dealing with things from time to time. Oh, he’s accepted us without any problems now, but at first he wasn’t too thrilled with the idea of my bonding to a wizard.” Charlie explained. “It was also mum who noticed how you were always looking at Blaise during our big family get-togethers.”

“I didn’t… I mean…” Ron stammered

“Sure you did. But it’s all right, Ron; really. I know how sexy Blaise is even when he doesn’t try to turn on that Veela charm.” Charlie smirked. “And mum suggested that we ask you to be that partner for Blaise way back then. I was going to ask you the day you announced to the family that you were going to marry Hermione. I dropped the idea then. Neither of us wanted to get in the way of your new family.”

“Hermione said she wanted someone to take care of you. Who better than someone who is happily married but wants to ensure you stay happy?” Blaise asked softly. “Someone who cares for you and always has?” he reached out and brushed his hair back from his eyes. “You know, Ron… if you join us… you’ll never be alone again.”
“I don’t like to be alone.” he whispered, biting his lip, taking the cup and tea and holding it in both of his hands. “It hurts… when I’m alone.” He said softly.

Blaise rose and moved behind Ron, slipping his arms about his shoulders and giving his shoulders a gently massage. “No one will ever force you; I’ll be the last to ever do that. It’s your choice, Ronnie… but you don’t ever have to be alone again.” he said softly.

Ron felt tears welling in his eyes and he closed them, allowing himself to relax back against Blaise. “I don’t want to let her go.”

“I’d never ask that of you… but you will be ours forever and hers as well.” Blaise murmured softly in his ear.

“Forever sounds just about long enough…” he murmured softly.

Charlie smiled and rose from the table, stuffing the last bit of cookie into his mouth. “Well, I think I’ll just let you two discuss things. I’m going to go pick up Rosie from the dance studio… she’s due out at three, right Ron?”

“Yeah… but it’s only two-thirty.” Ron said, glancing at the clock.

“Thanks, Charlie.” Blaise smiled.

“That’s all right, not a problem. I can watch her rehearse.” He grinned and turned away, moving out humming a merry tune. He was certain that his brother would go all chaste and shy again if he remained; he would rather allow them to let nature take its course.

Blaise looked about as the floo activated later that evening. He’d just gotten out of the shower and was toweling his hair dry when he trotted down the stairs to see who Harry step out, dusting the soot off his clothes. “Harry!” Blaise smiled warmly. “Nice to see you again… how’s Draco? Big as a house yet?”

“Not yet, but getting there.” Harry laughed. “He’s getting quite a tummy; he’s more beautiful than a winter rose.”

“Get pictures. Lots of them.” he recommended, continuing to dry his hair for a moment.

“Oh, I have; scads of them. Draco loves attention but he’s threatened me within an inch of my life if I take more than twenty photos a day. Accuses me of turning into another Colin Creevey…” Harry chuckled softly, and then sobered, glancing around. “Is Ron about?”

“Oh, most definitely.” He said, turning back to the stairs. “Ron! Oi, Ron..! Charlie! Harry’s here…” he called.

Ron trotted down the stairs, combing out his damp hair as he moved. “Oh, hi Harry; good to see you…” he smiled, looking happier than Harry had seen him since this whole mess had begun.

Harry looked from Blaise to Ron, his grin growing. “Ron?”

“It’s not what you think… really.” he started, blushing instantly. “Well… maybe it is, but… Hermione’s okay with it, and so is Charlie, I just…”

“There’s nothing wrong with it, you know.” Harry laughed reassuringly. “I already knew that Charlie was okay with it; he and I talked all the time about the possibilities that could arise if you
ever needed a place to stay.”

“Did he talk to EVERYONE about it?” he asked, embarrassed.

“Pretty much.” Blaise smirked. “Everyone but Ginny.”

Ron made a face. “Just lovely…”

“What I want to know, though, is if you’re okay mate.” Harry asked softly. “I mean with Hermione and all?”

Ron’s smile faded and he shrugged. “I dunno.” he said, looking down. “I mean, she came over and we had this horrible scene where she tried to convince me that divorcing me would be the best thing for everyone.”

“I knew she’d ask you for it… what did you do?” Harry asked.

“I told her she was absolutely mental to even consider it and I threw the bloody papers into the fire. But then, she… she told me to find someone else.”

Harry moved over to him. “We’ll get through this; you know I’m right here with you, mate.”

“Yeah, I know… I’ve got you and Rosie and Blaise and Charlie to keep me going. I really didn’t know what to do…”

“Well you can curl up with me anytime, even if it’s just a platonic snuggle. I’d rather have more, but that’ll be by your choice. You won’t be hiding from the world or giving up on yourself anytime soon if I have anything to do with it, Ron.” Blaise smiled.

“I know; I won’t, I promise.” He smiled warmly, giving Harry a grin as well.

“So what’s up, Harry? I’m assuming this isn’t a casual visit or Draco would be here too.” Charlie spoke up, trotting down the stairs as well, tugging a shirt on.

Harry grinned softly at the older Weasley boy. “Always straight to the point, eh Charlie?”

“Can’t help it; it’s become more than just a habit. Kind of dangerous to do anything else when you work with dragons.” he shrugged with a grin.

“I’ve come to ask your help.”

“Ask; you know we’d do anything for you and Draco.” Ron said simply.

“Like a drink, Harry?” Blaise offered. “You know, you can sit down, too.”

“Perhaps we all should have a drink, and have a seat as well.” Harry agreed.

“It’s that mess Hermione’s involved with isn’t it?” Ron asked, moving to help Blaise get drinks for everyone.

Harry nodded, taking a seat in the red chair near the window. “Yeah; our best bet to ensure she gets to have credit for everything she’s done is to catch Pansy red-handed.”

Blaise looked curious. “Exactly how would we be able to do that?”

“Bait.” Charlie said quite simply, understanding instantly.
“Bait? But…oh… You mean?” Ron knew exactly what Pansy was after; Hermione had just told him that. He blushed deeply and shuddered at the thought of Pansy ‘harvesting’ his sperm.

Harry nodded. “Exactly. She wants Ron and me most of all; she’s already sold our sperm. She wants us so bad she’ll make the mistake we need her to and stroll right into our trap. Let’s give her a shot.”

“You mean… let her come here, and… and…” Ron looked disgusted. “I’d much rather have nothing at all to ever do with that murderous, vile, smarmy bitch!”

“I can take Ron’s place. Use polyjuice…” Charlie offered.

“She wants you too, Charlie. If it was all four of us she wouldn’t be able to resist for sure.” Harry answered as Ron and Blaise brought everyone drinks, taking seats as well.

“It’s just… all of this is her fault.” Ron said, scowling. “Even if some good came out of it.” he glanced at Blaise and blushed slightly. “That Parkinson is one evil, twisted git.”

“I’ve registered blood feud against the entire Parkinson clan. I WILL take her down.” Harry said with a soft growl.

“Are you sure she won’t get anything from us?” Ron asked.

“Certain. We’ve plans for that as well, thanks to Severus Snape.”

Ron bit his lip and considered a moment, then sighed. “All right; what is it we have to do?”

“Thanks Ron.” Harry gave his old roommate a grin and took a drink. The four settled down to discuss the plans and exactly how things were to proceed.

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Pansy slipped behind the wheel of her Bentley Azure, taking a moment to smile as she stroked the steering wheel of the expensive muggle vehicle. It wasn’t a bad thing, owning one of these silly things; it made lots of noise but got her more than a little attention whenever she went about her errands in the muggle world. Oh, she planned to buy quite a variety of these cars within the next year. Sales were going incredibly well and she’d be able to afford to buy anything she wished!

Sales were going incredibly well and she’d be able to afford to buy anything she wished!

She licked her lips, smiling at her reflection a moment in the mirror. Oh, yes, everything was going swimmingly. Even daddy was happy with her and how things were proceeding. She’d just gotten a call from Hermione Weasley… or was she going to change it back to Granger now? She’d been separated from that husband of hers for weeks. It didn’t matter what the bloody hell she called herself; if everything worked out this evening, she’d adopt her as a Parkinson!

Potter, Charlie and Ron Weasley, and Zabini all together in one nice neat little package… ohhh it was almost too good to be true. One fell swoop, and she would be a very, very wealthy witch. And since daddy had finished his little ‘project’ successfully, she would be retiring and vanishing out of this community of dullards. Perhaps move to Germany? She’d leave poor little Hermione holding the bag and all the blame for the entire operation. A little call to the Aurors office to drop the hint of something smarmy going on would surely get her thrown in Azkaban for the rest of her pitiful little life. Oh. Poor thing. She grinned wickedly, pulling into traffic.

But she wasn’t unprepared, if it did turn out to be a double-cross. She had been impressed with Hermione’s performance at their little impromptu party in the hotel room, but something still nagged at her that this entire thing could be a trap for her, somehow. She had an emergency escape plan all set up; it was just perfect.
She released her grip on the wheel of the Azure, and it sped on through traffic on its way as it was spelled to do, doing all of the driving for her. It had definitely been worth the money to have that mad old wizard do those controlling spells upon the vehicle; she hadn’t had to bother to try to learn to drive it. She relaxed to enjoy the view and the ride; soon she would meet up with Hermione and ride in her car to Blaise and Charlie's flat. Oh, this was going to be a night to remember. Hermione had better not be late!

Harry answered his cell after checking the phone number. “Yes…? Oh, hey Tonks… yes. Everything is ready on our end. She’s on her way, is she…? All right… Yeah. Okay, see you soon. Thanks…” he hung up and looked at the others. They were as ready as they could be for what was coming; none of them really knew what to expect. All they had to go on was what Tonks had seen during her ‘party’ with Pansy, and what Hermione had told them. Details on what she had used were far too sketchy for the liking of any of them. Ron seemed to be the most nervous of all about the entire thing.

Ron began to pace slowly. “Remind me again why we’ve invited that backstabbing, family ruining, hateful bitch over here?” He requested, running his fingers nervously through his hair.

Blaise moved up behind Ron and wrapped his arms about him. “To send her directly to Hell, baby.” he murmured softly, kissing his neck.

Ron sighed, settling against him. “That’s one reason I agreed to all of this: that and the fact that I trust Harry.”

“She thinks Hermione’s arranged a meeting to reconcile with you. The word’s been put out that you two have drawn up divorce papers. Tonks is going to be posing as Hermione, by the way…”

He nodded, only half-listening. “All right… I’ll do whatever it takes; I want all this crap done with so we can just get on with our lives.”

“You don’t have anything to worry about; I won’t let her touch you!” Blaise growled.

Charlie gave his brother a reassuring smile. “If I can stop a dragon, I can stop her, little brother. She’s definitely not a dragon.” He said, putting a hand on his brother’s shoulder.

Ron smiled at him. “Yeah… I guess.”

“You three look good together.” Harry grinned, making Ron blush.

“I just… I feel safe. And it all feels right… I just wish Hermione could be here too.”

“You belong with us.” Blaise shrugged. “And she’ll be with us when she can be.”

The younger redhead wizard sighed. “So how do I… how do I act toward her? Pansy, I mean…”

“You’ve never liked Pansy anyway.” Charlie shrugged. “Act however you want. She’d probably be suspicious if you were acting friendly, anyway.”

“She was trying to drag me back into the back of the clinic to get me to have tea with her a couple of weeks ago; now I know why…” Ron said with a frown.

“Good thing you didn’t or she’d have less reason to come tonight. I’m sure that Pansy will more than likely leave you to Hermione, since you’ve brushed her off before.” Harry answered.
“Yeah… and … I know its Tonks and not really Hermione, but that isn’t gonna make it any easier.” he sighed.

“You worry too much, Ron.” Charlie laughed teasingly. “You worry even more than mum does!”

“I can’t help it.” he shrugged.

“Just go and have a calming draught; they ought to be here soon.” Charlie advised. Ron gave him a soft smile, still clearly worried, and moved off to get the potion. Charlie scowled, watching him go. “I don’t really like any of this either, but we’re gonna go through with it. Damn that Pansy anyway.”

“Come on, dragon-tamer. Let’s get it all set up.” Blaise led him off; following Harry as he led them all back into the living room.

Harry glanced at the clock, feeling highly impatient. Where the bloody hells were they?! They should have already been here by now!

Ron jumped when the doorbell rang, still high-strung and nervous despite the calming potion he had drunk. “Bloody hell!” he muttered.

“Easy, Ron…” Charlie said, moving to answer the door to find Tonks/Hermione and Pansy at the door, as expected. “Hi there!” he said in a welcoming tone. “Come on in.”

Ron rose to his feet, trying to conceal his emotions and his nerves. He found his eyes drawn to Tonks/Hermione and he felt it all come back… damn he loved her and wanted to be with her… was Harry really sure that wasn’t the real Hermione?

“I haven’t seen you in a long time, Blaise!” she beamed, smiling sweetly as she gave him a peck on the cheek and moved inside. She didn’t seem like she was after anything but a very casual and friendly visit.

“Pansy…” he smiled. “You look really good. You know my husband, Charlie?”

“Yes, of course; Ron’s brother, right?” she smiled. She was all manners and proper behavior, dressed in an outfit that hugged her youthful curves and made her appear years younger. “And Harry! Good lord, it’s been years! I heard the good news, congratulations!” she moved over and hugged him. “It’s fantastic!”

“Thank you Pansy... Draco’s very happy as am I.” Harry was able to answer in complete honesty.

She batted her eyes at him. “You simply have to bring him by for tea sometime; I haven’t seen him since that horrible tragedy at the clinic.”

Harry forced himself to keep a bland smile on his face; he hated her more at that moment than he had hated anyone in his entire life, but doing anything would ruin the chances of catching her red-handed and getting what they needed to ensure her conviction. Once the courts had their say, he would be free to pursue his blood-feud with her. “It has been a while.”

“Far too long… you and Draco are such a sweet couple…”

“Hey ‘Mione.” Ron said softly, unable to keep his eyes off her. Was Harry really sure that wasn’t his wife standing there beside the door? He couldn’t see anything to tell him that it really wasn’t.
“You look good Ron… I’ve missed you.” Tonks/Hermione said, walking over to stand near him.

“You… you look good too. Blaise is making sure I take care of myself…” he said, forcing his eyes away from her.

“Of course he is! Blaise was always the motherly type.” Pansy grinned. “I’ll never forget how he always took care of us in Slytherin House; he babied and mothered each and every one of us.” she smiled sweetly at Blaise. “You know, I’m surprised the two of you haven’t had children yet.”

“Just not meant to be, I suppose.” Blaise shrugged. “Ron and Rosie are over all the time and Harry will be bringing his baby once he’s born too.”

“I don’t have anywhere else to go, unless I’m pestering mum and dad.” Ron said, licking his lips nervously. That damned calming draught wasn’t helping; he was nervous and he could feel sweat breaking out on his lip.

“You know, Harry, I figured you’d be home with Draco, considering what his past pregnancies have been like.” Tonks/Hermione said.

“Oh, there’s nothing to worry about at all; Draco is doing absolutely fantastically. Our son is strong and there’s no trouble. He’s over his father’s house tonight, anyway.”

“Oh…? Lucius is all right with his son being pregnant with your son? No offense, Harry, but I know how he despises you.”

“My contribution really doesn’t matter… after all, it’s HIS son that’s pregnant, and it’ll be HIS grandson once he’s born. You know how he is.” Harry shrugged.

“True. After all, the baby is Draco’s son; that makes him a Malfoy no matter who the father is.”

“Exactly.” Harry nodded.

Pansy glanced at Tonks/Hermione and frowned. She was supposed to be getting close to Ron, how the bloody hell was she going to get him in bed to do the damned harvest if she couldn’t even get close enough to touch him? Did she have to do every bloody thing herself? “Hermione? Don’t you think you and your husband should go find a more PRIVATE place to talk?” she asked pointedly.

“I need to… to go check the roast.” Ron murmured, turning and heading towards the kitchen.

“Ron… Ron, wait…” Tonks/Hermione said, but Ron only hurried through the door.

“Go AFTER him, Hermione!” Pansy half-growled.

Tonks/Hermione glanced at the others and Harry gave her an imperceptible nod. They could handle Pansy. She turned and followed Ron through the kitchen door.

Charlie moved to the bar to pour a drink. “So, Pansy; tell us what you’ve been up to?” he asked.

“Oh?” he leaned on the bar as well. “You know I never pictured you in the medical business. I figured you’d marry some rich bloke.”

She sighed melodramatically. “I couldn’t find one that I liked that father even vaguely approved of. You married Charlie, and Draco went and married Harry… What’s a girl to do?”
“Your father would never have approved of either Harry or Charlie,” he scowled.

“He would have loved you or Draco, though.” she said, then shrugged delicately. “That’s all in the past now…”

“Yes, but you, Pansy, are quite the wrong sex for any of us.”

“And that’s such a tragedy!” she pouted. “Are you all quite certain that the only gender you want is another male?”

“I have my men; I need no others, and no women.” Blaise slipped his arm about Charlie.

“Then I’ll just have to carry on being single… at least until father dies.” She said. “So tell me, what have all of you been up to?”

Harry sat on the couch, drink on the table. “Just work, Pansy. As always…”

“Never met a cause you couldn’t take up for, have you Potter?” she smiled, reaching for his drink. She twitched her hand ever so slightly and a small compartment on her ring fell open, concealed by her hand as she lifted the cup.


“You boys go sit down; I’ll bring these drinks over.” she offered, taking Harry his now drugged drink.

Charlie moved to his easy chair, pulling Blaise down onto his lap and Pansy returned to the bar for the other two drinks. She picked the first glass up with her left hand, and then transferred it to her right as she picked up the second glass with her left smoothly. The drug dropped into each cup flawlessly. Smiling, she brought them over to the two men in the chair and sighed. “You two do look good together. You know; perhaps I should travel; maybe my wizard is out there somewhere waiting for me in some foreign country.”

“Hum… maybe. You never know.”

“There has to be someone!” she laughed, sipping her own drink. Just carry on the conversation, and wait. It wouldn’t take long. “Come on, fellas…! Give me SOME hope here!” she complained.

“They say there’s someone for everyone… keep looking.”

“Oh, I am… you fellows look so content maybe I should look at the witches for a change?”

That made Blaise laugh. “You? With a witch? Now that I’d like to see!”

She laughed as well. “Yeah… that IS a stretch, isn’t it?”

Harry checked his drink with a couple of muttered spells to detect spells or potions put into the drink. Finding none, he relaxed back, sipping it.

Tonks/Hermione followed Ron into the kitchen; he was standing beside the door to the garden, looking hangdog and guilty. “Ron…”

“I don’t think… look, Hermione, I… I’m sorry.” he said softly.

“What? Wait, Ron, you don’t understand…”
“I didn’t mean to… I want to be loyal to you, I…”

She moved to him and he bowed his head. “Ron!” she hissed at him in quiet tone, sounding much more like herself, glancing furtively back at the closed kitchen door. “I’m NOT Hermione!” she growled in his ear.

“Oh… Oh dammit. You just… you look so much like her,” he looked up at her, need and longing clear in his expression. “You even have her eyes,” he murmured softly.

“That’s the general idea when I go undercover,” she answered, unable to help a very un-Hermione like smirk.

Ron gazed at her, reaching out to touch her cheek. “I keep forgetting how good you are at that whole changing thing.”

“I’m just doing my job, and I need to get back in there. We’re putting the boys in danger, leaving them alone in the room with her.”

“What do I do?” Ron asked softly.

She pointed at the back kitchen stairs. “Go on upstairs, and stay there until we call you down. I’ll just tell Pansy I’ve already dealt with you.”

“But she’ll expect the… you know…”

She held up a vial with Ron’s name on it, the expected white viscous liquid inside. “Taken care of. Go. Hurry now.” She said in a soft, urgent tone. Ron turned and hurried up the stairs in silence.

Tonks/Hermione waited just a moment or two before pushing the door open, keeping the bottle in her hand.

Hermione dialed the phone, muttering soft curses under her breath. She had gone through everything; she had no doubt anymore… they had a lot more on their hands than she had even been aware of. She was still wrapping her mind about the facts that she had discovered through the course of the day. They definitely had to be stopped…

But something she had just found in her analysis of things she had brought home had nearly sent her into a panic. She had to warn Tonks, and do it right away! She tried Tonks’ phone three times then recalled that she’d given her the phone she usually carried. She called that number as well and again, there was no answer the first time. Refusing to give up, she called a second time and to her surprise Severus Snape answered.

“Yes, Mrs. Weasley?” he asked impatiently. “I have no time for you at the moment…”

“I don’t need to speak to you anyway; Snape, please!” She tried to put all the urgency she felt into the tone of her voice. “I need to speak to Tonks; it’s highly important…!”

She could almost hear his sneer. “That isn’t possible; she is more than a little too busy to deal with your petty whining!” He growled softly. “You will simply have to wait!”

“No! Tonks is in danger!” she snapped immediately.

“What?” he had been about to hang up; that simple statement had more than captured his attention.
“Pansy… she has a phial of Gregory’s Unctuous Unction. I don’t know if she has any on her, but she has it in the lab and she…”

Severus snorted with clear derision; he had for a moment thought that there was actual danger. “That’s no danger to her! Dora knows to look for such things!” he retorted.

“Of course she does, but would she know to watch for muggle drugs?!” Hermione demanded; she would NOT back down; she had make this snarky old snake understand!

That stopped him cold. “What muggle drugs?”

“In the lab, in the other lab technician’s station; I found both Ketamine and Rohypnol!” she said in an urgent, worried tone. “I went to the lab and inventoried every item in there. I came across two phials and I brought small samples of them home to analyze…”

“And you’re certain of this?”

“Absolutely certain! I’m in my car right now, on my way to Blaise’s house… I tried to use the floo but it’s blocked! The phone doesn’t even ring there, and Harry’s phone is turned off. Something is WRONG, Severus! Please! You have to help them! It’ll be at least twenty more minutes before I can get there!” she was nearly in tears but determined to get him to understand. The call ended at that moment as Severus apparated away.

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Tonks/Hermione expected to walk back in to a group still quietly chatting; it had become quiet in there but she could still hear Pansy’s voice. She and Ron couldn’t have been talking any longer than a few minutes, after all…

Pansy was closing the last of the bottles, turning away from the three unconscious men lying sprawled on the floor, chair and couch. “Oh, excellent! I thought you’d at least sleep with him one last time!” she commented in a biting tone. “You really are ready to leave the little hubby behind, aren’t you?”

“What did you do?!” she demanded, hurrying over to check Harry.

“Such a worrier!” she laughed softly. “I wouldn’t do a THING to harm the supplier of my best selling product. Carpe Retractum!” the spell snatched the bottle out of Tonks/Hermione’s hand with a flick of her wand and it zipped across the room directly to Pansy’s waiting hand. She slipped it away as well. “I’ve got what I wanted; and all is right with my world.” she said dreamily, then watched amused as Tonks/Hermione hurried over to check on Charlie. “They’ll wake up a little cramped from how they’re sitting in oh… about eight hours or so.” she said.

“But how? Harry wouldn’t take a tainted drink! What spell did you use?!” she asked, looking up at her sharply.

“Spell?” she laughed. “Oh you really are simple, aren’t you…? I wouldn’t ever try to use a spell or potion on a Dragon Tamer or the husband of our lovely Draco Malfoy.”

“Drugs?” Tonks/Hermione looked horrified. “But Blaise has Veela blood! Muggle drugs can kill him!”

“Really? Huh. I didn’t know that… how interesting.” she said in a droll and clearly uninterested tone. “I thought you were in all this for the money, Hermione.”
“I’m not a murderer! I need to get Blaise to St. Mungo’s!”

“So take him. Take them all; I really don’t care. Have the clinic too; I’m finished slaving needlessly away in that horrible place.” She said, her wand in one hand, the other touching the pendant on her neckchain.

Tonks/Hermione scowled and pulled her wand “Incarcerous!” She snarled.

“Protego!” Pansy snapped at the same moment. Her spell blocked most of the magical ropes moving to seize her and she snapped the pendant off her neckchain; the portkey it was activated and suddenly Pansy was gone.
“Ron!!” Tonks bellowed, rushing to the side of the unconscious men. Harry lay sprawled on the couch; Charlie half-sagged out of the recliner, and Blaise looked as if he had fallen on the floor and possibly hit his head on the side table as he fell. She allowed her features to blend back into their natural form as she checked each for breathing… Harry seemed all right, Charlie was having some problems but Blaise; the drugs were a deadly poison to him.

She wanted so badly to follow Pansy… the trail was fresh; she might be able to follow, if Ron was capable of looking after them and taking charge… “Ronald Weasley, get your bloody arse down here!!” she demanded, rushing to the fireplace to use the floo. She threw the powder in but it just hit the back of the fireplace and did not activate. Pansy had even taken the time to use a spell to block the damned floo! “Merlin, had she left ANYTHING to chance…?” She wondered aloud, stepping back and pointing her wand at the fireplace. It flared green and was reactivated.

As Ron came thundering down the stairs, she used the floo to call headquarters. Kingsley answered; he’d been awaiting her call. When she’d sent out the call for assistance with what they needed today, he’d come in insisting he needed to help. No matter how badly he’d been hurt in the battle against Voldemort, he was simply unable to keep his hand out of working. The healers always got angry when he aggravated his injuries, but he refused to stay completely retired.

She trusted him and his judgment completely; she had left organization of her personnel in his hands. He was the one who had set up teams of an Auror and an Unmentionable and positioned a team at each of the homes that the children of those who had purchased the stolen sperm were at, with descriptions of the age and gender of each child to be taken, as well as the four young women who were carrying ‘stolen’ children yet to be born. Those teams had been told to await her signal to move.

Tonks told him to set ‘Operation Stork’ into action, and passed on that Parkinson had escaped; she was considered highly dangerous and that she was to be arrested on sight. He did not prolong the call; he set immediately to work.

She then called St. Mungo’s and when someone answered she immediately identified herself and stated she had a Male Veela who’d been poisoned with muggle drugs and she needed a healer as quickly as possible.

Ron gasped in shock and worry, hurrying to where his friends and brother lay sprawled across the living room. “What the bloody hell did she do…?” he asked, feeling panic rise and berating himself fiercely. “I should have stayed in here; I never should have left…!”

“If you’d stayed you’d be lying there with them!” Tonks snapped at him. She knew there was no way she could leave now; Ron wasn’t in any fit shape to look after himself much less the three on the floor at the moment. She had no choice as Pansy had probably planned, the vicious hellion. Pursing her would just have to wait. She glanced over as the fireplace flared to life and an aged wizard in the robes of a healer of St. Mungo’s stepped through.

He glanced at Ron and quickly judged him to be just fine; he pushed him aside unceremoniously in his hurry to get to those who actually needed his assistance. He did a quick scan of Harry and Charlie, scowling; but when he did a scan of Blaise he immediately knelt and pulled a potion from his bag. “What in Merlin’s name happened here…?!” he demanded, shooting a glare at the two standing.
“Drugs… I don’t know what kinds…” Tonks began as the front door began to vibrate, being pounded upon. Both she and Ron whirled, wands at the ready as the door suddenly burst open, the doorframe shattering. Ron instantly cast a Protego, but it was not necessary.

Severus Snape strode in, taking in the situation in a single glance. “It may help to know, Healer, that I understand they’ve been given either Ketamine or Rohypnol, or a combination of both.” Severus Snape told the medic, moving over to stand near Tonks.

“How did you know that…?” she asked in a whisper.

“Mrs. Weasley seems to have become… motivated… by something or someone…” he answered in a rather smug tone, and then went on to explain. “She found them stored in with the clinic’s regular medications.” He told her quietly. “She did attempt to call, but as you had left the phone at home she was unable to reach you… She could not call here either and the reason for that is quite clear now…” He looked at the side table; and gestured to the phone lying off its hook. He waved his wand at it and the receiver floated back to rest in its cradle.

The healer grunted to let Snape know he understood. “Drugs… bloody muggle fools giving medication to wizards and Veela…” he drew another vial of potion from his bag and tore the cap off. “Damn it I’m not going to lose a Veela…!” he growled as he slowly fed it to Blaise. “Come on boy…” he growled, stroking Blaise’s throat to assist the unconscious man to swallow. “A little more…”

Three more medi-wizards came in through the floo, rushing forward to assist. Ron found himself shoved off to the side beside one of the chairs as they worked on the three unconscious wizards. Severus moved forward to offer assistance and Tonks did as well.

The one taking control of Blaise snapped rapid-fire orders, which were followed immediately by the two helping him. One looked up at the graying healer, shaking her head. “We can’t do enough for him here… if we don’t get him to St. Mungo’s he’s lost… what was he given?”

“Either Ketamine or Rohypnol…” Snape repeated. “Most likely both; the one who dosed them wasn’t concerned with ethics.” He added with a sneer.

The aged healer nodded and eased Blaise up off the floor, pulling him into a seated position and sitting behind him, wrapping his arms securely about him. He put a portkey into Blaise’s limp hand and sealed his own over it and barked “Emergency ward!” and they both were gone. Three more healers came in out of the floo to assist.

Ron found he was shunted further and further out of the way which he did not resist at all, watching the events unfold in shock. Had… had this all been his fault…? He ended up standing between the wall and the chairs, watching in mounting horror as the healers decided the other two had too large of a dose to treat here as well.

“These two need to go too… this one’s having trouble breathing…” another healer said, looking up from Charlie’s side.

“Go.” The female healer who had remained seemed to be in charge, and she nodded sharply. Snape helped two healers to get Charlie supported and into the floo and they left; two healers supporting Harry got him lifted to their shoulders and Tonks helped to get him shifted as well.

Ron found himself alone in the house, totally in shock.
Hermione pulled up in her car, hurrying up to the door. She hesitated; fear growing when she saw the door had been broken in. She moved up to the door cautiously, pausing to pull her shoes off. She might be without her wand, but she would sure as hell shy a shoe off at someone if they tried to attack her. She nudged the door with the toe of her shoe cautiously.

“Hello…?” she said softly, peering into the door as it drifted open. No sound… whatever had happened must be over. She slipped inside quickly; they might need her help… she moved in and stepped into the living room, seeing everything thrown aside and left all helter-skelter… and then she saw Ron, slumped and silent in front of the dark fireplace, staring into it.

“Ron…! Ron, what happened…?” she asked, hurrying to him. He didn’t respond so she touched him and he flinched, startled. But he did not look at her.

“They’re all gone… and it’s my fault… all my fault…” he whispered, staring into the black fireplace. “Blaise… Charlie and Harry… my fault…”

“Gone?! Gone where?” She gave him a little shake and he seemed to return to himself somewhat.

“I… dunno… St. Mungo’s I think…” he murmured, blinking as his mind was forced past the shock a moment. “If they die it’s my fault…”

“Oh Ron…! Don’t be such a naive nitwit…!” Hermione said impatiently. “Where’s Rosie…?”

“Mum’s…”

She seized him by the arm and hauled him to his feet. “We’re going to St. Mungo’s then!” she snapped. “You have things to do and places to go that I can’t…! Pull yourself together!” she ordered. “Get your wand and hurry…! We have to go immediately!” She had no idea if Snape had gotten her message here, and she knew it would be impossible to treat them in time if they did not know what drugs had been administered to her old schoolmates.

Ron was galvanized into movement by her orders, drawing out his wand from where he had stowed it in an inner pocket of his trousers. She took his hand and pulled him along outside, taking a firm hold of him. Then she took the wand from his hand and flawlessly apparated them away. They arrived within feet of one of the entrances to St. Mungo’s. Ron did not object, knowing he was in no fit state of mind to do it properly on his own.

The lobby of St. Mungo’s seemed more packed and even wilder than usual and highly confusing; Ron found he couldn’t really focus on anything except Hermione’s hand in his, leading him along through the crowd. She ignored the chaos around them, heading straight for the desk of the Information Witch, bypassing the line entirely.

The woman at the head of the line, a witch with a crying young boy of nine or so that had what looked like a cup engulfing his hand, began to object but Hermione rounded on her. “Shut your gob!” She snapped, and the woman fell silent, offended.

Ron blinked, staring at the cup, and he could almost swear the thing was staring back at him. It looked to him like it was trying to swallow the boy’s hand…

“I need to get to the Emergency ward…! There’s a male Veela there who’s been poisoned with muggle drugs, and I can tell them what they are! Please, there’s no time to waste…!” Hermione said urgently.
The Information Witch’s scowl was replaced by a grim expression, and she nodded, pointing directly to the leftmost hallway. “The Emergency Ward is down the leftmost hallway, up the lift… but you need to get there faster.” She took Hermione’s hand and placed an item in it. Hermione redoubled her grip on Ron as she felt a familiar tug behind her navel and she was yanked rapidly through the corridors to the Emergency Ward. Ron said nothing, still in a state of shock over all that had happened.

Severus Snape stood with his female love just inside the room where they were working on Harry and Charlie. When they’d arrived, the general level of activity in the room was very high; several mediwizards were bustled about the beds of the two, and more went in and out of the room that housed Blaise at the moment.

“Are they gonna be all right?” Tonks asked as she watched; the activity about them seemed to be settling down, though a young blonde medi-wizard remained, still monitoring Charlie with scans every two minutes or so.

“Yes, Madam Auror.” One of the medics who had left the two finally lay to rest sighed. “These two will be fine; it will just be several hours before they wake up. Knowing what they had been dosed with helped to neutralize what was left in their systems. That fellow there…” he gestured to Charlie. “He had been given a nearly fatal dose. If we hadn’t known what it was we would have lost him for sure.”

Dora nodded gravely. “I understand… what about Blaise…?” she asked as the door opened, Hermione leading a white-faced Ronald Weasley into the room.

“It’s much too soon to tell. Let us have a chance to work with him. If you have family to notify, I would recommend you do so…” he glanced at the newcomers. “And keep the guests in this room to no more than three until they wake… we still need to be very vigilant over their health…”

“I… I’ll go wait… outside…” Ron said softly; it was much more important that they be here... and Draco should be with Harry.

“Absolute rubbish.” Snape grumbled, rolling his eyes. “I will go and notify Draco of his husband’s condition.” He said, turning and pushing Ron away from the door and into the room as he moved to exit.

“Thanks, Sev… we need to let Molly know too, at least…” Dora said softly, glancing at Ron. “Keep him here, Hermione…” she said, nodding her head Ron’s direction. “And see if one of the healers thinks he needs to be looked at too, eh…” she suggested as she moved into the next room to check on Blaise and his progress.

Hermione moved over to the doctors, pulling Ron along. “This is Charlie Weasley and Harry Potter; we’re family. Please, we just want to stay in here…”

“They have all the help we can give them. They won’t thank you for letting yourself go into shock,
and if you insist on being an idiot about this I can easily arrange for you to be rendered unconscious to allow me to tend you!” The medic snapped back at him, refusing to back down.

“Ron, let him check you…”

“You stay out of this!” he snapped at her as well; she had brought this on all of them…

Ron heard the medi-wizard growl something and he felt himself freeze in place; he decided it was a damned good thing that he had been sitting down at the time. Hermione watched as the mediwizard scanned Ron, scowling, and then glare at Hermione. “This man hasn’t been eating.” He said in a disapproving tone. “He will take a restorative and a sleeping draught, and he will be left to sleep until the potion itself wears off. He MUST be made to eat regularly!” he ordered.

“Yes sir…” she said softly. “I will make sure he is taken care of…”

“Good.” He growled, moving to get the prescribed potions. He pushed the unresisting Ron back and force-fed him both potions before releasing him from his body bind spell.

“You can’t… don’t want…” he began to protest before the spell swept him off into unconsciousness.

Hermione pulled a blanket over him as the healer bustled off to assist with Blaise in the next room. She then turned to Tonks. “Please tell me you got her… that this is all over…”

“I can’t.” She sighed, scowling.

“She didn’t get away…?”

“She knew it was a trap.”

“How? I swear I didn’t do anything to alert her… I didn’t even know that anything was going on…”

“It was a bit spur-of-the-moment, actually. I didn’t know we were doing it for sure or not until Harry called me… everything had come together at the last moment.” Tonks sighed. “I got her with part of an incarcerous, but she had a portkey and blipped out on me…”

“She was always so paranoid, and loved to be in control of everyone and everything…”

“I don’t think she suspected anything more than she usually did. She came prepared for everything and anything. She didn’t take long to get what she wanted, either. She was sure that I would be tied up with Ron or put him right to sleep. She knew damned well I wouldn’t pursue her and leave Blaise to die, either. Charlie probably would have died as well; he was having a lot of trouble breathing.”

“Ron seemed to be in shock; he was pale and almost incoherent… that must be why he was so upset…”

“He has plenty of reasons to be upset if you ask me. He wasn’t there to do something about them being drugged, and neither was I because he had me out of the room for a bit. I think he holds himself to blame…”

“At least she didn’t harvest…”

“She did.” Tonks countered. “I had a bottle for Ron as well and she got it from me just a moment before she left…”

“Merlin…” Hermione murmured. “Tonks – the children, the clinic…”
“I’m not THAT disorganized, Hermione,” Tonks returned. “The clinic lab is sealed off; the wizarding infants that are not involved are being moved to the nursery at St. Mungo’s and the muggle infants are going to Mercy General. The children that were conceived by ‘purchase’ have been listed and are being pulled from their homes even as we speak…”

“They’re mad, Tonks…” Hermione whispered. “Absolutely barking…” she took a deep breath to plow on and tell Tonks about what she had found when the door opened and Draco hurried in with a very worried expression on his face. Hermione, remembering Harry’s determination that she should never be in the same place as his husband, she moved back against the wall. She should leave…

Draco moved to Harry’s bedside, stroking his hair back from his forehead with a worried frown. “Harry… Baby…?”

“He’ll be all right, sir; he just needs to sleep now.” The healer still attending Charlie said to him reassuringly.

Draco held Harry’s hand, sitting on the edge of the bed. “What about the others…? Charlie, Blaise and Ron…?”

“Ron’s not in any danger.” Tonks assured.

“Not anything a few good meals and sleep won’t cure. Healer Treven put him to sleep.” The healer half-smiled, but his smile was short lived as he returned his attention to Charlie. “This fellow, I think, will pull out of this without any permanent problems. The drugs played merry hob with his respiration, but he is past the worst of it all…” his eyes drifted to the separating door. “The dark wizard, though; he… well, we’ve four healers working with him, but his family has been sent for…”

“Blaise…” Draco whispered, tears in his eyes. He looked to Tonks. “How did this happen…?”

“Pansy Parkinson happened, the venomous guttersnipe…” she said quietly. “I got help for them as quick as I could….”

Hermione decided that she should leave; she turned for the door and opened it and found herself face to face with Damitri Zabini.

“How is Harry, Draco…?” Damitri asked, pausing by his bed, reaching to touch the younger man with a soft reassuring grip on the shoulder.

Draco gave him a grateful smile. “They say he’ll be fine, just needs to sleep… but… they’re not sure about Blaise…”

“We don’t know yet.” Tonks said softly.

The second door opened and a healer looked over each of them, and then moved to Damitri. “You should come in, sir. Only immediate family right now…” she said as Draco began to rise to follow. Draco sat down again as Damitri followed the healer into the next room.

Severus moved to Draco, pulling his godson into his arms, giving him something to hold on to. “You
must be strong, my dragon…” he whispered.

He hugged him. “I’m trying, Uncle Sev… poor Blaise…”

The room fell silent as they waited for news of how Blaise was doing. Time seemed to stand still.

“…oh… bloody hell…” Harry moaned as he brought his hand to his head.

“Harry…?” Draco whispered.

He opened his eyes and immediately regretted it; the lights seemed to lance into his head with the force of daggers. “Fuck…! What the hell’s with the lights…? It’s so damned bright…?” he mumbled, shielding his eyes by draping his arm across his face.

The mediwizard quickly lowered the lights.

“Is that better…?” Draco kissed Harry’s hand softly. “The lights are lowered, love…”

“What… happened…?” Harry asked groggily.

“That bitch drugged you.” Tonks said quietly.

“No, I… I checked… she… no potion, not a spell…”

“Correct, Potter; she used date-rape drugs.” Snape corrected him. “Drugs that desperate muggle males use to get females to pass out so they can do what they wish with them…” he said distastefully.

“Fuck…” he moaned. “You got her… right…?”

“Could have… but Blaise would have been long dead if I went after her and she knew it.”

Harry forced himself up to his elbows; it was more of an effort than he would have believed. “Blaise…? Where’s Blaise…?”

“Harry, no love…” Draco tried to keep him in bed. “We don’t know anything yet, and you’re too weak…”

Reluctantly he sank back onto the bed, feeling drained and exhausted. “Charlie…? And Ron…?”

“Ron’s fine…” Draco began.

Charlie moaned softly as if in response to his name being spoken. Molly cried out with relief but did not get in the way of the healer, clutching a hanky to her mouth. The healer did a scan to check him once more, then uncorked a bottle and ensured that Charlie drank the entire thing. When it was done, Charlie pushed the bottle away, looking around. “Blaise… Where’s my husband…?!?”

“He’s in the next room; come on, I’ll help you…” the healer said, moving to help Charlie to his feet. “Easy, now… you’re going to feel horribly weak…”

He was shaking as he rose but clearly determined to make it; Molly hurried up to help and support her son. “Thanks mum…”
“It’s all right, my boy…” she assured, smiling at him as she helped him make his way into the next room. Charlie made his way to his husband’s side and they lowered him into the chair next to the bed. Charlie kissed him softly. “Blaise…?” He asked softly. “Baby I’m here…”

The healer patted Charlie’s shoulder. “Don’t you worry, young man. He’s over the worst….” He said reassuringly.

“Thank you.” He gave him a smile, only glancing away for a moment.

“I’ll tell the others…” Molly said, moving to give her son a kiss before she bustled out.

“How’s Blaise…?” Harry asked when she came out.

She smiled finally; quite pleased everything was turning out all right. “He’ll be here a day or two, but he’ll be just fine…”

The healer moved over to check Harry as well with infinite care. “Hm… well, you are free to go; take it easy for a day or two.” He advised in a stern tone.

“I’ll try.” Harry assured with a faint smile, pushing himself into a seated position. Ron began to wake now as well, disoriented and confused for a few moments.

Tonks sighed in relief. “Thank goodness…” she said gratefully, and then stood. “Now that I know you boys are going to be all and are in good hands, I need to get over to the office to wrap a few things up…”

“I will join you.” Snape said, following Tonks out of the room.

Ron pushed the blanket off, sitting up, looking at Harry with great relief. “You’re all right… thank Merlin… is everyone all right…? Blaise and Charlie…?”

“We haven’t seen Blaise yet, but Charlie is with him.” Harry nodded.

“But is Blaise okay…?” Ron asked stubbornly. He really did want to be in there with them, but it really wasn’t his place…

“He’ll be just fine, Ronny.” Molly soothed.

The healer moved up to check Ron as well, then frowned in irritation. “All of the cases I see, and you come in here with lack of nutrition and dehydration.” The healer fixed Ron with a very stern glare. “You, sir, will EAT regularly!” he ordered.

Ron sighed and nodded, looking down. “I’ll try…”

“We’ll see to it.” Harry assured him. “Thank you for your time, healer…” The healer bowed formally to him, smiling, then moved out.

Ron pushed to his feet. “I… uh… sorry about that…”

“No worries. I told you; we’ll get through this, buddy…”

“Yeah…” he agreed. Molly put her arm about her youngest son’s shoulders reassuringly and he gave her a wan smile. “What… what do we do now…?”

“You just take care of Blaise and Charlie. Leave the rest of it up to us.” Harry said, getting out of bed. “I need to talk to Damitri…”
“I can do that…” Ron agreed.

“Come along, Dear…” Molly said, following Harry into Blaise’s room, pulling Ron right along with her and blithely ignoring his murmurs that he shouldn’t go in and did not belong.

Damitri was seated in a second chair, talking quietly to Blaise when they entered.

“Hey…how’s he doing…?” Harry asked.

“He woke up for a short while, but he’s gone right back out again. The healers say its normal; that he won’t be fully awake again until sometime tomorrow…” Charlie answered.

“I should never have walked out of that room.” Ron said, very worried.

“I’m glad you did little brother.” Charlie said. “At least she didn’t get you.”

“But she damned near killed Blaise…”

“You’re all three going to be just fine!” Molly interrupted him. “Really, now, Ronald! Stop focusing on the negative and look at the bright side once in a while…!” she scolded. “You go and sit down now… no arguments!” she said, transfiguring a little table into a third chair with a footrest. “Sit down and stay there! I’m going to go fetch you a meal and you too Charlie dear…”

“But I’m not hungry mum…” Ron started.

Charlie laughed. “That’s not going to stop her, bro…”

“Bloody well right it’s not!” She said, glaring at her youngest boy now. “And you will eat, Ronald. You’re not too big for me to force-feed you, you know…!” she said, waggling her wand at him.

He moved to the chair and sat, sighing. “All right mum… I’ll try…” he agreed.

Charlie put his arm about his younger brother’s shoulders. “We’re fine, Ronny. Just fine…! Stop worrying…”

“But… he’s so pale…” Ron said, gazing down at Blaise as Molly bustled out again.

“I think I will leave him in your capable hands…” Damitri said, rising. “Tell him when he wakes that I will visit again tomorrow, Charlie…”

“I’ll walk you out.” Harry said, arm about Draco. “We’ll see you guys tomorrow…”

“Bye…” both Ron and Charlie answered as the three moved out.

Damitri sighed as he moved out, allowing the other two to exit then closing the door behind them. “I do have some information for you, Harry; I’ve done background checks on all the employees there at the clinic… and come up with a couple of rather colorful characters…”

Harry took the files, flipping through them. “I need to take these to Tonks…” he frowned thoughtfully.

“Tomorrow, Harry. It’s late, and you’ve been through enough today. You’re going home with me.”

“This needs to get done…” Harry began.

Damitri simply took the files back from him. “Nonsense; it’s nothing that can’t wait until sunrise or
beyond. Everyone is in custody that needs to be. You need to eat, and to rest. Come along…”

Harry sighed. “All right.” He agreed reluctantly.

“Besides, Terry would love to make a fuss over your Draco for the evening…” Damitri smiled.

“So how is Terry…?”

“Just fine…” Damitri chuckled. “He has a new pet. Severus gave him a kneazle kit.”

“Angel has one too; Lucius bought it for her.” Harry smiled.

“Very clever gift, truthfully… They’re not only protective and intelligent; they make wonderful guardians if the bond between kneazle and wizard is true…”

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When Tonks and Severus arrived in her office at the ministry, Hermione was already there, quietly waiting for them with a stack of papers on her lap. Tonks looked at her in surprise; had she sat here for the entire five hours they waited for the boys to wake up…? From the looks of it, that was exactly what she had done.

Tonks moved around the cramped little office and took a seat behind her desk. “So, Hermione… you dug up something else…? What do you have for me?” Tonks asked.

“Her father was involved in all of this; deeply involved.” Hermione said, wanting to be sure to emphasize that fact.

“In what way? Funding the clinic…?”

“That and more… I’m not even sure that the original plan to use the leftover samples didn’t come from him and not Pansy… he used more of Harry’s sperm than anyone, working through August Bebel, making special children…”

“Special children…?” She frowned at her.

“They’re working with Harry’s DNA, trying to isolate a specific gene… I don’t think it can be done but… but I think they’re trying to isolate Voldemort’s essence out of Harry’s DNA…”

“The Dark Lord lives no more!” Severus snapped, irritated at her insinuation and unable to be silent any longer.

“Voldemort is dead, but the Dark Prince lives!” Hermione retorted, refusing to back down, offering the papers to Tonks. “And they think they have the result they want!”

“No one can create a copy of another… not even in the magical world…!” Dora scowled at the papers, flipping through them. They might as well have been written in ancient Aztec or some other lost language; the chemical formulas and notations meant absolutely nothing to her. She’d let Snape see if he could make heads or tails of them later.

“Yes it is possible…!” Hermione countered. “They’ve succeeded in doing just that in the muggle world. They’ve done it with sheep and cats… I’m telling you, there are five children that were not on your lists!”
Severus sighed. “Five children that we cannot save because we have no lead to and no way to locate…”

“I’ve studied the formulas. I’ve read through all the notes… I’m telling you, this was her ‘special project’; you both saw that file…” Hermione insisted.

“If they are out there, we will hunt for them.” Dora answered. “But without knowing who has them…” she shrugged to indicate the futility of the situation.

Hermione sighed, irritated at their lack of comprehension of the urgency of it all. “Her father has kept those records, I’m sure of it…! August Bebel’s files constantly mention him in the lab, bringing women to carry the babies. Bebel even describes each of the women brought in; the younger women were barely teenagers but none of those to give birth was older than twenty… The women were obliviated of the act of implantation, and all memory of the child was removed once the birth occurred…”

“One can get through an obliviation charm.” Severus answered. “It can be damaging if done carelessly. Only if the memories have been removed do they become out of reach…”

“The knowledge was removed once the babies were born… and those poor babies…” Hermione’s voice trembled with restrained outrage. “The babies were tested and tortured and more… and if they did not survive the tests or meet up to their standards, the infants were killed…”

Tonks eyed the paperwork, and then looked at Hermione. Maybe Snape was right and she had begun to fabricate things to implicate other people and ‘muddy the trail’… “Where was this done…? It all sounds extremely far fetched…”

“The embryos were created right in our lab… the babies were birthed in the homes of those who wanted to have the glory and the honor of being the father of the new Dark Lord…! McNair, Blackman, it’s a who’s-who of the inner circle of the Death Eaters…!”

“Just because a baby carries Potter’s genes would not turn that child into a Dark Lord no matter how he was raised…!” Snape countered.

Hermione frowned at Severus. “You’re the one not thinking now, Severus Snape!” She accused. “The proof is right there! Why in the world would I make any of this up…?! It all sounds extremely far fetched…”

Tonks intervened, holding up one hand to stop the argument. “Until we have proof of what has been done, what is there to say? Did you have a hand in creating these children? No. This Bebel did. So until we have a lead, we are at an impasse…”

“There are embryos in the lab! That should be proof enough of the facts of my statements and what is going on!” Hermione snapped, rising to her feet. “For the last six months, he worked for no one but Pansy or her father!”

“Then my next step is to bring him in for questioning. We have the lab on lockdown…” she said thoughtfully.

“You’re next step should be to do genetic testing of the embryos in the lab…!” Hermione insisted. “I’m telling you, the ones he has in his personal cryo chamber are ones they were trying to re-create the dark lord with… if the child who lives now fails any of their measures and dies, they have six more they can implant…!”

“We will test them.” Snape said. “Does that make you happy…?” he asked snidely.
“No!” she snapped back at him, refusing to be cowed or treated like a child anymore. “Only Pansy and her father in jail along with that twisted lab rat Bebel will make me happy! And those five poor little kids…”

Kingsley moved into the office, pausing for only a moment when he saw Hermione. Knowing she was involved and she knew every detail of what they had discovered as she was their insider, he plowed on with what he had to say. “We have the children safe, in the warded room, but…” he paused a moment, eyeing Severus. “You need to come with me. I think that you will be the best to judge…” he said cryptically.

Snape raised an eyebrow and followed him. Shacklebolt limped heavily as he led him to the secured and warded courtroom that had been modified and prepared for the seized children. The room was very large and three of the four walls had been turned to a soft pink for the children’s sake. There were two doors out of the room that Snape could see, but he knew they only led to small antechamber offices. The fourth room had been magically altered to be transparent on their side only to allow for monitoring by more than the eight or so nurses currently in the room attending to the few children that were awake.

There were over thirty children of all ages, hair types and skin types; from tiny infant to four year olds. There were also three young teenage girls with swollen stomachs clearly due to give birth soon. The children had hair of brown and gold and white-gold blonde as well as red; most were sleeping here and there on mats on the floor. A few were awake and playing quietly in a small group in the carefree manner of innocent children.

Snape allowed his eyes to take in the scene, finding nothing in particular that he needed to be the one to ‘looked at’ or judge… just a bunch of children who bore resemblance in some way to the owners of the samples used to create them… And then; his eyes landed on one particular child.

He blinked, frowning as he gazed at the little blonde boy. He seemed to be around four years old, his platinum blonde hair carefully combed back like a little adult, standing separated from the rest of the children. Everything about this boy screamed Malfoy; his thin angular face, high cheekbones, his fine white-blond hair, even his eyes of stormy gray. It was like looking into the past; of looking into his personal memories of a four-year old Draco Malfoy.

Kingsley watched his reaction, and then grinned in satisfaction. “That’s what I thought when I saw him as well.” He said as he watched the boy as well. “I was correct in collecting him as well…?” he asked.

“Of course you were; he must have been on the list…” Severus answered.

“He wasn’t.” He said firmly. “I double-checked each list. The child that we were to take from McNair house was a redhead; that little girl over there in nappies chewing on the stuffed pig. It was a stroke of luck we found him at all; we certainly would have missed him entirely if he had not come out of his rooms at the moment the dueling ended. He is quite angry about being removed form his home…”

“I’d better send for Lucius…” Snape said softly, pulling his wand and sending a Patronus message to Lucius, requesting his presence at the ministry.

The young blonde, Snape couldn’t help but notice, had the same expression Draco did when pouting, he even held himself the same and folded his arms, refusing to speak to or interact with anyone. Attempts by the nurses to get him to lie down on a pallet to rest were met with simple silence and glares until they gave up and let him be. Severus stood watching the child a long while; Kingsley moved off to return to other business.
“You sent for me, Severus?” Lucius asked, stepping up to gaze into the room through the transparent wall, only giving those within it a passing glance. It was the middle of the night; Severus had said that this was important.

“Indeed I did. Take a look at this young man and tell me what you think.” He suggested, gesturing to the blonde boy.

Lucius was instantly irritated and angry. “You may be an old friend, Severus, but I don’t take kindly to being dragged out of my nice warm bed so that I can look at some child!” he growled, but he allowed his eyes to slide over the room full of children out of simple curiosity. When he saw the boy, his voice cut short, his anger melted to nothing at all. “Well… I’ll be a muggle lover!” he murmured in shock.

“You see it too.” Severus commented quietly.

“I can understand that he should have Draco’s looks, as my son is his father, but… who is the mother? He does not look like Draco’s offspring; he looks like Draco stepped out of our photo albums and into life. Was he from a male pregnancy?”

“We don’t know all the details of his… creation. We only know for sure that he was not listed with the records of the others. It was mere happenstance that they found this boy. I will run the hereditary spell on him as soon as it is feasible.”

“Have the other heads of family been notified? These children must be with their true families.”

“Yes; Arthur Weasley should be here shortly. Crumb, Li, and McDougal have been notified as well. We have been unable to reach Zematis; I believe he is on tour with the band but an owl has been sent. And a message has been left at Beauxbatons for Lefevre. Your son has four children here, and Potter has four children and one unborn baby. The other two unborn children belong to Lefevre.”

“I will represent Potter; he is with Draco at the moment and does not need to be disturbed.” Lucius said aloofly. “What in Merlin’s name happened? I was informed that Parkinson escaped…”

Snape nodded. “She believes she got what she wanted when she escaped as well; but little does she know she hasn’t anything at all.”

“She did not?”

Snape smirked. “No. I provided all of them, including the younger Weasley, with sterilizing potions to ensure there would be no ‘essence’ to steal; just in case this happened.” He said. “They will be ‘shooting blanks’ for the next three months.”

“For that, Severus, I owe you a great debt.” Lucius smiled, watching the little boy slowly pace. “He holds himself with great dignity.” Lucius mused. “Whoever has taught him this far has taught him how to behave much better than I would expect of a child his age.”

“And beyond simple manners, I think.” Snape agreed thoughtfully. “As angry as he was at being taken from his home, he has yet to even raise his voice. I believe he may have witnessed a duel between those he called parents and his rescuers and seen the death of more than one of his relatives, but he has not shed a single tear. Several of the others have already gone through multiple crying fits…”
“As a proper Malfoy, he should never do that. Crying fits!” he snorted derisively. “Not one of MY offspring.”

Arthur Weasley joined them at that moment. “Lucius.” he greeted shortly; there was still little love lost between the two men, though they had come to an understanding and usually agreed to disagree nowadays. His eyes went to the children in the room and looked like they were about to pop out of his head. “Merlin’s beard…!” he whispered. “Look at them all!”

“Yes, look at them…” Lucius said quietly. “All stolen dreams; my son’s and yours as well.”

“How in the world? I mean; I can see where my boys, easily enough, but… but not Draco and certainly not Harry!”

“This entire situation is nothing – if you will pardon the pun – conceived of our normal wizarding world, Arthur.” Lucius answered.

“But how did they get Malfoy? Your son?” he asked in a whisper.

“Pansy Parkinson is a very devious, self-centered, and ultimately quite inventive witch.”

“Muggle science and wizardry, combined with clever minds created all of these babies.” Snape answered.

“What’s going to happen to them? The little darlings need families!” Arthur said with a frown. “They need good families to take care of them!”

“Yes; they will be going to their true homes, with their fathers.” Lucius answered calmly.

“That’s good, I… oh.” Arthur’s next sentence vanished from his mind as he spotted the blonde boy, quite obviously NOT part of the crowd of ‘babies’. “Yours, Lucius?”

“Yes, I do believe he is my grandson.” Lucius agreed.

“Poor boy; looks like he hasn’t had a moment of love in his whole life.” Arthur murmured sadly.

“Indeed; many of the wizards who would steal children like this would not care if there was love involved. Love is seen as a weakness.”

“Love is power.” Arthur countered immediately. “Weakness is simply the inability to understand love and its true power.” he said, looking at the children. So many of them!

“Well put, Arthur.” He agreed, surprising the wizard with the faintly red hair shot through liberally with silver.

Arthur glanced at him and responded with a bit of a smile. He felt a tug on his pant leg and looked down to see a child with bright blonde hair and tears oh his cheeks. “Want mama!” The child murmured, his lip trembling and new tears rolling down his cheeks as he spoke.

He scooped the child up, cuddling him and stroking his soft fine hair. “Hush now…” he soothed. “It’s all right…” he carried the child as he walked toward the other children. The boy clung to him, sniffling.

The young blonde looked over at the crying child and frowned with clear disapproval. He walked with carefully measured, graceful steps to the table where snacks and drinks were available. Picking up a small piece of dried fruit and a cookie, the boy moved to a corner that was unoccupied, actually
not far from the grownups at all. He clearly did not consider himself a child and did not wish to associate with them.

Lucius frowned, thinking of the implications of such behavior. The child had been found in the house with another child, but lived completely separate. “I do believe that I should have a word with that young man.” he murmured.

“Please do.” Snape made a mock-bow and gestured grandly. Lucius shot him a sardonic smirk as he moved to the door. He took a moment to compose himself then stepped into the room, looking elegant and regal; his face calm, a mask of deadly yet carefully reigned-in power. He had known he was coming to the ministry so had taken his usual pains to ensure that he was looking his absolute best, even if he had only had two or so hours of sleep.

The young blonde stopped eating his cookie, his eyes riveted on the fair-haired wizard. Cookie forgotten, he walked toward him, silently gazing at him and halting just outside of arm’s reach. Lucius watched him, though he appeared not to; a smirk on his face.

“I’m not like them, sir. I don’t miss my mother.” He said in a quiet, proud voice. “I want to be strong; like you are.”

Merlin; he even sounded like Draco had as a child. It gave him a strange pang of sadness; he had not really known Draco when his son had been this age. He had avoided him to avoid treating him with the same cruelty he had been raised with. “Do you know why I am strong?” Lucius asked him, still not looking at the boy.

“Yes sir.” he nodded. “You’ve got power, sir.” he said in a much more grown-up voice than a lad his age should have.

“Yes, indeed. But I have more than simple power. I had a mother who supported and loved me, as I support and love my son. He, in turn, is a strong wizard as well.” He explained, finally lowering his eyes to look at him. “Was your mother cruel to you?”

The boy looked away quickly but Lucius saw a brief moment of the hurt little boy inside that child’s eyes. “I… yes, sir. I don’t want anyone to feel sorry for me. I’m stronger now.” He said with his jaw set resolutely.

“You need not be concerned about her; she will be punished for her deeds.” He answered, glancing down at the child who looked very confused for a moment.

“Why would she be punished?” he asked softly. “She did what was needed.”

Lucius considered his answer, gazing at the child. “She will be punished because she has done wrong, young man.” He answered, and then paused for a moment. “Do you have any idea who I am?”

“No, sir. I do not know who you are, my lord, but… are you one of the people who will decide where I will go now? They told me I couldn’t go back home to my bower.”

“I am much more than simply a man who has a say in your placement, child. I am Lucius Abraxus Malfoy. And I am your grandfather.”

The boy was going to face a very confusing evening; it seemed he had been told nothing of his heritage. “I already have a grandfather, sir. Lord Father McNair is my grandfather.”

“He is, through that woman that birthed you.” Lucius said with a sneer upon his lips. That woman
had abused this child purposefully. “But he has no claim upon you, as you are my son’s child. Therefore, you are and will always be a Malfoy.” Lucius added with a smile.

“I am…?” he said, eyes brightening as he gazed up at him. “Will I live with you, Lord Father Malfoy?”

“Is that your wish, child?” he asked, raising an elegant eyebrow.

The boy flushed and bowed his head. “I… I cannot say sir.” he murmured.

Lucius realized this boy had indeed endured a very strict upbringing and would have been punished for trying to assert his will with an elder. He wondered what this little innocent had been forced to endure in his short life. The stories that this boy could tell could rival his own stories of suffering. “Tell me, child. What is your name?”

“Alerick Salazar McNair, sir.” the answer was very quick and clear.

“Not McNair. Malfoy.” Lucius corrected.

“Oh… yes sir. Alerick Salazar Malfoy.” He repeated, adding the correction with a bit of a shy smile.

“Your name means ruler of all.” Lucius said with a soft smirk. “And you have indeed been named well.” Alerick glowed with the praise even though it was not directed at him. “Have you begun any training? Have your powers shown?”

“Oh, yes sir. I’ve been training a long, long time. Every day, sir.” he held himself proudly.

The elder wizard wasn’t sure he liked the sound of that. This boy was much too young for training. “And what have you been training for?”

The boy looked very proud as he recited, head held high. “I have been given the highest honor in all the land; I will be the Dark Prince’s right hand, the one he turns to with all his problems, his advisor. I am the consort for the Dark Prince.” He answered.

A slight frown touched Lucius’ face for only a brief moment. Consort? The child was only four! “Indeed? And do you know, young Alerick, what a consort is?”

A scowl appeared on the boy’s face as he thought hard for the proper answer. “I’m… I’m to serve him, to help protect him, and to help him. And to give him everything he needs to be happy?”

“In a way. You have many years to learn what a consort is, and you will be given the chance to decide if this is what you truly wish to do with your life.” Lucius told him.

The boy’s expression clouded. “It’s what I was born to do. I HAVE to be the consort. I couldn’t be anything else.”

“If that is your wish.” Lucius repeated. “Then that is what you shall do. But first I will have you understand everything that is involved, then you shall make your decision.”

“Yes, sir, Lord Father Malfoy.”

Lucius allowed his gaze to wander back to Arthur, who was seated on the floor with two children already cuddled in his arms and a third clamoring for his attention. That man did truly have a way with littles. He pulled his mind back to the subject at hand. “Have you met this so-called Dark Prince?” Lucius asked, doubting the existence of such a person.
“Oh yes sir; but he’s still a baby…” he started, then closed his mouth and flushed, biting his lip.

Obviously Alerick was not supposed to speak of him. Lucius pressed further. “Is he here in this room?”

He hesitated, then lifted his eyes and scanned the room, looking carefully at each of the other children in the room. “No, Lord Malfoy… but… but I’m not supposed to even talk about him.” he said, flushing deeply, expecting a harsh reprimand.

“I am your lord, am I not?” Lucius asked. “I wish for you to tell me. I am, after all, the Dark Lord’s commanding officer.”

He looked up at him with wide, slightly unsure eyes. “Yes, but… he’s not here, Lord Father Malfoy.” he said in a quiet voice. “But his hair is really dark, like theirs…” he pointed at two of the children who were clearly Harry’s offspring with his unruly shock of black hair. “All crazy like that and dark.”

“Where have they hidden my lord?” Lucius asked. “Who is keeping him from his rightful home?”

Alerick frowned, his young face screwing up in concentration. “He’s a long ways from here, very far away.” he said, and then looked at Lucius. “The others are much closer.”


“You don’t know, Lord Father?” he tilted his head questioningly.

“I wish to hear what you know, young Alerick.” He answered evasively, and his evasion worked.

Alerick smiled proudly, thinking he was being tested. He knew the proper answer to this one. “We are the Dark Prince and the Inner Circle. I am the consort, and they are the guardians and the enchanter.”

That sounded ominous. “Guardians? Explain, Alerick.”

He glanced at the others as if fearing someone. “We must not talk of all that here, Lord Father… the others… someone else will hear who should not and they will hurt the Dark Prince.” he said worriedly. “Please… do not ask this of me, I must never do anything that will harm my Prince.”

“Then we shall retire somewhere more private; there is a room right over there.” Lucius gestured to one of the doors and led the child across the room around the sleeping and milling children being tended by the nurses. He opened the door with a gesture of his wand and walked in, pleased to see that Alerick had followed him dutifully and entered the room with him, glancing about. It was a small office.

Lucius spoke a spell and transfigured the two worn out chairs into more appropriate furniture for himself and the child. The dumpy purple thing turned into an elegant chair with ornate woodcarvings covered in what looked to be watered green silk. He moved to take a seat, gesturing with his wand to shut the door behind them. “You can speak here; there will be no danger to you or anyone for revealing information to the wrong ears.”

Alerick looked very relieved and obediently took his seat. “What do you wish me to tell, Lord Father Malfoy?” he asked, gazing up at him.

“The guardians?” He prompted.
“They are to protect the Dark Prince and me too.” He answered. “There wasn’t supposed to be two but he was a twin. They live…” he frowned a moment, then pointed due north. “They live that way.” He said.

“You know where they live?” he asked the child.

Alerick frowned slightly, shook his head. “No, sir. But I know they are in that direction.” Again he pointed due north.

“And the other? The enchanter?”

“She lives that way.” he pointed southwest.

“What is her job, Alerick?”

“She makes friends.” He smiled at him. “She’s really good at it.”

“Hm…” Lucius said, very careful to keep his face clear of expression though his mind was racing. The guardians would be, of course, to protect this Dark Prince. The enchanter? Perhaps to ensure that he had a strong following bound to him if his own charisma did not prove strong enough. If Alerick was not on their list these others would not be; and all must be rescued. These would be the most important of all to rescue: the Dark Prince and his full entourage. “Very good, my boy. You have an excellent memory, indeed.” he said.

Alerick beamed at the praise, head held high. “Thank you Lord Father Malfoy.”

“Tell me; where is the Dark Prince? Where have they taken him?”

“Its’ very far; it always snows there and its very, very cold. There were two babies before him but they weren’t the real Prince. The real Dark Prince got born just before spring last year, we waited and waited and he finally got born.” he explained, though he didn’t understand exactly what he was telling. “I went there a lot of times but I can’t understand anyone there they talk all funny…” he said, his face now screwed up in concentration as he sought for the right words to explain.

“Who is holding him? Who dares to keep the Prince away from his rightful family?”

“The man had an odd name and awful looking teeth… Cara-rac-a-coff…?” he said, stumbling over the name and looking irritated at himself. “I can’t say it; I’m sorry Lord Father Malfoy.”

“Excellent, Alerick.” He corrected firmly and the boy smiled for only a moment, then his smile faded. “But… they won’t take him too, will they Lord Father? They mustn’t take him away from his home.”

“Who shouldn’t take him?”

“These… these PEOPLE!” he whispered, looking over at the door. “They took me from my home, from my bower. I don’t belong here, Lord Father Malfoy, but they won’t let me go home. If they take the Dark Prince he won’t be strong enough. He has to… they… they will kill him!” he said, looking very worried.

“They are not going to harm the child. You see; the Aurors work for me.” Lucius smirked.

Alerick gazed at him, his worry draining away. “Truly, Lord Father Malfoy?” he whispered. “The teachers and servants watch him all the time to keep him safe, he can’t ever be alone because he’s in so much danger.”
“Well, I shall find a way to retrieve our little Prince. Do not fear for him.” He assured the boy, rising. “Now, it is time to get you out of here and properly housed. You will come to my home for the night. In the morning you will meet your father and his husband.”

The boy looked hesitant. “I… I don’t have a father… only Lord Father McNair… and you, sir.”

“Not only do you have a father, you have a family.” He clarified.

“I can’t have. Its not… I mean… Lord Father, family makes you weak.” he said, clearly repeating what he had been taught by repetition.

“Nonsense. Come along; you have been taught much and will need to unlearn some things. You will have the best of families; for you, my boy, are a Malfoy.” Lucius said proudly, his hand resting a moment on the boy’s soft hair for a moment.

The child stiffened at the touch, then looked up at him confused when the hand was drawn away without striking him. “Yes of course, Lord Father Malfoy.” he murmured.

“Severus?” Lucius moved out again into the main room.

Severus and Tonks were standing near the door talking; the room had emptied in their absence and only a dozen children remained. Even the pregnant young ladies had been whisked off somewhere. Those remaining had blonde, brown or spiky black hair; the redheads and most of the dark-skinned children were gone. “I will be taking the Potter and Malfoy children to the manor; they will be staying with us.” He said firmly. “And young Alerick here will have a special room until our little Dark Prince is found and returned to us.”

“Dark Prince?” Tonks repeated, hoping she was just tired and had heard wrong. “What?”

“You heard me. The Dark Prince has not been found; neither have the guardians, nor the enchanter.”

“Four more.” Tonks murmured, glancing at Snape.

“Exactly as Mrs. Weasley stated we needed to find.” he commented.

“Three of them live near us; the fourth, the most important, is in Bavaria. Somewhere near Durmstrang, I believe.”

“Merlin.” Tonks breathed thoughtfully.

“And they may have been alerted.”

“We have to move immediately to get them all!”

“You do and the child will vanish. Don’t be a fool.” Lucius snarled.

“He’s going to vanish if we don’t!” she snapped back at him.

Lucius took her by the arm and led her forcibly out of the room. She shook her arm free, glaring at him. “Don’t you treat me like a child, Lucius Malfoy!” she snapped.

“Then stop acting as one! I would have thought that Severus would have taught you to use your head!”

“We took twenty seven children out of their homes tonight! What makes you think that they won’t spirit these other four out of their happy little nests and hide them from us? Or, what the hell, why do
“Because they are their chosen ones. The Dark Prince is the one who survived. He is the one they have waited for. They will never do anything to harm him.” He sneered.

She fell silent a moment, struck by that news. Hermione had said they were killing the children who did not survive their tests; that they were trying to make a perfect child. “We have to go in covert and get them… damn it all! I know we didn’t miss anyone on the list!”

“No, you did not. These children are not on those lists. You heard Kingsley; it was mere coincidence that they found Alerick at all. They were hidden from the very start.”

“How will we find him, then? How will we find any of them? We don’t even know the age of these children, much less where to find them beyond the country that they live in.”

“The Dark Prince is a baby, so I have been told.”

“Ought to be really simple to find; a dark-haired baby in Romania. How in the bloody hell is that supposed to help find him?” She asked sarcastically, and then drew a deep breath, letting it out in a sigh. “I do have some contacts there.” She said thoughtfully. “I don’t want to wait on this, Lucius. If what Hermione said is true, we can’t afford to lose track of him or any of the others.”

“I agree; we must work with haste but we must also move quite carefully.”

“Then we will work together and get this done. I don’t want to leave a single child in their control.”

“We will not be able to do anything tonight. These children need to go home and be tended and cared for. A warm bed and good meal in the morning is in order for all of them.”

“And they need to be safeguarded as well.” She agreed, though she was clearly unhappy with the delay. “Severus told me that he thinks that the young boy who looks like Draco has had rites performed upon him… they’ll want him back for certain.”

“Oh; this I know. They will try to retrieve their second.” He agreed. “They will stay at the manor. I have special protections upon my home that have been reinforced generation after generation; no one will reach them without my consent or knowledge.”

She sighed. “All right, I know he’ll be safe there.” she said softly.

“Does Severus know what rites were performed upon the boy?”

“No; he didn’t, but he has ways to find out. All the rites leave their mark upon the body somewhere. Shall I send him to see you?”

“In the morning.” He nodded. I think it is time we get these children home and settled. I will leave you to find proper quarters for the children of the other fathers.” He said, turning back into the room.

Alerick gazed up at him with worry on his face. “Lord Father? Is something happening to my Dark Prince?”

“Not yet, young one. Tonight we sleep. But soon we will go and rescue your Dark Prince and bring him home where he belongs.”

“I get to live with my Prince?” His eyes lit up. “I feel so happy when I’m with him!”

Lucius smirked. “Yes, young Alerick. You will be living with him and with me as well. Come now;
it is time we go to our home.” He stated. “Mimsy!” he called out sharply. With a muffled ‘bampf’ a house elf appeared at his feet, bowing low.

“You is needing Mimsy, Master?”

“Yes. Gather the Potter and Malfoy children. Have them fed if they wish food, bathe them and settle them into rooms in the manor. Use the east wing rooms, they should be more than suitable. And prepare my son’s old room.”

The house elf gazed about, eyes wide. “Many childrens… yes, oh yes Master Malfoy!” he agreed.

“Very good.” He said sighing with weariness. “Come, Alerick. It is time for you to see your new home.”

“Yes, Lord Father Malfoy.” Alerick answered, moving to his side.

Angel was curled up in Lucius’ favorite armchair before the fireplace, dozing lightly when Lucius stepped through. The soft noise of the roused her and she opened her eyes sleepily, pushing herself upright slightly. She sat up sleepily, smiling when she saw him, reaching out her arms to him. “Nonno!” she murmured.

He gave her a soft smile and reached to scoop her up, holding her in a hug for a moment. “Hello, my little Angel.”

She settled against his shoulder with complete and innocent trust. “I had a bad dream… Nona said it was all right if I waited for you out here.” she murmured, half asleep on his shoulder as kissed her hair tenderly.

“Everything is all right, little one. Let’s get you to bed.” he said, glancing at Alerick.

The boy gazed up at him expectantly, clearly exhausted but willing to do whatever was asked of him. Lucius indicated with a nod that the boy should simply follow. He carried Angel back to her bedroom and settled her in her bed, murmuring soft and soothing words to her as he tucked her back in, giving her a gentle kiss on the forehead. “Sleep now, little one. Sleep deep and peaceful.” he said, straightening. She was already asleep by the time he stood. He watched her a moment then turned to see Alerick standing by the door, looking unsure.

“Is something wrong, Alerick?” he asked as he moved out the door and led the boy onward.

“No, Lord Father, of course not. But… who is that girl?”

“You will learn all in the morning, lad. Now is not the time for long discussions and conversation; now is the time to rest.” He said. The boy followed him silently through the quiet entryway to the east wing, turning right into the first door. “Here is the room you will be staying in.” he said, opening the door.

Alerick stepped into the room furnished in a very ornate, traditional style. The furniture was dark-toned carved wood complimented by rich green velvets and silks. Heavy drapes hung on the windows; there was a tall bookshelf full of books and nicknacks and other items. Centered between the two windows sat the bed; it was the most unusual thing that Alerick had ever seen. The mattress was circular and clearly feather and silk made up its covers. The headboard was no mere board; it
was the form of a protective guarding dragon. It lay curled about the bed with its head low over its foreclaws on the right side and its tail curling about the left. One wing was folded behind it, but the forward wing was extended and made a sort of canopy over the mattress. The carved creature was silver-white and scaleless with huge blue eyes that seemed to sparkle and swirl. Lucius smiled as he gazed at it; he had paid an artisan specially to design this bed for his son; Draco had spent many peaceful nights sleeping in the protective dragon’s embrace. Lucius had reinforced its perceived protections with real protections; anyone who the bed was not tuned to could not even reach a hand over the mattress without the carved beast keening an alarm loud enough to wake the dead.

“Is this my room, Lord Father Malfoy?” he asked softly, gazing about.

“It is. Do you like it?”

“Yes, Lord Father. This is even better than my bower.” He said, moving over to the bed. “Is this a real dragon?” he asked innocently, reaching up to touch the intricately detailed headboard.

“No, nor is it designed after any dragon ever seen in our wizarding world.” He answered. “But I can assure you; it will protect you while you sleep.”

Alerick gave him a soft smile. “Thank you, Lord Father Malfoy.” He said.

“Tooles!” Lucius called.

Almost before he had finished calling for her, the energetic little house elf appeared before him, bowing low. “Master Malfoy is needing Toodles?”

“Yes. This is Alerick. You are to tend to him tonight and ensure that he is comfortable.” He ordered.

“Yes master, Toodles is doing.” The elf looked at the young boy who was easily two inches taller than she, looking quite eager to get to work.

“I will see you in the morning, Alerick.” Lucius said, turning to leave.

“Sleep well, Lord Father.” The boy said with a perfectly executed formal bow.

“You as well, young man.” He said, moving out. He knew that Toodles would take every precaution to protect the young ‘consort’ and would ensure his safety for the remainder of the night.

He glanced out a window as he made his way to his own room; false dawn was lighting the sky. He sighed wearily but did not go directly to his bed. He moved into the nursery and went to check on the infants. He could not help but smile as he gazed down at the two sleeping so peacefully there. Their little faces were softly illuminated by the streams of moonlight still filtering through the window. They were such beautiful babies…

Severus Snape stepped out of the fireplace, dusting himself off fastidiously. It was early, but he wanted to get a better look at these children. Especially that little doppelganger of Draco; what was his name? Ah, yes. Alerick. He suspected there was something more going on with that boy than met the eye. He called for a house elf and sent it off to find Lucius and alert him to his presence if he was awake.
It was not long before Lucius moved to join him. Severus found it extremely irritating how Lucius Malfoy could look resplendent with every hair in place even with only three or less hours of sleep. “Here rather early, aren’t you Severus?” he asked, glancing out at the sky. It had the faintest pink glow of impending sunrise.

“I don’t think we should delay in the search for the other ‘special’ children.” He said quietly. “Dora has only just now fallen asleep; she has worried herself to exhaustion about them, although I doubt she will sleep more than an hour or two. I could not convince her that there was nothing we could do as we had no leads.”

“What has she done to begin the search?” Lucius asked.

“Mrs. Weasley is certain that Pansy’s father is deeply involved in all of this. The appearance of your grandson looking so similar to Draco sent her into motion to see if perhaps Parkinson had returned to her home. She sent a team to the Parkinson’s home and it turns out there is no one living there. They had bewitched the lights to continue to turn on and off at random times, so those watching the house were certain someone was home. It has been very recently abandoned with very little of value left behind.” Snape said, slowly pacing as he spoke.

“Somehow that doesn’t surprise me.” Lucius said sardonically.

Severus frowned. “The trouble is, now we have no lead.”

“On the contrary, my old friend. We have a very solid lead.”

“We do?”

“Yes. Alerick.”

He scowled at him. “That boy? What can that boy know?”

Lucius smiled softly. “Plenty, it seems. He can, for example, tell us which direction each of the others of the ‘inner circle’ resides.” He replied.

“And when did he reveal this to you?”

“Last night.” He answered, moving to get both of them a cup of very strong tea. “There seems to be a bond of some sort between them. Alerick is to be the consort, and he may well be the perfect one to use for an old-fashioned scrying to see if we can locate the others.”

“Old-fashioned is right; I’m not even sure I have the supplies necessary to do such a thing.” Snape frowned softly.

“Between my galleons and your knowledge, we will have everything ready to perform by luncheon.” Lucius smirked, sipping his tea.

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Harry and Draco stepped out of the fireplace, arm in arm. “Terry is sweet as can be, but it really is good to be home.” Draco sighed contentedly. “I truly do hope he’s with child.”

“That would be absolutely brilliant.” Harry agreed. “Do you think your father brought the children
home last night?”

“Of course he did. He would never have allowed them to remain there.” Draco said firmly.

“Where would he have put them?”

“In the children’s wing, of course.”

“You have a children’s wing? But you were an only child, what did you need a children’s wing for?” Harry wondered aloud.

The blonde laughed. “The manor has been in the family for generations, love. Just because mother and father only had me doesn’t mean every generation of Malfoys have had only one child.” He reminded. “I have been told at one time that there were three full families living here.”

“And this place is so big they probably never ran into each other unless they intended to.” Harry smirked, walking with him through the halls. Draco chuckled as he led him through the great entrance hall and to the east wing. The distant sound of children’s voices became clearer.

“Young sir, it is time for you to dress.” one of the nurses stood in the hallway beside the door of a bedroom. “You must dress for breakfast…”

“I will not wear such childish things!” a young voice said insistently, arms folded. Draco smiled softly as he watched a moment.

“You must change to be properly presented to your grandfather for breakfast and to meet your grandmother.”

“I will NOT wear that! There is nothing you can do to make me wear such a silly looking thing! I want my robes!”

“They are being cleaned, I told you…”

“Then I will remain in my room until I can wear them!” he scowled at her and the nurse took a step back as an unmistakable wave of power came from the young boy. “I will NOT wear that!” he repeated.

“And you should not wear it, if it is not to your liking.” Draco said, stepping forward. “Never settle for second best.” The power waves dissipated and the boy looked over at him; Draco was immediately struck by the boy’s likeness to him. Alerick gazed at him, silent, and bowed formally to him.

“I’m just trying to get him dressed, but he won’t wear what we have on hand.” the nurse explained. In her hands was a simple button-down shirt and pair of shorts. “He doesn’t have anything else.”

“I will take care of this; you may go.” Draco told her. The nurse nodded, gave a quick bow and hurried off to help take care of the other children.

Draco returned his gaze back to the child. “I am Draco Malfoy. I am your father.” He said then noticed he was staring at Harry. “Is something wrong?”

“I’m never supposed to see him.” Alerick said quietly, slipping backwards into the room.

“Things will be changing for you, many things. One of those is that you ARE allowed to see your father, and you are allowed to see my husband.” Draco assured, moving to the doorway to watch the
He stood beside the dragon bed, directly under the head of the creature as if seeking shelter. “Yes Lord Malfoy.” He said quietly, and then took a deep breath. “I’m ready to do my reciting.” he said.

“Reciting?” Draco asked.

“Yes, Lord Malfoy. I must recite my duties as consort every morning to be sure I never forget, and then I have to practice my spell words to be sure I can say them right.” He said, looking a little confused. These grown-ups knew nothing of his regular routine; he’d surely fall behind if he remained here. “Won’t I have my old Nursemaid here? She knows what I must do.”

“You will be tended by our house elves and nurses here, Alerick.” Draco answered.

“You will not be returning to your old home nor will you see any of those you used to be surrounded by.” Harry told him quietly.

He frowned, looking down. “I haven’t any proper clothing here. I cannot go to meet my grandfather and grandmother dressed in this… this nightshirt that house elf made me wear.”

“I will get you something more appropriate for a young wizard.” Draco assured. “You shall have one of mine; I will use a sizing charm to make it small enough to fit you.”

He looked up at him. “You will?”

“Of course.” Draco assured, turning to the closet. He opened it and moved into the expansive walk-in closet, looking around. He picked out one of the first sets of wizard’s robes that his father had purchased him, when he was nine years old. “This should do. We will see about getting you a proper wardrobe purchased very soon.” He said, turning back and showing the boy, who eyed it with a little hesitance, then nodded.

“All right, thank you Lord Malfoy.” He said, turning his back as he stripped off his nightshirt.

Upon Alerick’s right shoulder there was a very clear and very familiar tattoo; just seeing it sent a chill of dread running down Draco’s spine. A skull, with a snake twining around and through its mouth opened as if to scream… This boy bore the Dark Mark! He looked back at his husband, eyes wide. “Harry!” he whispered, his face losing all color.

“I see it.” Harry responded in a quiet tone. Draco had backed out of the room and Harry called for a house elf to come and adjust the sizing to make the robes properly fit the boy.

“Thank you, very much sir.” he said formally.

“You’re welcome.” Harry assured. “The house elves will be along shortly to show you to the breakfast table.” He told the boy, who nodded and moved to the window, sitting down in a chair there to wait in a quiet and unruffled manner.

Harry turned from Alerick’s room to find Draco was nowhere to be seen. He frowned, worried. Draco had been so pale when he had hurried away, leaving Harry to take care of Alerick. He moved
to their room, looking around in the adjoining restroom before he moved on to check both the library
then the den. “Toodles?” He called, knowing it could take him quite a while to locate his husband in
all of these rooms of the mansion.

The little house elf appeared instantly. “Yes Master Harry?”

“Where is Draco?” He asked.

“Master Draco is gone to the greenhouse.”

“Thank you.” Harry said, moving quickly on his way. “Draco?” he called as he moved into the
building. He spotted a bit of off color down in the area where the larger plants were cultivated; he
moved closer and found Draco there, pale and shaking. “Oh, Dray…” Harry moved to him, pulling
him into his arms.


“He’s just a child. Voldemort is dead. It can’t be the real Dark Mark, the Dark Lord is long dead,
baby.”

“You’re sure? You’re sure he’s gone?”

“Yes, Dragon; I swear to you. He will never return to harm you again.” Harry held him close,
soothing him with his soft speech and gentle caresses. “This is just one of Pansy’s sick, twisted jokes
or something; he’s only a child, much too young to have the true mark. He’s an innocent, caught up
in a sick game. It’s all right.”

Draco trembled in his arms, clinging to him. Seeing that mark again on such an innocent child had
shaken him to the core. “It’s not a game, Harry; not a joke… there’s more to it, I know there is!” he
whispered.

“He’s gone, Dragon, he is NEVER coming back!” Harry said softly, gazing at his husband in
concern. “No one is going to hurt you or our children.” he reassured, then, seeing that he was having
no impact upon his husband’s level of anxiety, he called for assistance once more. “Tootles?”

The house elf appeared, looking rather worried. “You is needin’ Toodles?”

“Yes. Can you have Severus Snape come? Draco is upset and needs a potion.”

“Oh yes, Master, Toodles is fetchin’ him right away!” She said and vanished immediately.

“Come on; let’s get you to our room…” Harry said gently.

“What’s going to happen to Alerick, Harry? What’s father going to say? What’s he going to do?”

“He’s just a normal child, Dray…”

“But he has the Mark, Harry! Do the other children have the mark too?”

“No one knows about the mark; as far as anyone is concerned, he’s a normal child.” he gently led
him toward the house. “You’ll see. Severus will check him; he will know for certain if the mark is
real or a fake.”

“Could it really? Could it be a fake?” Draco asked hopefully as Harry led him into the bedroom.

“Of course it could. I’m fairly sure it is. It’s gotta be just Pansy’s sick way of making fun of what’s
happened in the past.” he reassured, having Draco sit on the edge of the bed.

There was a loud bang and Toodles reappeared with a rather startled Severus Snape. The sallow-faced wizard held a basket laden with various spell components; some that Harry could tell were actually quite expensive. The house elf looked very proud of herself. “Master Draco, Master Harry, I bring him for you!”

“Someone will have to explain to the shopkeeper why I did not pay.” He scowled at the elf, who scowled up at him.

“Master Draco be needing you NOW! We is not waiting to pay!” she retorted, standing her ground.

“The Mark… Uncle Sev, the Mark, the Dark Mark is back!” Draco whispered, eyes wide and skin pale.

“What are you talking about? Here, you need to be lying down…” he frowned, setting the basket aside and moving forward to assist his godson to lie back on the bed. “What in Merlin’s name has you so upset?”

“Alerick! Alerick has the Dark Mark!” Draco whispered.

“What?” Snape’s frown deepened as he glanced at Harry.

“On the back of his right shoulder. It’s a tattoo some mad person put on the boy. It does look like the Dark Mark, but it can’t be. He’s far too young,” Harry clarified, more shaken than he would show anyone at this point.

“The Dark Lord is no more, Draco.” Snape said calmly. “You must calm yourself; this has to be a fake. Why someone would do this only Merlin knows.” he settled Draco onto the bed and pulled his wand, doing a few scans. “You must calm down.” he repeated, pulling a potion. “Your stress is affecting your son.” he said, pulling out a potion.

“I would have given him something but I didn’t know for sure what would be safe,” Harry said softly, watching worriedly. “So I sent for you…”

“Please Uncle Sev, please look at it. I swear it looks so real!” Draco murmured, hands shaking as he took the potion.

“I will take care of it, Draco. I want you to try and rest now. I’ll send up some breakfast for you, but I want you to stay off your feet.”

“Yes, Uncle Severus.” Draco murmured, allowing himself to finally relax as the potion did its work, relaxing tense muscles and easing the level of panic, muddling his mind and helping him to rest.

Harry covered him gently, sitting beside him on the bed. He tenderly brushed Draco’s hair back away from his face. “Everything is going to be fine,” he said softly, reassuringly as he watched Draco’s eyes slowly close. “We’ll take care of it. You have nothing to fret over.” he stayed by Draco’s side until he was certain that his husband was sound asleep. “Toodles? You stay here with Draco. Tell us if he needs anything.” He instructed.

“Toodles is caring for Master.” She bowed low to him.

“Where is Alerick?” Severus asked. “I need to see this mark.”

“He’s most likely at breakfast.” Harry walked out with Severus. “The mark is hardly bigger than a
Galleon but it really does look like the real thing; this is just mental! Why would anyone want to mark a child this way?"

"The mark was never placed on any child of his age; it was never put on anyone younger than their teens. The Dark Lord had absolutely no use for children.” Severus answered quietly.

Harry was struck with a thought and memory of the uses the Dark Marks were utilized for by the Dark Lord. "Merlin.” He murmured, looking at the older man. “Severus; they can’t call him with it can they? They can’t find him here?’

“I don’t think they could call him by using it, if the mark turns out to be real.” Severus answered. “The Marks were used to call the servants, not to drag them unwilling to his side. If they had been usable that way Karkaroff and those who did not show up to his reappearance in that cemetery would have been dead the very first night. I doubt they could even use it to call the child, if it is real, anyway. There are many generations of protections on and about the Manor that would prevent any type of summons from getting through.”

“We need to be sure of that. I don’t want to take any chances someone might show up here. I want Draco and Angel safe.”

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“Morning daddy.” Angel smiled as the two moved into the dining room. All the children were seated about the table; Lucius at one end watching the nurses tend to the children as they ate their breakfasts. Angel sat at Lucius’ left side, and Narcissa sat on her other side. Opposite Angel at the table sat Alerick at Lucius’ right side. Of all the children, only Angel and Alerick were displaying proper manners expected of someone much older than they were.

“Good morning Angel.” Harry moved to give her a kiss on the head.

Alerick watched him kiss the girl, and then looked down at his food, a faint look of envy on his handsome young face. He picked delicately at his meal and took another bite.

“I missed you last night. Is papa okay?”

“Yes, love. He is resting right now; we had a very late night last night.” he reassured her.

“But Papa needs to eat too, for the baby.” she said worriedly.

“Don’t you worry, Angel, we’re taking care of that. He will eat when he wakes.”

“Severus, I didn’t know you had returned.” Lucius said. “Join us, won’t you?”

“I’ve eaten. I was actually out shopping for what we needed when I was called to come here today.” he said with a smirk in Harry’s direction.

“Ah, excellent. Were you able to acquire everything?” The elder Malfoy asked, taking a sip of his tea.

“Most of it; I shall have to return to pick up the rest.”

Alerick nudged his plate back and sipped his juice, watching Severus out of the corner of his eye.
“I’m all done, Nonno; can I feed the babies now?” Angel asked.

Narcissa smiled. “I think that Nonno has business to tend to, so you may help me to care for the little ones after you wash up.”

Angel’s eyes sparkled. “Can I be excused? Please?” she asked, so eager to go she was wiggling in her seat.

“Of course you may.” Narcissa laughed softly. Angel bounced out of her chair, paused to push her chair in and scurried off to wash up.

Alerick watched her with envy clear on his face now. He had not really been allowed to act like a child, and seeing adults who doted on the behavior of a child was a little confusing and disconcerting. He would have been beaten for sure if he had dared to act as that girl just had. He looked down and sighed softly, waiting to be properly dismissed from the table.

“Alerick, you will be coming with us.” Severus ordered. The boy looked at him, then turned and looked at the elder blonde wizard. “Lord Father Malfoy?” he said as if asking permission.

“You are excused, Alerick.” Lucius said, nodding to the boy.

“And you should come with us as well, Lucius.” Harry said softly.

Lucius raised an eyebrow at that, but rose nonetheless. “I think I shall.” he agreed. Alerick looked up at him and smiled, clearly relieved. He moved to fall in step behind the elder blonde wizard.

Severus led the group through the house to Lucius’ well-stocked lab, securing the door behind them when all were inside.

Lucius glanced at Severus, then Harry. He was beginning to worry; something had to be extremely wrong for these two to call him in as well. “What is the trouble, Severus?” he asked, preferring to inquire of his friend, keeping his tone calm.

“There is something that I need you to look at. Both of you…” Harry said softly. “Alerick? I need you to take your robe off your shoulders.”

He looked up at Lucius. “Must I, Lord Father?”

“If it is something that these two believe that I should see then yes, you must remove your robe, Alerick.” Lucius said with a nod.

The boy nodded and obediently undid his robes, allowing them to slip off his shoulders to the floor.

The shock of seeing the Dark Mark, so clearly and perfectly inscribed upon the pale skin of the little boy hit Lucius like a physical blow. Even Snape, who had been expecting to see a mark, was shocked by seeing the actual thing upon the boy’s shoulder. It was on the back of his right shoulder, and an inch tall. It was a perfect representation as both older men knew; they had copies of it permanently engraved up on their forearms that, with years of dormancy, had faded over the years but would never be gone. Both of them felt a tingle and warm sensation from their own Dark Marks; they knew at that moment that this was no joke, no sick attempt to try to make people fear. This Dark Mark borne by this boy of only four was definitely the real thing.

Lucius’ eyes held a dark fury as he looked at Severus. “My son has seen this?”

“Yes.” Harry said softly. “We put him to bed and sent for his healer.”
Alerick looked over his shoulder at them, confused. “What is wrong, Lord Father?” he asked, trying to see what was making them all so upset.

“Nothing for you to be concerned with, my boy. Just a simple birth mark.” Lucius answered.

“I don’t have any birthmark, Lord Father, I…Oh!” the boy’s face lit with a smile and he held himself quite proudly. “You’re talking about my Dark Mark.”

“Yes, indeed. You are quite a clever child. What does this mark mean to you, Alerick?”

“It means that I belong to the Dark Prince.” He answered. “It means that I am his to command.”

“So the others will have this mark as well?”

“One of the guardians doesn’t.” He said, shaking his head. “They didn’t really want her but he was so strong they marked him and let her stay too.”

“But how was it placed, if this Dark Prince is but a babe? Who controls it?”

His smile faltered at that memory. “There was a ceremony. I was very strong; it hurt but it didn’t stop me, I was born to be the consort. My Dark Prince had to be tested too and he went through a ceremony but he was very strong and doesn’t have to have a mark.”

“Alerick, how was it placed upon you?” Snape interrupted the boy.

He frowned at Snape. “I told you. The ceremony…”

“Who was the head of the ceremony?” Lucius asked.

His frown deepened. “I… I don’t know his name, Lord Father Malfoy. I was not allowed in the room when they would talk. And Lord Father McNair called him lots of things that I’m not allowed to say when he wasn’t around. When he was he called him… um… Parks?”

“You may put your robes back on, Alerick.” Lucius instructed, and then called for a house elf. “Take the young lord to the nursery with the others.”

“Yes, Master Malfoy.”

“Lord Father Malfoy? Must I be with the babies?” Alerick asked softly as he obediently picked up the robes and slipped his arms into the sleeves.

“Angel is not a baby. She is your age; actually a bit older than you are. She will be a companion to you.”

“She is different, I am no like her…” he said, looking down. “She is not trained, I…”

“Trained or not, Alerick; she is my granddaughter and your sister. I expect you to treat her with respect as is befitting a Malfoy.”

“Of course, Lord Father.” He said, bowing to him, continuing to fumble with the catches on the robes meant for someone much older than he. “I will treat her as I have been taught, I would do no less.” the house elf moved up to assist him and Alerick stepped back from the elf, giving it a distasteful look. He was the Consort; he should not be sullied by house elves. Last night was bad enough! He looked up at Lucius. “I can’t… I’m sorry, Lord Father, its much more complicated than my own robes. Help please?”
Lucius knelt to fasten the robes with a quirked eyebrow and no smile. “You must allow the house elves to assist you; that is their job here, Alerick.” He instructed.

Alerick looked ashamed, looking down. “Forgive me Lord Father.” he murmured.

“Forgiven. But you need to learn how to live in our home.” He said, brushing Alerick’s hair back and smoothing it in place. “Things will be all right now that you are home, my boy. It will just take some getting used to for you.”

“I miss my things, Lord Father. And I miss my servant.” He said softly.

“You had a servant?”

“Yes, Lord Father. He dressed me and bathed me and took care of all of my needs… I am unused to doing things for myself though I did try to learn.”

“You will adjust, Alerick.” Lucius assured. Perhaps he should look into hiring someone to tend to the children; just to assist, of course.

“Why can’t we get my clothes, Lord Father?” Alerick asked innocently, gazing at him.

“They were left at the house you came from but you need not worry of that. I will arrange for a tailor to come today and fit you for all new clothes.”

“Really?” he gazed up at him, his eyes and hint of a smile the only giveaway that he was truly excited. Lucius found this rather sad; this boy could not really express joy. He had so much to learn, and Angel could teach much of it to him, if he would allow her to.

“Only the best for a Malfoy.” He answered, straightening. “Now go on, enjoy the day. Soon enough schooling will begin.”

“But… what do I do?” he asked softly, gazing up at him again. “I’m supposed to study, and to recite and to work on wand movements.”

“Be a child.” Lucius answered simply. “That is what you can do. Allow Angel to show you the joys of simply being young.”

Alerick frowned thoughtfully and then nodded as he took a deep breath. “I shall try, Lord Father.” He said in a very serious tone.

“Come little Master.” the house elf said and led the boy out.

“That mark isn’t just a joke, is it?” Harry asked softly.

“No. It’s very real, Harry.” Lucius answered in a soft growl, one hand moving to unconsciously rub at his still tingling mark.

“Can it be removed?” Harry asked.

“Don’t be a bloody fool Potter. You know the answer to that already.” Lucius grumbled, giving the younger wizard a momentary glare. “If the damned things were removable without losing the entire arm, neither Severus nor I would still have them.”

Harry sighed. “I know. But he’s just a baby; he shouldn’t have to bear such a thing…”

Severus, quiet until now and quite thoughtful instead of angry, spoke up finally. “You know, Lucius;
we could use this to our advantage.” He said quietly

Harry looked at Snape as if he were mad. “What are you talking about?”

“The Mark. It feeds both ways, Harry.” Severus said, pacing to the window and pulling up his sleeve to look at the mark he had hated for so many hears. “The Dark Lord used these to call to us, that is true. But we could also use this mark to call to him.”

“Call to him?” Harry was confused now. “What the bloody hell are you talking about? The Dark Lord is Dead!”

“The Dark Lord may be dead, Potter, but the Dark Prince has been born. He is the Master now.”

“Dark Prince…?”

“There was more to Pansy’s scheme than simply making money, it seems.” Lucius explained. “There are five children who were not on her lists…”

“I’m not even sure that Miss Parkinson knew or cared of these children.” Snape put in. “These children aren’t like the others, according to Mrs. Weasley.”

“What does she have to do with this? Damn it, I want to know what is going on!”

“They’re trying to recreate the Dark Lord with their Dark Prince. And since the Dark Lord’s main failing was he had no true support system, they are starting our little Princeling off with a support system bound to him magically. He has a consort, guardians, and an enchanter.”

“This is madness. These are children!”

“Child or not, Alerick is quite proud of the fact that he is destined to be the Dark Prince’s consort.” Severus retorted.

“Consort?” Harry looked to his father-in-law, stunned by this news. “But he’s just… Lucius, you don’t think they’ve trained him in…” he could not finish his sentence, the thought abhorrent to him.

“Sex magic?” Lucius finished for him. “No, Harry; I do not believe that the phase of his training involving that would have begun at least until he reached puberty.” He reassured. “But there is definitely a bond related to the Mark. I am not certain if the bond itself can be removed from him without harming the boy, and I will not harm my grandson nor allow any harm to come to him…”

“This is madness! Why would anyone wish to recreate that psychopath? And make him stronger?”

“There are those who had power during the Dark Lord’s reign who would give anything and do anything necessary to return themselves to positions of power. Surely you could think several who would enjoy a return of their status.”

“One or two.” Harry agreed quietly, subdued now. Draco’s fears were quite justified, it seemed.

“This is precisely why we must retrieve the children.” Severus said firmly. “Most dark rites will need to be performed when the children are older, near puberty. We must have them in our hands to prevent any such thing from occurring to them. We may be able to undo most of what has been done to them with time.”

“And it may be possible to use Alerick’s mark to call to the Dark Prince, and follow that link to find the child.”
“We might even be able to use our own.” Lucius said softly, thinking now of how his had reacted.

Severus shook his head. “Although they reacted I do not think we are included in their circle or every past Death Eater would know where they exist.”

“But the potential of controlling us lies there, if the child grows in power.” Lucius said softly. “So the onus lies upon us to take advantage of their rash mistake and follow the bond. That will lead us to the little Prince, who then can show us the precise location of the other children.” He finished with a smile.

“I want them stopped.” Harry growled. “This has gone past the point of letting the ministry take them. I want them gone. I want them dead!”

“Agreed.” Lucius said. “But for now, we must focus on the children. Those who are sheltering them and raising them to be monsters are, as far as I am concerned, dead men.”

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LATER…

“One at a time, one at a time!” Tonks snapped, and the room quieted. Before her in the room that had held the children the night before were at least three dozen adults demanding the return of their children.

A woman stepped forward, her face a mask of fury. “You have no right to steal our children away from us in the middle of the night!” she snapped. Her statement set the others off once more in an outraged roar of agreement.

“SILENCE!” Tonks snarled, using the sonorous charm to magnify her voice and drown the others out. It worked; she was rewarded by total silence from the parents. She allowed the charm to lapse and glared at them. “We will be interviewing you, one at a time; YES ONE AT A TIME!” she repeated loudly to head off the rumblings of protest once more. “And each case will be seen by the Wizengamot and considered BEFORE any child is returned!” She snapped.

“Why did you take them?!” the first woman demanded.

“All will be explained as you are interviewed! Now if you will kindly assemble yourselves into a queue, you will be seen as soon as we can get to you.”

There was much protesting and complaining, but the witches and wizards did shuffle themselves about to form sort of a queue and some seemed to simply fade out of view. There were only twenty-five or so in the room now.

Tonks glanced at the fellow he was working with; a rather nondescript wizard she had been told worked in the Department of Mysteries. She didn’t remember ever seeing him before, but she knew she could depend on what Shacklebolt told her, and he had stated this fellow was powerful, quick, and quite skilled. Not to mention highly trustworthy.

Nymphadora rose and escorted the first parent into first room. All three of the little connecting office rooms had been adapted according to her specifications as a simple interviewing room with two witnesses present. She escorted the woman to a seat and gestured for her to have a seat, then closed
the door behind her as she slipped out of the small room.

The witch was in her forties and looked very nervous as well as angry as she moved to the seat hesitantly. “What is this? Why am I being treated like a criminal? I just want my child returned!”

“Yes your child; perhaps. But not your husband’s child.” The first interviewer said, pouring half a teaspoon of veritaserum into a cup of tea. He was narrow-eyed with an olive complexion and was glaring at the woman. “We will be administering you a strong dose of veritaserum; do you consent to this?”

“What do you mean not our child? Of course she’s our child! And why would I have to consent to Veritaserum?” she asked, looking frightened.

The second witness in the room was a witch, round and sweet-faced with friendly eyes. Her blonde hair was bound in a bun at the nape of her neck but it did little to control the wild little curls that surrounded her face. “We only want to ensure the safety and well-being of the children, Mrs. Harper.”

She hesitated, glancing at the man then gazing at the woman for a long moment. The blonde witch smiled and nodded encouragingly and the mother reached for the glass. “I would never do anything to harm my little Trillby…” she said.

“Drink it all. We are bound to ask you questions only about the children, and a particular clinic.” The wizard growled.

She paused a moment more, then drank the potion. The two watched, and waited for it to take effect. Two minutes later they began the questioning her directly about what she knew of the purchased sample at the clinic and the treatment she had given the child who had resulted from that insemination.

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“She thought the samples were voluntary.” The man said, looking particularly sour at the thought of not having caught one of the ones they wished to stop. “And her testimony and memories tested through Legilimens show no mistreatment whatsoever of her child. She is not who we want.”

The sweet-faced woman rose to her feet and dosed the woman with the antidote which was also laced heavily with sleeping potion. She opened a door to the other side of the room that had been hidden behind a panel and levitated the body, taking the woman out.

Tonks glanced at the door and gestured the next one forward to be interviewed.

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“We will be administering you a strong dose of veritaserum; do you consent to this?”

“You have no right to insist that I do any such thing. Do whatever testing you wish; my child is my
child!” the young woman in her early twenties stated, eyes narrow, arms folded. “You have no right to take my child from me!”

“You have no right to take my child from me!” The witch countered, eyes narrowed. She got to play the ‘bad cop’ this time.

“Stolen?! I have stolen nothing!”

“No, but Miss Parkinson did! Just because you paid her for the goods does not make it your property; it was taken without consent!”

“What?!”

“Pansy Parkinson is a wanted criminal and you purchased stolen goods from her!” She snapped.

“I’m not culpable for what she did! I will go to the Minister of Magic himself! I want my child returned!” she countered.

The blonde witch smirked at her. “The Minister of Magic has approved our whole operation. Your refusal of veritaserum testimony means you have given up your rights and you will NOT have possession of any child taken in last night’s raid returned to you! The true father of the child will have taken possession and following the rules of custody for wizarding families, they will keep custody of your child unless you comply with the testimony requirements!”

“My father is going to have your heads on a platter for doing this!” she growled, glaring at them.

“Threaten all you like, Miss Urqhart; it hasn’t a chance in hell of changing your current situation.” The blonde witch answered acidly. “Either drink the veritaserum or leave.” The dark-haired witch glared at her, challenging her to make her do it. “No? Then get out; we have plenty of other parents who wish to regain their children.”

“This isn’t right! You can’t do this!”

“It’s being done. Leave, or take the serum.” She ordered coldly.

The woman took the cup, glaring at them, and then drank it down in one shot. Her eyes closed as the effect swept over her.

“You purchased sperm from Pansy Parkinson?”

“No. I did not.” She said with a sneer.

“You knew the sperm was being purchased?”

“Of course I did. All the sperm in that establishment is for sale; its what they do!”

“Did you know the sperm you purchased was Draco Malfoy’s?”

“I chose him specifically, yes.” She answered easily.

“And were you aware that the sperm was attained without his consent or knowledge?”

The woman fought to keep her lips shut, paling slightly as the effects of the veritaserum forced the truth out. “Y...yes...” she stuttered, face twisted with the effort to try to prevent that truth from escaping. She pressed on, trying to cover herself with some truth that lay in her favor. “But I had no hand in its taking! You can’t hold me or an innocent child responsible for what someone else did!”
“Why did you specifically choose Draco Malfoy?”

Again she tried to stifle the truth and keep it from escaping. “P… power…” the word dragged itself out of her gritted teeth.

“And the child; I understand you have a girl?”

“Yes.” She hissed, still trying to resist but the triple dose of veritaserum drug every answer out they required.

“How are you raising this child? Is she getting proper education or is she being groomed for something?”

“She… she has a right to her inheritance as a Malfoy! She is being trained in the Malfoy manner and will someday take her place.”

“And this training? What does it involve?”

Before long the woman was silenced, and being taken away out of the room under the effects of a Petrificus Totalus spell.

The blonde witch looked perfectly disgusted. “Who would use the Cruicatus on a child to ‘toughen’ them?” she murmured.

“A couple of the old wizarding families, believe it or not.” Her partner responded in a quiet tone. “Mostly families who joined that old Dark Lord from the start and who were his most loyal supporters. This is not the first time I have heard of such a thing.”

“Madness. Simple madness.”

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Tonks watched the line in the room slowly dwindle; she knew they were being taken out the back doors of the rooms as their interviews were completed. Tiny scraps of paper flitted to her from the rooms as each of the interviews was completed; this child would be returned, and that child would not. She had to present her evidence before an emergency assembly of the Wizengamot before she would approach the heads of the families involved and let them know what the decision of the council had been.

She watched three more of the waiting adults slip out of the room by the entrance door without being interviewed; she smiled faintly to herself. None of them were going to get out of the Ministry of Magic without some sort of an interview, whether they liked it or not. Aurors were waiting by the lifts and would escort them to where they would await their interviews in front of the Wizengamot this afternoon. She reached for her drink, fighting off a wave of weariness. She hadn’t slept at all and it was starting to catch up with her. Dora rubbed her eyes wearily.

“You should go and get some rest before this afternoon.” Kingsley Shacklebolt said, moving up behind her.

She looked up at him, and then realized she was going to have a VERY long day still ahead of her. Suddenly she felt exhausted. “Will you take over for me here?”
“You didn’t even have to ask.” He said, limping forward to take her chair. He was more than up to the task of handling the few waiting for their own interviews. Dora left him to the task, moving out briskly with the information gleaned so far in her hand. Out of the children that had been Draco’s sperm had been used to create, two would be returned to their parents. From those that were Harry’s children, one so far would be returned. Most of the other children, except three of the Weasley and one of Professor Lefevre’s would be returned to their mothers. There were still at least a dozen interviews to go…

Pansy walked into the hotel, glancing about. She had never been here but she knew that it was where her father had told her to come were there to be any emergencies. She turned once inside and headed to her left to the restaurant. She walked right on by the other patrons and the restaurant staff, ignoring them as if they weren’t there.

Her father sat where he had said he would be, in a private room in the back. He was scowling when she came in and shut the door behind her. He had his wand out, and spat a silencing charm, locking charm, and a confundus charm toward the door in case she had been followed.

“Ugh; what in the world is that you’re wearing?” she asked, wrinkling her nose as she looked at his khaki pants and simple shirt. “You look like a muggle!”

“I don’t plan on being hunted down!” he scowled at her. “I’m dressed this way because of you!”

“Because of me?” she moved to take a seat, her gown swishing about her feet. “You’re being ridiculous.”

“Am I? You had to go and attack not only Harry Potter, but Blaise Zabini and the Weasley boys as well! Don’t you pay any attention? Potter and Zabini are INVESTIGATORS, Pansy!”

She looked distinctly disinterested. “Why should I care?”

“You nearly killed Blaise!”

She rolled her eyes and sighed. “Am I supposed to feel guilty or something? Why? My entire future was snatched away from me and you didn’t do anything about it! I was supposed to be Mrs. Draco Malfoy, remember? You promised me that when I was fourteen!”

“Merlin, you’re still on about that? It was out of my hands; Malfoy isn’t exactly interested in women!”

“I didn’t care then, father, and I don’t give a damn about his preferences now.” She said, scowling at him. “He could have been just like his precious father, with lovers on the side to keep him happy. I would have been quite satisfied with a marriage of convenience!”

“Well it will never come to pass now; you need to leave the past behind you!”

“I think I will father. You’re the one who’s stuck in the past, not me.” She said with a sneer.

“My project is important! It will save the wizarding world!” He snarled at her angrily.
“I don’t give a damn what your project is. But I want you to know that I’m not financing it anymore. Nor will I work one second more with that little leech, Bebel. He’s thoroughly disgusting and I can’t stand how he looks at me. He’s not even pureblood and he’s a squib to boot!”

“We have to use who we have to, in order to achieve what we need! I told you that!”

“Over and over and over, yes, I know but I don’t have to listen to you anymore!” She said, rising. “You look like you’re going to go hide in the muggle world; I can assure you, I won’t be joining you.”

“Oh, yes you will! You’re my daughter, and…”

“And I’m of age! I don’t care if you never had a son; I don’t have to take over any ‘family’ business!”

“You could have at least provided me with an heir!”

Pansy’s eyes turned hard and she looked hurt and angry. “That wasn’t my fault! I tried, you know I did!”

“Your child does not have to be Malfoy’s!”

“As if that was any of your business…” she scoffed.

“Of course it was my business! I don’t want Lucius Malfoy having the right to take away my only heir!” He growled at her.

“He never would have known!” she snapped. “I hate that I lost the babies!” she said, too angry to even think of crying. “The second one was a boy, too!”

“It would never have mattered. If Lucius even suspected you had gotten pregnant with his son’s seed, he could claim family rights you would have lost any claim to them anyway!”

“I’d have left the country! He would never have found them.”

“You would have done whatever I told you.” He retorted. “You know your place is by my side, Pansy.”

“Oh, no; I’m finished with you and your mad schemes!”

“What?”

“You heard me!” She said, rising. “I’m done with you. I won’t have any more of your commanding me about and spending my money for any more of your schemes. I have more than enough money to live happily for the rest of my life without YOU!”

“You don’t have any idea what you’re throwing away!”

“I don’t CARE, father!” She said, turning her back on him to leave.

“Petrificus Totalus!” he snarled and she froze, body and clothing seeming to be sheathed in ice as her body went rigid and she fell to the floor. “You aren’t going anywhere, my daughter. You are my property and I will never allow you to leave me, Pansy my dear.” She stared at him, unable to move or speak. “You will forget all about any sort of dreams of having a child with Draco. As you eliminated his child with Harry, so I eliminated your children with Draco.” He told her, taking a sadistic delight in the shock and disbelief in her eyes. “It was idiocy to waste his sperm on such an
attempt. You WILL have a baby to give me an heir, but that heir will be with someone of my choosing. Now; we have to get into hiding immediately!” he said, pointing his wand at her again. “Only one way to ensure you cooperate… sorry about this, my love…” he smiled sweetly at her and said in a firm voice “IMPERIO!”
Severus stood in the room in the mostly empty west wing, arms folded and eyes narrow as he surveyed the work that he had accomplished. The room had been cleared completely of all furnishings or anything that could possibly be of a distraction; even the walls had been shaded to a quiet and rather drab pale brown. The bare floor, a dull grey now, had a pentagram inscribed upon in chalk and colored sands. He had spent an inordinate amount of time on laying out that blasted thing.

The creation of it required a wizard to use precise and exacting detail, which was why he suspected few ever bothered with this type of magic anymore. Luckily he had already known where to find the details to lay out this design; his many hours spent poring over old tomes had once again paid off. The details for this intricate design were located in a book that was over five hundred years old. He’d had to turn the pages with magic only; touching the book had crumbled the edges of the ancient parchment under his fingers. This magical circle one of the very few that were not designed to summon, to bind, nor to call or send; its purpose was simply to enhance whatever lay within its boundaries. And he had constructed the design to allow the center to be more than large enough for what he planned to place there.

He would to perform this operation at precisely two in the afternoon; the early afternoon sunlight would at that time fall fully upon the carefully inscribed design upon the floor and prevent anything ‘dark’ from happening to the magic he would invest in it shortly.

He paced slowly about the circle, placing a white jasmine-scented candle in each of the plain unadorned circles left for them in the pattern. He paused before moving on from each, using his wand to magically inscribe a rune for protection upon each of the candles. Just a few more touches, reinforcing the layers of protective spells to prevent any harm from coming to his subject, and he would be ready to begin.

Snape heard someone enter the room and suspected from the light footfall that it was Lucius. He did not look round to see, rather he proceeded to ignore him completely as he continued his work and whispered the soft chant required.

Lucius waited in silence to allow him to complete what he was doing. He did not speak, watching until finally Severus turned to him with a questioning expression. “Are we almost ready to begin…?” He asked softly.

The dark-haired wizard eyed his handiwork with a critical gaze. “Nearly ready.” He agreed. “We must wait half an hour more; I want the strength of pure sunlight to reinforce the casting.” He explained.

“I do not really trust this type of magic, Severus.” Lucius said quietly. “I don’t know of many applications of it that are positive… This will not hurt the child, will it?” He asked, examining the circle with a frown.

“The only purpose of this circle is magnification.” He answered. “The child will not be harmed in the slightest; in fact, he will be more protected within its boundaries than in that special bed you have him sleeping in.” Severus stepped back carefully; he did not want to damage his handiwork.
Harry moved into his office to find the stack of folders exactly where Damitri said he would find them; right in the middle of his desk. He sat down paused a moment, looking at the names on the tabs. Shrugging, he opened the first folder.

He had looked through several of them with the same sorts of information. Lots of school, a couple with family abuse issues, some little petty crime information here and there but nothing that would catch the attention, nothing that would account for what had been happening at the clinic.

Then he opened the file of Bebel; this file was much thicker. Born and raised in Austria, he was been ostracized as a child due to his lack of magical ability. He was not sent to the schools set up by the wizarding world for squibs; instead he was made to attend muggle school while his magically talented siblings were cosseted and sent on to the schools of their choosing. His father and two of his siblings were currently in the German equivalent of Azkaban for crimes against the wizarding world. Only one of his siblings, a woman five years younger than Bebel, remained free as a recluse and part time teacher at the school.

His school records revealed constant clashing with the other juveniles all through his school years; constant fighting usually with children of other races. His early college years were spent in Germany and again, clashes with muggle police officers. He belonged to a group whose biggest focus was the need for humanity to return to the purity of the Aryan race. The clashes had to do with protesting churches that performed interracial marriages and clinics that assisted with helping interracial couples to have children. He spent a few years in prison before Parkinson’s father had bailed him out, bringing him with him to England and putting him directly into college for genetic engineering. His grades in college had been quite impressive in the scientific realm, but the ones having anything to do with social studies or politics were poor and his college record was notated several times that he disrupted class often with his violent outbursts and opinions.

He had not completed all the classes required for the degree he had been pursuing; in fact he had been forced to transfer three times before no college would have him. Pansy’s father hired him on personally ensuring that he got a position in the lab. His application for the job showed that he had two degrees when in fact he had none. His pay scale was atrociously high for the position as well, all things considered… a nice little position for someone doing the dirty work of the owner of the clinic.

Damitri had also done research on the background of Pansy’s father, Malcom Parkinson. He had not been an active participant in the mess when Voldemort was in power, at least not that the Aurors had been able to detect. He had been a small but relatively successful businessman from a pureblood family, making his way in the wizarding world. He was caught up in the madness and controlled by the imperious spell for many years. When Voldemort was killed, Malcolm had spent over three years in a private ward in St Mungo’s Hospital for Magical Maladies and Injuries, in the ward for those with mental injuries. Pansy had pulled him out of there despite the advice of doctors to leave him for more treatment.

Malcolm seemed to return to his normal life, sinking into mediocrity once more. The loss of his daughter’s claim on the Malfoy heir had caused him to have a brief return to St. Mungo’s, but once again Pansy pulled him out against the healer’s advice. The notations in his medical file indicated that he was suffering from paranoid schizophrenia, and would quite easily become dangerous if provoked.

A month after his second release from St. Mungo’s mental ward, his wife of twenty years, Nancy, had been found dead in their summer home where she had been staying separate from her daughter and husband. As she had been growing more and more ill over the months, it had not been deemed as suspicious and the body had been buried without any inquest. Immediately after her death, Mr. Parkinson had left the country and spirited Pansy away with him to Germany for a trip that lasted
several months.

When they returned they had Bebel in tow, and Malcolm had returned to St. Mungo’s for a checkup. The medi-wizards found no problem with him now and he had been released with a clean bill of health.

Malcolm Parkinson had convinced several other wizards to pool their money and establish the medical clinic. His showed absolutely no negative involvement in anything, clear of any black marks from that point on. All his activities seemed to have been legal including fund-raisers and work for the clinic he had started. He had even did volunteer work down at the ministry…

Harry frowned slightly. Could this mean… maybe… that there was someone at the ministry working with him? This entire plot was madness; obviously this man should have remained in that mental ward permanently. At this point in time he would believe nearly anything of that man.

Angel giggled as she ran after her Kneazle kit, romping through the flowers and the carefully tended beds of the garden. The kit was leading her on a merry chase over benches, under bushes and low hanging tree branches, and around the plant and flower beds. The girl doggedly followed the kit, which slowed and watched her progress before taking off again in a game of touch and chase.

Alerick sat on a bench at the edge of the expansive garden which was shaded by a tree with tiny apples on its branches. He had followed Angel outside, trying to do as Lord Father Malfoy had wished of him. He was supposed to allow this girl to teach him how to be a child, but… what did that mean? He sat watching her in almost complete befuddlement. Why would she run around and chase a kitten? He knew it was a kneazle, he had learned about those animals already in his studies. The kit was a baby, but it should be taught to protect and to hunt, not to chase about with no purpose whatsoever.

The girl broke off her chase of the kit and skipped over to him, her eyes bright and cheeks flushed. “You should come and play, Alerick!” she said breathlessly, jumping up onto the bench to take a seat beside him.

“How?” he asked in a curious tone. “What do you learn from it?”

“You learn lots of things like how fast you can run and how high you can jump and how long you can do it.” She answered. “You know what? I bet I can run faster than you can!” She challenged.

“Can not!” he frowned at her.

She giggled. “Sure I can. I run lots and you don’t so I guess its not fair if I ask you to race is it?”

“I can too run.” He said, getting to his feet. “Where do we run to?”

“To the greenhouse and back to here.” She directed, and he took off running toward the greenhouse without waiting for her to finish her sentence. “Hey!” she laughed, taking off after him.

Lucius stepped out of the French doors to see his granddaughter and Alerick racing back from the
greenhouse toward the bench. It was clear right away that Alerick was sorely outclassed, as Angel constantly was running and playing as any happy child should. Angel, however, held back and let Alerick stay very close to her without allowing him to win… then Lucius saw at the last moment she slowed quite a bit to allow him to pass her and to win.

He collapsed on the bench, panting and smiling at her as he fought to get his breath back. “Told you I can run.”

“You sure can.” She smiled back at him. “You wanna go play something else?”

“Not right now, Angel.” Lucius spoke up. Alerick looked up and immediately sat up properly on the bench, trying not to look as if he had just been running and playing. “Come, Alerick; you will be needed for a few minutes.”

“Of course, Lord Father Malfoy.” He said, rising to his feet, his cheeks flushed.

“Will he be coming back out to play, Nonno…?” Angel asked, hands clasped behind her back. Her kitten Tia jumped up behind her, swatting at her fingers with her soft paws, claws retracted.

“He will return soon to play with you, my own.” Lucius assured as Alerick fell into step behind him.

“Okay.” She smiled, turning to pick up her kneazle cub. “I’ll go see if Nona needs help with the kittens.” She said with a giggle.

“Excellent idea, pet.” He smiled at her, turning to lead the young boy back into the house.

Alerick followed him, curious but knowing better than to ask any questions of where they were going and what they were going to do. Perhaps it was time to begin his schooling for the day. He could show his grandfather exactly what he had learned, and how well he had studied his runes and his spells.

Severus looked over as the two entered the room. “Potter has not yet arrived; I will not wait for him Lucius. This spell must be activated the moment the sunlight highlights the entire circle.” He grumbled.

“I have sent for my son’s husband; if he wishes to be here he will arrive shortly.” Lucius said, guiding Alerick to where Severus gestured in a chair beside the circle.

Alerick looked at the circle, then up at Lucius with a shadow of fear clear on his face. “Lord Father Malfoy? I must be tested again? I thought I had passed all my tests…” he murmured in a voice that clearly reflected fear.

“You were tested in a circle like this?” Lucius asked.

“Yes, Lord Father Malfoy.” He looked down at his feet. “I am sorry. I should not fear; I am strong. I am the chosen consort. I am strong…” he recited, his voice trembling.

“There will be no testing done today, Alerick.” Severus said immediately, intervening to try to alleviate the boy’s worry.
Alerick looked at him, eyes full of doubt and fear.

“Have you studied runes? You told us you studied daily.” Lucius asked.

“Yes, Lord Father…”

“Define this rune.” Severus pointed to one of the candles.

Alerick gazed at it hesitantly, and then looked at the dark-haired wizard. “It means protection.”

“Yes. This circle is for your protection only. Look carefully; you will see that rune all about this circle.” He went on to explain, pausing to point out at least five times at each point of the star was again the rune for protection.

“It is not a test?”

“No test. All we want you to do is to focus upon your Dark Prince. We need to find him, Alerick. We need to ensure that he is safe from those who will harm him further and make him into someone that others will truly wish to harm.” Lucius said.

“Just think of my Dark Prince? That’s all?” he looked greatly relieved.

“That is all that we require of you.” Severus assured. “Although we may need to activate your dark mark to ensure that we can find him.”

“I don’t mind that; its been done before by Lord Father McNair to ensure that it worked right.” Alerick said, looking much happier about being here now.

Severus glanced at the door, then at the circle. The sun from the windows just spread far enough to light up the last of the circle upon the floor. He murmured the final words to activate it and the entire circle began to glow.

“All right, Alerick. Now is the time. Take off your robes. I will place you within the circle and then we can begin…” Severus instructed.

The boy looked to Lucius, who nodded to confirm he wished him to do as instructed. Alerick undid his robe and sat back down in the chair, folding his legs up under him. Once he was settled, Severus used the levitation charm to move both child and chair into the exact center of the circle. Severus walked slowly about the circle, using a charm to light each candle as he passed it.

Harry moved into the room as the last candle was lit, and Lucius gestured him both to silence and that he should move to his side. Harry complied with both; he had never seen magic done this way. He’d only read about it in old magical tomes or seen it on cheesy muggle movies. He didn’t know what would happen if he were to interrupt Severus’ concentration, but he really didn’t want to find out. It could be bad for the boy if he did.

Severus stood at the north end of the circle and it glowed brighter. Alerick, in his chair in the center, looked completely calm now. He watched the wizard activate the circle with complete curiosity. Severus met the boy’s eyes with his own. “Focus on your Dark Prince, Alerick. Concentrate with everything you have upon him, upon reaching him through your mark and your bond.” He instructed. “Do not allow anything else to intrude upon your concentration.”

Alerick took a deep breath and his eyes drifted closed. He slowly released the breath, his face peaceful as he concentrated as instructed. He really did want to see his Dark Prince, to see for himself that he had not been taken and was not in danger. A soft smile touched his lips as he thought
of the last time he had seen his Prince, about three weeks ago. The Prince had mastered walking and now was all over the house he lived in, and he and the prince had spent many hours together.

Severus moved to the table where very large book lay closed. He opened it, murmuring softly, lifting a dagger into the air holding it above the book. He scowled; this wasn’t enough. They would have to use the Mark, though he would prefer that they did not. “Lucius, I need you to activate the mark.” He said quietly.

Lucius stepped into the circle and to the boy’s side, using special care not to smudge any of the circle’s markings. He then drew his wand and touched it to the Dark Mark upon the boy’s shoulder. Alerick’s eyes shot open and his mouth opened wide. His eyes were unfocused as he stared up toward the ceiling.

“Perfect.” Severus said, feeling the dagger in his hand vibrate wildly now. He spoke the incantation a second time and the book lifted into the air, cover whipping open and pages flying as something unseen flipped through and searched. The dagger plunged down and slammed the book to the table, nailing itself to a page. Snape gazed down to see a map of Romania, the dagger stuck on a countryside area outside a small town. He smiled. They had him! Lucius slipped his wand away, taking that smile as success.

Alerick blinked groggily, looking over at Severus. “Are we done, sir…?” He asked softly. Snape nodded, studying the page.

“Yes, Alerick; you have done fantastically. Thank you, lad.” He said in warm praise. Alerick glowed with pride, sitting perfectly still to allow them to do whatever it is they needed to.

“What was all that?” Harry asked.

“A location spell, Potter.” Severus rolled his eyes. “Why else would I have a map book out?”

“I’ve just never seen anything like this before.”

“It’s old magic; it’s simply not used often because setting this mess up took the good part of several hours.” Severus sighed softly.

“And cost quite a few galleons to procure everything required to cast.” Lucius added.

“Alerick should leave now.” Severus said dismissively, putting out the candles with a gesture of his wand.

The boy got carefully out of the chair and picked his way across the lines of the circle without smudging a single line or rune. He picked up his robes and Lucius knelt once more to help the boy don them properly. “You go on and play, back out in the yard with Angel. The others should be up from their naps soon and will be out to play as well.” Lucius instructed.

“Yes, Lord Father Malfoy.” Alerick said, bowing to his grandfather. He turned and quietly walked out of the room.

Harry watched him go, and then walked around the circle to join Severus in looking at the map book. “Romania… so when do we go?” he asked.

“We…? No, Potter. You aren’t going.”

“Bullshit. I’m going. I have as much invested in this as you do, Lucius…! More! That boy, Dark Prince or not, could be one of my direct offspring and as you reminded me earlier this week, he is my
responsibility. I WILL be going!"

“And what of my son and his peace of mind? He needs to know that you are safe as well!” Lucius shot back.

“Enough!” Severus interrupted, glaring at them both. “Lucius, use your head. They’re not going to have this Dark Prince out in the middle of a field for us to simply pluck up and waltz away with…!”

“Of course they won’t!” He snapped back, then calmed a bit. “He’ll be well guarded and most likely protected by a Fidelius Charm…”

“And without the secret-keeper…?” Severus prompted. Gads. He felt like he was back at school…

“Probably that bastard Malcolm Parkinson…” Harry growled.

“…we’ll never find the child.” Lucius finished, scowling but not yelling anymore. “So how do you propose we get around that?”

“We use a decoy.” Severus answered.

“Decoy…? No! I will not have Alerick risked in such a way!”

Severus smirked at him. “Again, you’re not thinking… I think Potter’s rubbing off on you.” He commented, earning black looks from both Potter and Malfoy for that statement.

“Shut up and explain yourself.” Lucius growled.

“We need a decoy. Potter, you will not be coming along with us as yourself.” He said, holding up one open hand to forestall the protest he knew was coming. “If you showed up they’d certainly spirit the boy off somewhere before we could even dream of getting him out of there safely. But we’ve activated his Dark Mark; if Alerick showed up they may simply open it all up and enable him to come inside. After all, the boy has already undergone training. He might be resourceful enough to find a way out if he was unhappy with his lot where he was kept. It’s not unreasonable to believe that he would find a way to get to his Dark Prince.”

“Potter will be the decoy, disguised as Alerick…?” Lucius asked, following the thread of thought.

“Precisely; using a polyjuice potion we can ensure that there is no chance that he will be discovered as a fake.” Severus agreed.

“Brilliant. I’m in.” Harry said simply.

Lucius frowned. “And how do we ensure that they do not take our little decoy inside and vanish from our sight and ability to reach him as the charm reactivates? Its not as if Harry can just look at the address of the place and share that with us. The secret keeper must share the location with him directly!”

“I’m aware of that.” Severus returned, rolling his eyes. “But if he did not go alone…”

Lucius quieted now, thinking. “I can go with him.” He said thoughtfully.

“You? You’ve rarely associated with any death eaters lately. How could you convince them you are serious?”

“I’ve associated more than you have, Severus, and not intentionally. One approached me in the pet store just a day or two ago…” he said, glancing at Harry, who clearly remembered his father-in-law’s
rage over the situation.

“Who?” Severus asked.

“Thorfin Rowle.” He responded.

“I thought he died.” Snape said, looking disgusted. “Or rather, I had hoped he had died…”

“No… he’s scarred, but quite alive and free to walk about on his own. He thinks that I purchased Angel from Parkinson. He told me he wanted to have the power of the Potter line infused into his line by her little baby-implantation program. They all know that Alerick is of the Malfoy blood; it is simple logic that I will be given custody of the boy as all of the children were returned to the biological heads of family.”

“And you’re sure Rowle is still involved with them?” Harry asked.

“One way to find out. Rowle was always a coward; that’s how he managed to survive that final battle. He ran like the yellow-spine bastard he was when the Dark Lord was defeated.” Lucius confirmed. “Let me pay Rowle a visit and I will see exactly how much he knows.”

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Thorfin Rowle looked up from his paperwork with a scowl; he wasn’t expecting anyone to come visiting today… he pushed away from his desk. Maybe it was his bride-to-be… she was supposed to come by with that easily influenced fool of a father of hers today and settle the final details of his wedding to this girl who was three times younger than he.

He stood and walked to the door as the bell sounded once again. Who the bloody hell…? He yanked open the door, ready to bellow at the person there and froze.

Lucius Malfoy stood on the stoop of his home, resplendent in his black and silver formal robe, his silver tipped cane in hand, his hair groomed impeccably, eyes narrow as he glared right back at Rowle.

“I’ve no time for visitors right now, Lucius.” He said, starting to close the door.

Lucius reached out and stopped the door with the snake head of his walking cane, the metal scraping on the wood of the door. “Oh, yes you do, Rowle. You have time for me. And you will give me as much time as I demand of you.” He growled.

Rowle narrowed his eyes. “Why would I do that?”

“Because, Thorfin.” Lucius paced forward and the scar-faced man fell back a step. “You know that I can ruin your happy little existence here in our world. You know that I hold evidence that could easily put you into Azkaban if I so see fit.”

“You haven’t done it before now. Why would you do it now?” he scowled.

“My reason is quite simple. The Parkinsons have involved my FAMILY. And NO ONE fucks with my family!” He growled, stepping forward again, forcing Rowle backwards into his house to keep from colliding with the far more charismatic blonde wizard.
“I don’t know anything…!”

“Do you think me a fool, Rowle?” Lucius asked, glancing about the place with a look of extreme distaste. Not only was it badly furnished, but it was far from any semblance of clean. “Did you kill your house elf?” he asked bluntly.

“Don’t have one.” He growled, stomping into the living room to take a seat. “Those bastard friends of yours down at the ministry say I’m not fit to have one… any wizard should be able to have a damned house elf!” he growled.

“Not if you continue to kill them, Thorfin. I told you that years ago.” He said quietly.

“That useless thing they sent me did nothing but whine; I tried to replace it. What else was I to do? I couldn’t stand the thing."

“Precisely why you wouldn’t be a good owner of a new house elf.” Lucius watched the man take a seat but did not deign to sit himself. He would not soil his robes sitting on any of this furniture. “But we both know that I’m not here to discuss house elves.”

“I haven’t the foggiest idea why you’re here, Lucius. I haven’t laid eyes on you three times since the Dark Lord passed.”

“And do you associate often with the others? We have all gone our own ways.” He returned.

“Not all of us have given up on the Dark Lord’s ways…”

“Where is he, Thorfin?” he cut off the sentence, asking the question bluntly.

“What? Where is who?”

Lucius paced away a few steps, never once taking his hand off his cane which concealed his wand. He turned back, expression showing pure confidence in the words he spoke. “The Dark Prince, of course.”

Rowle lost a shade of color off his already pale scarred face. “The… the what…” he attempted.

“Innocence…?” Lucius almost laughed. “Playing stupid suits you perfectly, but don’t try to use that innocent shit on me.” His eyes narrowed as he went on, voice changing to a dangerous growl. “I know about the Dark Prince and the Inner Circle! I have the consort in my home, under my PERSONAL protection!” He took a step toward Thorfin and felt great satisfaction at seeing the man flinch away though he was seated. “You of all people should know that NO ONE fucks with the Malfoy family!”

“You have him? He’s safe?” he asked.

“Yes, at great personal risk I might add!” he glared at the man. “Did you all think you would be better off without me and what I could contribute to the movement?”

“Great personal risk? Come off it, Malfoy! The Ministry saw a blonde boy with your features and called you in to take him! How is that a risk to you?”

“You are so simple, Rowle. It’s amazing you don’t muck everything up that is entrusted to you! You know nothing of the risk I place myself in every time I set foot into that ministry building!” He sneered at him, turning to glare momentarily out a window. “This plan has taken a long time to come to fruition…”
“What…?”

“You fool. I have been working with Parkinson to bring about this project. The only condition was that he was never to use my line. Obviously he has betrayed me; one glance at Alerick makes that very clear. I’m going to take over this little scheme of his. And you, Rowle, will be just the one to help me.”

“How the bloody hell am I supposed to help? You think they included me in their little circle…?”

“I know they did.” He growled at him, pacing closer. Rowle was staring up at him now through narrowed eyes. His posture gave it all away; Rowle knew more than he was admitting. “Have you heard from Parkinson lately…?” he asked acidly.

“No. Not in over a week…”

“How convenient for Parkinson. The Aurors are on the trail of these last children. McNair screwed up when he allowed Alerick to be taken, though I must admit that it was a brilliant move by Parkinson to place him that household. I would never have thought to look for Alerick there. I wouldn’t think anything of such value would be safe a moment in that fool’s hands… I certainly never would have left any child in the hands of that idiot.”

“He died trying to keep them from taking the little sex slave…” he began.

“Crucio!” Lucius snarled, though he intentionally did not use the spell with full strength and allowed it to end after only a second or so. He watched impassively as Rowle writhed under the torture spell, and then sagged when the spell ended, nearly half out of his chair. Thorfin gazed at him with a shocked expression. There was no way in hell he would have done that unless indeed he was in with the rest as he had claimed. “NEVER speak of any of my kin with such foul words!” Lucius said, wand in hand, still leveled directly at Rowle’s face.

“Oh… ’course not… sorry… it just… din’t mean it that way…” he mumbled, trembling slightly with the aftereffects.

Lucius growled at him, eyes narrow. “I don’t give a rat’s bloody ass what McNair said about Alerick. You are to treat him with the respect that you treat me else you WILL suffer my wrath!”

“Yeah… yeah, okay…” he muttered, pushing himself upright in his chair again. “So how the hell am I to help you…?” he asked.

“Tell me where they have them. I told you. I WILL be taking control of the entire project.”

“But Parkinson…”

“Is an absolute fool and is on the run from the Aurors! Haven’t you been paying attention, Rowle?” he sneered. “Malcolm Parkinson is gone. He’s probably fled the country by now, along with that leech of a daughter of his.”

“She wouldn’t be with him.” He said, shaking his head. “she told me she was gonna tell him off.”

“Did she now? Too bad for them. I honestly don’t give a damn about either of them; and if I do see them I’ll be sure to take them straight to the graveyard after our duel.” He growled.

“You’re gonna…?”

“Yes. I will kill Malcolm Parkinson if I ever see him. And I will do the same to that little bitch of a
daughter of his.”

“What about the project…?”

“Its mine, I tell you. I want those kids, Rowle. And if you want to keep your skin attached to your body, you will get me to them. Alerick is linked to them and I will not have him suffer from separation from the others.” He growled, raising his wand again at the other wizard.

“I can’t take you to them; the house is protected with the Fidelius Charm!”

“Of course it is.” He rolled his eyes. “Only a fool would leave something so precious in a house that is plottable. But you will get me there nonetheless. And you do know who the secret-keeper is, don’t you?” he smiled evilly.

Rowle hesitated, and then slowly nodded. “Yeh… I know who is. And… they took all the kids when Alerick was taken. They’re all in the Safe House in Romania somewhere…” he said, deciding that pissing off Malcolm Parkinson was a hell of a lot safer than facing the wrath of Lucius Malfoy. “You’d be better off taking that little… um… taking the consort to join the rest of the kids.” He said, careful not to use any sort of contemptuous word to describe Alerick. He didn’t want to be subjected to another round of the Cruciatus curse for choosing the wrong word.

“And you know how to get past the wards to get us in safely?”

“Yeah… just can’t find the place without Warrington…”

“Then you will get Warrington here immediately.” Lucius ordered.

“I can owl him…”

“You will firecall him!” he corrected. I will have these children reunited by sunset!”

“I don’t know, I… I don’t think…”

“IMPERO!” Lucius snarled, using every ounce of strength he had to enforce the spell and impose his will over this weakling. “You leave me no choice, Rowle.” He growled, the dazed wizard staring at him blankly.

Lucius summoned up his Patronus and sent an urgent message to Severus Snape; this weak fool needed to have his mind stripped of all useful knowledge as quickly as possible.

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Severus lowered his wand, turning away from the now unconscious Rowle. He had spent the last two hours stripping the mind of the hapless man, completely removing the memories of the creation of the Dark Prince form the mind of the man under the watchful eye of Nymphadora, representing the Aurors.

“So what did you find?” she asked
“It might be better if the Aurors stay out of this, Dora.” Severus said quietly. “And the entire Ministry, for that matter.”

“They’re just children, Severus…”

“No. Its much more than that. And if you find out all the details, you will be required to report it to your superiors.” Severus said, not raising his tone at all. He knew that this would be difficult for her to accept. When she continued to remain, giving him a look of doubt and disbelief, he sighed. “Dora, please. If these children are to have any semblance of a life then you must know no more.”

“Without the backing of the Ministry of Magic…”

“We can find them. We can free them. We can allow them to simply be… children.” Severus assured.

Dora gazed at him a long moment, then nodded. “All right. I’ll get rid of Mr. Rowle here and let you two discuss what to do next. Two days, Severus; no more. After two days I have to step in and take over…”

“That will be sufficient.” Severus nodded, and then watched as Nymphadora used her wand to levitate the prone form of the man and take him out of the room.

Severus apparated back to Malfoy Manor to discuss the next step with both Potter and Lucius; they were under a tight timeframe now and had to get these last four immediately. Dora was sticking her neck out, allowing them the 48 hours to find these children; he intended to take advantage of every moment he had.
Retreival

AUTHOR'S NOTE: The chapters will be coming slower from now on; sorry about that but between a full time job, my four year old child, SisterSlytherin's shop, and going back to college I don't think I'll have too much free time. But I have NOT given up on this story and will continue to write. Be patient with us and thank you so much for reading!

***NOTE: References to Harry Potter disguised by Polyjuice potion into Alerick will be noted by calling him Alerick/Potter***

Jerrod Warrington stood at the doorway of the house leading out to the expansive garden. Snow covered half the ground still, but the children had been bundled up and taken outside for their afternoon training. It was different for all of them. The little enchanter worked on her spells to bind and force others to her will. The guardians focused on offensive and defensive spells. The Dark Prince watched them and participated wherever and whenever he chose with his nanny and personal guardian for the time being always close behind him. Anton Karkaroff, bastard son of Igor Karkaroff, had moved in permanently as well and was seldom more than six feet away from the Dark Prince.

He turned from the scene and walked back inside, finding himself pacing again to the library and the fireplace that Malcolm Parkinson always used to get in. Of course, he wasn’t there. He had heard from the other members of the Secret Dark Circle that Malcolm had not only been found out; that their Consort had been taken as well.

That damned fool McNair hadn’t followed his orders, which were to just kill the boy so that their plan wouldn’t be found out. They could have created another one, even though Alerick had been extremely bright and promising and fit the planned profile with gratifying perfection. He had sent out the order immediately to bring all the children together in one safe house and now this place was overflowing… you could almost feel the power as nearly all the children were together.

The problem of the consort would solve itself if they did not relocate him and reunite him with the Dark Prince by his thirteenth year. The boy would simply die; it was a condition that Malcolm had insisted be incorporated into the bond. Nothing would be able to save him. They’d put too much effort into raising that blonde brat to lose him now.

The Daily Prophet had reported that the clinic had been shut down and that there was a huge scandal and the children that Pansy had created had been found and returned to the heads of family. Stupid madcap harpy that she was, she had created more trouble for them than she had ever imagined. Damn her and her greed… she’d ruined everything.

The trouble for Jerrod was he couldn’t depend on the Daily Prophet to be accurate about anything anymore. That paper had never recovered from the takeover over twenty years ago by those sympathetic to the Dark Lord. The fools only seemed to print trash anymore, or articles that were highly controversial. Nothing but a news rag anymore…

The paper and his contacts said nothing about the capture of either Pansy Parkinson or her father Malcolm, but that really didn’t mean anything. They could be keeping it quiet if they were after these kids. It had been four days since he last heard from Parkinson; he had no idea what to do right now
but he was about to take matters into his own hands.

He was tired of waiting.

There were vast expanses of empty land in other countries… he had been considering taking them away and doing away with everyone here he knew had any knowledge of the children. Memory charms were nice, but every time he tried to Obliviate someone he usually did irreparable harm to their memories. The trouble with that was the harm that was done did not get done to the memories he wanted to destroy most of the time. He sighed. He would have to kill the lot of them.

He’d need to go to town soon; the children certainly weren’t suffering in their appetites. He would much rather go to the bar anyway… he moved to his own room and donned his winter cloak, bellowing for a house elf. He ordered the creature to go to town and resupply the house, deciding he needed some time away from the damned children and this house, no matter how huge it was.

He took a moment to cast a disillusionment charm about himself before he left the house, apparating to an area just beyond the village. He bowed his head against the wind from the north that had just blown into the town. That meant it would be hitting the complex within the next hour. The children had better have been put back inside… damn it all. He wasn’t going to worry about it not for the next hour or two.

He scurried inside the shelter of the mud room, closing the south-facing door quickly to block out the bitter wind, taking a moment to shake the snow off his cape and cap. Another wave of snow-laden weather was coming, just when he had thought spring had finally arrived. Perhaps it was better that he needed to move the children; they would be safer where they would not suffer from frostbite simply by taking their lessons out-of-doors.

He turned inside, whispering a warming charm, and made his way to the bar as he glanced about at the other patrons. He felt his heart leap, then freeze. Alerick. Great Merlin… Alerick was here! And sitting beside him… oh fuck! The one person that Jerrod Warrington wanted nothing to do with more than any other wizard in the entire world: Lucius Malfoy.

He considered turning and running. He considered apparating directly back to the house and taking only the children and leaving… but Lucius was simply having a meal with the lad in a booth. He did not seem to be hunting for anything…

Warrington slipped into the entry way and scowled. Did Parkinson send him? Lucius had been in the thick of things with the Dark Lord but he’d never been in on any of this… was it simply luck that had brought him here? Or had Alerick used his bond to find this place? There was really only one way to find out.

He released the disillusionment charm and moved quietly to the bar. The barkeep looked at him, and then gave a bit of a nod, moving to get this usual drink.
Lucius had positioned himself so that he had an eye on who came and went through the door. Severus had told him that this bar was one that was frequented by Warrington. Lucius himself would hardly know the wizard on sight, but Potter definitely would. He had gone to school with the boy and Potter and Draco had both told him that Warrington had been on that ‘Inquisitorial Squad’ that Dolores Umbridge had established in the fifth year. He glanced at his companion at the table. You would never know unless you had been there to watch the change that the delicate blonde little boy at his side was not Alerick, but truly was a polyjuiced Potter.

“That’s him.” Harry/Alerick murmured, pulling another of the hard candies out of his pocket and popping it into his mouth. Severus’ contribution, these candies… polyjuice in a hard candy form so Harry could maintain his disguise much longer than a polyjuice potion usually lasted. It was about half a dose of potion encased in a hard candy shell and their testing of it had shown it lasted about half an hour with each one.

“Remember to stay in character.” Lucius murmured a quiet reminder.

“Yes, Lord Father Malfoy.” Harry/Alerick answered with a bit of a smirk that he fought to quell.

Lucius laughed softly, lifting his glass to take a drink. “Behave yourself, Alerick.” He scolded with a smirk of his own.

“Of course, Lord Father Malfoy.” He said, openly watching Warrington. He felt completely safe in doing so as Alerick was a curious boy and watched everyone and everything anyway. “Are you sure I shouldn’t call you Granddad…?” he asked teasingly, keeping his voice soft.

“Lord Father Malfoy will suffice.” He answered, lips twitching a moment into a smile. “Eat your soup.”

“I think I’m finished.” He said, pushing the half-eaten plate back, letting his hands fall properly into his lap.

“It is rather tasteless and greasy, isn’t it?” Lucius said, pushing his own back as well. “Must be considered the best available here, as this place gets very busy at lunchtime and dinner…” he glanced toward Warrington out of the corner of his eye. The man was still at the bar, and was frequently stealing glances at the two of them. “I would prefer to do this my way.” He said quietly. He had told both Severus and Potter that he preferred to simply Imperious the fool and force him to take them into the protected house.

“He keeps looking over… I think he needs to drink himself a little courage before he comes to talk to us. He needed Draco to give him guidance in school, and he found another to follow now. Not to mention that you do cut a rather daunting figure, Lord Father Malfoy…” Harry/Alerick responded, picking up his drink to delicately sip at it, forcing the awful tasting candy down quickly. He wouldn’t have to have another one for half an hour… he glanced at his watch then continued his monitoring of Warrington.

“That is by design and plan, Alerick.” Lucius answered, seeming to completely ignore Warrington now. “Those who exude power and display that power for others to see are rarely those who are approached by fools.”
Warrington put down his second empty glass and turned; he either had to get Alerick back or find out what the bloody hell that Malfoy wanted here. He didn’t come to the outskirts of some tiny town in Romania to have one of their bread bowls filled with greasy lamb stew no matter what it looked like. He took a deep breath to build his courage and moved toward the table. Alerick kept staring right at him as he approached; it was clear the child recognized him but said nothing.

“Good afternoon, Warrington. A mite early to be drinking, isn’t it?” Lucius asked quietly when he was nearly to the table, not even bothering to look about.

“Um… yeah. A little.” He said quietly, moving into the range of Lucius’ view. “Not exactly your area of the world here, is it Malfoy?” he asked quietly. His words were bold, but his tone was hesitant and unsure.

“No. I am here with my grandson here… you have something I want.” He turned his steel-grey eyes on Warrington. “And you will give me what I want.”

He shook his head. “I don’t have anything you could want…”

“Is this the man, Alerick?” Lucius asked, not taking his eyes off the man.

“Yes, Lord Father Malfoy.” Harry/Alerick answered in a confident, even tone.

“Sit down, Warrington. I’m not going to hex you right here in the middle of the bar, nor will I do such a thing in front of my grandson. Sit.” Lucius waved at the third seat at the table.

Warrington hesitated, fighting the impulse to immediately comply. After a few moments he moved to the chair and sank into it. “What is it you want?”


“Who…?” Warrington flushed. Damn it, he knew… his eyes shot to Alerick who sat looking at him with complete innocence.

“Parkinson hasn’t been in contact with you, has he?” Lucius asked, picking up his drink, studying the liquid through the clear glass as he asked his question.

“How would you know…?”

“He’s abandoned the project. I’ve already spoken with Rowle. I know about the Dark Circle. I know about the Prince.”

Warrington felt his heart skip a beat and his blood run cold. Malfoy was getting involved… this was what Parkinson had warned him against. Malcolm had been very adamant that Lucius Malfoy was never to find out even one iota of what was going on… McNair. It all came back to McNair… if he hadn’t been killed by the damned Aurors he’d hunt McNair down and kill him himself.

Lucius watched the emotions play across Jerrod’s face, his own face in a soft knowing smirk. This man had no training in restraining his own emotions and allowed himself to be read like a book. Parkinson had probably stated he did not want Malfoy involved… well no wonder. There were probably lots of things that Parkinson did not share with Warrington as well… it was time to play the next card.

“He betrayed me, Warrington. Are you aware of that?” Lucius asked in a bland tone.

“Who did?” Jerrod asked. Lucius wasn’t sure if the man was truly that stupid or just acting that way to try to cover up.
“Parkinson.” He set his glass down, sitting up in his chair, eyes locked on Jerrod’s. “He betrayed me. He told me he would not use my line for this. I was adamant on that subject when he began this project.”

“So you turned him in?” Jerrod asked, jumping to the first and most obvious conclusion.

Lucius snorted. “I would not have been kind enough to have simply turned him over to the Aurors. His fool of a daughter accomplished that.” He said, leaning on his elbows on the table. “Because he betrayed me, though, I will be taking over this project for myself.”

“Taking over…? But… you weren’t…”

“Do you really think that Parkinson came by a sudden fortune? How do you think he afforded to establish that clinic? Not all of his donors were publicly touted. Each piece of equipment in that clinic cost thousands of muggle dollars, and the work done there cost much more than that. Many of my ‘charities’ are very private and not advertised.” Lucius said scornfully.

“He never mentioned…”

“Of course he didn’t.” Lucius said, clearly losing patience with the inane statements. “There were many things he didn’t share with you, Warrington, because he did not plan to keep you around much longer.”

“I was going to be around for quite a while.” He countered. “I’m the one who came up with the idea of aging…”

Aging…? They were going to age the children? Lucius did not allow his surprise at the statement to show. “Are you? Or did he allow you to think you came up with it so that you felt important to the cause? You were nothing before, when the Dark Lord ruled. You were going to be nothing again when the Prince came to power.”

Warrington looked dumbstruck. “He couldn’t have dealt with them on his own.”

“Perhaps not. And that is why he had others with strength and power in the wings, waiting to step in.” Lucius said, clearly meaning himself. Warrington stared at him in silence for several long moments but said nothing. After a minute or so Lucius gestured to the barkeeper, who mixed another drink and brought it over to Warrington before bustling off again. Warrington took a deep drink. “Parkinson is gone. No one has heard from him in several days. He has been forced into fleeing, and forced into hiding. Both he and his daughter don’t dare show their faces in the wizarding world right now.” Lucius explained. “I happen to know that there are several wizards who have filed blood feud against the Parkinsons. They’re sure to be killed by one wizard or another fairly soon. Then where will you be? You will be the one left holding the bag, as it were. Four children with no family hanging upon you for money and food… and our Prince will not appreciate any sort of deprivation. I know Alerick prefers the best of everything.” He said, glancing at the childlike figure at his side.

“As it should be, Lord Father Malfoy.” Harry/Alerick agreed quietly.

“You don’t have the money to continue raising them as they should be raised, even if you take them to another country, do you?” He asked, eyeing the younger wizard, who flushed.

“I’ve done well enough…”

“With Parkinson’s constant contributions, yes you have.” Lucius agreed, working to get Warrington thinking along the lines he wished him to. “You may have done an excellent job up until now with what you have had. But these children will need proper wardrobes and proper instruction, as well as
a much firmer hand to get them through their teenage years.” He said in a calm tone, passing Harry/Alerick a napkin and the blonde boy dutifully dabbed at his mouth before sitting quietly to listen once more. “Do you have the desire to continue, to be the only one responsible for their upbringing? I think you’re feeling rather overwhelmed right now, since all of them must be under one roof…”

“It is harder.” He grumbled. “I can’t stand little girls.” He said.

“Then take me to them. I can ease your burden; get them proper nannies and instructors that Parkinson could never have afforded. They must have the proper education else their teenage years will drive you insane. Even then they can try your every last nerve and I ought to know; I have raised one myself.”

Warrington again looked torn, turning his eyes to Alerick. “They have really special needs… and now that we have them together they refused to be separated. And I’m having a lot of problems with Eric…” he said, deciding. Let Lucius take command; he was much happier being a nobody within the framework, someone dependable to give continued support to the new Dark Prince.

“You have only to show me to where they are. I will get them all properly in line. No offense, Warrington, but you don’t have a very dominant personality. I have plenty of experience dealing with powerful personalities. Just show me where they are.”

Warrington took up the drink that Lucius had purchased for him and drank it down, coughing a bit at the strength but downing it nonetheless before he rose to his feet. “All right. Come on; I’ll take you myself.” He said quietly.

“Excellent choice.” Lucius said, rising as well. “Come, Alerick. It is time for you to see your Dark Prince once more…”

Harry/Alerick smiled, rising to his feet. He tried to copy the expression of joy that he had seen every time the Dark Prince had been mentioned around the boy, but said nothing.

“You’d best bundle that boy up; it’s quite a walk from here.” He said, moving to the door. Lucius followed, and Harry/Alerick found it a relief that the boy he was pretending to be would not have held the older wizard’s hand… it was weird enough having to call him ‘Lord Father Malfoy’ all the time.

The wind was bitter and laden with snow. Although it was not a hard blow yet it promised to get much worse by nightfall. Harry/Alerick stayed as close behind Lucius as he dared; the cloak that he had brought didn’t seem to be doing anything to stop the wind at all. He whispered a soft warming spell on the inside of his cloak as they trudged onward.

Jarred Warrington had not been exaggerating; the three were walking for nearly an hour down the hard-beaten dirt road before Warrington turned north toward a small sheltered valley. Harry had already ingested another of the polyjuice candies and knew he had about ten more minutes before he needed another one…

Warrington held out his hand to Lucius as they approached an empty field. Lucius wordlessly took the hand and took hold of Harry/Alerick’s hand with his other. Jarred led them onward and when they rounded a copse of trees, he released their hands. “There it is…”

At the heart of the valley, sheltered by surrounding high hills from the worst of the biting winds was a grand little manor and grounds. It was clearly lit and occupied, had an east and west wing and expansive gardens out back of the house. It was completely fenced in, and highly secure. “We didn’t
want to take any chances with the Dark Prince… he started walking so we had to put in fences to keep him from toddling off…” he said, moving to the tall wrought-iron gates to unlock them. There were inscriptions of the Dark Mark on both of the gates, and representations of the mark on the fences surrounding the property.

Jerrod Warrington stepped square in front of the wrought-iron gate and sighed. He produced his wand and used a transfiguration charm to change the end of the wand into a sharp blade, which he used to slice a small cut in his thumb. He pressed his thumb into the lock and the blood released the lock on the gate. He pushed it open, then chanted a soft incantation to release the first ward then entered the grounds. “We have pretty good security here…” he said, though he did not sound overly enchanted by it all.

“So I see… how many wards are set over the grounds?” Lucius asked as he and Alerick/Harry followed Warrington through the gate.

Warrington turned to reseal the gates and reactivate the perimeter ward. “About twenty or so we’ll need to pass through before we get to the house. All the doors inside are warded too and you have to release them before you can go from one part of the house to another.”

The three moved on, with Jerrod magically assisting Lucius to pass through the multiple layers of wards as they crossed the grounds and made their way down the long graveled pathway that led to the main door of the mansion. Harry/Alerick was not sure if the wards were crafted to allow the boy he impersonated through, so he tried to make sure he was quite close to Lucius to ensure he was passed through the wards by Warrington as well. "They were outside practicing when I left, but I’m sure they took them inside when this damned storm hit. They could have put them in their rooms, but it is rather early. You'll be happy to know that I've ensured that we've stuck to the plan, even without Parkinson around to tell us how important it is that they get their education as quickly as possible,” he said conversationally as they walked. "Verden didn't think the children would pick up the lessons so quickly, but Parkinson said they would. So did that German bloke that they brought when the pregnant mothers would come to deliver the babies; he said they were engineered that way, whatever that means..."

Lucius made little thoughtful noises as Jerrod rattled on, learning more about what was going on in here by the moment. He was glad that Warrington had apparently just decided to give it all up as a bad job and hand it off to someone else. That made it so much easier; now he didn’t have to torture him for the information. That would have been a bit more satisfying, though…

Harry reached into his pocket and pulled out another candy, slipping the potion-laced candy drop into his mouth. He wasn’t sure if he needed it, but he surely didn't want to change back just as they stepped through the door.

Warrington saw him with the candy and his lip curled. "Candy...? You'll spoil the brat, Lucius." he sneered. "We don't give them sweets here; it rots their teeth..."

"He is MY grandson, Warrington, and I will give him whatever I wish." Lucius growled at him, narrowing his eyes dangerously. "You overstep your boundaries."

"Am I...? Parkinson used to get just as pissed if I mentioned anything too...” he grumbled, scowling as he mounted the last stair that led to the front door.

The door was made of some sort of very dark ironwood, seasoned by years of exposure to the harsh elements here in the unforgiving northern country of Romania. Warrington used the still sharp end of his wand again, nicking the tip of his thumb before he slipped it up underneath the doorknocker, whispering "Recognitum." The door audibly clicked and he reached with his other hand to open it.
"I hate that damned spell; my hands get the hell beat out of them when I have to leave." he grumbled as he led the two into the grand entryway.

This place was meant to be a palace; probably the only place the little Dark Prince was ever to see in his youth. The entryway had definitely been built to impress with marble floors, expensive artwork on display, and two curving staircases of marble arching off to the left and right from the center of the room. The deep blue upholstery on the furniture in the area stood out in stark contrast to the shining silver polish on the frames they were attached to. A huge mirror was affixed to the ceiling and when Harry gazed up he could see himself and the entire room reflected in that glass.

Warrington didn't pay any attention to it, letting them in and closing the door against the harsh northern wind to finally cut off the blast and assault by snow. "They're probably in the Great Room, if the nannies have chosen to continue the training inside..."

"Decided that nannies were vital, did he...?" Lucius asked, though he was truly fishing for information.

"Yeah... the teachers and 'father' figures were supposed to take care of them but they got really pissy when they were left with all that work..." he muttered as he re-sealed the door. "So he brought in nannies for each child, even one for each twin. Parkinson insisted that we have only squibs as nannies for them, so they wouldn't be tempted to try to twist the children in some way. Alerick's nanny was killed when he was taken away, along with McNair..." he answered, not really seeming to care if he caused shock or dismay to the child standing just behind him. "So he won't have one here."

"I see. And who did he finally choose to teach each skill?" Lucius prompted him.

Warrington glanced at him, a little suspicious. "He didn't tell you?"

"I told you, he was hiding certain things from me; he didn’t want me to know he was making my own family into a servant class for his Dark Prince." he returned with a scowl as they stood there in the entryway. "Is the name of one of the teachers going to anger me or is there another reason you aren’t telling me?" He queried.

"Oh, uh... well, I dunno." he shrugged, unsure. He hated that he had been left in charge! "For defense and offensive spells, mostly to teach the guardian, we have Woodall. For seductive spells, Cecilia Chen, she's a Chinese lady or something, and this weird woman from America, name of Christi Burke or something like that. I can't stand that woman. That's one thing that Alerick and I both agree on; she's a right prat. Where was I...? Oh yes. For charms we had to settle with Moran. I know he's almost useless but these are just kids right now. When they need a better teacher we'll move on from him. For Hexes and the like we have Vreshnick and Karkaroff. Verden teaches them how to use a wand and proper wand work..."

"Sound like a good start for a properly rounded education... Where are their wands?"

"They don't have 'em yet; we were gonna wait until... well, until we got them to eight or nine or so..."

"Fine. Go on...?"

"Oh, um... Oh, yeah. Baroness Grechim teaches them manners and deportment. This is her place, you know. Old friend or something of Bebel’s; grew up with him or something like that. I really can't stand either one of them."
"She, at least, has done a very good job teaching proper manners... I know Alerick has displayed many of the proper mannerisms for a young man of his stature."

"Taught 'em all to be uppity, that's what she's done. But we're keeping them in line." he agreed, starting them off again as he continued to list teachers. "McNair was teaching them about poisons, but he's dead. And I teach about herbs and some potions stuff but only Alerick there was old enough to even begin to train there... the twins are dead useless at potions but spot-on using all kinds of attack spells."

"Interesting." Lucius mused.

"We don't have anyone lined up to take on the next round of lessons; Parkinson was supposed to take care of that in the next couple of weeks. After the aging, we were going to start with Alerick's consort training. Verden and Moran have volunteered to start off his lessoning."

"They have, have they?" Lucius growled softly.

"Yeah... he has to learn that he's to be a proper submissive, and not to try to dominate those who have power over him." He gave the boy a bit of a glare, but did not linger with his gaze as he unlocked yet another door with his blood. "But that won't be for another month or so." He said, glancing at the boy again. "So, are you going to go ahead and kill off the girl?"

"Why would I do that? You just said she was intelligent and useful."

He shrugged. "Parkinson wanted to kill her when she was born. He only wanted the boy to be the guardian, not his sister. And they consider them a mistake... they aren't pure as the consort and Dark Prince are. I told them it would be idiotic to kill her off right then; just to be patient and wait, to let us see if these two have that weird 'twin' thing going on. And they do. They know what the other is thinking and sometimes even without a word can argue and settle things... it's creepy sometimes, watching them."

Lucius considered the man thoughtfully. He was fairly useless but he had been bold enough to speak up to save the life of one of the children... "Interesting... no, I do not intend to kill any of them." he said honestly. He felt Harry tap his hand ever so gently and knew that they were just not the three of them in this antechamber anymore; someone had moved up behind them and was hoping to take them by surprise.

"Who have you brought amongst us, Jerrod...?" purred a silky voice with a very heavy Russian accent from behind them. Harry had been watching him approach; the man was not very tall, but his eyes were only on Harry/Alerick. "Is this your precious young Alerick, returned from that hell of the English Ministry...?" he asked, reaching out to stroke the lad's cheek in a manner that indicated more sensuality then fatherhood.

Harry/Alerick had no trouble recognizing the sexual desire in the man’s eyes and he shoved his hand away, completely disgusted. "Don't touch me!" he snapped.

The man snarled and drew back a hand, prepared to slap Harry/Alerick across the face but barely got his hand raised when a wand flashed out and a spell slammed into his chest, slapping him hard against the marble pillar with a sickening crack.

Lucius watched him slide to the ground, grasping at his ribs, moaning in pain. His head was bleeding from where it had struck as well. "NO ONE touches my family!" he snarled at the man, eyes narrow. "Who the bloody hell is this idiot, Warrington?!" he demanded.
"Verden." Jerrod murmured, shaken. "We don't have medical care here, Malfoy..." he started. "I should get him to..."

"He's not going anywhere; he’s earned his pain. His bleeding isn't too bad and he can wait to be tended." Lucius said coldly, watching the man get to shaky feet.

Harry/Alerick scowled. "Where is my Prince?!" he demanded, arms folded. "Take me to him now!"

Jerrod looked from the boy back to Lucius, shocked. This kind of behavior would have resulted in severe punishment from his handlers before; what had Lucius done to this boy? He'd only had him for a few days! "Alerick, the Prince might be in bed now..." he said quietly, unsure now of his own position in this and how he was going to survive.

"Regardless, you will take us to him immediately!" Lucius instructed.

"You ain't supposed to be giving orders...!" Verden snarled, drawing out his wand.

"Expelliarmus!" Harry/Alerick snapped, knocking down the injured man once more and sending his wand flying into the air, spinning wildly. He thrust out his hand and snatched the wand out of the air deftly. "You will not threaten either me or my grandfather any longer!" he snapped.

"What the fuck? Wandless?!" Warrington mumbled in disbelief.

Alerick/Harry innocently smiled as he offered the wand up to Lucius. "Here, Lord Father Malfoy..." he said.

"Very good, Alerick. Thank you." Lucius said, accepting the wand with a smile, not taking his cold steel eyes off of Verden. "You had better understand, Verden, that nothing around here is going to remain the same..." he began and held up the wand, threatening the man with his own wand. "Do show your intelligence and shut the hell up, Verden. I am taking over this operation. There is nothing you can say or do that will change it. Do you understand me...?"

Verden hesitated, and then nodded slightly to indicate his understanding.

"Take us to him." Lucius ordered, eyes flicking to Warrington for a moment.

"Yeah... yeah, sure..." he said, moving onward quickly. Lucius gestured for Verden to follow ahead of them, and then took up the rear with Alerick. He muttered "Silencio" and took away Verden's capability of speech and ability to continue to mutter and moan in pain as he limped ahead of them.

"Why do you not have the aging potion ready yet, Warrington?" Lucius probed.

"We want a particularly strong aging potion, one that’s permanent and that will age them a minimum of four years. I have one but the effects aren't permanent yet, I've nearly got down to the last details of how to perfect it. A few more tests..." he shrugged, leading them down an ornate hallway to the last door at the end. He opened this and it opened into a huge room that was clearly meant to be a sunroom or greenhouse.

The room was easily forty feet across and round, the walls all wrought iron and glass. Even the ceiling was made of glass, arching upward to create a dome in a very graceful curve. The snow slid off this shape, though it doggedly hung on to the joints of the metalwork wherever it touched. The furnishings in the room were basic and simple, yet elegant at the same time. Poufs, tables of solid materials, chairs of sturdy wood stood about the room in small clusters but the center of the room was completely cleared. One wall next to the door was dedicated to a small library of spell books with very few if any appropriate for children of the age they saw in the room.
Off to the north was a small dais and that is where the child who had to be the Dark Prince was located at the moment. He was dressed in a splendidly tailored miniature version of wizard’s robes that allowed him freedom to crawl and move about on his own. He seemed to be around a year old, with a shock of wild untamed black hair and startling green eyes that watched everyone and everything. Off to his left were the two guardians, practicing attack spells. They both were black-haired too, but the boy's was very curly and cropped close to his scalp. His twin had her hair back in a braid, wisps of dark hair framing her little pale face, reminding Lucius uncomfortably of a tiny Bellatrix. Off to his right was the other child, a girl with a cherubic face, wide blue eyes, and flaming curls that came down to the center of her back who seemed to be doing nothing more than play. All activity halted when they moved into the room.

"You see, Alerick? Your Dark Prince is fine and healthy." Warrington said in a slightly irritated tone.

"Yes, so we see." Lucius said, one hand resting upon Alerick/Harry’s shoulder.

"Found the brat, did you?" Someone spoke off to the right. He was tall and very handsome, around twenty or so if you were to judge by his young features. But something about him made Lucius suspect that this man was no child. With his blonde wavy hair, careful style of dressing, stunning smile, and highly self-confident poise reminded Harry strongly of Professor Gilderoy Lockhart, but not at the same time. Had he had children? This man was more of a predator than Professor Lockhart would ever have considered being. "Good." he said with a toothy smile that was almost a leer. "I was rather peeved when I found that they'd taken you, Alerick... I've been waiting long enough. Your next phase of training will be starting soon... you are such a pretty little thing I'm going to REALLY enjoy it..." his leer became far clearer.

Harry/Alerick snarled and stomped his foot, pulling up a great amount of power and pointing his hand at the speaker. "Crucio!" he snapped. The blonde man fell backwards, howling and screaming in agony, struck by the full force of the spell and the power.

The other children stared, but the Dark Prince merely watched with a look of interest upon his round baby cheeks.

"Now, now, Alerick...!" Lucius smirked. "You must play nice."

"He's not a nice man, Lord Father Malfoy." He said innocently, watching as the man writhed and screamed. "And I am not meant for HIM."

"I take it that this fool is Moran?" Lucius asked, glancing at Warrington, who nodded his affirmation. "Let him go, son, and go join the other children." He said, giving Alerick/Harry a gentle nudge.

Alerick nodded, dropping his hand to his side. Moran lay gasping as a woman hurried over to him with wide fearful eyes, watching the little blonde boy make his way over to where the other children stood.

The smallest boy scowled and stepped back on his podium. "No!" he said clearly.

The other three looked at each other, then without another word they all moved toward the Dark Prince as Harry/Alerick halted, allowing the boy to set the scene.

A man who had been up on the dais with the baby stepped forward, his eyes lit almost fanatically as he gazed at the child. "What is it, My Prince...?" he asked as he knelt beside the child. It was clear that this man doted on every wish and whim of the little Prince. His face was long and gaunt, and he wore the same type of beard that his father had. Karkaroff. The child toddled unsteadily over to Karkaroff’s side, never taking his eyes off of Alerick/Harry, clear suspicion and complete lack of
recognition on his face.

The curly-haired boy stepped between Alerick/Harry and planted his feet firmly. Harry could feel unmistakable power from the lad, doubled when his sister moved to his side and planted herself as well. The redhead moved to the baby, standing behind them both.

The man looked up and smiled; his teeth were easily as bad as his father’s had been when he had been hunted down and killed for abandoning the Dark Lord so many years ago. "Lucius Malfoy, if I am not mistaken... what is this creature you bring to us? My Prince is not pleased." He said.

Lucius turned the wand on Karkaroff. "I am coming for what is mine." He said calmly. "My money financed this operation and I claim it as mine. You can join me, or you can die."

"YOUR money financed...?" MY money financed this Dark Prince! I made it possible for him to exist! I chose the proper carrier for his seed! I tended that useless witch who bore him life! That little yellow-haired brat is yours, I give you that. But the Dark Prince is MINE!"

Harry/Alerick calmly glanced about the room, summing up the possible battle that he and his father-in-law would have to deal with. It was clear who the nannies were; they were all dressed in simple dresses of brown with little white aprons. They were squibs, Warrington had said, so he could ignore them. It was doubtful the children would participate in a fight unless their Prince was threatened, and Harry intended to make it plain he was defending the boy. Other than those groups, there were seven witches and wizards about the room. One was already injured and unarmed, one lay upon the floor recovering from his attack. He didn't think that Warrington would do anything unless he was cornered. That left five to be dealt with...

"My money paid for the equipment to create the boy." Lucius answered calmly.

"What would someone like you possibly want with them? We've raised them very well here! You have no use for my Dark Prince; he has his own destiny...!"

"I will not be parted with my grandson. And Alerick will not be parted from the others."

"You know the plan...?" His eyes were wide with suspicion and disbelief. "Malcolm said he would never tell you!" his face transformed into a scowl.

Lucius smirked. "Why would I not know? Do you truly believe that Parkinson had the intelligence to devise such a plan?"

"He was a few nuts short of a fruitcake, Karkaroff..." Warrington said in a completely agreeing tone.

"Of course it was all his plan! He planned this from the moment he escaped the clutches of those maniac healers in that so-called hospital!"

Lucius sighed in a regretful way. "And they said you were intelligent. Lamentable, really..."

Alerick/Harry studied the little Prince as the boy looked at Karkaroff, then up at Lucius, thinking hard. He scowled at Karkaroff, pointing at Lucius. "Mine?" he asked in his simple way.

"Yes, little Princeling, but..." Karkaroff began.

"Mine!" The boy repeated, scowl deepening.

"Have the house elves gather the possessions of the children." Lucius ordered calmly, eyes landing on one of the nannies.
"You just back off, Malfoy!" Karkaroff said, rising. "You'll not be taking my Prince!"

"No!" The Dark Prince said, stomping his foot. "Mine! Now!"

"He wants to take you away from me, my Prince! He wants us to never see each other! I belong to you too...!"

The toddler had clearly made up his mind; he pushed at Karkaroff. "No! Want mine!"

Karkaroff did not resist the baby, nor hold him; he allowed the child to push him away. He turned toward Lucius, cold fury in his eyes as he gazed at the object of his sudden rejection. He said not a word, but simply attacked with the cold fury of a fanatic who had just had the object of that fanaticism snatched from his grasp.

Harry saw a shield spring up about the children that did not include Harry inside, simply sheltering the twins, the Prince, and the redheaded girl. Satisfied that the children were at least protected, he surged forward, thankful that he had studied so hard and no longer needed to have his wand in his hand to wield his magic. He stunned and disarmed one wizard before he turned to assist Lucius.

Lucius was moving rapidly about the room, alternately pursuing and attacking and fleeing his attacker.

"Little freak!" A woman snarled and Harry found a killing curse flying his direction; he had time to dodge it and someone behind him screamed but was cut short when one of the nannies was put to death by the killing curse.

"Sectumsempra!" Harry snarled and watched as the gashes appeared all over the chest and stomach of the startled American woman. Christi Burke collapsed to the ground, wide-eyed and in shock. The injuries from that hex would have her bleeding too badly and in too much pain to fight any longer. "Hah! Two down!" He said in a satisfied tone, turning to find his next opponent.

Karkaroff fought with a skill that easily surpassed what his father had possessed even at the peak of his magical career, easily a match for Lucius. He was vicious and held nothing back, cold fury driving him. "He is MINE, Lucius!" he snarled finally.

"You are a fool! The Dark Prince has clearly chosen me!"

"Only because you look like the consort! Where have you taken Alerick? We want him back!!!"

Harry's elation didn't last long as he felt the disorientation that meant the change was coming back over him. The damned potion had picked a hell of a time to wear off! He cursed and threw up a shield, transfiguring his robes to the proper size as his body returned to its natural size and shape. He felt the negative surge of energy as more than one curse smashed against his shields from two different directions.

"Holy Fuck! It's Potter!" a wizard who sounded British gasped, backing away, throwing up a protego charm. That had to be Woodall, which meant the others still standing were Vreshnik and Chen. The two wizards, realizing who they faced, tried to apparate away but were trapped within the multiple wards over the mansion. The oriental witch did the wisest thing and simply turned and fled the room.

Lucius snarled as a curse grazed his arm and it went numb. The Dark Prince babbled something and the boy with the curly dark hair looked at Karkaroff with a glare. He let the shield drop and ran forward, snatching up the wand from the fallen American witch. He turned and pointed it at Karkaroff. "Expelliarmus!" He yelled.
The wizard’s wand flew out of his hand, blasted away to spin wildly off across the room. His eyes went to the children, confused and shocked. “No, My Prince…!” he pleaded.

“Avada Kedavra!” Lucius snarled. There was a green flash and Karkaroff toppled like a felled tree to fall almost at the feet of the Dark Prince, his face still a mask of confusion and shock.

By this point, only Woodall and Vreshnick were left capable of fighting and Harry gave them no quarter, advancing on them and forcing the two to defend themselves. They split up which was a very smart move to prevent Harry from using area-covering spells to attack both of them. But Lucius turned and met Woodall head on, holding his wand in his left hand now, dueling one on one which left Vreshnick to Harry. The Russian man snarled as he threw up defensive spell after defensive spell, throwing in as many curses as he could but Harry’s experience with dueling was more extensive and the man began to wear down… finally he fell to a leg-locking curse and Harry used Petrificus Totalus to ensure the man moved no more. He turned to see if Lucius needed any assistance and he was straightening from the last attack he’d made; Woodall lay dead on the floor, the victim of a very effective Avada Kedavra.

The only sound now was the whimpering of the three nannies who had survived huddling together behind one of the stone benches and the soft moans of Burke as she lay bleeding. Moran was sitting up slightly, still dazed from the Crucio spell and Harry paused a moment to petrify him as well. Harry ignored the others for now, moving over to Lucius. “Are you hurt…?”

“It’s nothing.” He said, though it was clear that he was not in good shape. His right arm still hung limply at his side, seemingly completely lifeless. “A small injury at most and not important. The children are not harmed…?”

“The guardians are very well trained; they cast a very strong shield about all of them and it protected them quite well. I didn’t have to ensure their safety at all or you’d have been against seven all by yourself…” Harry assured him. “There’s nothing to worry about with them, but it’s pretty clear you need a healer. Let’s get the children and get the bloody hell out of here.”

“I agree.” Lucius said, glancing about thoughtfully. “We need to get the children out of here as quickly as possible.” He said, ignoring the bit about himself needing to be tended.

Harry turned toward the children and saw that although the shield had been allowed to dissipate, the dark-haired twins still stood as a physical barrier between the two men and the Dark Prince. The boy still held the wand gripped in his hand, holding it up and his stance indicated that he would not hesitate to attack if needed. Both the twins had identical expressions upon their faces, and that expression showed no fear whatsoever, only determination and aggression.

The dark-haired wizard smiled reassuringly at them, showing them empty hands. “Well I suppose I should introduce myself. I’m Harry Potter. This is Lucius Malfoy. We’ve come to take you home to your families…”

“The Dark Prince is all the family we require.” The twins responded in complete unison with no change in posture or facial expression. The red-haired girl did not add her own statement; rather she stared at Harry with eyes wide and frightened and her face pale. She moved further behind the Prince in silence.

The little boy in the regal robes stood still, considering Harry, ignoring the dead man who had died trying to keep him for his own.

“And you will all get to remain with him.” Lucius assured. “But you are missing one of the members of your Circle, are you not? Alerick is at my home and he needs to be with his prince as well; I wish
to escort you all to him.” He answered reasonably.

That seemed to get through at least to the youngest. “Mine.” The Prince said, finally making the decision and toddling forward, reaching for Lucius. “My Ri!”

“He wants to be taken to Alerick.” The boy spoke up, glancing at his sister before he lowered the wand.

Lucius smiled and knelt, drawing the baby into his good arm, lifting him up carefully. “I will of course take you to him, my Prince.” He smiled. He felt almost drunk just holding the boy. The power that flowed outward from this little wisp of a boy was simply amazing; and intoxicating. “He will be quite pleased that you are safe, Little Lord.” The infant giggled, clearly pleased as he played contentedly with Lucius’ long blonde hair.

“What will we do with the nannies?” Harry asked, gesturing toward the cowering women. He did not need to ask what would be done with the wizards and witches who had attacked them. He knew their lives were forfeit.

“As far as I am concerned they are part and parcel of this entire scheme. They belong to the children; we take them.” Lucius said, turning.

“What… what do I do…?” Warrington spoke up. He had stayed completely out of the battle, back against the wall with his own Protego to keep himself from being hit by a stray spell. His voice was nervous and faint.

“Gather what you wish to take.” Lucius said, looking at the man with a sneer. “You will make a vow to serve me, if you wish to live.” The coward hadn’t even bothered to fight at all.

“I’m already bound to Parkinson.” He admitted with more than a little reluctance. “But I think you’d be a bit easier to serve than he was…”

“Parkinson will be dead soon.” Lucius said simply. “Harry, gather the children and take them outside; use the portkey to go home. I will tend to matters here.”

Harry nodded, gesturing to the nannies, who came out of hiding looking more than a little frightened.

“You lot get the children, you know them better than I. We need to go quickly.” Harry said. The red-haired girl dodged the hand of the nanny and scurried over to Warrington, hiding behind him.

“He can’t. She won’t go with Potter.” Warrington said softly, clearly uncomfortable with the girl clinging to his leg and hiding her face against him.

“Why is this?” Lucius asked in a calm tone, looking toward him with a bit of a scowl.

“It’s got something to do with her conditioning. I didn’t work with the girls. I told you, I really don’t like girls, and I don’t work well with little girls.” he said reluctantly. You couldn’t tell that from the behavior of the girl; she was clinging to Warrington as if he were the only rock in a storm and she was staring at Harry as if dreading the moment she would be required to go anywhere near him. Jerrod glanced at the girl, then over at his fallen comrades. “I told you it was Moran and Verden who handled the special training aspects too. I didn’t want any part of that.” He pointed toward the wizard who had made the sexual statements toward Alerick. “That one that you’ve crippled and silenced was the one who did the special conditioning of the girls in particular.”

A cold fury lit Lucius’ eyes and he handed the baby to Harry. The Dark Prince scowled, not pleased with having been handed off so flippantly. “And tell me, Warrington. Was this ‘conditioning’ of a sexual nature…?” He asked, tone soft and cold.
“I don’t know; probably so. Parkinson said that sexual conditioning was an excellent way to gain control of them.” Jerrod answered with a bit of disgust. “I was only to teach them Herbology and potions. I really don’t know anything about what they used or how they did it to condition them.”

Lucius considered a moment, and then nodded. “Very well, then. She will remain with me until we return, then; I do not plan to tarry here for long.”

“Stay!” The little Prince demanded, reaching toward Lucius once more.

“Oh, my little Lord… Alerick is waiting for you at my mansion…” he stroked the boy’s tousled hair. “I promise you we will not linger here for long.” The baby pouted, but he did settle into Harry’s arm and quit squirming once more.

“All right, Lucius. Be careful, and hurry.” He said, turning to the nannies who had moved forward, still huddled close together. “Come on, no one is going to hurt you. You need to hurry and get us all outside so we can leave. We will be using a port key to get out of here…” he said as the nannies finally seemed to understand and they hurried to take the two dark-haired children’s hands and hurried out with Harry.

Warrington hesitated, unsure of what he was expected to do. “I can… um, I can pack for the kids…” he offered.

“You have fifteen minutes.” Lucius said. “Not one moment more. If you are not back here within that time, I shall destroy you along with everyone and everything that remains in this accursed place.” He told him in a very clear tone. Warrington needed no more prompting; he took off at a run leaving Lucius to deal with those he chose to with the borrowed wand.

Severus turned, wand drawn as the group appeared in the center of the garden. One of the nannies fell to the ground, the other two managed to land with some grace, both using their bodies to cushion the fall of the children they held. Harry landed with practiced skill, the baby in his arms squealing in delight, clearly having enjoyed the trip. “At least he likes Portkeys…” Harry said with a soft grin.

Severus lowered his wand, frowning slightly. “Where is Lucius? Why didn’t he return with you?” Severus demanded.

Harry moved toward him with the baby in his arms. “He decided to stay and do the clean-up.”

Severus glanced at the group Harry had brought back with him. “I see that you are one child shy… please don’t tell me you forgot to bring a child.”

Harry snorted, stifling laughter at the sarcastic comment. “Of course not; Lucius has her.”

That had Snape curious. “Why would he keep her with him?”

“I’m not certain, something about her conditioning. I’m sure he’ll know more when he comes.”

“Lovely. So what are their names? I can guess what their jobs are.” He said, eyeing the twins who glared at him in silence. “Those two are clearly the guardians.”
“I haven’t bothered to ask, actually. It’s been a bit of a hectic afternoon. Alerick will know, I’m certain.” Harry answered.

The baby gazed toward the door, waiting a moment while the adults were speaking. The movement in the direction he wished did not happen, though, and he began to push at Harry, squirming.

“Down!” He demanded.

“My prince wishes to be put down.” The male twin said. “You will do as my Prince wishes or else!”

Harry looked at the child still holding the wand and found he quite believed the boy had the capability of backing up any threat he cared to utter. “I was going to take you to Alerick; it would have been much faster. But if you prefer to walk…” he bent and set the child down on his feet.

“So, this is the little Prince?” Snape studied the boy dressed in the regal robes. The similarities between this infant and the memory that Snape had of young Harry were astounding; if he had a scar he would have sworn that Harry Potter was standing right there staring up at him, regressed to the age of a year and a half.

The toddler frowned up at Snape. “Take! Ri!” He demanded.

“Oh yes, this is the little Prince all right.” Harry smirked.

“You must take us to Alerick. Now.” The scowling dark-haired boy translated in the same commanding tone as his Prince had used.

“Well, it seems he is quite used to getting every little wish his heart desires…” Snape mused, though he did turn toward the house and open the door. The baby toddled along after him as quickly as his baby legs would allow. The guardians moved up and took his hands, helping him keep his balance as they hurried along, the entire group following Snape through the house.

He moved to the ballroom and flung the doors open; the room had been converted to an indoor nursery for the children. All manner of toys and games were available for the children, as well as slides and a swing set and sandbox. The floor was covered a soft plush carpet of real grass, grown to protect the children from the hard marble of the ballroom floor. A path of cushiony foam stones wound its way around the room curving here and there, for the children to ride little scooting vehicles on or to run on. The room was brightly lit and was full of the laughter of children.

Alerick was running about the nursery with Angel in close pursuit, laughing as he was able to keep ahead of her. Her Kneazle kit romped along behind them, swatting playfully at the ties dangling off her dress.

The Dark Prince saw them running and scowled, angry. “No, Ri!” He snapped. “No!” He stomped his foot. “Mine!”

Alerick halted immediately and Angel bumped into him, nearly knocking him down but he barely seemed to notice at all. His face was suffused with joy when he saw the Dark Prince; he ran over as fast as he could. The baby’s scowl faded and he smiled happily, hands reaching for Alerick. “Mine!” He squealed happily. Alerick knelt to hug the prince and both Harry and Snape could feel the heady power of their bond rolling over them from the children.

“The bond is so powerful…” Snape murmured, amazed. “Its almost visible to those who can see.”

“Who are they, daddy?” Angel asked, moving up to him and slipping her small hand into his.

“They are your brothers and sister, my love.” Harry smiled at her.
“Really…?” she smiled up at him, cuddling close. “Oh, I hope they’ll all play with me too, we could have so much fun…”

Alerick looked up at Harry. “I was so worried for my Prince… thank you so much for bringing him home to me.” he smiled, then looked back at the child. “Are you all right?” he asked. The baby babbled happily and Snape smirked at the two interacting. It was almost comical how the older boy acted as if he actually understood the meaningless babble. Alerick then gazed back up at Harry again. “Thank you for bringing him to me. But how did you look like me?” he asked.

“How did you know I looked like you, Alerick?” Harry asked.

“My Prince told me. He said I shouldn’t trust you because you could look like people you weren’t. And you tried to pretend to be me, but he knew that you weren’t.”

“He’s very smart to be able to see through a polyjuice potion.” Harry ruffled the toddler’s hair.

“You just don’t feel like me…” Alerick clarified, shrugging.

Warrington shouldered his bag and hurried back to the arboretum, hoping like hell he hadn’t taken too long running from room to room gathering up things that he knew the kids would need, things he knew that they treasured. He’d also grabbed two changes of clothing for each of them and then spent a few precious minutes of time gathering his own clothing and his most precious possessions. Fifteen minutes just wasn’t enough time to pack a life’s time of gathering precious materials for spells and books and… wait! He knew what he had to make sure he grabbed; Lucius would be sure to be pleased if he brought that oil. He hurried back into his potions room. He picked up two rather large beakers of clear oil from the shelf; slowing his pace considerably as to not shake the liquid as he tried to hurry back to rejoin Lucius.

Lucius flicked his borrowed wand with a satisfied smirk, turning from the second of the two men who had voiced an interest in sexual relations with the young boy safely ensconced in his home. “Ah, Warrington. Just in time. So, have you everything you need?”

“Everything I had time to find.” He agreed, moving to his side. “I thought these might be of use to you…” he started, holding up the two beakers to him. “These are Enrumpent Horn Oil…”

Lucius laughed, delighted. This man might not be a waste of space after all. “Oh, yes, that will do very nicely. To reward you for your thoughtfulness and intelligence, I will allow you an extra thirty minutes while I set this house to disappear. Take whatever trinkets you wish for yourself; this place won’t be here for anything to be missed, shortly.” He smiled, using the wand to make the two bottles levitate since his one hand still was useless.

“Thirty?” Warrington’s eyes lit up. That was a lot more than he had hoped for and much more than he needed. “Hell, Malfoy; I’ll meet you at the GATE in thirty minutes!” he said, hurrying off once more.

“She followed him, glancing at the remains of the man who had tortured her for so long with little
emotion. She hurried past him without a single glance backwards as she followed this blonde stranger into a future she hoped contained those she was bound to.

“So, child, what is your name?” Lucius asked as they moved through the halls at a fairly brisk pace. Any doors that required blood to open them received it from a small vial he had extracted from one of the dying wizards. He kept the bottles of oil floating along at a very smooth pace. The last thing he wanted was for them to impact against anything, much less each other.

“I am Alyssa, my Lord.” She murmured in a voice that was very pleasant and almost musical to hear. Lucius smiled faintly. They had trained even her voice to be proper to seduce and attract, even at the age of three. “Alyssa. That is quite a lovely name for a very lovely little girl.” He commented, pausing by a room. “Wait here in the hall a moment, dear. I shall be but a moment.”

She halted obediently outside the door, looking quite nervous but not nearly as fearful as she had when she was looking at Harry. Lucius moved into the room’s center, using the borrowed wand to create a magical vial suspended from the ceiling. The container would be a limited time spell, and would lose strength in about an hour or so; more than enough time. He opened the first bottle of oil with a gesture from his wand and carefully filled the magical vial with the liquid, adding a spell to it to enhance its explosive properties. When this hit the floor, it would be about ten times the strength of a normal Bombarda explosion. This room would be reduced to dust, and most likely those surrounding it would be as well.

Alyssa watched him in silence, not speaking up until he had completed his work. “We’re never coming back here, are we, sir?” She asked softly.

“No, child. This place will no longer exist.”

“I’m glad; I didn’t like it here at all. I didn’t want to come except I would be with my Dark Prince. I had horrible dreams all the time here.” She said softly.

“I will do what I can to ease your dreams, once we get you home. Come; we still have several rooms to set before we can leave.” He said, leading her onward. She followed obediently, falling silent once more. Her feet barely made any noise upon the marble floor as she hurried after him.

Finally Lucius turned away from the final time bomb, satisfied and wearing a quite contented smile. “Pefect.” He said, turning to lead little Alyssa out. He wished that he would be able to stay and watch the house become a huge crater in the earth, but he needed to be where witnesses would vouch for him being elsewhere when the explosion occurred. Perhaps he would call his niece Nymphadora and chat with her a bit when it was due to occur; that would be an excellent alibi. He ensured that he left the wand inside the building, then exited, sealing the door behind him.

When he approached the fence he saw, true to his word, Warrington stood at the gates with only the simple bag on his shoulder. Lucius smirked as he drew nearer. Warrington must have that bag charmed for infinite space; there was no telling how much riches he had stripped from that building and crammed into that bag. Quite clever indeed.

The little redhead hurried along in his wake, managing to keep pace with him and trying not to show how cold she was. Lucius turned to her and transfigured the little light sweater she wore into a warm fur cloak. “Are you warm enough, my dear?” he asked her.

She looked up at him gratefully and smiled. “Yes, thank you, sir.” she said, snuggling down into the warm furs.
“We have to be outside the grounds to apparate.” Warrington said, glancing back at the house. He already had the gate opened.

“Then let us waste no more time.” Lucius said, taking Alyssa’s hand. Warrington nodded and led them out and sealed the thing behind them. “Take my arm, Warrington.” Lucius advised. “We will have to apparate many times to get to where we need to be.” He waited until Jerrod had a firm hold on his arm, then the three spun away to leave the house silent and waiting for its doom.
Lucius was so happy to see the gates of Malfoy Manor; he didn’t think he’d ever seen anything quite so beautiful. He was feeling rather worn out. This had been quite the day… and his arm still was not responding enough to be used yet. He was sure that it had been more than a stunning spell that had struck him. His arm hurt and felt like it was on fire, and the pain intensified if he attempted to use it. Through the entire trip, Little Alyssa had been very stoic; she had not asked to be picked up at all but Lucius had seen how exhausted the little girl was getting as well and had taken pity on her. It had taken seven apparitions to get them back home, but now the deed was done. He had to get inside, and possibly even get his niece over to ensure his alibi. After all, she would want to see the children they had rescued.

Alyssa now lay snuggled against his shoulder and though she was holding on to him, it was clear she was asleep. “Come, Warrington.” He said, brushing off his weariness and discomfort for the moment. “It’s time to get this child to bed, and to call for Severus to perform your bonding.”

“Yeah, I, um…” he sounded hesitant, clearly not looking forward to what still lay ahead of him this evening. “I got her clothes and her doll. She won’t sleep without it, not through the night, anyway. We had to send her nanny back to fetch it for her that first night.” He said. “I got some stuff for the others, too, pajamas and clothes for a couple of days too. I didn’t really know what they’d need but…”

“I’m sure you picked items that will suit.” Lucius interrupted him, thoughtfully glancing at him. “You seem rather fond of this child. You’ve got a bit of auburn to your hair; are you her father?”

He shrugged, looking away. “No, I’m not important enough or powerful enough to be her father. But they did use my bloodline for her.” He shrugged. “Parkinson and Bebel felt my bloodline would come in handy for her, given what she’s to do. They were disappointed she was female. They wanted the entire circle to be male for some stupid reason. Alyssa has outshined their every expectation, though; she’s become everything they wanted her to be and endured every test she was presented…”

“And what is it about you, Warrington, which makes your bloodline so desirable?”

“Not me, that’s for sure. I wasn’t good at much but potions and charms. My Mother’s side of the family is something else, though. Dad was a wizard, and not that strong of one, but then you knew that. He was only a year behind you in Hogwarts.”

“Ah, I think I remember…” Lucius said as they made their way through the gates and toward the mansion. “Quiet fellow, rather drab wasn’t he? I never heard the slightest thing about him after I left school.”

He smirked. “Drab is a really good word to describe my dad, actually. Kind of dishwater dirty blonde, nothing special in powers, but mum was mad about him. He met her when he was visiting his grandmother out on the Shetland Isles and well; he likes to say it was fate. Mum was a witch, but she has both selkie and siren in her bloodline. My Grandmum was a siren but I never met her. That combination didn’t do me any good; here I am in my forties and still single.” He snorted. “Anyway, they said that the combination would give her powers, and they combined mine with Weasley’s somehow. And there she was… I was really hoping it would be a boy, but nothing ever seems to go the way I want it to.”

Lucius couldn’t help but smirk. “Perhaps, Warrington, that happens for a reason.” He said.
He sighed. “Maybe… but I really have trouble with girls. You know, dealing with them. Especially when they get all teary-eyed…”

“They are a mystery, aren’t they?” Lucius chuckled as he led Warrington inside the house and through to the east wing. He chose the room next to Alerick’s and carried the little girl to the expansive bed.

Jerrod moved forward and pulled the blankets down for him, and then turned and set his bag down on a chair and began rummaging around. He produced a pink nightgown covered with frills and lace and hearts, handing it to Lucius before going back to dig again. “Let me find ‘Thulu now…”

Lucius laid the child on the bed gently, and with a flick of his wand he had the child dressed in her gown. He turned to see Jerrod returning with a stuffed toy the likes of which the older wizard had never seen before. It was a twelve-inch tall plush of a very strange creature with tentacles dangling from its face like a beard and wings sprouting from its back; it was deep green mixed with neon greens and looked rather ominous. The beastie reminded him of his studies of texts written by the author H. P. Lovecraft. He took it, looking at Warrington curiously. “Am I correct in assuming this is supposed to be Cthulhu?”

“Um, yeah. That’s her ‘Thulu.” He shrugged.

Lucius remembered the viciousness of the beast in the stories and even the plush toy looked rather baleful. “Who in Merlin’s name would give her such a toy?”

“Hey, she likes it.” He said defensively as Lucius’ smile grew. “How was I to know what girls liked?”

Lucius chuckled softly. “Quite the interesting choice.”

“I got it for her when she was little, smaller than the Dark Prince is. I’d only seen her once before that when she was born. They tell me she won’t sleep a wink without it.” He shrugged. “She doesn’t know about me and I prefer that she don’t, really… it would make things more complicated.”

“As you wish.” Lucius set the toy down beside the girl and she reached for it reflexively and smiled in her sleep, clutching it close. He smiled and pulled the covers over the girl, tucking her in. “We must see to the binding first, and then we will get the others settled.”

“Sure.” Warrington said, picking up his bag once more.

“Severus is probably with the children, if I know him. He will want to talk to you regarding their bonding ceremonies.” Lucius said, leading the man to the makeshift nursery.

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Severus looked over as the two entered the room. He was standing and watching as the group of four children interacted; they truthfully acted very little like children. The only one who behaved in any sort of a child-like manner was the Dark Prince. At this moment he was happily sitting on Alerick’s crossed legs like a throne, holding his arms around him. Alerick was quite happy as well, listening to the twins and the toddler, more than content to simply be with them again.

“You did not bring your wife?” Lucius asked Severus as he approached.

“She is not my wife, she is Lupin’s. Must I keep reminding you of that?” Severus asked sourly, rolling his eyes. They had this discussion constantly. He was sure that Lucius did it just to irritate him.
"You should wed her and make your bond into a triad." He said stubbornly, but then he let the subject drop at a warning glare from Severus.

"She had business at the Ministry to attend to; although she should be here any moment." He answered, eyes returning to the children for a moment. "And unless I have counted incorrectly, you seem to have forgotten a child as well; we only have four." He commented dryly.

"I have not FORGOTTEN any of the children, Severus." He returned in the same tone. "She was simply exhausted; I have put her to bed." Lucius couldn’t help but smile. Nymphadora would be here and his alibi was perfect. “I need to avail you of your services, Severus. This is Jerrod Warrington, and he is to be permanently bound to me as my servant.”

Severus turned his eyes to the man the same age as his godson. He seemed to remember this fellow, from when Harry and Draco were in school. He hadn’t been too unpleasant a person, he recalled, just quite involved in protecting himself. “And this is something you wish?”

“It’s better than dying.” He shrugged, glancing over at the kids.

Malfoy found himself watching the children for their reaction to this man that he had brought along; he had not gotten a very good feel for how he had interacted with them at all. He did know about their education and all the details that had been necessary, but was he cruel to them? Their reaction and Alerick’s as well, would tell him a lot. Alerick gave the man no more than a passing glance; clearly the man was not important or unimportant at all to him.

Lucius’ smile grew. That was an excellent reaction, and he knew that he had made the correct choice at that point. Not only did the man speak up and save one of the children, he had also not been one that had abused them. He would have Severus sort through the man’s memories and ensure of this, but he was fairly sure there would have been some sort of reaction from the children if he had been abusive.

“Let’s get this done, then; we should go somewhere a bit more private.” Severus suggested.

“The children should all be in bed already. It’s way past their usual bedtime and they have been kept to a very strict routine.” Jerrod said, glancing at the nannies who were all seated close together, allowing the children to interact without any interference. That was NOT normal for the children and they were definitely taking advantage of the fact. “The nannies know that...”

“The children can wait a bit more; they look like they’re quite happy for the moment.” Lucius gestured for him to follow and he did after a long moment, pulling his eyes away from the kids. Severus followed behind as Lucius led them back out and to the study to perform the bonding per Lucius’ wish.

Snape instructed Warrington to face Lucius and he did so, his nervousness clear on his face. "You do understand, Jerrod Warrington, that this is not a casual bonding? This bonding will last until your death, or until Lucius chooses to release you."

"Yeah, I got that part." He said, pulling up his sleeve. His arm bore the markings of several bonds already. "I've been through this a time or two before."

Snape studied them with narrowed eyes. He whispered softly, tracing his wand tip down one of the scar-like marks upon the man's right arm. Warrington hissed as pain lanced up his arm, wincing. "Do you HAVE to do that?!" he asked petulantly.

"My mistake; the revealing of who is involved in a bond usually does not cause pain." Severus said
as a sort of off-hand apology. "The pain you felt is due to the one that bound you, not me. You already bear three bonds, I see…"

"Three?" Lucius looked at him questioningly.

"I told you already I was bound to Parkinson." He answered the inquiring look with a shrug, still holding his arm out.

"Yes, that would be who this one is connected to." Snape said, though he did not touch the bond marking again on the man's arm.

"The second bond is to the Circle, to keep the children safe and protect them. The third is to the Dark Prince... I must keep him safe even if it means forsaking the others and giving up my own life." he said softly, eyes on the marks that crisscrossed and wound their way about his forearm. Severus found himself wondering if they would find the dark mark emblazoned upon his shoulder as the children had been marked. Even if he had no mark, he was clearly no free man and had not been for quite some time.

"As Parkinson will not be alive long that is not a problem in my estimation. The other two I can surely live with." Lucius said with a shrug. "Proceed, Severus."

Severus looked the younger man square in the eye. "You will likely feel quite a bit of pain while we do this; any other bond that conflicts with Parkinson's will give you that same pain you felt, but magnified."

"Great." He grumbled, though he did not withdraw his hand, still willing to proceed.

"I do not know, however, if this pain will be transferred to you as well, Lucius. I do not believe it will." Severus warned.

"That makes no difference. Proceed." He agreed.

Severus began the binding, casting the spell to make Jerrod Warrington a servant at the bid and call of Lucius Malfoy. He recited the words for the bond and the two men spoke the words as instructed by Snape. As the bond began to twine its magical cords about their hands and settle against the skin, Warrington cried out, his knees almost buckling as he fought against the agonizing pain shooting up his arm and through his entire body. He clamped his eyes shut and gritted his teeth, forcing the words out despite the pain. Snape did not falter, proceeding with the spell until it was finished. Warrington sank to one knee, panting hard; cradling his arm that felt like it was on fire.

"Your other bonds, it seems, have a dark purpose." Severus said dispassionately, watching the man a moment. "Lucius, do you have any of that soothing ointment I made for you…?"

"Yes, of course. Mimsy!" He called. A house elf appeared, bowing low. "Mimsy, take Mr. Warrington to a spare room and bring him the soothing ointment from my bed stand. See to his needs and ensure that he can rest comfortably through the night. We will have quite a bit of business to attend to tomorrow."

"Yeah, of course. Thanks, Malfoy." he mumbled, getting shakily to his feet.

"Now to see to the children." Lucius said, turning to go but Severus caught him by the arm.

"What…?"

"No, you need to be tended to, and you need rest as well. There are nannies that can take care of the children and nurses as well. Potter, Draco and I can handle the children for the night. You are to go
to Cissa and see if she can help you with that arm; if not, you are to have your doctor come."

"Severus, really, you're making a big deal..."

"If you don't want that arm to be useless for the rest of your life, you will do as I say." Severus growled softly, his eyes narrowed. He knew that the injury to his friend’s arm had to be more than just superficial.

“The children must know who is here to care for them, and I will first make sure they are bedded down comfortably and properly. THEN I will go and be tended.” Lucius said stubbornly. “Alerick will not wish to be separated from the Dark Prince and I will not stress the children by forcing any of them apart. There must be beds for all, and I wish at least one nanny to be housed in the room with them to monitor them and care for their needs through the night, and…”

“Must I tell Cissa of your injury?” Severus said in a threatening tone.

Lucius scowled at him; calling in his wife was simply foul play. “Severus, she’s not going to change my mind.”

“Change your mind about what, dear?” Narcissa asked softly. She had moved in without being heard, one of the twins nestled in the crook of her arm. She had not seen her husband yet and had decided to bring little Remmy along as she checked on him.

“Ah Cissa my dove, is little Remus giving you trouble tonight?” Lucius asked moving to give her a loving kiss.

“Just a little restless; he will be fine I’m sure.” She smiled at him, touching his cheek gently. “Are you all right, Lucius…? You were gone a lot longer than we expected you to be…”

“I’m all right.” He said shooting Severus a warning glare that Narcissa, unfortunately, did not miss.

“Are you truly? If you’re injured…”

“A stunning spell is all; it grazed my arm. I wasn’t hit with anything serious…” he admitted reluctantly, not liking one bit the expression of worry on her face.

She turned to their friend. “Severus…?”

Severus met Lucius’ eyes and gave an innocent shrug; there was no point in trying to cover when he wanted his friend to be taken care of as well. “He will be perfectly fine, if he gets himself treated tonight. The sooner the better.” He answered truthfully.

“Come along, then, love. You will have a bath while I summon our personal healer.” She said in a tone that brooked no argument.

“I will ensure that things are set up as you desire for the children, Lucius. And when the doctor has finished with you we will be expecting you to rejoin us, correct?” Severus said with a bit of his characteristic smirk stealing onto his lips.

“Naturally…” Lucius agreed, moving along with Narcissa now.

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Severus returned to the playroom; most of the other children had been taken off by the nurses and settled into their beds for the evening. Angel had crawled up into Harry’s lap and snuggled in his
arms, dozing lightly on his lap as he sat and watched these children who did not act like children. Severus moved over to join him. “They should be settled for the night… would you prefer I set up the room for them? Lucius prefers that they be housed in the same room tonight, until their bonds settle at least. Their powers are still sending out fluctuating waves right now…”

“Yes, I’ve noticed. Even Angel has noticed that; she says it was giving her a headache.” Harry said, stroking his daughter’s hair gently. “How has Draco been? He was so stressed when I left, but I had to get these kids out and safe…”

“Draco has come to grips with the situation, as I knew he would. My godson has a very good head on his shoulders. You ought to know that by NOW, Potter.” Severus answered with a smirk.

“I know, but with him pregnant…”

“There is nothing to fret over. Honestly, you are getting as bad as your friend Ronald.” Snape rolled his eyes, turning away. “I will prepare the room, if you can get those nannies moving and the children on their way, it would be of great assistance.” He said, strolling off.

Harry half chuckled; maybe he was being too much of a worrier. He just wanted everything to go well this time, he couldn’t help but think about every little thing that could go wrong and focusing on that was getting in the way of his enjoyment of the moment. He rose, adjusting Angel to be lying on his left shoulder. She sighed sleepily, not waking fully, trustingly laying against him without clutching at all.

He noticed that one of the nannies looked over, watching him. He was struck by how similar the three women were to each other; all three had black hair pulled back in proper buns, all three had the same type of facial structure with high cheekbones and wide eyes. The only difference in them seemed to be that one had a pointed nose, one had a tiny mole just beneath her eye, and the third had bright blue eyes while the other did not. She was the one who had been near the Prince when they had arrived, and she was the first to respond back at the house when he had ordered them to prepare. Harry gestured to her to come over and she moved over hesitantly.

“Yes, sir?” She asked quietly. Harry realized he’d not heard a single one of them do any more than whimper or scream today.

“I know it’s been a really strange day, but it really is past time for the kids to be in bed, isn’t it?” He asked.

“Yes; it’s quite a bit past, sir, but… but where do we…?” She asked, her gaze lingering a moment on Harry’s face before she flushed and lowered her eyes.

“We have rooms for them, and you as well.” He reassured. “Let’s get them rounded up. The red-haired girl is already asleep.” Harry used his gentlest tone; these women needed to know they were as safe here as the children were.

“Yes, sir. Of course sir.” She turned back to the others. With a bit of spoken encouragement, she got her two compatriots moving and they got to their feet, moving over to do what they were accustomed to doing.

“Bedtime, My Dark Prince, Alerick…” the one that had spoken to Harry said in a firm tone.

“No!” The Dark Prince scowled at her, holding on tighter to Alerick. “No! Stay! Mine!”

“You get to stay with him, nothing to worry about little Prince.” Harry said reassuringly. “It is simply time to rest.”
“Stay with…?” he seemed to ponder this for a moment, then nodded and released his grip on Alerick’s arms, rising to his unsteady feet. He turned away from the nanny and to Harry, lifting his arms up. “Up!” He commanded.

Harry chuckled softly and knelt, scooping the boy up with his right arm, careful not to disturb Angel as he did so. “Of course, little one…”

Severus allowed Harry to gather the children and manage the nannies, moving on to the room that Lucius had told him that was being used by the boy Alerick. He walked in, glancing about a few moments and considering exactly what was needed. The dragon bed’s mattress was set down into the floor to look like the dragon was guarding the sleeper within its nest. It would be more than suitable for both Alerick and the baby; he doubted that they would be able to separate those two tonight or for several nights to come. But the other children must be considered.

He turned and waved his wand and transfigured the two chairs on either side of the entry door into child size beds. That would do; especially for the two guardians. They would wish to be in positions that would indicate they guarded their little Prince. That would cover the four on their way, but there was the other girl to consider. Although she was asleep in her bed in the room just down the hall, he doubted it would be long before she found her way here. And she would probably just sleep on the floor if there were no other place, so he would provide something just for her. He transfigured the settee near the window to be wider and deeper, and then called for the house elves to get the beds ready for the children.

The house elves had just vanished when Alerick and the Dark Prince moved into the room, still hand in hand. “This is where I have been sleeping, my Prince…” he said, pointing at the bed. “And that’s my…”

The baby stopped, eyes wide, and then a huge grin spread across his face. “Mine!” He squealed, excited as he pulled out of Alerick’s hand and toddled as quickly as his chubby little legs would let him to the bed. He reached up toward the dragon’s head which was just out of reach. He giggled, then jumped onto the bed and rolled about, laughing happily.

Alerick moved over toward him then paused, looking back at the two adults. “Can he really sleep with me? Please, my lord…?” he asked, eyes wide and pleading and full of hope.

“I’m not about to tell him no.” Harry smirked, chuckling.

“Thank you!” Alerick said, excited as he moved quickly over to join the baby.

“All right, my Lords and Lady, it is time for you all to get ready for bed.” The blue-eyed nanny said, glancing at the others as she approached the children. What were they to put them in to sleep…?

“I believe Warrington has clothing for them.” Severus commented, and then called for the house elf to retrieve the children’s clothing. Toodles appeared with the clothing moments after she vanished, arms laden with clothing for each child, even Alerick.

“She got me my clothes!” He murmured, eyes wide, hurrying to get his own from the house elf. She beamed at him and he looked at her rather surprised. House elves were actually intelligent things…?

Tonks moved into the room, glancing about at the children. “Hey, Severus; did you get them all?” She asked.

“Every one of them.” He agreed, watching the Dark Prince march over and take his pajamas from
the house elf.

He spotted his nanny and turned to her, holding it out to her. “Now! Mine! On!” He demanded of her.

“Of course, my Prince.” She agreed, kneeling to help him change.

“Demanding little tyke, isn’t he?” Tonks chuckled softly, watching.

“Ah, Dora.” Lucius smiled as he walked in, quite pleased to see her there. His little deathtrap back in Romania should be rocking their world right about now. His arm was resting in a sling. “I am glad you could join us.”

“Good evening, Lucius.” She greeted, eyes flicking to his arm for just a moment. “It wasn’t an easy retrieval, was it?” She asked.

“Nonsense; it wasn’t difficult at all. We just walked right in and picked them up.” Lucius smiled.

“Really, now…”? She smirked slightly, gesturing at his arm. “That didn’t happen during your little rescue operation?”

He glanced at it. “What, this…?” He scoffed. “I was working my new stallion. He’s a bit spirited.”

“Oh come on. I’ve gotten pretty good at telling when I’m getting hippogriff shit thrown my way, Lucius; and something tells me I should have worn my wellingtons to come over here tonight.” She smirked.

“The children are safe, that’s all that is important.” He said dismissively. He moved over to the bed, pulling his wand and resetting the wards not to react to children or to those bound to them, such as the three nannies.

“Good night, Lord Father Malfoy.” Alerick said, giving him a courtly bow. He looked more than happy to be dressed in his own pajamas; a pair of silk breeches of deep green with oriental blossoms in the silk, a button-down top to match. The overall effect was almost feminine, but suited him quite well.

“Rest well, my boy.” He said.

The baby toddled over to the bed and flopped on the springy mattress with a happy squeal. “Mine!” He giggled.

Alerick looked over and moved to join him, clearly delighted at his reunion with the boy. He plopped down beside the child on the mattress, making him squeal again with laughter.

“Once the children are asleep I will need a blood sample from each.” Severus said softly.

“Yes, though I do know the parentage of one of them already. I would still prefer to see it confirmed; it would give me more confidence in the word of my newest bonded servant. I’m curious to know who their mothers were…” Lucius said.

“We will know by morning. I’m going to go and find Draco.” Harry smiled, stroking Angel’s back. “And of course get this one to bed. Call me if you have any need of me.”

“We can handle the children, nothing to worry about.” Lucius assured.

The twins were dressed by one of the nannies, in identical pajamas of plainest black but in the same
cut and style as Alerick’s. Neither of them for one moment took their eyes off of Tonks and Severus, or Lucius for that matter. The twins allowed the nannies to set them in their beds but both of them refused to lie down.

“I’ll need to have a copy of their paternity tests for my report, of course…”

“You’ll have them. I have the potions prepared as we speak, awaiting their samples.” Severus answered, glancing at Lucius. “I think we should leave so that they will be able to settle down.” He suggested, eyes drawn to the dragon bed where Alerick was jumping on the bed to make the baby bounce and laugh.

“All right, Alerick. It is time to settle. You must rest to be as strong as you wish to become.” Lucius smiled. “You can play more in the morning.”

Alerick pouted slightly, but he plopped down to a seat on the bed. “I can’t sleep, Lord Father. I’m much too excited and happy to rest.”

“Well perhaps some warm milk and biscuits will help…” Lucius smiled, calling for Tootles. “My lord, they should not have sweets so late…” the nanny with glasses spoke up timidly.

Lucius turned, cold eyes on the woman, face an expressionless cold mask. “Who are you to tell me what I may or may not give to my child?!” he demanded, snarling.

She paled, shrinking away from him. “I’m sorry, my Lord, I’m… I did not mean, I…” she backed away, covering her face with her hands and bowing in total submission.

“It seems that Parkinson has trained his nannies as well.” Severus commented, watching the behavior of the girl. “She’s only following his idiotic rules, after all Lucius.”

“They will be re-trained, or I will dispose of them.” Lucius said coldly.

“Then we retrain them.” Snape agreed. “Warrington will undoubtedly need a firm hand in training as well.”

“We have a lot of work ahead of us, my old friend.” Lucius sighed.

“Yes, we do; but fortunately for me, I don’t live here. You, your lovely wife, and your son and Potter can handle most of it I’m sure.” He said as the plate of requested milk and biscuits appeared on the table.

“They’ll be gone by the end of the week if you don’t give me a hand with them. I can guarantee that.” Lucius growled softly, glaring at the still bowing girl who hid her face in her hands as if awaiting punishment.

“Lucius Malfoy, you will do no such thing. You have to give them a chance.” Tonks said reasonably. “Besides, you might anger the little Prince if you take away his servant.” She commented as she watched the boy. The Dark Prince had taken a seat on the bed, with Alerick at his side, holding hands as their nanny fed them both cookies and milk. The twin girl was eating some as well, but not the boy. He continued to stare at them with clear suspicion.

“Come; let us allow the children to settle.” Lucius turned toward the door.

“You will tell us when they are asleep.” Severus ordered the nanny who waited on the Dark Prince. She nodded to show her understanding, but did not for a moment turn her attention away from the
children that she tended to. Severus, satisfied with that, followed the other two out of the room.

“Would you care for a drink, Dora?” Lucius asked as they entered his den.

“Yes; I think that would be fantastic.” She sighed, moving to take a seat. “We’ve just finished all the interviews and the reviews of all of the parents involved in this entire fiasco. We will have reports to each of the heads of family concerning each child in their care by tomorrow afternoon, so you can all decide where the children from the Clinic should be going…”

“I have the last say in where the Potter and the Malfoy children go.” Lucius said firmly.

“Well certainly you have the final say for the Malfoy children; that is your given right as head of family. But you are not the head of the Potter line; Harry will decide for himself regarding his own children.”

“As my son’s husband, he will respect my wishes.” Lucius said with clear confidence.

“Respect them, yes. But you forget, Lucius, that Harry does have a mind of his own.” Snape said drolly.

“He and I shall discuss matters and come to an agreement.” Lucius moved to the bar, using his wand to fix drinks for his guests.

“Should I fetch Harry so we can discuss it?” Tonks asked.

Severus moved to assist him. “You aren’t even supposed to be up and about.” He said quietly, and then answered Tonks. “That’s best left for the morning; we don’t even have everything we need yet. I need to do the hereditary readings on the final five children.”

“I am fine, Severus; really.” Lucius smirked at him. “Honestly, you’re worse than Cissa.”

“I’m weary of outliving my friends.” Severus countered simply.

Lucius picked up a glass and placed it in Snape’s hand. “Take this, old friend, sit down and shut up.” He said in the same tone. Severus gave him a soft grin and took the glass, complying with his friend’s instructions as he went to sit as well. He took another glass and moved to Nymphadora, handing her the drink. “So what families have attempted to steal the Malfoy name and power?” He asked calmly.

She sipped her drink, watching as he turned to fetch his own and settle down in his favorite chair. “Each of them, really, is a different situation. I think I need to explain a bit of what Pansy had done, first.” She mused.

“Yes; please do.” Lucius agreed. “I’ve been left quite in the dark about matters.”

“Now that everything is settled and done, everyone will know the details. I’ll honestly be surprised if this doesn’t show up on the front page of the newspaper in the morning.” Snape agreed, eyes on his glass but his mind lingering on the many ways he could employ to locate the missing Parkinsons. He knew that Tonks had managed to capture August Bebel and he was being held under strictest security while he was awaiting his trial, but there had been no sign or attempt to contact him by either of the Parkinsons.

“The entire scheme began back when Harry and Draco went to the clinic to try to have their baby.”
She said softly. “They had to donate all kinds of sperm for testing and genetic mapping and things like that, stuff that makes no sense at all to me but they had to do it nonetheless. Well somewhere along the way Pansy Parkinson got the bright idea to have the potential fathers donate extra sperm, to ‘insure’ fertilization by extra applications or something. They had to donate nearly every time they went in, and Pansy had them go through extra testing to try to justify it. The truth was; she had already begun to fish around to see who would be interested in purchasing their sperm. That was about six years ago; she began giving the sperm and eggs to Hermione to combine without telling her any details of who they were for or who they were from. As the Weasleys were strapped for cash at the time, she did all the extra work without complaint or question.”

“Absolutely foolish.” Snape commented.

“She knows that now. Anyway, Draco became pregnant with his baby. The problem was, Pansy saw that baby as an obstacle to her best selling product. She started thinking she would run low before she’d made her fortune and she tried to get them to come in again, but there was no reason to and they told her they were done. To try to get them back, she poisoned Draco with a Kreshweed potion…”

“She nearly killed my son when she murdered my granddaughter!” Lucius snarled.

“I know… and she did not stop with your son. She’s done that same thing to four others since then.” She told him quietly.

“Death is too good for that cold, emotionless bitch.” He growled, taking a deep drink.

“I couldn’t agree more. And once the reason for the miscarriages was discovered, it has been found that she did cause the death of one witch with her damned potion…”

“What family?” Lucius asked softly.

“Swenson; she was an American witch. She had come over here about five years ago with her British wizard husband. They used the clinic to get her pregnant, as they had already been trying for years without success back across the pond. They didn’t use stolen sperm, but they were going to settle here and apparently Pansy felt that he would make a fine addition to her stable of donors. When she gave her the poison, something went wrong and both of them, mother and baby, died. Her mate was sent to Azkaban for her murder.”

“What? Why was he sent to Azkaban?”

“The two of them had become estranged; at the time of her death they had been separated for two months. Their marriage wasn’t a happy one but I believe that he truly loved her and that’s why he refused to dissolve the marriage. The Americans were sure that he had done her in as revenge for leaving him; they came over to press charges against him on their daughter’s behalf. Surely you remember that mess; it was about two years ago and all over the papers for about a month.”

“I always thought that something seemed suspicious about that entire mess.”

“He’s been released from Azkaban as of this morning…” Tonks said softly. “…though it won’t do him any good. He’s most likely going to need a permanent room in the mental ward of St. Mungo’s Hospital. I doubt he’ll leave that place for the rest of his life.”

“Lucius needs to hear about the children, Dora.” Severus reminded.

“Oh; of course.” She sighed, pulling her mind back to the subject. “Pansy had several types of customers. It would be quite simple if there were only the type that you would expect; Death Eater
families out to get the strength of other families mixed with their own. Pansy preyed on anyone and everyone she could get her claws near. She also sold to just plain everyday witches simply wanting a child. One witch knew that it was sperm from your line, but she believed the donations to be voluntary. Her daughter Trillby had never been abused; she is here as well. All they knew about the ‘donations’ is that they were pureblood. One in particular I can assure only chose Draco’s bloodline because she is blonde herself and he was the only pureblood selection on the list shown as blonde.”

“What is her name? What family?” Lucius asked.

“Larissa Mc Fell.”

“McFell…” Lucius murmured thoughtfully. “Her father’s name is Donal?”

“Yes.”

“He was top of his class in charms. When I was in seventh year he was in first. She is from a very good family.”

“And she was shocked to learn that the sperm was stolen, and doubly shocked that it was from the Malfoy line. We also did Legilimency searches on the memories of each individual to determine if there was any abuse to any of the children; of course she had none.”

“Truthfully, I think that his daughter and Draco would have been an acceptable match had my son been so inclined.” Lucius said thoughtfully.

“I shall speak with Donal regarding his grandchild.”

“The mothers range from that to Winnifred Urqhart, who not only knew that the sperm was stolen and that it belonged to your son; she planned on using her son’s heritage to demand a portion of your fortune when he was old enough to lay claim.”

“She will never see the child again.” Lucius said coldly.

“Good.” She saluted him with her glass.

Tootles appeared, bowing low to the floor. “All the littles are deep sleeping, Master Malfoy sir.” she announced.

“Thank you.” Lucius began to rise.

“I am more than capable of doing this, Lucius.” Severus said, already on his feet.

“I’ll join you; I may need to spell them to sleep.” Lucius said stubbornly.

“I think I’ll be going on home and let you fellows argue it out.” Tonks said with a soft smirk. “I’ll be back sometime tomorrow with those reports.”

“I will be home later; don’t let Remmy wait up for me.” Severus told her.

“It’s night, Severus. You know he’d much rather sleep in the day. He’ll be up when you get home.” She grinned softly, setting her drink aside.

Snape watched as Tonks used the floo and vanished from sight, and then moved out with Lucius. He glanced at the sling and thought that his old friend would finally be honest about his injury. “So, what did the healer say?”

“The muscles were detached from the bone.” He answered.
“Lovely.” He grimaced. “It’s a good thing that you didn’t wait, then.” He commented as they moved through the quiet mansion. “I wonder if the little Guardians know that particular spell yet.”

“That boy is dangerous. I’m not sure of the girl; I can’t get the feel of her yet. But that boy will need watching.”

“I feel the same.” Severus agreed. “Unfortunately, he may need to be destroyed for the safety of the others, as backward and cruel as that may seem.”

“I am aware that we may need to do that, but I want to make sure to try every other possible avenue before we go there. Destroying them will be only an absolute last resort. The child is not evil; I feel no true darkness in any of them.” Lucius sighed.

Snape nodded; he felt the same. “I’ll begin work on the bonds tomorrow, once I’ve made my regular rounds.”

Lucius looked at his friend with a bit of curiosity. “I’ve been meaning to ask you; how do you like that job of yours? Working with muggle healers must be a bit of a trial.”

“I can honestly say it’s quite interesting. I only take the cases that involve children; it’s amazing just how much muggle children can get into on their own with no magic at their disposal. And it’s a perfect way to locate wizarding children who are born to muggles who are clearly confused about what is happening with their child…”

Lucius opened the bedroom door, letting Severus enter then he followed. He smiled as he moved to the dragon bed, to find the two cuddled together like a couple of kittens. Severus wasted no time; he immediately cast a sleeping charm upon the two guardians. He was sure that the boy had begun to wake as the spell settled on him, making him drop back into a deeper and undisturbable sleep. Lucius cast the same sleeping charm over the two in the dragon bed.

Severus glanced at him. “Do we even know the names of these waifs yet?” He asked.

The door to the next room stood open and a figure stood in it; it was one of the nannies watching them as they moved about in the room with the children. She hesitated and stayed mostly out of view; she had no intention of angering Lucius as her compatriot had done earlier.

“You there.” Lucius commanded. “What are the names of these children?”

“The Dark Prince is the Dark Prince; he has no other name sir.” She said softly. “Alerick sleeps at his side. The male guardian is Erik, and his twin sister is named Erin. Alyssa is the one you kept with you when you left us at the compound.”

“Ah, yes. Alyssa is a sweet child.” Lucius nodded. Snape slipped the two marked vials into his pocket before he moved over to join Lucius at the dragon bed.

The nanny remained quietly watching, as Lucius expected her to. Severus completed the spells to gather the blood without disturbing the sleep of any of the children. “That boy needs a proper name. Dark Prince, indeed.” He grumbled, scowling.

“I agree.” Lucius said, turning toward the door. Framed in the doorway stood a pale little red-haired girl in a pink frilly nightgown trembling as she clutched her stuffed toy to her chest. “Alyssa? What is it, little one?” He asked, moving toward her. “It’s all right; you can come in, child.”

She inched past Snape and then hurried to him, trembling. “I… I know I’m not s’posed to be scared but he’s here, I know he’s here, and I… I’m scared! He’ll hurt me!” she whispered, leaning in close
to him as he gathered her into his arms comfortingly.

“No one here will bring you harm, child. I will not allow any such thing to happen to you in my home. Who do you fear?"

“That man… the man who pretended to be Alerick.” She whimpered. “He hurts me; please, please can I sleep with them? I’m afraid…”

“Of course you may. You see this dragon…?” He reached to stroke the smooth opalescent white creature’s head and her eyes followed his movement. “She will not allow anyone to harm any who sleep within her nest. You will be safe there; you have no worries.” He gave a soft kiss to her brow.

She flung her arms about him and hugged him, still trembling. “Thank you my Lord…”

“Let’s get hers before she lies back down.” Severus suggested.

Lucius nodded and got the girl’s attention once more. “Alyssa, we need to take a small sample of your blood.”

“Will you use the shiny knife?” she asked, looking worried.

“No. No knife. It will not hurt.” He assured and Severus scowled. This child had definitely seen far too many rituals.

She hugged her toy close, gazing at him over its head. “Not at all?”

“Not one bit.” He assured.

Alyssa held out her hand. “Okay.” She agreed.

Lucius performed the spell, drawing the blood from her hand with no pain whatsoever. “There. You see? As I promised you; no pain.”

“Thank you. Can… can I go to bed now…?” She asked, looking longingly at the bed.

“Go to bed, child.” He agreed. She hurried to the bed and climbed on with the others, settling herself at the feet of the other two.

Severus flicked his wand and a pillow and blanket settled over her. The girl gave him a very sweet smile, pulling the pillow under her head and the blanket over her. “It’s quite interesting where she fits in their hierarchy; I did not think that she would place herself at their feet, as there is plenty of room on the bed…” He murmured thoughtfully. As she settled to sleep with her toy firmly held close in her arms, Snape stood a long moment, opening himself up and feeling the sheer power just filling the room. “Merlin… the power here is enough to make you dizzy.” He mumbled softly.

“Glorious, isn’t it?” Lucius smiled.

Snape gathered his thoughts together and sighed. “I need to begin the hereditary spells. These children are in good hands.” He said as he glanced at the still vigilant nanny. He had not seen the others but that one; she seemed to take her duties seriously. She bowed her head, stepping back out of sight into the shadows of the next room.

“Yes; I am eager to see who the parents of my Alerick are.” Lucius agreed.

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Severus and Lucius walked into the lab where five cauldrons were bubbling over low flames, prepared and waiting for the final step in the spell. There were also a stack of prepared parchments waiting next to them on the table, and five silver knives specially sterilized for this operation. Severus took the vial of Alerick’s blood first, adding carefully measured drops to the potion. When the change of composition completed, he dipped the silver knife into the solution. He murmured the spell, allowing the drops to fall upon the prepared parchment and watched the lines blossom and spread to show the Malfoy family tree. To his surprise, the paper did not show Draco as the father of the child at all; to the contrary there was no sign of Draco at all upon the paper. The line that led up from Alerick’s name led directly to Narcissa and Lucius, indicating them as the actual parents of the boy. Snape scowled at the results, confused.

Lucius moved to look at the parchment. “What? There is no possible way. Cissa and I would know if we had a child!” he objected.

“You’re missing something, Lucius. This paper does not show your son Draco.” He pointed out. “If Alerick was indeed yours, should it not show Draco and your grandson?” He asked quietly.

“So the potion was faulty?” Lucius ventured.

“I doubt that. I’ve brewed this potion a thousand times and haven’t gotten it wrong in years.” He said, thinking hard, scowling at the paper. “You said you knew for sure the parents of one of the children; let’s go ahead and test that one and it will show if the potion is faulty or not.”

“Yes; little Alyssa.” Lucius handed him the phial.

Severus’ scowl darkened as he performed exactly the same motions, the same spell, did the same thing. Measured drops, a clean blade to dip into the liquid, perform the casting, and drip the potion onto the scroll. The tree blossomed but it was strangely divided; instead of two names joined above the name of the child, lines led upward from either end of her name to two completely separate trees. One line led to the Weasley line; George Weasley indicated as the father. The second line led to Jerrod Warrington’s family. Severus snorted in surprise. “Weasley and Warrington…?”

“That is exactly what I expected to see.” Lucius said softly. “It is a good casting. But that doesn’t explain how Cissa and I can be Alerick’s parents…”

Severus found his mind returning to Hermione’s impassioned speech back at the ministry and one word sprang to mind. “Clones.” He said quietly. “Give me the Prince’s blood.” He ordered.

Lucius passed him the requested vial. “Clone? What is a clone? Explain this to me, what is it?”

Snape ignored his questions as he proceeded to perform the spell again. The tree showed the family they expected, but Harry was absent from the scroll. In his place below the names of Lilly and James was the title Dark Prince. “Merlin…” he breathed, shocked by the facts that his magic had revealed. “They did it… the crazy maniacal bastard actually managed to do it…”

“What does this mean?” Lucius demanded, confused and angered by what he saw on the paper. It made no sense! “Lilly and James are far beyond having anything harvested to produce children!”

“Not if they used Harry to do the cloning.” Severus answered. “The Dark Prince is not Harry’s child. He is… the closest I can describe it is he is Harry’s twin. A copy made of Harry, as Alerick is a copy made of Draco.”

“No one can make copies of wizards!” Lucius snapped.

“Obviously they can, Lucius.”
“But how? And how in Merlin’s name do we stop it from happening again?!”

“Hermione Weasley told us that this was happening when she went to that clinic the night before we closed it all down. She pulled documents off the computers and realized what it was they were truly doing. She was nearly hysterical; she believed that they were trying to bring Voldemort back to life by cloning Harry…”

“That little Potter child has no part of Tom Riddle in him!”

“Not for lack of trying, but I believe you are correct. If he had, Riddle’s name and family would show on this chart instead of Potter’s.”

“So why are the two missing? Where are Harry and Draco? If these two are their… their twins, then why are they not showing?”

“I’m not sure… but I am determined to find that out. At the very least they should be showing as siblings to the side with some sort of connection to the children, not completely gone from their charts.” Severus said, frowning.

“So.” Lucius began to smile. “Alerick really IS my son; Draco has a little brother. Well, Cissa always did want another child.” His smile faded slightly. “But what about the Potter child? And what is the Ministry of Magic going to say about the little Lord? If they get wind of this, they’ll want the boy…”

“If they even get an inkling that the mark exists, they’ll want the lot of them.” Snape corrected.

“I know that the mark cannot be removed.” Lucius said, not even bothering to voice that hope as Harry had. “But can it not be changed…?”

“I will research that, but I seem to remember that the master is the only one who can alter the mark. It will be years before the baby will learn what he must to be able to change them.”

“Let’s finish this; it is late and my arm is aching.” Lucius sighed. “Maybe things will be clearer in the morning.”

“Yes. Let’s proceed with the twins.” He produced the last two vials and performed the spell once more with the blood for the girl. The paper showed the same odd split it had with Alyssa, but this time the two families involved were the Potter family and the Lestranges. Bellatrix Lestrange was listed as the mother of the child.

“She is?” Lucius said her name with disgust. “I don’t care if she’s Cissa’s sister, she is a completely insane bitch. She’s going to be trouble.”

“Let me do this for the boy as well.” Severus said, performing the spell once more. To his relief he got exactly the same result. “They are true twins, then…?” he mused. “And this explains why that little girl looks so much like Bellatrix.”

Lucius frowned. “Our only hope is that the Potter blood will balance out Bella’s madness.”

“I don’t think Bella’s madness is in her genetics, else your wife would be just as crazy. Still, I believe they’ll both need to be raised with a very watchful eye to avoid her mania.”

Lucius gathered the papers and performed a duplicating spell. He handed the originals to Snape. “Good night, Severus; I will see you in the morning.”

“I will be here as early as I am able.” He assured, taking the papers and clearing out his cauldrons.
“Not too early, I hope.” Lucius said. “It’s been an extremely long night.”

“I will be doing my rounds first so no, I will not be here too early.” He assured, stowing his wand.

“Good night, then, Severus.” Lucius rubbed his arm with a pained look as he turned to go up to his room.

“Take a sleeping potion, sleep in. Let your body heal, old friend.” Severus recommended as he moved to the fireplace.

“Don’t worry; Cissa will take care of me.”

“I know. I can depend upon her for that.” Severus smirked, and then stepped into the fireplace.

Lucius moved out and made his way to his room. He paused by Angel’s room to check on the girl. He smiled as he moved to the bed to straighten the tousled covers. Tia looked up at him sleepily from her spot on the pillow, not overly concerned about his presence. “Take good care of my Angel.” He whispered as he reached to scratch the kit’s ears, making it purr loudly. He fixed the covers over the girl and kissed her gently on the brow. “Sleep well, my little love.” He murmured.

“Love you… Nonno…” she mumbled, smiling in her sleep.

“As you hold my heart, my own.” He whispered with a soft smile before moving off again.

He checked on the twins before going off to his own room and to finally get some rest.
Draco found himself pulled away from his peaceful dreams by a distinct pain; he felt one of the baby’s feet pressing hard against his side. He grimaced slightly and ran his hand over his stomach, then pushed gently, getting the foot to ease off and give him some relief. The baby must be stretching; it was getting rather cramped in there for him. He smiled and stroked his tummy lovingly, watching the ripples move across his tightly stretched skin as the baby turned and moved. He looked to his side and close beside him laid his husband. He took a few moments to enjoy watching him sleep, his contentment only growing.

Harry sighed and reached for him, pulling Draco into his arms without bothering to open his eyes. “Morning, Dragon…” he murmured.

“Good morning, my Harry.” He gave him a long, slow lingering kiss.

Harry caressed Draco’s belly with a gentle hand. “Good morning, my precious little boy.” he smiled. “I can’t wait to hold you in my arms, James.” He said, opening his eyes to gaze at Draco. “When do you see the healer next?”

“Three days until we get poked and prodded again.” He said with a half chuckle and the baby kicked right where Harry’s hand was resting.

Harry laughed. “He’s active this morning.”

Draco found himself laughing as well. “That’s putting it mildly… I think he’s trying to tap-dance on my bladder. He woke me up this morning…”

“We’ve such a houseful, even if half of the children go back to their homes, there’s no way that our little cottage is even half large enough for all of our family now.” Harry commented, feeling so happy and contented.

“I’ve been thinking about that, actually. I know for certain that father wouldn’t mind if we stay here for a while; he dotes on Angel so and she loves him. And it will be really fun to play big brother to the twins for a while.” Draco smiled.

Harry stroked his cheek, finding the smile on his husband’s face only made his contentment increase. “There are more, you know. Your father and I found the ones we were looking for and we’ve got them in your old bedroom with Alerick. There are four more of them; two boys and two girls.”

“Merlin, Harry; how are we to manage?” Draco murmured.

“Lots of love and even more patience.” Harry sighed.

“We’ll get through it; we will always have each other…”

“Together.” Harry kissed him tenderly.

“Are they all ours?” Draco asked.

“No, not all. One of them is quite the redhead; I think she’s the product of one of the Weasleys…” he reassured. “I wonder if George and Fred are ready to be fathers.” They shared a chuckle at the thought; those two still hadn’t grown up even if they WERE older than Ron. Harry enjoyed holding his husband a few moments more then sighed reluctantly. “We’d better get up and face the world.”
“Yes; Angel’s missed you. I’m happy it only took two days for you to get in there and get back to us; she’s been worried and watching out the windows every moment that she was not distracted by the twins…” Draco said, pushing himself with a grunt of effort into a sitting position. “Merlin…” He groaned. “That gets harder every day!”

Harry smiled. “You’re beautiful.” He said firmly, rising to help his lover to his feet. He was unable to resist another quick kiss. “Now its time to have a nice hot shower and then we’ll be off to breakfast with the children.”

“That’s all fine and dandy if we can get that far.” He said in a sour tone.

“What…?” Harry asked, half-chuckling at him.

“I’m rather tired of father dragging you away to talk or to go do something mental with him.” Draco said petulantly, pulling Harry close into his arms.

“He has been a bit bossy, hasn’t he?” Harry chuckled.

“He’s spent more time with you lately than all of the rest of us combined and I’m about to tell him off.” Draco mock-threatened.

“Aw, Dray, be nice to the old man.” Harry chuckled. “This is all a bit overwhelming to him as well. We have children and he has a whole new generation to pay attention to…”

“Yes, that’s all true, but you’re MY husband!” He said with a wickedly teasing grin. “He already has mother I won’t let him have you too!”

“Eww!” Harry laughed as his husband slipped out of his arms. “Don’t even think that! Bad visuals, Draco…!”

Draco laughed merrily as he stripped off his clothing, heading for the private bathroom off of their room. Harry stopped to simply enjoy the sight of his husband naked, pale skin flawless, his rounded tummy not even showing from the back, long silver blonde hair flowing down to the center of his back. Draco paused by the door, half-turning showing his husband his profile; it was the loveliest sight he had ever seen in his life.

“I wish I knew how to make a memory crystal; I would treasure this moment forever…” Harry murmured. “I WILL get your father to teach me.”

Draco blushed self-consciously; he thought he was anything but attractive right now. “Harry, you can’t be serious! Merlin, I’m as big as a house!” He complained.

“And all the more beautiful for it.” Harry said firmly, moving to join his husband.

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“Lucius, what is on that paper that has you so worried and concerned?” Narcissa asked, moving up behind her husband. Her hands drifted onto his shoulders and she could feel that his muscles were all in tight knots. When he didn’t answer her immediately, she leaned down and whispered in his ear. “Honestly, my love; you are as uptight as a virgin bride…” she said in a teasing tone.

“Cissa! Really…” he scolded, but the anecdote did get his mind shaken loose from the problem for just a moment. Cissa always had known how to get him thinking when he’d gotten into a rut.

Narcissa laughed. “Well you are tense, my husband. Now tell me; what is it? You have rescued all the children, are they not well?”
“The children are well, and healthy, and quite happy to be reunited once more. It’s not their health, Cissy…” he said, still struggling a few moments more to try to think of a way to explain it all. He finally just sighed. There was no use in keeping it from her; she would need to know everything. “It’s about Alerick, first of all. There’s no easy way to tell you this; Alerick is ours.”

“Of course he is.” Cissa smiled. “He is so much like Draco was; he’s an absolutely charming little man…”

He shook his head, stopping her little comment. “No. You don’t understand, Cissa. I don’t mean that he is our grandson. Draco is not his father, I am. You are his mother. Alerick is Draco’s brother.” He said.

“What? Lucius, that’s simply not possible.” She said softly, confused. “I birthed only one child…”

He handed her the paper. “It is possible. Alerick, my dear, is our son.” He told her in a soft tone.

“But…” Narcissa took the paper from him, feeling her knees suddenly go weak and he reached for her, guiding her to a seat on his lap. “But Lucius, how?” She whispered, tears in her eyes.

“Malcolm Parkinson and that bitch queen of a daughter he spawned.” He growled softly.

She let her fingertips drift over the names on the parchment. “I don’t understand; how could they have done this?”

“I don’t know the answers yet, my dear, but I can promise you that I WILL find them.” He promised. He would start once he had a chance to talk to his new bondservant; surely that man knew a lot more than he let on. He’d had plenty of information for them back at that mansion…

She looked up from the paper at him. “What of the other children?”

“One other is like our Alerick.” He handed her a second parchment and her eyes scanned the tree, her face showing a bit of shock and disbelief. “The Dark Prince is the son of James and Lilly.”

“How could James and Lilly parent a child from the grave, Lucius? This is sheer madness.” She murmured softly.

“I understand that it is something that the muggles have developed. Cloning, I think they call it, and it has resulted in the duplication of animals. But Malcolm Parkinson was mad enough to try it with wizards. When they made the other children they took the ‘essence’ of two people… I think in this case they only used the one they were duplicating. They used only Harry for the Dark Prince.”

“When a wizard child is conceived, there must be the essence of two, and the power the child has is a combination of the two… if they used only Harry, won’t that child have twice the power that Harry does?” she asked softly, seeing the inherent danger in the situation.

“Yes. And Alerick possesses twice the power of our son.” He agreed quietly, arms resting about her for both his and her comfort. “Severus believes that they were trying to bring Tom Riddle back.”

She looked at him in horror. “Please tell me that isn’t possible…!” she whispered pleadingly.

“It most assuredly is NOT possible.” He said firmly. But that didn’t stop them from trying.”

“Oh, thank Merlin…” Cissa whispered, running her fingers over the lines of the paternity chart. Her name and Lucius’, meeting together over the name of Alerick. “We have another son, Lucius.” She
whispered. “One of our blood… It doesn’t matter at all how he has came to be, he is ours.” She reached over to his desk and looked through the other papers and stopped, seeing her sister’s name. “Bellatrix…? That harpy was involved in all of this?! Oh! Wait until I get my hands on her!” She said, becoming angry.

“She’s the mother of the two who were raised to be the guardians.” He told her softly. “She must never be allowed to see them, especially the girl.”

“Why must the girl be hidden especially?”

“She looks just like a copy of her as a child.” He answered. “She would want to snatch her away in a heartbeat.”

“She would, I’m certain…” she agreed quietly. “I did not get a good look at the children last night; I see that I will have to look at them much more closely this morning.” She said. “Does Bellatrix even know they exist, I wonder?”

“It would be exceedingly bad if she did.” He said quietly, remembering her maniacal devotion to Tom Riddle and knowing she would do the same in a heartbeat to that little Prince in the bedroom if she knew of him. She could be the one who could make all this go wrong; if anyone could raise another Voldemort into being it would be that madwoman Bella.

“I wonder what happened to the ones who birthed these children.” Narcissa said softly. “There are no names of the birth mothers, not on any of these lists.”

“I shall ask Warrington.” Lucius responded. “I have a growing list of questions to ask that man, once he has woken.” He rose to his feet, setting his wife gently upon her feet using his good arm only.

“I will let you get on with your business… I get to feed the twins this morning.” Narcissa said as one of the infants began to cry.

“Nona?” Angel’s voice sounded from the next room. “Lilly’s all wet.”

“She’s up already?” Lucius asked, looking toward the nursery.

“She gets up at sunrise; she loves to help with their morning feeding and changing.” She smiled, kissing him on the cheek before she turned and walked to the nursery. “I’m coming, my dear.” Narcissa smiled indulgently.

“Can I change her this time? Please…?” Angel asked as Narcissa moved into the room, waiting for her standing beside the baby’s crib.

“All right.” Narcissa lifted the baby and placed her on the changing table. Angel climbed up on the stepstool, a large smile on her face as she started to undress the damp baby.

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Warrington woke, not feeling much better than he had when he had lain down. That stuff that Malfoy’s stupid house elf had given him hadn’t helped at all. If it hadn’t been for the sleeping potion he wouldn’t have gotten any rest at all. Reluctantly he pushed himself up to sit a moment on the bed. He gathered himself together, and then slowly began to move about and get dressed. Merlin, he felt sore all over. He was almost certain that Severus Snape had done something to make the binding especially painful.

He sank back to a seat on his bed a moment feeling nearly exhausted simply from the effort of
dressing. He dug in his bag and pulled out a potion to dampen his pain and sat to wait for it to go into effect. Before he felt he was ready to do anything at all, a house elf popped into the room, startling him and making his aches intensify for a moment.

“Master Malfoy is wanting you sir.” He told him in a squeaky voice.

He glared at the creature a moment and then reminded himself that the elf hadn’t any idea about how he felt. He sighed softly. “Naturally.” He grumbled. “Where do I find him?” he asked, not caring to use the bond to find his new master.

“Master Malfoy will be with little Master.” The elf replied.

Warrington forced himself into motion; he wished he could just sleep in but now he really had no choice. It might have been easier to just let Malfoy kill him yesterday....

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Lucius stepped into the darkened bedroom that the five children were resting in, intending to simply check on them as he had his twins to ensure they were all right. He left the door partially ajar and had turned to start walking toward the dragon bed when he noticed that the floor was not clear as it should have been.

A small shape lay upon the floor between the bed and the door. Just when he had realized that it was a pallet, made of blankets and a pillow from one of the beds, he saw a blur of movement. Even though it was just moments after sunrise, the boy surged up out of the wrapping of blankets to stand as a clear obstacle between Lucius and the bed. His hands were glowing as he prepared to strike whoever was entering the room, but his face is what caught Lucius’ attention; the boy’s face was downright unnerving. His face was a lifeless mask; no expression of anger, no fury; no emotion at all showed upon it like a china doll. Only his eyes were narrowed as he prepared to attack. He hesitated when he recognized the blonde wizard and his stance relaxed, the glow fading away to nothing.

Lucius considered the boy a moment before speaking. If anyone came in this room too quickly it was clear he could do them harm without even caring to find out why they had come. “Good morning, Erik. You did not sleep well?” He asked carefully.

“I’m not s’posed to sleep while the consort sleeps.” He answered quietly. His face took on some expression finally, the one that Lucius was accustomed to see on his face; a petulant sulk. As he stood there with his hands at his sides, he seemed to be no threat at all, quite a change from a moment or two ago.

“You will sleep at night while you live in my house.” Lucius said firmly. “There is no danger to you here.”

“Maybe, not while we’re here.” He agreed quietly, but squared his shoulders. “But we won’t live here forever.” He said, gazing up at him. “We have to be ready. There are many who wish to harm my Prince and I will defend him with my life.”

“You will have time to do so, son. Now it is time for you to rest a bit more. I will watch over them while you rest.” Lucius said.

“I don’t… I’m not tired…” he attempted.

“Nonsense. This is my house. It is much too early; all the others are still asleep.” Lucius eyed the little boy challengingly. “Do you doubt my power? Do you doubt that I can protect you and the Prince as well?”
Erik gazed at him for several minutes, then shrugged and pulled his eyes away. “I believe that you can, Milord.” He agreed quietly.

“Good. Go ahead and lie down for just a bit; when the others wake we will all get dressed and go to breakfast.” He instructed. Erik grudgingly complied with his instructions, sulking back over to his pallet and dragging the blankets back to the bed near the door. He threw them on the bed and then and crawled under the blankets. He lay there for a while, staring at Lucius, but after about twenty minutes Lucius was pleased to see that Erik had fallen asleep.

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Warrington moved into the room and Lucius gave him a quick examination before he glanced away. His new bondservant looked very tired. Well, perhaps that was a good thing; he might be able to get more answers out of the man. He gestured for Warrington to join him by the window in the half-light of dawn. Jerrod sighed and moved over as he was instructed, sitting in the other chair by the little table.

Lucius glanced at the children, then cast a silencing spell over the two of them at the table to enable the youths to sleep without interruption. “You know why I wanted to see you so early?”

“To lay down the rules or something?” he ventured, leaning back in his chair.

“No. We will be discussing some of what these children have been taught and to ask you a few questions about yourself.”

“I’ll tell you anything you want to know, as long as you don’t do whatever Snape did to my arm last night. It’s still aching…”

Lucius gave him a faint smile. “I will not be doing anything to your bonds.” He said firmly. “Ask whatever you want. I’ve got nothing to hide anymore.” He shrugged.

“First of all I want to know if you bear a mark as well.” He said, not bothering to be delicate about anything.

“A mark…?”

“Don’t be stupid, Warrington. You know I mean the Dark Mark.” He scowled at him.

“Oh.” He flushed slightly. “Yes, I do. It’s on my…”

“Right shoulder. I know.” Lucius scowled. “So you underwent the same ceremony as the children did.” He eyed him. “Who did this ceremony?”

“It was led by Parkinson. His daughter was never there, she said he was mental and didn’t want anything to do with his plans. He said she was playing her part somehow but I don’t see how.” He frowned slightly as he tried to recall all the details to share. “There was this weird triangle thing on the floor, in the basement of that house you found us in. There were three of those old-style circle things inside the triangle; Parkinson would be in one, the baby in his little pram in a second, and the one being marked in a third…”

“Can you identify what you saw if you saw the mark in a text? Or better yet, do you have an idea of precisely what the rite was called…” Lucius offered, voice a slow drawl.

He sighed, staring at his shoes. “No. I can’t.” he said quietly.
“Then we will have to find another way to get those particular details from you.” Lucius mused for a moment. “Now, some information you did not tell us. Explain what happened once the women became pregnant with the babies. And how many failures there were.”

Jerrod frowned slightly. “Well… it was really all pretty straightforward. Once the women were pregnant, they were kept in a semi-conscious state with potions. They really didn’t know what was going on, most of them anyway. Some were able to shake off the potions and they were kept locked up so they did not harm themselves or the baby.” He said quietly.

“And you thought all of this was fine and dandy, did you?”

“No, of course not. I didn’t like it at all but I’m BOUND, Lucius, and I…” his voice drifted off and he refused to look his direction. Malfoy remained silent, allowing the younger man to work through what he had to understand. He was bound then, and he was bound again to Lucius. He had to tell him everything if Lucius asked. Warrington sighed and decided to go ahead and tell him everything. “They had my dad.” He admitted with a shrug, unable to look at the older man.

“Had…?”

“Yeah. He died last year.” He said softly. “Not at their hands. They let him go when I was bound to the kids and the Dark Prince passed his tests.” Lucius found himself wondering if they had indeed killed his father to keep him in check, just not told him about it. He would look into that later.

Jerrod took a deep breath and pressed on. “But the mothers… after the births, they just vanished. Parkinson and Bebel would show up for the birth, and then the mother would be taken out of the room while I cleaned up the infant. I don’t know where they took them or what they did with them. I never saw them again, but then I never left the house except to go to town from time to time.”

“Did they ever use the same mother for more than one child?”

“I did see one girl: woman, I guess but she looked awful damned young to me. She was there three times and always to try to give birth to the Dark Prince. I think she was related to Karkaroff; he was the one who kept bringing her by. She died giving birth to the third baby.”

“What were your duties?”

“I was in charge of making sure the pregnant mothers were woken to be fed; at first… then Bebel showed up and started hooking them up to tubes to feed them.”

“Were all of the children… how can I put this? Were they all born healthy?”

“At first we got some real freakish things. Most of them didn’t even look like they were human.” He said, looking uncomfortable. “I had to get rid of the… the bodies.” He said softly.

“Did you destroy them?” Lucius asked.

“Why? They were just babies; they didn’t do anything to deserve being destroyed… no. I buried ‘em.”

“You will have to show us where. I’m assuming you did not do this at the mansion where I found you?”

“I’d have been an idiot to do that. No, it was off up in the mountains. Kind of a little graveyard, but I couldn’t just burn them like they wanted me to.” He sighed.
“But they told you to take care of the bodies, did they not?”

“Never gave me any such order. They told me to ‘get rid of the beasts’,” He answered. “They were kids. I got them out of the way, and took care of them too. Best I could, anyway…” he shrugged.

“And you don’t know what happened to the women? What happened once they began to get results they wanted?”

“That’s when things got bad. I mean, some of those babies that were born early on wouldn’t have survived, probably, but the ones that looked healthy… it weren’t right. It just weren’t right to kill ‘em.”

“If the children were healthy why would they do such a thing?”

“The Dark Prince and the Consort had to be pure. No trace of any family could show on their hereditary tests except for the donor’s parents… that would be you and James Potter as the father. Some of them showed the mother’s family and they were killed outright…”

“That brings me to my next question. What exactly did they do to keep the hereditary spell from showing them? The test we performed to prove Angel’s family tree should have shown the Dark Prince as her uncle. And the one we did for my little kittens should have shown Alerick, but neither of them shows up on either chart.” Lucius leaned forward on the table. “Tell me; how was that done?”

Jerrod grinned faintly now with a bit of pride. “That’s probably driving old Severus Snape insane, I bet.” He commented, looking more comfortable than he had since he sat down with Lucius. “That was my real project.” He admitted. “At first I was working on it for Parkinson’s daughter; she was trying to have your son’s child – but then you probably already knew about that.”

“Yes, I know of that.” He growled softly.

“She wanted me to make it so the baby wouldn’t show up on any chart you had done. But I can tell you it was a right pain in the ass to come up with the right formula to do it.”

“Obviously you have managed to do it. Quite the accomplishment, Warrington. You must be very proud of your success…”

“I am, rather… but I really couldn’t publish it or anything…”

“Undo it.” He growled.

He looked at him. “Undo it…? I’m not sure I can.”

“Undoing it, Warrington, is your one goal in life now. You WILL undo that spell. Restore Alerick to his rightful place within my family. Restore that little babe he sleeps with to his rightful place as well.” He ordered.

Jerrod’s smile slipped. “All right… but I hardly have anything left of my lab…”

“I have a potions lab here, quite well stocked for anything you need. In fact, Severus Snape should be there quite soon. I’m certain he’ll be quite interested in hearing how you got around that particular spell.”

Warrington’s smile faded completely. “I can work on this on my own, right?”
“No. You’re to give Severus Snape every bit of information you know, and you’re to work closely with him. The man could probably assist you in getting this reversed much faster than you could manage yourself.”

“I’ve never worked with anyone else, Malfoy… and… well, if you’ll pardon me for saying it, I really don’t think I could work with Prof… I mean, Mr. Snape. He wasn’t exactly easy to work with back in school and…”

“Oh, do grow up Warrington!” Lucius said, rolling his eyes. “You are not some pimply-faced little schoolboy anymore, Severus Snape is not evil incarnate.” Lucius snorted, but considered for a long moment. “Well; perhaps I can give you a few days to attempt it on your own. But I cannot afford for Alerick to not show properly upon my family tree.” He said with a frown.

“I’ll try. I swear it.”

“Of course you will. But you will still need to talk to Severus, and you will give him any information he requests of you. He may wish to use legilimency to look at your memories himself.”

“I would rather jump of the top of the astronomy tower than let him do that to me…” he mumbled, not looking at him.

“If he deems it necessary, you will allow it, Warrington.” Lucius said, ensuring to word his statement carefully to forbid him from getting out of his instructions.

“Yes, sir.” He said softly, clearly reluctant.

“Good.” Lucius said, glancing back at the bed. The sun had risen during their conversation and the light was falling fully across the bed where the Prince lay curled up with Alerick, with little Alyssa at their feet. “Looks like the children will wake up soon…” he commented.

“They were always woken at dawn to have breakfast, a bath, and start their practice.” Warrington told him. “I’d be shocked if they slept too much longer.”

“I will talk to you later about their daily rituals; today I plan to throw everything off and ensure that there IS no schedule. That way they will accept my new schedule for them with little complaint. As for you, I want you to return to your room and take a healing potion. You’re hardly rested at all.” He ordered.

Warrington looked at him, confused. “But you wanted me to start it right away….”

“What good will you be able to do, exhausted and stressed as you are? You will go back to bed, Warrington. If you haven’t any healing potions I will have one brought to you.” He said, then couldn’t help but smirk at the expression on his new bond servant’s face. “I am NOT Parkinson, Warrington. I know the value of rest and what value there is to work when one has enough. You are not ready to work at this moment. Go. Don’t anger me on your first day.” He said warningly.

“Uh… okay. Sure… thanks…” he said, rising with a slight grimace of pain that Lucius did not miss.

“If you have not recovered by lunchtime, you can expect to have a healer in your room to tend to you.” Lucius said, waving his wand to dismiss the spells he had used to protect the children from being disturbed by their conversation.

Warrington hesitated, then gave Lucius a formal bow. “Thank you sir.” He said quietly, turning toward the door.
He glanced at Erik, lying in his bed beside the door, and saw the boy watching him as he walked past and quietly shut the door.

Lucius studied the tousle-haired boy as he crawled giggling over Alerick, who happily allowed the younger boy to do whatever he wished. The twins were seated off to the side, watching in silence. Erin was leaning on her brother’s shoulder, and he had the typical sulky expression. Alyssa sat apart from the two on the bed, simply watching and hugging her toy.

“How are they this morning?” Harry asked, smiling as he led Draco into the room.

“They seem quite well, actually.” Lucius smiled.

A smile lit Draco’s face as his eyes landed on the youngest child. “Oh, look at him Harry…!” He murmured. “What’s his name?”

“He has only a title at the moment, son.” Lucius answered. “This is the Dark Prince.”

Draco sat on the bed with the children. “Dark Prince? Really, father; that’s just silly. He’s so sweet… surely you have to be mistaken, father!” he said. “Aren’t you the most handsome little thing…!” he said in a sweet voice, smiling at the baby.

The little Prince looked up at Draco, his eyes wide as he stared at the adult features his consort would have once he matured. “MINE!” He squealed and lunged into Draco’s arms, giggling. Alerick sat up, his smile fading quickly into a blank mask, his eyes burning with jealousy.

Eric came to his feet, scowling now, reacting to the anger of the Consort. The dark-haired baby looked over at him, stopping in his play with Draco, frowning at the older boy. “No! Mine!” he said, hugging Draco tightly.

“Easy now, little one.” Draco said, running his hands through the baby’s hair, getting the baby’s attention once more. Alerick slipped off the bed and went over to sit beside Alyssa, looking hurt and jealous. The girl put her arm around him, laying her head on his shoulder. “I think you need a nice bath this morning, then a good filling breakfast. How does that sound?”

The baby babbled at him, gazing up at him with his big green eyes. He looked over at Alerick and babbled again. “My Lord says that he would like that quite a bit, Lord Malfoy.” He translated, voice quiet and subdued.

“Good, then that’s exactly what we shall do.” Draco said, stroking the child’s cheek. He looked over at Alerick. “And would you like to help get this little one ready for the day?” He asked.

“Me…?” Alerick looked over, the look of jealousy fading slightly. “Well, yes, I would…”

“Good. You see, Alerick; I have my sweet love already…” he sent a smile Harry’s way, and Harry smiled back at him. “Come; you all need to be cleaned up and ready to meet mother and the other children.” Draco said, trying to get to his feet. He finally subsided, sighing. “Damn it all…”

Harry chuckled as he hurried over, helping Draco to get to his feet. “You shouldn’t take a seat on a floor-level bed, lover, not until after the baby comes.” he said, helping him to get back on the firm floor.

“I keep forgetting…” Draco chuckled.
The Dark Prince followed him and tugged at his hand. “Bath!” he demanded as Alerick moved up to stand on the boy’s other side.

“Of course; let’s get you bathed and ready.” Draco smiled.

“Looks like I might have some competition for your attention.” Harry chuckled softly.

“Come along and help me.” Draco said. “I think Angel is busy with mother and the kittens. These two need to know their fathers…”

“Actually, Draco, I need to talk to you and Harry about that.” Lucius spoke up. “After breakfast, while the children play, perhaps we could sit and talk out in the conservatorium, hmm?”

“I actually get to join in, do I?” Draco asked, giving Harry a smirk and he laughed. His father looked curious and Draco only shrugged. “Sure, father. We’ll see you then, if we can get away from the children…”

“Bath! Now!” The Dark Prince insisted, tugging hard on Draco’s hand.

“All right, little one; you get my attention for now.” He laughed, and let himself be pulled out of the room.

Instantly Erik rose to follow as did the other two. The senior nanny, the one with the blue eyes, moved forward to intercept them, glancing at Lucius for his approval. “Hold it you three… My little lady, I already have your bath awaiting you, and your clothing for the day as well.” She said.

“But we should stay together, I don’t want to…”

“This is Malfoy Manor, my little Alyssa. You must learn that there are new rules, and you must do as your new Lord Father wishes.” she said with a gentle yet firm tone. The nanny saw Lucius smile and nod minutely to let her know that she was doing what he desired. She smiled and gently took Alyssa’s hand, looking back at the room where the other two nannies hovered. “We will help you three ready for the day; the Prince and Consort are well tended at the moment.”

“But I’m supposed to guard!” Eric said petulantly. “I must guard him always…”

“Not always, my little lion.” She corrected, kneeling before him to make eye-to-eye contact. “Your duty is to guard when the consort is away. He will be with the Prince, so you can be taken care of as well.” She reminded. Eric scowled in Draco’s direction, scowl deepening, but he did not say anything further.

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Draco carried the baby into the bathing room setting him on the floor to start the water running in the tub. The baby cooed and babbled actively as any baby would, and Alerick knelt down on the floor beside him, clearly happy to be in the same place with the infant and giving him every ounce of his attention.

“There now; your bath is all ready nice and warm. Would you like to take a bath with him, Alerick?”

“Oh, yes!” he agreed happily, most traces of his earlier jealousy gone.

Draco undressed the baby, then laughed softly. “You have the same little birthmark as my Harry.” he said, tickling the child.
The Dark Prince squealed, laughing. Alerick began to undress as well. “He says that you are pretty,” he said.

Draco laughed. “He does, does he? Well, I think that he is the pretty one.” he replied, placing the baby in the water. The baby gurgled and babbled more, gazing up at Draco with sparkling eyes. Draco smiled and played with the two boys as he bathed them. “Where ever did you come from, little one…? And what is your name…?” he wondered as he tickled the baby’s chubby toes.

“The Dark Prince IS his name.” Alerick giggled softly. “And he was born in Romania…” “That’s a title, not a name. Everyone needs to have a proper name. He needs a name, don’t you?” Draco cooed at the baby.

“He’s just my Lord… will you give him another name?” Alerick asked.

“He needs one… he looks so much like Harry, maybe that should be his name…” “But that’s your husband’s name, Lord Father…” Alerick began, his attention drawn away from Draco and the conversation by the baby babbling again. “But my lord does want to have a name…” “Then we will have to think very hard to find the perfect name.” Draco assured. The baby squealed and kicked, splashing water all over as he thoroughly enjoyed the novelty of a bath uninterrupted by any time restraint or schedule.

Lucius moved into the room. “I see that you have things well in hand Draco; I think perhaps I am going to have a nap.” “All right, father.” Draco smiled. The baby waved at him, babbled, then splashed more. Lucius smirked then moved out of the room passing Harry in the doorway. Harry smiled. “Dragon, look at you…!” he chuckled. “I think you’re as wet as these children are…” Draco chuckled. “I think they’re competing to see how high they can splash.” he commented. The two boys were silent now, the baby watching Harry closely and Alerick looking more than a little worried as he gazed from Harry to the baby. Draco looked at the two of them. “And now it seems that they are all finished…” he said, pulling the plug to allow the bath to drain. “There…”

Harry went to the shelf, picking up some towels before he moved to join Draco at the side of the tub. “Come on, little Prince…” he said, reaching for the boy. His hands impacted against something; it felt like an invisible shield prevented him from reaching closer and actually pushed him back. He looked at the Dark Prince with a bit of surprise. “No…?” he asked, glancing at Draco. “Well it seems that he’s a bit unsure of me this morning, love. Here…” he handed Draco the towel.

“Thank you…” Draco said, reaching for the little boy, scooping him up with the towel, wrapping him up and giving him a bit of a tickle. “Now, we need a good meal and some clean clothing, that’s exactly what you both need right now.”

Harry picked up another towel and moved to wrap Alerick, pausing before he touched the boy. “May I?”

“Yes, Lord Father Harry” he said, holding up his arms to him. The child in Draco’s arms watched carefully but did not object. Harry dried off the boy then moved to help Draco to his feet. “Easy, love…” “But Lord Father, we have no clothing here…” Alerick said softly. “Well, I do, but my Dark Prince
has nothing suitable…”

“Not to worry, we have a few changes for the four new ones; Warrington saw to that.” Harry assured. “And we will get more for you all.”

“We are all Malfoy-Potters, after all.” Draco said, tickling the baby again. “The world is at our beck and call…”

“Draco, I don’t think these kids need any help with their self-esteem.” Harry chuckled as he tickled Alerick slightly; the boy cuddled against him with a giggle as they moved out of the bathing room.

When they returned to the nursery the nannies were tending to the other three; the lead nanny was taking care of Alyssa. The girl was dressed in a dress that was tailored to her upper body with a frilly skirt in silver and green. Her hair was pulled up into a single ponytail, completely dry but shining and clean, shining orange and red and gold, the deep green bow restraining her hair a sharp contrast. The child looked ready to go to a ball, not simply go to breakfast.

The twins had been readied and dressed as well; both Erik and Erin were dressed again in plain wizard’s robes of a green so deep that it nearly looked black, making them look starkly pale in comparison. The cut of the robes they wore allowed for plenty of movement.

“Well, it seems your friends are already ready to go…” Draco smiled as he set the baby on the changing table. The baby giggled, babbling happily as he was dressed; the lead nanny hurried to fetch the clothing for the Dark Prince and Alerick as well. The clothing she brought for them was of the same color scheme as the others wore; silver and deepest green, but of course theirs were much more ornate than the others. Draco dressed the child, continuing to play with him as he did so.

Harry glanced at the others sitting waiting for them in silence, lined up on their bed looking a little confused and nervous. “These kids have a really complex relationship already; I just hope that they treat our little Angel well.”

“I know she and Alerick get along well enough, they were playing nicely together just yesterday.” Draco said softly.

“Yes, that may be true, but you see, it all depends upon how that little boy there gets along with her. I think these four will do anything that he wants them to, even at this age.” Harry answered, allowing Alerick to do most of the work to dress himself, helping only when he was needed.

Draco gazed at the baby, brushing his dark unruly hair back. “Such a sweet little boy…” he whispered, smiling sweetly before he kissed his brow.

The Dark Prince stared at him, started, blinking his wide green eyes in confusion. He had never been treated so; no one had ever kissed him. The tickles had been amusing and even fun, but to be kissed…? Alerick looked over, watching as the baby reached out to touch Draco’s lips as if fascinated by them.

Draco smiled and kissed his little fingers. “Let’s go eat, yes?” he grinned. The baby gazed at his fingers now, then back at Draco and nodded. Draco lifted him up and settled him on his hip, laughing softly as the baby in his stomach kicked. “Your newest son is letting me know he’s awake, love.” he said to Harry.

He chuckled. “I think he wants you to go and eat too.”

“Well, I am a bit peckish…” Draco grinned, scooping the baby up into his arms once more. Harry did not pick up Alerick nor did the boy demand it, walking along behind Draco and the baby.
“Angel’s gone into the kitchen with your mum, I believe.” Harry said as they moved out, the others following behind.

“Mum always did want a little girl to spoil.” Draco chuckled softly. The baby in his arms was completely fascinated with Draco’s belly, trying to put his hand over the place where the baby would kick and squealing with delight when he managed to accomplish that feat.

“Now she has several.” Harry smiled, watching the baby with amusement.

The group moved into the dining room where the other children were already seated and eating. Harry had never really been comfortable with eating in the formal dining room; it made him think of a stuffy place where you had to be on perfect behavior and use all the manners that he had learned living in Aunt Petunia’s home.

The room felt nothing like that now. The long table had its typical spotless white tablecloth and fancy centerpieces, the candelabra above the table lighting the room. In addition to this, the table was loaded with trays that would have been the envy of the kids back at Hogwarts; at least twelve separate types of dishes to choose from to eat breakfast. The scents of those varied dishes, the sound of the voices of uninhibited children, and the sight of them simply enjoying eating the sumptuous meal made the room feel welcoming and homey. The room seemed so full with Narcissa seated just to the right of the head of the table and Angel at her right. The children were ranged about the table, most in chairs transfigured to raise the seats to allow them to reach the table easily. Two were seated in high chairs with trays, and a third high chair awaited the Dark Prince.

“Good morning.” Draco smiled, moving to his mother with the baby on his hip to give her a delicate kiss.

“Good morning, son.” Narcissa smiled back at him.

“Papa! Daddy!” Angel hopped out of her chair and hurried over to them to give each of them a hug.

Harry swung the girl up into his arms, kissing her. “Good morning, my beautiful little Angel. Did you have a good nights’ rest?”

“Yes, I did daddy and look! There’s lots and lots of kids here now, but Nonno says that some of them are just sleeping over…” she was so excited that she was almost breathless.

“Yes, and most of them are your very own brothers and sisters.”

“Really?” she gazed up at him, eyes sparkling.

“Yes, we have such a beautiful family now…”

She laughed and hugged him tight. “This is so wonderful, daddy!”

“Isn’t it, love? I hope you all become very good friends; I never had a brother or sister of my very own.”

“Do you think they’ll like me…” she asked, some of her insecurities clear to see.

“How could they not?” Harry smiled. “Draco and Nonno love you so.”

Draco let his husband chat with the dark-haired little girl while he moved to the highchair to put the baby in and secure him in place. “There you are…”
Harry set Angel back down in her chair, then filled her plate for her, then moved to help the others, pausing by the baby to caress his soft hair and offer him a piece of banana. The baby took the banana but did not do what a normal child would do; he put it down on the tray, staring up at Harry.

He didn’t focus on the boy, turning instead to Alerick, filling his cup with milk. “What would you like to eat, Alerick?”

“Some fruit and sausage please, and juice.” he answered, glancing at the little Lord seated beside him, reaching over to touch his hand.

“How about a bit of porridge?”

Alerick looked up at him. “What’s porridge?”

“Why don’t I fix you a little and you can try it to decide if you like it or not?” Harry suggested as he fixed a small bowl, adding cream and honey.

Alerick watched him, smiling charmingly up at him when he handed him the bowl. “Thank you, sir.”

Soon the others were served and Harry sat down to his own meal.

“Where is Lucius this morning?” Narcissa asked. “He got up with me, but I haven’t seen him since…”

“He mentioned he was going off to bed. He was up late with the children from what I understand…” Draco replied.

“Was he?” she smiled. “He is so involved with these children…”

“So I’ve noticed.” Harry said with a soft frown. “I wonder why that is…”

“It is because they are my grandchildren.” Lucius answered coolly, moving into the room at a relaxed pace. “Even if it is by marriage, they are still my grandchildren. Even you should know, Potter, that family is everything to a Malfoy.” He moved to his wife and gave her a soft kiss. “Good morning, my darling.” he smiled.

“Good morning, Lucius.” she smiled at him.

The baby in his high chair cooed, kicking happily and reaching toward him. Lucius moved to the baby, hand softly resting on his hair. “Good morning to you as well, little Lord.” he smirked. The baby cooed at him and Alerick smiled as he watched.

“That baby needs a proper name.” Harry said. “What would you suggest, Lucius?”

“I’ve been considering that for a while.” Lucius admitted. “I feel that he needs a strong name, one that reflects the personality I see in this boy. I think that perhaps the name of Mallek Salazar Malfoy-Potter. Mallek means ruler, and the second name channels one of the most powerful Slytherins that there were…”

“What do you think of the name, love?” Harry asked, placing his hand over Draco’s.

“It is a very strong name.”

“He is a very strong child.” Lucius responded.
“My lord likes it.” Alerick said with a smile, watching the baby. He squealed and tried to feed himself with the spoon he clutched in his chubby little fist. He dribbled food down his chin and his mood quickly turned sour. Alerick forgot his own meal and stood on his chair to wipe the baby up.

Draco smiled. “Do you, little love?” he asked, taking the spoon and scooping up some porridge holding it out to the baby’s mouth. The baby opened his mouth an took a bite, grabbing at Draco’s hand.

“He seems to have accepted you quite well, son.” Lucius commented with a smirk.

“Yes.” Draco smiled. “Look at him, father; he’s just like my Harry… so beautiful.”

“You know, Harry and Draco, since we are on the subject of names… I think at least one of the other children needs a name fitting a Malfoy.”

“I don’t even know all their names yet.” Harry said, looking down the table at the children. “I know we’re not going to keep them all; Tonks is supposed to get back with us to discuss their placement…”

“I know them.” Draco said. “I’ll just go around the table, shall I? That little girl beside our Mallek is Astrid Urquhart. Next to her in the high chair is Dorcus Bletchley…”

“Dorcus. What kind of a name is that?” Lucius scowled.

“If we keep her we can rename her…”

“We should be allowed to rename her regardless! Dorcus for a Malfoy name, indeed!”

Draco smothered his smile and went on. “The very thin, tiny boy there beside the twins is Fallon Avery, and then we have Lazlo Yaxley, then Elston Lestrange, Alexander Jugson, and finally Tristin Baddock.” the children as he named them looked over or gave shy grins, except for the child who was even younger than Mallek. She was stuffing her face happily, the rotund little girl quite pleased to be eating and actually getting more into her mouth than on her clothing or her tray.

“We need to focus now on protecting these new arrivals…” Lucius said firmly.

“With everything in our power.” Harry agreed, finding himself wondering who was the mother of the little tyke that looked so much like him. He would have to be patient, though; Lucius had said they would discuss this after breakfast.

“Are we sure we got all the children…?” Draco asked softly.

“We believe so.” Lucius answered. “I believe that Nymphadora has completed her interrogation of the parents that were mentioned, and that all the children have been secured.”

“Nonno…?” Angel said in a soft voice, timid and frightened, eyes damp with tears. “Now that… that you have your own granddaughters… do you… still want me…?”

Lucius gazed at the child who gazed over at him with tears brimming in her eyes for only a moment before he held out his arms to her. She pushed away from the table and rushed to his arms, climbing quickly up into his lap. He gathered her close in his arms, giving her a warm, comforting hug. “Of course I want you, my little Angel. I will always want you. None of the rest of them will ever be my eldest granddaughter…”

“But they’re pretty and blonde like you and papa are or they have daddy’s hair, and I… I don’t…”
she whispered.

“And you, my Angel, are the vision of the one I have loved all of my days. Your grandfather James.” He set her back a bit, gazing at her and stroking her cheek. “How I wish you could have known him; you are his gift to me, you know. Without James, your father would not be here and you would not either. Put your worries aside, my own. You hold my heart.”

She hugged him tight, trembling slightly. “I love you, my Nonno… I wish I could have known him too.” Lucius settled his eldest granddaughter on his lap, sharing his breakfast with her from that point on.

All the children ate well, except for Erik. He bolted his meal down then sat watching the others, eyes narrow and face showing his typical petulant scowl.

“It seems that some of you have not been taught how to eat properly.” Lucius said, eyeing him. “That will be corrected shortly.” Erik glanced at him sulkily and folded his arms. “I do not fault you for your lack of learning, child. Those who had possession of you are to blame.”

“I learned well!” Erik said defensively, rising to his feet. “I learned my lessons and I follow my teachings…!”

”No!” Mallek scowled at his young guardian. “No no no!” he emphasized each of his stated words with a slapped hand upon the tray of his high chair, clearly angry.

Erik silenced immediately, flinching visibly at the infant’s anger. He gazed at him, immediately contrite. “Sorry, my Lord, I’m sorry…!” he whispered.

Mallek babbled at him, slapping the tray once more. Erik turned his eyes to Lucius. “Forgive me, My Lord Father, I will strive to do better.” he murmured, tears in his eyes as well as fear. He scrubbed at his eyes with the back of an arm, then looked back at Lucius with clear hope in his eyes. “Forgive me…”

“Return to your seat, Erik, until the meal is over. And do try to act as a Potter-Malfoy should at lunchtime.”

“Yes; as you command, Lord Father Malfoy.” he said completely contrite, giving Lucius a stiff formal bow before he slipped back into his seat, head bowed as he battled to stop the flow of tears. His Dark Prince was angry with him…

Mallek returned to his meal completely unconcerned now, mashing his banana in his hands with a giggle. Erik said not a single word during the rest of the meal, nor did he touch his drink or even look up once. Erin moved her chair closer to his, tears on her cheeks rolling unchecked, the rest of her meal completely untouched.

“Now, you may return to the nursery wing and freshen up. You may enjoy the interior gardens for your play session, then after luncheon you shall retire for naps, then return to the play room afterwards. Any questions?”

“Nonno…? Can’t I see the babies…?” Angel asked timidly.

“Of course, my own.” he assured with a smile, leaning forward to whisper in her ear. “You shall join me shortly; you promised to make me those… what were they? Ah, yes; those cookies with me…”

“Really?” she said eagerly. “Oh, yes Nonno! I want to do that with you!” Lucius chuckled.
Erik silently obeyed the commands of Lucius, rising from the table and only waiting for his sister. He had already been corrected by his Dark Prince, he would not do anything to anger him if he could avoid it. He would follow his teachings to the letter. Erin remained at his side, but Alyssa and Alerick waited to go back with Mallek.

“Go on, then, my own. Go get cleaned up then join me with the kittens.” Lucius said fondly to Angel.

“Yes Nonno.” she giggled and kissed him. He returned the kiss, then set her down on her feet to allow her to scamper off after the others.

He watched her go, then took a deep breath. “Narcissa…? Be a love and please fetch me a pepper-up potion. I’m dead on my feet but could not rest…”

“Of course, love…”

“You ought to have a sleeping potion instead, father.” Draco advised, picking up a very sticky and sated Mallek.

“Perhaps, but I promised my Angel, Draco. And a Malfoy does not break a promise.”

“Very true, father.” he agreed with a soft smile.

“Well if you will excuse me.” Lucius said, rising. “I will be with the kittens, Cissa.”

“I will be with you soon; I want to make certain the nannies and nurses are tending to the other children properly…” she smiled.

Lucius glanced at his son; he needed to tell him about Mallek and Alerick. “If you two will meet me in my study I have something highly important to tell you.” he said in a serious tone. “Allow the nannies to tend to the children; they know what I wish them to do.”

“We’ll see you there.” Harry nodded, moving out with Draco to return the five children to their nannies.

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Lucius washed his face quickly, then moved to the nursery to meet with Angel and Narcissa. After reassuring Angel he would be back to join her and take her off to the kitchen, he moved off again, downing the potion to revitalize himself as he moved through the house.

He sighed and pushed open the door of the study to see Draco and Harry sitting close together on the love seat in the room; his son was cuddled into Harry’s arm, and the dark-haired wizard’s hand was lovingly caressing the swell of his belly.

He cleared his throat primly and the two did not part, but they did pull their attention away from each other. Draco gave his father a smile.

Lucius took his seat, sighing softly. “The testing of the twins was what we expected; they are the product of Harry’s essence and Bellatrix’s eggs.” he said, watching them for their reactions.

Harry scowled. “That bitch… does she know?”

“If she did I’m sure we’d have seen her already trying to break down the gates.” Lucius answered with a smirk. “Though we must somehow ensure that she never finds out.”
“I’ll see her in hell before I let her have any of them.” Harry growled softly.

“What about the others?” Draco asked.

“Alyssa is the daughter of George Weasley and Jerrod Warrington.” he answered.

“I’m sure George will be thrilled to have a child with Warrington.” Draco couldn’t help but smirk.

“He’s going to go mental… but what about Alerick? Who was the mother? And Mallek?” Harry asked.

“The results of their heredity are clear, and not what we expected at all. Let me at least assure you that there will be no confusion on Alerick’s legal custody; no one has any right to take him anywhere. Mallek’s heredity is a bit more difficult, but also very clear.”

“Is his mother dead?” Harry asked softly.

“Well, as a matter of fact, yes…”

“Did they kill her?”

“No, THEY did not…” he said, stressing the difference in the term. “Mallek and Alerick are not like the others. I watched Severus perform this spell three times to ensure it was correct; the results never changed… Harry, do you know what a clone is?” he asked softly.

“Well, yeah. The muggles were experimenting; they cloned a sheep and some other animals I think… What’s that got to do with my son?”

“He’s not your son, Harry.” Lucius answered.

“What…?”

“He is your brother, Harry. Your clone.” He held out a scroll to him.

“Bloody fucking hell…!” Harry murmured, leaning forward to snatch the scroll away from his father-in-law, opening the scroll up to stare at the tree. How could this be? His father and mother were shown as the parents of the Dark Prince… this had been done last night or his new name would be reflected upon it.

“As you the eldest in the Potter line, you will have legal custody of him as any elder brother would, but when this gets out, the Ministry may have other ideas.” he said softly.

Harry’s face drained of color as he stared at the paper. “Oh Merlin…”

“And that’s not all.” He fingered a second scroll that he held. “Alerick is also a clone. He is your brother Draco, and my youngest son.”

“What…?” Draco murmured, taking the scroll with shaking hands. Harry turned his gaze to look at that scroll as well.

“We can’t let the ministry get hold of them…” Harry murmured, looking back to Lucius.

“They won’t be able to do take Alerick; he is clearly mine and Narcissa’s; but they can and will try to take Mallek. Unless, of course, you have already established legally who will care for the child.”

Harry blinked, trying to digest all of this information. The ministry would object to him raising
Mallek as a product of that genetic creation from the lab, but if he moved quickly to get him placed and made it legal there would be nothing they could do…

Draco touched the memory crystal that hung about Harry's neck. “Father loved James so… I think he would be a good father to Mallek…” he whispered softly in his husband’s ear.

“I know.” he said softly, frowning in thought.

“I have two days before we have to turn in all the parentage papers; the Ministry isn’t even aware that these five exist… well. All except for Nymphadora, of course.” Lucius said. “You have time to make your decision and get matters settled.”

“What about Severus? Do you think he would consider it?” Harry asked softly.

“You can ask him; he should be in the potions lab if you wish to suggest it to him.” Lucius said, pushing himself to his feet once more. “As for me, I have a granddaughter that I have promised to meet in the kitchen…”

Harry waited until Lucius left the room, then he sighed softly, eyes closed. “This is all such a nightmare.”

“How could they have done this?” Draco asked.

“I thought that after Voldemort was dead, things would be different…”

“It is different, Harry, but there will always be evil in the world. Getting rid of Voldemort didn’t eliminate the evil in the world.”

Harry pulled Draco into his arms, hugging him tight. “What do I do, Dray?”

“We live, Harry. We live one day at a time. We live and we love… and we teach our children to love.” Draco answered quietly. “If we just do that, it may be enough to change the future…”

“How are YOU feeling, Dragon…?” he asked softly. “I mean, all of this stress. Are you all right?”

“Just a little tired; I’ll be all right.” he reassured with a soft smile.

Harry ran his hand over Draco’s belly. “I can’t wait to hold him…” he whispered.

The baby rolled and kicked and Draco chuckled. “He wants his daddy as much as his daddy wants him.”

“I wish I knew how my dad would feel if I let Lucius raise Mallek. I can’t let the Ministry have control of him; he’s just a baby.”

“Harry, family means everything to my father… and he loved James so. Just watch the memory again, you can see it in his every move and his every look. He loved James just like I love you.”

Harry kissed him softly. “He did; and dad loved him too. But after it was over; whatever they did to dad changed it all. Merlin, I wish I could talk to him.”

“Whatever you decide, love.” Draco assured him. “It will be the right choice.”

Harry kissed his husband softly. “It’s… just, whatever I decide will affect Mallek for the rest of his life. I want him to have a happy life, a good life. Things for all five of them are so strange and twisted now. They need things to be normal, especially little Mallek.”
“He’s a baby, Harry. He needs love and care, and he will grow up just fine.” Draco assured him with another gentle kiss.

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Severus scowled, glaring at the paper that he had setting before him on the table in the laboratory. Lucius had left a sample of blood in the lab for him to use in his testing and the damned results were exactly the same; no change. Lucius’ chart showed Draco, and Draco’s child. Alerick’s chart showed only Alerick as the child of Lucius and Narcissa. How the bloody hell had this been done?

Jerrod Warrington hesitated by the door, not wanting to join the man in the room. He hadn’t liked Severus Snape as the head of Slytherin house, he hadn’t liked him as potions master, and he certainly wasn’t looking forward to spending an extended period of time sequestered in the same room with the man now.

Severus didn’t look round, still glaring at his paper. “What do you want?” He growled softly.

“To be anywhere but here, but I don’t get that choice.” He answered with a sigh. “Malfoy sent me to help you.”

Snape snorted. “Oh, please, Warrington! You were a half-rated student in school; unless you’ve gotten a special tutor to help you along, I doubt there’s anything YOU can do at all that I haven’t already done.” He sneered at him.

“I doubt you’ve figured out why your Hereditary Spell isn’t working right. How or why Alerick isn’t connected to Draco.” He suggested, causing the potions master’s expression to darken. Severus looked over at him finally, eyes narrow, his irritation clear.

“And you have the answer to this puzzle?” He asked, picking up the parchment with Alerick’s family tree upon it.

“ Took me years, but yes.” He said quietly.

Severus slapped the paper down on the table. “Prove it.” he sneered, clearly not believing a word of it.

Warrington studied him a moment, then shrugged. “Lucius was right... I need to grow up and stop thinking you’re some super-powerful evil being...” he said, moving forward. “I don’t need to prove anything; you’re gonna believe whatever it is that you want to believe. If I need to I’ll ask for your help... but solving this conundrum is my problem.” he answered, moving to the secondary work table and beginning to gather together the things that he felt he would need.

Snape snorted with laughter. “You think I’m some sort of evil supervillain?”

“I didn’t call you that.” He smirked back as he opened the cabinet, considering a long moment before he picked out several bottles and levitated them over to his table.

“Calling me a super-powerful evil being is the same thing.”

“Yeah, well, you made quite an impression on us in school.” he shrugged with a grin, moving to the table with three more bottles. He set them down and lit the fire under his cauldron.

“That was the whole idea.” Severus smirked, watching him.
“Are they coming soon daddy?” Angel asked impatiently, holding Harry’s hand and gazing up at him. She was wearing one of her good dresses, one that Narcissa had chosen for her that was pale green cascading down in layers of gossamer fabrics to deep green near her knees. Tootles had taken special care of her dark hair, putting it up so it spilled in waves down her back yet left little curls about her face, with a tiara sparkling vividly with green stones against her black hair.

He smiled down at her indulgently, giving her hand a squeeze. “I know you’re excited, love, but you need to wait until they get here. Ron said they wouldn’t be long…”

She bounced on her heels a moment, her pretty little shoes making clicking noises on the marble floor. “Do I really get to have a real tea party with Rosie?”

“Yes, Angel. A real tea party, just you and Rosie.” he assured with a chuckle.

She snuggled against him with a happy sigh. “I’ve missed her… but I wish that Mimi would come too. I only got to give her that one hug.”

“She knows you care for her honey. She’s just really busy right now. She’ll come visit you when she can.”

“All right, daddy.” she smiled, then looked over with an excited gasp as the door chimes sounded. “They’re here, they’re here!”

“Yes, right on time, I see.” Lucius walked up just then, joining the two in the entryway with Draco only a step behind him.

Angel smiled up at them. “Hi Nonno and Papa.”

“Good afternoon, my Angel. You look quite stunning; are you attempting to be more beautiful than the prettiest flowers in my garden this afternoon?” Lucius smiled at her.

Angel blushed prettily and giggled. “No, Nonno, that’s silly. I’m going to have a tea party today!”

He reached out his hand to her. “You’ll be the perfect hostess. Now, shall we let our guests in?”

“Oh, yes!” she said eagerly, releasing Harry to hurry to Lucius’ side. Draco moved to Harry’s side and they put their arms about each other, watching with amusement as their daughter and father-in-law moved to the door to open it.

In the doorway stood Ron, dressed in one of his better outfits, with Rosie. She was wearing a dress of deep blue with a matching ribbon in her red hair and a covered basket in her hands. “Good afternoon, Draco’s Daddy, Sir.” she greeted with a curtsy.

Lucius half-chuckled at the greeting. “Good afternoon, Miss Weasley; and good afternoon to your father and his brothers as well.” he said, looking past Ron to see the twins standing behind them.

“Yes, um… good afternoon sir.” Fred and George said in unison.

“Good of you to come. If you will follow us, we have everything arranged for the girls…”

“I brought some little cupcakes with flowers on them. They’re not too pretty but I know they taste good.” Rosie said, offering the basket to Angel, who took it and then took Rosie’s hand.
“Come on, daddy says that Tootles is setting everything up for us and we get to have tea all by ourselves cause the others are still taking their naps. I have lots and lots of brothers and sisters now.”

“You do?” she asked. “I wish I had some…”

“One of them has red hair like yours, her name is Alyssa but she won’t really play with me.” she said, leading Rose off through the entryway toward the gardens.

“After you.” Lucius said, gesturing to the redhead men who still stood in the entryway. Ron stepped in, flushing slightly, followed by his brothers and the three followed the two girls. Lucius gave Harry a smirk and strolled after the three.

Harry gazed after them in disbelief. “I never thought I’d see three of the Weasley brothers in your house at the same time…”

“Father must have invited George to come and meet Alyssa.” Draco said, giving Harry a little nudge to get him started toward the gardens after the others.

Angel and Rose giggled as they skipped together to the little table set up just for them under two of the trees still blossoming. The table was covered with a pretty little lace tablecloth and there were several trays of cookies and biscuits for their consumption as well as tea in a little porcelain teapot and all the condiments needed. The teapots and the cups all had the Malfoy crest upon them.

“I can’t believe your father invited them over.” Harry murmured, moving deeper into the garden to settle with Draco on a bench.

Draco chuckled softly. “Father’s changing, Harry. He told you he was going to try.”

Ron kept glancing at the twins as if he expected them to do something totally mental and embarrassing at any moment.

“Where’s my girl?” George asked.

“And when can we take her home?” Fred added.

“Can they?” Ron asked with a soft frown. When his brothers looked at him in surprise he went on to explain himself. “I mean, could you two really take her? I don’t want her to suffer because of this bond thing that she has with the other kids.”

“Quite an astute question, Mr. Weasley.” Lucius gave him a rare faint smile. “Severus and I are still working on dissolving that, or altering it in some way. I don’t think you want to take her just yet, I doubt we could effectively separate them at this point. The five of them share the same room, and it is a rare thing to see one of them without the others.” Lucius said calmly, . “If you took her off I’m sure she’d vanish somehow and end up right back here.”

“When do we get to see her?” Fred asked impatiently. He didn’t like how Lucius was stonewalling them, he felt like they were being kept away from the girl for some reason. Why the hell invite them over to have them stand out in the garden?

“You will meet her soon; she and the others were having their nap. The nanny has firm instructions to bring her out the moment she has woken and is ready to be seen. I will introduce you then.”

“Why wait? Can’t you just wake her?”

“Be patient, George.” Ron sighed, but he himself began to walk away from them. This was between
Lucius and his brothers and he would much rather hang around with Harry and Draco.

“I thought perhaps you would like to know a bit more about her, and learn of her full lineage before you met the child. You have no ordinary little girl, you know.” Lucius commented, moving to a the larger table in the gazebo which was set up for an adult tea.

“Of course she isn’t ordinary. Looks might be deceiving, Lucius, but we Weasleys are anything but ordinary and my daughter will be something special too.” George smirked.

Lucius rolled his eyes but did not comment on that, sitting down with grace. “Would you like some tea?” he asked, gesturing for the boys to sit as well. He gestured at the teapot with his wand and filled his own teacup.

The twins looked at each other, shrugged in unison, then moved to take two of the four remaining seats at the table. “So what is it we need to know?” George asked.

“As you know, Pansy Parkinson has been playing God.” Lucius sipped his tea.

“Yes, that’s how I ended up with a son.” Fred commented.

“And me two girls, counting this one.” George answered.

“That’s not how you got this child. This child has nothing to do with Pansy.” Lucius corrected. “You see, Pansy’s father was playing Zeus.”

“Zeus…?” Fred repeated.

“Her dad thinks he’s a Greek God?” George said, equally mystified.

“Father of the gods, to be specific.” Lucius answered. “The children he created, including your daughter, Mr. Weasley, are much more than simple children.”

“How the bloody hell can they be more than kids?” George asked.

“She’s what, three or maybe four…?” both the redheaded men looked confused.

“Her body is four, but her mind and her powers are far more advanced than any child I have seen save those in her circle.”

“He was making super babies?” Fred asked.

“More than that, Mr. Weasley. Much more.”

“Hey Fred, I’m the father of a little Goddess.” George smirked.

“And not just any run-of-the mill Goddess either. Your daughter was to be his Aphrodite, goddess of love.”

“Goddess and temptress.” Fred agreed, frowning slightly. “What exactly was he trying to accomplish?”

“I don’t know all the precise details, but I can deduce what he was aiming at.” Lucius told them, relaxing in his chair as he watched the girls and their little tea party. “I know that Malcolm Parkinson was involved with the Dark Lord, although he was never marked by him as a Death Eater. When young Mr. Potter and his friends gathered together and destroyed the Dark Lord, it drove Malcolm to the brink of madness and beyond. I know he was committed to St. Mungo’s for at least two, possibly
three stretches of time. At some point, he came to terms with his madness and followed its demands. He looked at young Mr. Potter and his friends as the reason for the fall of his master; and decided he would return him to our world.”

“He WHAT?!” George murmured in shock.

“He’s off his bleeding nut!” Fred mumbled.

“I’m sure he is quite dangerous to anyone he comes near, he’s quite mad. He did not only attempt to recreate the Dark Lord, gentlemen. He has created him a circle of dedicated and devoted servants, called the Dark Circle…”

“Well he’s not using my daughter for any bloody Dark anything!” George snapped.

“No, I agree with you, he will not use her.” Lucius placed a scroll onto the table, his hand resting upon it for a moment. “I can assure you that none of them will be used for their predetermined purposes.”

Fred frowned a moment. “Do you know what her purpose was to be?”

“Yes. She was to be the recruiter. The seductress. The one who could bring all the servants into the fold and keep them under control, and all under the control of her master.”

“Aphrodite.” Fred muttered.

“So who’s her mother?” George asked, now sipping his tea as well.

“She doesn’t exactly have a mother.” Lucius said, pushing the scroll toward him.

George opened it, spreading it out on the table so both he and his brother could examine it. George looked dumbfounded. “Warrington? Jarred Warrington? Why the bloody hell…”

“Another of Malcolm Parkinson’s little ploys. Warrington should probably explain that to him on his own.”

“I don’t get it… Warrington wasn’t anything special in school, why would they pick him for anything? What would he have that be worth anything?”

Lucius smirked. “He has a surprising lineage which Parkinson decided to take advantage of.”

“I guess I’ll have to talk to him… we do share a daughter…”

“He knows she is his, I should tell you that. He has known since the girl had created, but the girl has no idea of his relation to her.”

“Good, then. That means he doesn’t want her.”

“Not precisely, it doesn’t. it’s a bit complicated; I think I will simply call him out and have him talk with you.”

“Call him? You mean that git is here too?” Fred asked, scowling. He only remembered Warrington as a pimply-faced prat living in Slytherin House back in school, before he and his twin had shucked it all to go into business for themselves.

“Yes he is, Mr. Weasley.” Lucius answered with a disapproving scowl.
“Yeah… yeah, okay.” George sighed. “Call him out.”

Lucius called for a house elf and when it appeared he sent it off again to fetch Warrington. Once the elf vanished, Lucius sipped his tea again. “I have Warrington working on a project for me, here in the mansion. It’s quite important that he have everything available to do what he needs to complete his work…” he said, taking his time to choose a cookie. He gazed at the childish smear of frosting on the cookie and smiled, remembering just how messy both he and Angel had gotten making these silly things. Silly, but quite tasty. “But he should not take long to put things on hold.”

“You have HIM working on a potion for you?” Fred asked.

“Braver than I am.” George snorted, then changed the subject. “These people who had the girl; how did they treat her? She was cared for, right?”

“She, and the others of the circle, have little idea of what it is to be a child. When I found them, they each spent four to six hours a day training. And I can tell you without a doubt that Alyssa has been abused…”

“Why abuse her if she was part of their little plan?”

“She was being conditioned. Her abuse was both physical and sexual; they had her convinced without a doubt that it was Mr. Potter who was abusing her. She still cannot look at him without a reaction of fear, though we are working on alleviating that.”

“Why have her afraid of Harry?”

“How better to get her to avoid any relationship with him of any sort? How better to ensure that she hated him once she was grown?” Lucius asked. “She was meant to be the supporter of Mr. Potter’s greatest enemy.”

“These people are completely mental…!” George whispered.

“Were.” Lucius corrected with a wicked smile.

“Master Malfoy, can’t this wait?” a voice from the doorway caught their attention. Jerrod moved out into the dazzling light of the late afternoon, his hair pulled back by a hair clip, wearing old robes with the sleeves shorn off and a stained and pockmarked leather apron. “I was right in the middle of… oh.” his voice drifted off when he realized who was at the table, stopping yards away from them.

George rose. “Um…hello, Warrington.” he said, thinking that this fellow didn’t much resemble the idiot he remembered from school. He’d definitely grown up and had taken care of himself. “Won’t you join us for tea?” he offered in a formal manner.

“Actually, I’m really busy, and I…” he started but Lucius interrupted him.

“Nonsense, Warrington. You have time.” he said, nibbling on the cookie. “You know as well as I did that you set a stasis spell over your potions before you left the potions room.”

“Yeah… Yeah, I guess I did.” he admitted reluctantly.

“Come then, and have a seat. Don’t be rude.” Lucius scowled at him. Jerrod trudged to the table and took a seat beside Lucius, leaving a chair between him and the twins. He looked tired and his hands were as stained as any potions masters were typically; he’d clearly been working on something.

“You’re Alyssa’s father?” George asked.
Jerrod grunted softly with laughter. “Me? No. No, you are. Your genes were dominant in her creation. Mine… well, they were used but only because of who and what my mother was.” he said, slipping his hands off the table and into his lap. Lucius gestured and the teapot filled his cup, sugar cubes dancing about the edge of the sugar bowl before leaping into his tea with a plop.

“Why? I mean, why you and me? That doesn’t make any sense.”

Warrington looked at George with a faint grin. “And you were always so sharp in classes.” he teased lightly. “They didn’t really want your seed, but no matter what Pansy did she couldn’t get Ron’s…”

“Why would they want Ron’s over anyone else’s?”

“He was part of Harry’s circle of friends. Who better to put as support for the circle than one of the ones who helped bring the Dark Lord down?”

“Oh.” George frowned.

“So why use just Ron? Why not Hermione? She was one of Harry’s good friends too and supported him just as much as our baby brother did…” Fred asked.

“Simple. She’s a mud blood. Can’t get anything useful out of a mud blood.” he shrugged. “And since they couldn’t get Ron, they figured that any Weasley would do.” he added with a smirk.

“What the hell’s that supposed to mean?” Fred scowled.

“ANYWAY…” Warrington spoke over the objection. “They wanted me because of what my mother had to offer. You see, my mum was a siren.”

“Just because she had siren in her doesn’t mean it will breed true.” George said, disgruntled now.

“My mother didn’t ‘have siren in her’; she is a siren.” he corrected, eyeing the twin who’s genes had contributed to his daughter’s existence. “I take it you haven’t met her yet.”

“NO, not yet. Is that supposed to make some sort of difference?”

“She wasn’t made by just slapping our DNA together and hoping something they wanted came out of it all. She was created. She was designed. She was engineered to be exactly what they desired.”

George scowled. “You’re saying they designed her like a potion? Trial and error?”

“Exactly.” he agreed.

“What happened to the ‘error’ children?” George asked pointedly. He wanted to know if there were more children out there.

He pulled his eyes away, staring at his cup. “They were… they died.” he said bluntly.

“How many of them?” George asked quietly.

“And how did they die? Were they just not born alive?” Fred asked probeingly.

Warrington looked really uncomfortable, eyes on his hands. He knew exactly how each of those children had died but he didn’t want to have to tell the story to anyone but Lucius and that damned interrogator from the Ministry. “There were two before Alyssa was born.” he answered. “And… and they were born alive.”
“What killed them?”

“Not what. Who.” Lucius corrected, getting a glance from the twins who then returned their gaze back to Warrington.

“All right; who killed them?”

“Malcolm Parkinson. He wasn’t trying to kill them, just trying to test to see if the siren bred true…” he began.

“What did he do?”

“He fed them a potion made from dragon’s blood and dragon root.” he answered in quiet voice. He really had no idea when he’d brewed that potion for Malcolm that it would be fed to babies.

“What?! That’s insane! No one could drink that and live even if they were adult!” Fred scowled at him.

“Not true; sirens can withstand it.” he said softly. “Alyssa is half siren, that is the only way she was able to survive taking the potion.” he picked up his tea and gulped it; he was immediately sorry as the hot liquid burned his tongue. Wincing, he went on. “Just listen to her voice when you meet her; you won’t have any doubt.”

“You seem awfully proud of her…” Fred began.

“…for someone who doesn’t want her.” George finished, eyeing him. “Why don’t you want to claim her? She’s your kid too.”

“She was never meant to be mine.” he said, shrugging and not raising his eyes. “What would a loser like me do with a little thing like her?”

“I don’t care how ‘special’ or ‘engineered’ she is, damn it, a kid needs parents.” George scowled at him.; “And you’re as much her father as I am!”

“I know that, but…” he sighed. “You don’t understand…” he glanced at Lucius as if asking for help but saw nothing there that would give him any assistance at all. Lucius simply gazed back at him with a slightly inquisitive look. He dropped his eyes again. “She was never meant to be mine. She was never meant to have fathers. She’s only had me in her life as a servant and a teacher.”

“Serving and teaching is part of parenting.” Fred commented.

“I wouldn’t have any idea how to be a dad to her. She’s…”

“Nobody knows how to be a father until fatherhood is thrust upon them” George countered.

“And she doesn’t like me anyway, not really.” he said. “I’ll help support her as much as I can, but I don’t give myself much hope for good earning potential…”

“We don’t need financial help. She needs to know her family. You’re only a year younger than us, didn’t you ever get married? Didn’t you ever have a family?” Fred asked.

“Did you?” he countered challengingly, throwing the question right back at them.

“We were building our business…”

“And I was tending to business of my own.” he answered, refusing to allow them to ruffle him. “She
just deserves better than me…” he said, eyes drawn to the door.

A nanny in a crisp black dress with a white apron came to the door, holding the hand of little girl. It was Alyssa, and she looked like a perfect little pale porcelain doll, her hair in ribbons and curls, her face sweet and unblemished, dressed in pink satin, clutching a toy of some awful green tones in her arm as she gazed at them with wide eyes.

“Look at her Fred.” George whispered.

“She’s beautiful, George.” he answered.

Alyssa half-hid behind the nanny, but the woman continued to lead her over to join them at the table. She pulled her hand free a few feet away and stood staring at them, rubbing one eye sleepily.

“What in heaven’s name is that thing she’s holding?” George asked.

“It’s her ‘Thulu.”

“What’s a “thulu”…?”

“Chthulu,” Warrington clarified. “You know; H.P. Lovecraft’s novel? He was the High Priest of the invading godlike armies.”

“I don’t read much muggle writing…” George answered.


“Yeah. Weird, but cool.” George agreed.

“Warrington gave it to her when she was an infant, and she refuses to sleep without it.” Lucius put in, ignoring the glance from his bondservant, whose expression was begging to be left out of it.

“Yeah? Well, it’s good to know what she needs to sleep with.” George said, starting to rise.

Lucius rose as well as Alyssa reached the gazebo. “Ah, there you are Alyssa. Come; we have a seat saved for you. There is someone here you need to meet.” Lucius waited as the nanny gently got prompted her to moving up the steps and to the last open chair. The others rose as the girl sat down, then gazed at them with sleepy and unsure eyes. “This is Alyssa. Alyssa, this is George Weasley. This man is your father.”

She turned her eyes to George, looking at him a long moment. “Are you sure he’s my father, Lord Father Malfoy?” George found that he had no doubts at all about Jerrod’s claims right now, the little girl had a very musical and charming voice, soft and lilting.

“Absolutely certain, my dear.” he said firmly.

“I am.” George agreed. “And this here is your Uncle Fred, and that runt over there by Harry and Draco is your Uncle Ron.”

“I can hear you, George.” Ron said sourly, but George ignored him.

She gazed at Fred, then back at George. “You’re twins.” she said, her stuffed toy held close to her. “Erik and Erin are twins too.”

“Erik and Erin? Are they your friends?”
“Yes, sir.” she answered. “They’re the guardians. Erin is my friend, but Alerick is my best friend.”

“Friends are good to have.” George smiled. “Fred there is my best friend.”

She smiled ever so faintly, then looked down, her expression distinctly unhappy. “Why do you have to be my daddy?” she asked softly.

“I don’t have to be, little one. I AM your daddy.”

“But I don’t want you to be. I want them to be.” she said, looking over at Harry and Draco.

“Why?”

“You’ll take me away from them… I couldn’t bear it if I got taken away again…” she murmured softly.

“You don’t have to leave here, you know. Mr. Malfoy needs you to stay with the others for now.”

She looked up at George again, eyes shining. “Really…? I get to stay…?” she asked hopefully.

“Well, for now, yeah.”

She smiled and gave him an upper-body formal bow. “Thank you, Lord Father Weasley…” she said, her voice holding even more musicality now that she was pleased.

“I would still like to spend some time with you, Alyssa.” George smiled.

“Will you be my new teacher?” she asked him, looking quite a bit happier than he had so far.

“They’re not giving us any classes or lessons here. Master Warrington isn’t even teaching any of us anymore…”

“I’m too busy, child.” he said softly.

“Lessons? But you’re just a little girl. What lessons could you have to be taking?”

“Well, herbs and plants, wand work and spells, reciting and chants, and deportment and manners and how to talk and how to use my powers…”

“But… but you’re what, four?” George looked dumbfounded. “You should be playing and enjoying being a kid. You’ve plenty of time for school.”

She hugged her toy close, looking crestfallen. “I like school, sir. I’ll be five in January I’m not a little baby.”

“Well. I’ll talk to Mr. Malfoy about it. I’m sure we can work something out.”

“We all miss our classes, Lord Father Weasley. The Dark Prince; I mean Mallek; he’s supposed to start classes too he’s big enough now.”

“Dark Prince?” George looked sharply over at Lucius.

He wasn’t ruffled at all. “I told you they were different.”

“Can I go now?” Jerrod asked quietly.

“No. You will stay put.” Lucius answered coolly. Warrington sighed and slumped in his seat.
“That’s quite an unusual friend you have there, Alyssa.” George grinned. “I don’t think I’ve ever seen anything quite like it.”

She hugged the plush toy. “He keeps me safe. If I lose him I always have really bad, horrible dreams.” she said, then she turned the creature about and let George have a really good look at him. The stuffed toy was even more ominous on close inspection; there was nothing cute or fuzzy about the beast. It looked threatening, with batlike wings sprouting from the middle of its back and eyes of red. There was one feature on the beast that it was obvious Alyssa must have added; there were red bows tied upon the tips of each of the wings, and one on one of the tentacles.

“Well, if I was a bad dream, I wouldn’t dare come around him.” George grinned.

She giggled softly at him. “He’s strong and he eats bad dreams.” she said, reaching for a cookie.

“Does he have a girlfriend? I have bad dreams sometimes and I could use something like him to keep them away…”

She laughed, the sound charming and sweet. “No, that’s silly too. He’s just mine. But…” her mirth faded and she got really serious. “But maybe if you needed to really bad you could borrow him and he would eat up those bad dreams…” she offered in a soft voice.

“That’s sweet, Alyssa.” George smiled, quite happy with the offer. Indoctrination or not, this child was giving her most treasured possession to help someone else. Nothing dark there! “I think he needs to stay with you.”

She nibbled at the cookie, smiling at him, leaning over to rest against Warrington’s arm. He looked a little stiff and nervous, clearly having no idea whatsoever what to do or even how to react.

“She ain’t gonna bite you, Jerrod.” George smirked at his reaction, and Alyssa giggled softly.

“I know that. She hasn’t bit anyone since she was a year old.” he answered with a smirk.

“So why are you so nervous around her?”

“It’s cause they have me practice on him.” the little girl answered for him, not relenting or giving him any space.

“Practice? Practice what?”

“Attraction and enthrallment spells.” she said with a purely innocent little smile. Jerrod simply turned a bit red.

“Enthrallment?”

“Uh-huh.” she nodded. “They said he was hard to put spells on but I could do it anyway when I learned the right words.”

Lucius smirked, gazing at Warrington. “Interesting that you never mentioned that bit.”

“It’s not something I care to advertise to the world, Master Lucius; I’m not too thrilled that a four year old can put me under her power.” he grumbled.

Malfoy half-chuckled at that comment. “No, I guess you wouldn’t want that made too public.”

George studied the little girl a few moments, silent. Able to enthrall a full grown half siren at age four…? This girl was going to be a lot more powerful than he thought even Parkinson had planned
for! The angelic little girl just cuddled close to Jerrod and nibbled her cookie, looking every inch innocent and harmless.

Warrington found himself looking at George and not liking the expression on his face. “Alyssa?” he said softly. “Go and find the others, will you? I think Mr. Weasley and I have to have a grown-up chat.”

“Can I take my cookie?”

“Yes. Go on. Fetch your nanny and find the others.” he told her gently.

She gave him a hug, then slipped down and moved to George, giving him a perfectly executed formal bow. “It was nice to meet you, Lord Father Weasley, and you Lord Uncle Weasley.” she said, giving Fred the same bow.

“Nice to meet you too, Alyssa.” they answered and the girl moved off.

Warrington watched her go. “If you’re thinking you’re going to take away her powers, you need to stop thinking it.”

George looked at him, frowning. “What? I thought you didn’t want any part of parenting her. That isn’t your decision if you aren’t her parent.”

“You aren’t taking her powers from her.” he repeated stubbornly.

“You’re mad, Warrington.” George scowled. “That girl can put you under her power and you’re half-siren. What’s to keep her from doing it to every person she sees?”

“…or everyone who might disagree with her?” Fred added, his scowl matching his twin’s.

“Maybe she can, but if you’re going to be making decisions about sirens you better find out more about their physiology.” Jerrod scowled right back at them. “If you block her powers like any normal wizard you’ll kill her!”

“What are you talking about?”

“She’s not your average human witch!” he growled softly at him. “I won’t let you or anyone else kill her by trying to block her powers.”

“I don’t want to KILL the girl, just stop her from manipulating people!” George growled back.

“Her ability to do that is not just a power. It’s part of her. Blocking it…” he scowled, pushing his chair back and rising. “Go read a damned book about sirens and find out what the hell you’re about to do to her before you try anything.” he said, turning away.

George rose as well, scowling. “You just wait one damned minute!”

“Enough!” Lucius interrupted them both. “I told you, Mr. Weasley, we’re working on modifying their capabilities; yes, WITHOUT harming them Warrington. Severus Snape has been studying the children and as we speak he is working with one of the children to determine the extent of their bonds.”

“Yeah, yeah, I know. Alyssa don’t like him either.” Warrington grumbled, refusing to turn back to the table.

“She doesn’t have to like him.” Lucius shrugged. “But he and I have both been working with the
“Can we help?” Fred asked quietly, and both Lucius and George looked at him with surprise.

“I can tell Severus you have offered your assistance, Mr. Weasley.” Lucius gave him a smile.

“Just keep clear of me.” Jerrod grumbled.

“That won’t happen, unfortunately. Like it or not, Warrington, we have a kid. And she needs us both no matter what you say.” George said, still angry.

“…so the baby is you?” Ron said softly, gazing at the baby. He’d asked to seen the others and Harry and Draco had escorted him inside. Draco, unable to resist the charm of the cheerful yet demanding little tyke, had moved to a chair and sat near where the children were playing; Mallek immediately moved to be beside him, beaming up at the blonde man.

“Yes and no…” Harry said, unsure of how to explain it all.

“But if he was made like the others but with only your genes, Harry, he’s you.” Ron said reasonably.

“Your powers, your basic needs… you know the Ministry is going to have a field day with him. And they’ll never let you keep him.”

“I know.” Harry sighed. “I want to have his future secured before anything gets out.” He watched as Mallek would point at a toy and one of the twins would fetch that toy and bring it and Mallek would offer that toy to Draco, who would try to show the baby how to play with it.

“Is the boy the same? The blonde that Snape took out of here?”

“Yes, he’s Draco all over again. Quite the little charmer too.” Harry said with a soft grin.

“What are you doing with him?”

“There’s nothing to do. He’s Lucius’ son. Plain and simple.” Harry’s smile grew, and Ron’s smile grew to match.

“Brilliant; no worries there, then.” he said. “Just that little dark-haired one.”

“Yes; Mallek. Severus is here, I was thinking of asking him.” He admitted.

“Severus with a baby?” Ron looked rather worried.

Harry had to laugh. “You never saw him with Teddy. He’s not so bad, really, once you get past all the sneers and snide comments…”

“Never could get past all of that…” Ron admitted with a grin.
Alerick moved into the room, glancing about him with more than a little trepidation. “What... what is it that I am to do, Lord Master Snape?” he asked, his voice betraying his nervousness. He didn’t like this room, it reminded him of the room where he was tested. It had only one chair and a bed in it, the rest of the room had been cleared of any content.

“Nothing, Alerick. And please do stop calling me Lord Master anything. If you must call me something respectful, call me Mr. Snape. All right?” he suggested.

“As you wish, Lord Snape… I mean, Mr. Snape…” he murmured softly.

“Sit down, Alerick, I don’t care where.” Severus said, moving to open the drapes on the window to let in the natural light.

The boy hesitated, then moved to the chair beside the wall and took a seat, his nervousness growing. Snape did his best to project total calm and lack of concern; he could almost feel the fear rolling off the child in waves as it disrupted the normal flow of his powers. He allowed the child to settle in his seat and not paying any attention to him. He turned toward the boy finally. “All right, we will begin.”

“Doing what, sir?”

“I want you to do one thing and one thing only; focus on being open.” he answered, drawing his wand. “I am going to perform a spell called Legilimency upon you. Do you know what that is, Alerick?”

He frowned at the question. “Yes, sir, Mister Snape… it means you’re going to try to open my mind and get things out of it. Why do you need to do this sir?”

“I need to examine your bond. I wish to understand it completely so that we can see what can be done to ensure the safety of all five of you in the future.” Snape answered with complete honesty. “There should be no pain to you. Simply relax.” he instructed.

“I will try, sir.” Alerick said quietly, gazing up at him.

Severus determined there was no use in delaying, so he proceeded with the spell. “Legilimens.” he spoke the spell firmly.

Nearly ten minutes passed and Snape was growing frustrated; this child had was a natural Legilimens himself; he was blocking the wizard’s experienced attempts to break through with no conscious effort.

Alerick shifted uncomfortably in his seat, feeling something welling up inside him. “Master Snape, please, I… I don’t want to do anymore, I’m tired…” he murmured.

“Patience, child.” Severus said firmly, continuing to press his Leglimency spell further and to wend his way past the natural defenses into the mind of this child. He was so close to breaking through...
A wave of pure power blasted outward from the room that Severus had taken Alerick into like a pulse of panic and uncontrolled fear. Harry’s first impulse was to look at Draco who looked stunned but unharmed; he instantly lit out toward the door with Ron close behind him. By the time Draco got to his feet, Mallek was babbling angrily, halfway across the room and Lucius and the twins had burst into the room as well. The children in the playroom, with the exception of Mallek and his little guardians, were crying. Erik beat Draco to the room; he and his twin were there just moments after Harry.

Harry found Alerick curled up in the corner, whimpering softly; Severus Snape lay beside the opposite wall, crumpled where he had fallen. There was a clear impact mark where he had been smashed into the wall, both head and body impacting hard upon it, and his robes were clearly smoking as he attempted to push himself to his elbows. The drapes were smoking and the window panes completely smashed out, and there were splinters in the center of the room as well as the remnants of a chair’s cushion.

A quick glance at each other and each of the men who arrived first knew exactly who to go tend to. “Severus! What happened?” Harry asked as he rushed to his side while Ron ran over to Alerick.

“I… triggered his… defenses.” the dark haired wizard’s left side of his face was beginning to blister and he was in clear pain though he fought to show nothing.

Ron knelt beside the boy in the corner, attempted to get Alerick to talk; the boy absolutely refused to even respond to him and curled up tighter.

“Leave him ALONE!!” Erik snarled, the power flaring into his hands in a heartbeat as he lunged toward Ron.

“NO!” Draco cried as he watched in horror. Erik, slight as he was, lunged into Ron and the power in his hands blasted both of them apart. Ron instinctively sheltered Alerick from any of the damage from the attack, and he was thrust head-first into a wall and thrown off sideways. Erik was thrown into the other wall but was back on his feet in moments and positioned himself to guard over Alerick. Draco found himself with his back against the wall where he had fallen to a seat, stunned by the power of that attack. Lucius and the older Weasley brothers burst in to assist.

“What the bloody hell?!“ George murmured.

“Help now, wonder later!” Lucius snapped, pausing by Draco.

“I’m fine father. Help them…” he insisted immediately.

“Come on Draco, you don’t need to be in here.” Fred said, offering Draco his hand. Draco took it gratefully, feeling pain lance through him as he got to his feet. He did not argue with the insistence that he leave the room though he cast a worried look behind him as he was led out.

George’s first impulse was to go help Ron, but Lucius caught his arm. “I will tend to Erik, you go tend to Severus and check Harry.” he ordered, locking eyes with Erik. The boy was in pure defense mode at that moment, his hands still glowing, Ron slowly stirring on the floor in front of him. Once again his face was completely devoid of emotion, his hands glowing.

“Erik! Erik stop this immediately, there is no danger to Alerick here!” Lucius snapped in his most commanding tone. The boy blinked which let Lucius know he had penetrated the boy’s mind, but he showed no other reaction nor compliance. “Erik, you must let us tend to Alerick, he is injured and we must have him tended to!”
Eric seemed to snap out of a trance, looking a little confused as the power faded from his hands. “He… he’s injured…?” he murmured.

“Yes, now step aside!” Lucius ordered, moving forward. Eric gazed up at him, then stepped back against the wall.

Alerick was trembling, curled up against the corner, head bowed.

“Easy now, Alerick… its all over now. Are you hurt, son?” Lucius asked softly, kneeling beside the boy, touching his back.

“Go away. I don’t to hurt you Lord Father, I didn’t mean to do it I don’t know what…” he whimpered, flinching away.

“You won’t hurt me, son. I just want to make sure that you’re not harmed…” he said soothingly, resting his hand on the child’s back gently. “Come, now, come out of the corner and let us have a look at you.”

He raised his head, gazing at him, trembling. He had a small mark on his cheek and looked horribly pale. “I… I don’t know if I’m hurt, I…” he lifted his hands that were starting to turn red and angry as if they were burned, then looked toward Snape. “I hurt that man, Mister Snape… I fell down, and… and I hurt him…”

“We will take care of him; you have nothing to worry about. Let’s get you all patched up.” Lucius maintained a gentle tone. Alerick responded obediently, coming slowly to his feet.

“You okay Ron?” George asked, helping his brother to sit up.

“I’ll live…” he murmured, wiping at his forehead, his hand coming away bloody.

“You’re bleeding, Ronnikins.” George said, concerned.

“I thought there was something to that red stuff… Thanks for pointing out the obvious, Forge.” he said, saying the name wrong on purpose.

Harry had moved Severus up onto the bed with a levitation spell and was shocked to see how many burns the man had over the front of his body. He had heard Ron’s statements and couldn’t help but smirk. “Typical Gryffindor… Get my bag, Potter. It’s on the windowsill, I had it shielded. Give the boy a healing potion and that fool friend of yours one as well…” his voice was a shaken whisper.

“You need one too.” Harry said, scowling.

“Must I get the bloody things myself?” he asked, grimacing in pain as he started to rise on his own.

“Don’t be daft, lay back down!” Harry snapped, rising from the bedside. Snape subsided on the bed, quite content to simply lay back and be still.

“I really didn’t mean to do it, Lord Father…” Alerick whispered softly, gazing at his hands. “I… I think I hurt my hands… and my arm…” he gazed at Lucius, who is kneeling beside him now.

“It won’t hurt for long.” Lucius said comfortingly, calling for a house elf to bring his bag to tend the child’s injuries.

Harry looked over to see Fred moving back in with Mallek in his arms, the child highly agitated and
worried. Mallek pointed at Alerick and said firmly “Mine!”

“Yours, is he? All right, let’s get you over there so you can help take care of him, all right?” Fred said, moving over to join Lucius.

The toddler watched as Lucius spread a cream onto the boy’s hands, his face very worried. Alerick gazed up at him. “It really doesn’t hurt that much, my prince…” he said, trying to make the boy feel less worried about him.

Mallek scowled angrily over at Severus Snape. “BAD man!” Mallek said angrily.

“Your little follower is the one that attacked, not I.” Severus said as Harry returned to him with the bag.

Harry opened the bag and frowned. “You only have two bottles.”

“I didn’t plan on your friend getting in the middle of an assault; I told you; give it to them…”

“Give Snape his potion. Alerick will be fine.” Lucius corrected. “I have a healing potion here, you take your own, Severus!” he directed. Severus finally acquiesced, accepting the bottle but not until after Harry had moved off to give the potion to Ron. His hand shook slightly as he drank down the potion.

Alerick took the healing potion as Lucius instructed, then gazed a the older wizard, his bright blue eyes shadowed with fear and worry. “I don’t want to do that anymore, Lord Father Malfoy, please… I won’t have to, will I?” he asked softly.

“I don’t know, son. I will see if there is any other way to do what must be done.” he said, stroking the boy’s cheek with a soft touch.

“It scares me; I don’t want to…”

“Mine!” Mallek said again, squirming to be put down and Fred acquiesced, setting the toddler down on his feet. He hurried over to Alerick, who fell to his knees to hug him tight. Mallek stroked Alerick’s hair and the older boy buried his face in the toddler’s chest, who glared back over at Snape once more. “Bad man. Bad!”

“I think we need to have a change of scenery.” Lucius said, rising. “Come, Mallek, Alerick. I’m sure Draco would love to read a story to you two while we sort all of this out…”

“Nonno!” Angel ran through the door, worried and breathless. “Daddy, hurry! Papa says his tummy is hurting really, really bad and I can’t help him…! Please hurry!”

Harry was on his way to the door before she even finished her sentence, his heart in his throat. Draco had gone into labor.
Yours, Mine and Ours

Draco panted heavily, his brow coated with sweat and more pale than normal as he wrapped his arms about his constricting stomach. This pain had started just after the attack on Severus by Alerick, but it had intensified when Erik had gone after Ron; now he felt he would rather die than go through any more of this. Fred had gotten him to a chair then gone to see if he could intercept Mallek, not realizing that Draco was in trouble.

When he opened his eyes Angel was standing in front of him, her face a mask of fear and worry. “Papa…? Papa something bad happened, I felt it and… oh Papa you’re hurting….!” her worry grew, fear fading slightly as concern touched her delicate little features, touching him with a gentle little hand.

He gave her a weak little smile. “I’m hurting, love, but I think its just because your brother is wanting to come out and meet you and his daddy…” he said softly, doing his best to try to keep the pain out of his voice. “I need daddy, Angel… he’s in there, with Uncle Ron and my father, go get him, all right…?”

She looked worriedly at him, wrapping her arms about him for a moment. “I can’t leave you hurting this bad…” she whispered, closing her eyes.

Draco breathed a little easier as a wave of relief swept over him. “All right love… I’ll be fine for just a moment or two, I need you to go…”

“You is not leaving Master Draco with bein’ alone.” a high-pitched squeaky voice piped up to their right; they both looked to see Tootles, her bat-like ears trembling and eyes wider than saucers with concern as she moved forward to place one long-fingered hand upon Draco’s arm. “Nothing to worry for, Missy Angel…”

“All right, I’ll be right back!” Angel assured as she gave the house elf she had learned not only to trust but to love a very warm smile. She gave Draco a swift kiss on the head, then ran off.

Draco closed his eyes as another wave of pain washed over him; something was wrong. Something was horribly wrong, it was supposed to hurt but this was too much! He must have been hurt somehow when that first blast had ripped through the room. When he mastered the pain enough to straighten slightly and look around he realized with a start that he was no longer in Malfoy Manor. “What…? Tootles what did you do…?” he whispered, voice shaky. He knew exactly where they were; he and his chair now sat in the waiting room of the maternity ward in St. Mungo’s hospital.

The house elf stood straighter, clearly proud of herself and what she had done. “Master Malfoy needs hospital so Tootles bring you!” she said firmly, looking about. “Help Master NOW!” she squeaked at the witch at the counter.

The woman was on her feet in a moment and she hurried over to him, eyes worried. “Mr. Malfoy…! What’s happened? Are you all right?” she asked worriedly.

“No, Evalie, I’m not all right, something… I don’t know, something is wrong…” Draco said, allowing his fear to finally show. If he lost little James he’d lose his mind.
“What happened?”

“I’m in pain…” he murmured, not wanting to tell them that he was around such a powerful attack as he had felt, much less about the second one he had actually been in the room for…

“I can see that… Mark! Trudy! Hurry and bring a chair, notify Mediwizard Kilpatrick immediately!” Evalie ordered, her voice sending three people scrambling.

“Toodles fetch mediwizard!” the house elf offered.

“He will be here in just a few minutes, thank you.”

“Fetch Harry for me, Tootles… I need Harry…” Draco requested as he gave himself up to the handling of the nurses, who were lifting him magically to transfer him into a chair with wheels for easy transportation to a private room. Draco tried to relax once he heard the distinctive sound of the elf vanishing without another word.

“Easy, sir… you need to just try to relax…” someone murmured to his right; Draco found it all seemed easier if he just kept his eyes closed.

“I’m trying… I swear, it feels like… like something is torn…” he whispered. For a moment, the pain seemed to be fading, he could breathe again.

Harry rushed into the room, following little Angel but she stopped, looking confused. “Daddy I left him right here he sat down in the chair and he said his tummy was hurting really bad and he told me to come and find you…” Angel whispered worriedly. “Daddy, Papa was hurting so much he couldn’t have gone anywhere…”

“We’ll find him love, don’t worry…” he said, though panic began to well up in him. Where would Draco have gone?! He’d have to recruit the house elves to find him faster…

“But I didn’t leave him alone, I left him with Tootles, and he…”

“You left him with Tootles?” Harry’s eyes snapped back to meet those of his daughter’s.

She nodded solemnly with frightened eyes. “Yes, daddy…”

“You’re absolutely brilliant!” Harry gave her a reassuring hug and kissed her quickly on the brow. “Its going to be just fine, love; I’m sure she’s taken him to the hospital. I should…”

“Harry Potter, you are being coming along Master Draco be needing you!” Tootles suddenly appeared beside the two, making them both jump with her sudden appearance.

“Tootles! Yes, take me but we need to get his bag before we go…”

“Tootles get it, you go NOW!” she insisted, seizing his hand and the two of them vanished.

Draco felt utterly and totally alone; the pain stretched out into one long red-tinged blur and time
slowed down to an abysmally slow crawl. The medi-wizard arrived but the relief that he had believed the physician would bring him never came. Infuriatingly, the man just started asking him questions but Draco didn’t answer anything; he just kept asking for Harry over and over. He was all alone; everything was going to hell and he was going to die all alone, and his son, their son… they’d both die. He should never have gone into that room, the second wave of power had done something horrible to him, and even worse; it had done something to little James.

“Get him in here immediately!” he heard Dr. Kilpatrick snap at someone and someone hurried out of the room. A few minutes later the door opened and Draco heard the most wonderful sound he had ever heard in his entire life. “Dray… I’m here baby…” Harry said, and he was touching his hand, he was kissing his brow…

A tear rolled from Draco’s eye as he gazed up at him. Even his vision seemed tinged with red but he gazed up at him. “Harry, I thought you’d never get here… it hurts, it really hurts…”

“I know love…” he murmured softly.

“I need to know what happened… this isn’t normal labor. He wasn’t due for another five weeks.” Mediwizard Kilpatrick said firmly.

“He was exposed to an accidental release of magic by a child.” Harry answered.

“Accidental release…?”

“Yes; Severus Snape can confirm what happened, as can his father… what do you mean this isn’t normal labor?” Harry asked, his heart skipping a beat.

“I can give you a few minutes, Mr. Potter, but we have to get him to surgery immediately. The baby has to come out, that is without a doubt, but the scans I was able to do show there is something else wrong. Two minutes, that’s all I can spare.”

“Two minutes…?” Harry held Draco’s hand tight in his, gazing down at the blood-drained, pinched face of his lover. Two minutes was all he had… he was sure he wouldn’t be allowed into surgery if it was more than a simple delivery. He stroked Draco’s cheek, his hand trembling ever so slightly. “Draco Malfoy-Potter, how can I possibly tell you how much you mean to me?” he whispered.

“Two minutes isn’t enough. Two lifetimes isn’t enough… don’t you dare leave me, Dragon… you’re strong, you can get through this…”

“I’ll always love you, my Harry.” he murmured softly, his eyes reddened and moist with tears.

Lucius strode into the waiting room with Narcissa close at his side and Angel in his arms, Severus Snape trailing along afterward with a definite limp. Behind Severus came Ron and Rosie as well as his brothers. Harry stood at the window, staring out sightlessly.

“Harry? Where is Draco? What’s happening?” Lucius all but demanded.

“They took him off to surgery.” Harry said softly, not turning round.

“Surgery…?”

“Oh Merlin…” Narcissa whispered. She knew something had to be terribly wrong if Harry wasn’t in
the room with Draco. She’d spent several hours discussing with her son exactly what their plans were for the birth; they had gotten clearance for Harry to be present with Draco when the baby was born.

“But daddy you’re supposed to be with him…” Angel said worriedly.

“I can’t be, Angel. The Mediwizard told me to wait here and they took him away… I don’t know what’s happening, no one has told me anything.”

Ron moved up to Harry, putting a supportive hand on his shoulder. “He’s strong, mate. You’ll get to see your son soon, and the Ferret as well.” he said firmly. “

“He should not have been anywhere near that room… I should have paid more attention to where he was.” Severus said as he sank into a chair. He was deathly pale and had clear burns upon his face and hands, but clearly intended to be nowhere else.

“You were a little busy, Severus.” Lucius pointed out, though deeply worried about his son.

“Did they tell you anything at all?” Narcissa asked softly.

“The scans that Mediwizard Kilpatrick did before I arrived showed him that something was wrong, but he did not go into any more detail than that. I don’t know. I don’t know anything…” he whispered, bowing his head.

“Come on, mate. You need to sit while you wait… it’ll be all right, and Draco’s gonna need you ready to be at his side when he comes out, right…?” Ron urged him, gently nudging him.

Harry numbly allowed himself to be turned from the window and guided to a seat.

“I’ll get you something to drink.” George said, rising and going out of the room. He came back with enough tea for everyone to have at least two cups, and they all settled in to wait. Angel slipped from Lucius’ arms and moved to Harry, crawling into his lap; he set his hot tea aside and cradled the girl close in his arms.

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Harry’s eyes raised when he saw someone enter the room; it was Mediwizard Kilpatrick and he looked very grim. “He needs you, Harry.” he said quietly. He was instantly on his feet, following the doctor. He was led to a private room that was semi-darkened. Draco lay upon the bed, deathly pale, he seemed almost shrunked, childlike as he lay in that bed with sunken eyes, blanket pulled up over his stomach, arms laying at his sides.

“We’re losing him… we’ve tried everything but he’s fading quickly, Mr. Potter.” Kilpatrick told Harry quietly. “Your son is being washed and readied to meet your family…”

“He can’t be dying.” Harry said softly, the shock so devastating that he didn’t even hear the news about his son. “You’re wrong. I… I need him, I need Draco…”

“Go to him. Be with him. Say your goodbyes while you can.” he suggested, moving out of the room.

Harry hurried to the bedside, scooping up his husband ‘s hand, kissing it. Draco’s eyes fluttered open at his touch and he smiled weakly at him. “I was hoping you’d get here in time…” even his voice sounded so weak, like it was fading away with the rest of him.
“Dray…? Oh Merlin, Dray, I can’t do all of this on my own, please… don’t leave me dragon, don’t leave me…” Harry whispered desperately, feeling his heart shattering. It was true; he was losing Draco.

“I’m so weak Harry… I’m so cold… I just… I can’t. I’ve done all I can baby…” he said, reaching a weak hand up to touch his husband’s cheek. “Our son needs you. Our daughters and sons all need you now more than ever… please Harry. You have to go on for them.”

Harry’s hand, trembling violently, reached to cover Draco’s, gazing into those pain-filled eyes for what would be the last time, tears streaming down his cheeks unheeded. “Go on without you…? How in the bloody hell do I do that?” he whispered. “I love you Dray…you’re everything to me, everything that I live for…”

“James needs you lover… they told me he’s all right; my magic shielded him and that’s how I got so hurt… we have a son, Harry. Our son… You have yours and I have mine, but only James is ours…”

“I’m not ready, I can’t do it all by myself Dragon. I need you…!”

“You’re ready… you’ve always been the strong one, Harry. I was the one leaning on you when things went bad. You’re a lot stronger than you think you are. Just remember me is all I ask. Tell our son about me.” his voice seemed weaker than ever, fading to little more than breathed words though he was trying to say more. “I will… love you… forever…” were the last words he managed to speak.

Medi-wizard Kilpatrick came to the door just in time to intercept Lucius, preventing him from coming into the room. Angel started to follow her father into the room but Lucius caught her hand and kept her with him.

Lucius scowled at the medi-wizard who stood between the room and everyone else, blocking the door bodily. “Just give him a few moments, please sir.” Kirkpatrick said softly.

“What in Merlin’s name is going on?” Lucius demanded, puffing up his chest and using every bit of his considerable influence to intimidate.

“The damage was simply too much.” Kirkpatrick answered quietly. “There’s nothing further we can do for him.”

Lucius paled instantly, eyes narrowing, not wanting to believe what he had just heard. “What…?”

“There’s nothing more we can do.” Kilpatrick repeated in a soft tone.

“No!” Narcissa whispered, her knees giving way. Severus, standing just behind her, was there to support her when she crumpled in shock. Her son…!

Angel stood gazing at the adults, trying to understand. Something bad had happened to her Papa, she knew that much but no one was saying anything and now her daddy was crying like before, like Mama Missy and Mimi had done when her mama died. Lucius’ hand that was holding hers went slack and she slipped from his side and past the doctor into the room.

Her daddy was seated in a chair beside the bed, her papa’s hand in his, weeping. Angel felt her heart sinking; it was all so horrible and so familiar. The only difference here was there was no smell of
burnt hair or flesh. Angel felt herself begin to tremble and tears roll down her cheeks, but she didn’t do what Nona had done. She could not... no, she WOULD not let this happen again...! Fighting the pain and loss that welled up inside her heart to try to numb and cripple her, Angel hurried forward around the bed and out of sight for only a moment. She pushed the doctor’s rolling stool up beside the bed as quietly as possible, climbing up on it.

“Angel...?” Lucius looked about, realizing he had lost his grip on the child, looking into the room to see the girl climb up onto the bed with Draco. “Angel!” he had given Harry enough time, he wanted... he had to say goodbye himself. He surged forward, pushing the now unresisting doctor aside and into the room. Harry was too wrapped up in his own grief and loss to notice anything; his husband was gone forever. Angel ignored Lucius and before he could get close she laid down beside Draco, touched her forehead to the side of Draco’s sweat-soaked hair, and suddenly went limp herself.

“What the bloody hell do you mean you don’t know what’s wrong with her?” Lucius demanded, his cheeks flushed with his anger. Angel, who had fallen still at Draco’s side, did not respond to any external stimulus at all.

“She’s gone into a coma, Mr. Malfoy; she’s not responding to anything we do. We can’t help her right now.” the doctor said, trying to be patient. “You have to understand that there are some things that we can’t...”

“Leave her alone. Get out...” Harry, who had not said a word at all since Angel had come into the room, finally spoke up. His voice was hoarse with pain and grief but he did not raise his head nor his eyes from his lover’s face and now his daughter’s beside him, so still and unmoving that she seemed to be as lifeless as he felt at this moment. “Get them all out of here Lucius. Just... get them all out. I don’t want any of them in here anymore.” The others in the room fell silent, looking over at them and they all became momentarily silent. Harry was silent for a few more moments then he spoke again, this time to the doctor. “You said you can’t help her. You can’t help him. Get the bloody hell out of here.” Harry murmured.

“You heard him. Go. Out.” Lucius added to Harry’s statement, his own grief needing a target to vent upon and the doctor was still so conveniently here in the room. He glared at him fiercely until the man nodded.

“I will go, but I will need to return and check on her...” he said quietly as he slipped out of the room, allowing the door to close quietly behind him on the room that now was as silent as a tomb.

Where in the world was he...? For a few moments Draco couldn’t seem to see anything, but it was far from dark where he was. He realized he was seeing after all; there was just nothing to focus on. Everything was white; and he stood in vast plain of billowing white fog. He was dressed in the style he was accustomed; wizards robes but of purest white silk. He ran his hands over his flat stomach, feeling grief well up in him. He would never get to know his son, nor share him with Harry. His eyes ached, trying to focus on something when nothing was there. He began to slowly walk, wanting to find something, to see something...
It felt like he had been wandering aimlessly for hours when he saw something; a shape coalescing out of the fog. It looked like part of his father’s sitting room; his father’s favorite chair done in white with a white snake upon its back, a fireplace with strange blue flames low over the coals, and a second chair just like his father’s but with a griffon emblazoned on its back.

Happy to see anything, Draco hurried forward to this small spot of sanity in this strange, featureless world. He stopped when he saw that the chair with the griffon on it was occupied.

The man in the chair looked as if he was expecting him, smiling at him as he approached.

“Well, if it isn’t Draco Malfoy… I do have to admit I didn’t expect to meet you.” he said in a kind voice.

Draco found himself staring at the man seated in the chair so relaxed. He looked to be in his twenties, with hazel eyes behind round framed glasses. His hair looked windswept and stuck up in the back, and the jet black of its color was startling against all the white around them. Draco couldn’t help but see Harry’s face in every line of this man’s face, his lips, all except his eyes. He blinked, finding his voice but unable to really put what he meant into coherent thought. “Are you…? I mean… “

He chuckled softly. “Am I James Potter? Yes, Draco. I am. I’ve been waiting here for quite some time for your father; I’m prepared to wait many more years as well.”

“So that means… I’m dead…?”

“Yes… and no.” The man gestured to the chair before him. “Have a seat, Draco. I’d like to talk to you a while.”

Draco didn’t hesitate; he moved to the chair and sank into it, staring at the man who looked so similar to his husband. “How do you know me?”

“How can I not know you? You look so much like my peacock, there’s no one else you could possibly be. And Lucius told me way back in school that he intended to name his first born son Draco. Some silly family tradition or something along those lines…”

“Peacock…?”

He chuckled once more; he seemed to have quite a jolly temperament. “Oh, yes. Your father was absolutely obsessed with fashion. If anything came into fashion you could be sure that Lucius was the first to have it, and the first to know of any sort of change coming down the line even before any of the girls did…”

“He still does, truthfully…” Draco admitted with a soft smile.

“I’d be disappointed if he’d changed that much.” James smiled.

“So you remember…? About father, about all of it…?”

“I do remember I was in love with your father. It was a strange time, Draco… wizards having children was not something generally approved of by the world in general; witches who got pregnant were sent off to a private school until after the baby was born. Marriages were still arranged, especially in pureblood families…”

“They still are by some, not that it did my father any good…” Draco said with a soft smirk.

“We’ll get to that.” James answered with a grin, making Draco feel a bit uncomfortable; did Harry’s
father disapprove of their bond? “Anyway; your father was betrothed to your mother when she was born, an agreement between the two heads of family. Lucius and Narcissa grew up together, and were very close all through their childhood. Everyone except them expected the two of them to get married.” James smiled at him. “But that was before we met.”

“Father’s told us a bit about that…” Draco said, hoping to hear more.

“Well, I’ll let him give you any details about that time… it is rather personal.” he said wistfully. “After it was no longer possible to hide the fact that I was pregnant, the teachers notified our fathers of the situation. My father, his father, and Narcissa’s father met to discuss what to do; from what I understand Abraxus told the others that he would ‘take care’ of the problem. I went home for spring break and was taken away then by Abraxus Malfoy to a villa up in the mountains, I couldn’t tell you where.” he looked a bit troubled.

“Did the baby live?” Draco asked.

“She was born. I didn’t see her but a moment or two before she was taken away. Even now those memories are really… distant. It’s hard to focus on them and get any of them to make sense, but she was born and she was healthy at birth… then she was gone. I have no idea what happened to her after that, but I want you to tell Lucius that his Kitty said that the baby was a girl, and that she had his blonde hair but my hazel eyes.”

“Kitty…?”

“Pet name. He called me Kitty. He can explain if he wants.” James said with a grin. “Now, to the subject of my son…”

“I love him, Mr. Potter.” Draco began.

“Please; I never did stand on formalities in any situation. Call me James. And I know you love him. You two aren’t just a married couple; you’re bound both heart and soul to one another.” James smiled reassuringly.

Draco felt himself relax; he had nothing to worry about at all. “You’re waiting here alone? Where is Lilly…?”

“She’s gone on. When she’s ready, she’ll discover her past life. I’m not ready to go on yet, I won’t go on without my Lucius.” he said with a smile.

“Oh. So, do we just sit here and wait for our loves to meet us?” Draco asked, prepared to do exactly that.

“I will. You, however, cannot.” James answered.

“What…? Why…?”

“You have to go back, Draco.” he said, leaning forward a bit to emphasize his point. “You stay here, and those five children that you rescued who bear the Dark Mark will be dead within the year at the hands of the Ministry. When that occurs I know my Lucius will be here with me much too soon, as he will attempt to take out the entire Ministry on his own.”

“But how can I change the future for them?” Draco asked worriedly.

“You must remind Harry that little Mallek is his CLONE. That means that not only does Mallek possess his magical power, that power carries the exact same magical signature as Harry’s. You
don’t have to wait for Mallek to be old enough to understand how to alter the marks; HARRY CAN DO THAT HIMSELF.” he said.

“Harry can… Then Harry can control the children as well through the marks…”

“Yes, exactly; though I don’t think you could make him do that to them.”

Draco paused, remembering something that Harry had said, wishing that he could ask what his father desired. There was no better time to do that than right now. “James…? Can I ask you something…? Not for me, but for Harry.”

“Of course, ask anything.” he agreed, looking curious now.

“Mallek. Harry isn’t quite sure what to do with him. He’s considered giving him to Severus, but…”

“Please, tell me he isn’t serious about that…! Do NOT give that child to Snivelus!” he said with the first negative attitude that Draco had seen, a sneer curling his handsome lip. “I really don’t care what kind of man he’s turned out to be; that man and I never did get along, even before I started dating Lilly. I’d hate to see what he would do to a child that looked like me.”

“Severus wouldn’t…” Draco began.

“Of course you’re going to defend him but I’m telling you. Don’t give him to THAT man.” James said firmly. “Give him to Lucius if you must find him a home. But do not give him to Snivelus.” he repeated, then the man came to his feet, extending a hand to Draco. “Come on, on your feet, son.”

Draco rose and without any hesitation, James pulled him into a warm hug. “Tell your dad that his Kitty is waiting for him but if he shows up too soon I won’t talk to him for at least a decade.” he said with a warning growl and chuckle.

The blonde wizard returned the hug, “Thank you; I will tell him…”

“Now go on; you’re to seek out the garden.” he instructed, letting him go reluctantly. “I can’t go with you; this is my place until your father comes. Go to the garden. You’ll find what you need to find there.”

“All right. Thank you, James.” Draco said with a bit of sadness. He was glad he had this chance to talk to Harry’s father, but wished he had more time to get to know the man. “Thank you for everything…”

“Nonsense. Go on; you should not have to wait long.” James said, stepping back from him. “And tell Harry for me that I’m proud of him. He’s everything that I hoped he would be and more.”

“I will.” Draco said, turning to go. He took a few steps away from the comfortable scene then looked back, finding that both James and his little ‘waiting room’ had faded away into nothingness.

Angel hesitated, frightened by her new surroundings. Everything was colorless, flat and featureless. There was nothing to see no matter how hard you looked, though it seemed that there was something there if you stared hard enough… it looked like an intensely heavy fog bank stood just out of arm’s reach. Where was she? Where was the hospital and… oh. Maybe she could find her papa here if she looked hard enough. Her daddy needed him and so did she.
“Papa…? Papa, are you here?” she called out. It wasn’t cold but she was shivering, her arms wrapped tight around herself. Her voice seemed to simply stop right where she was, hanging in the thick air as if it was even too foggy to allow sounds to pass through. Everything felt like it was wrapped in cotton. Angel began to walk slowly. The ground was firm and it didn’t make any sense that she would find her Papa if she just stood in one place. She knew he was here somewhere. She just had to find him… “Papa!” she called once more. “Papa, we need you!”

She saw a shape and hurried forward faster; the fog seemed to swirl and move away to show a garden of pure white. The tree trunks, leaves, flowers and grass were all of the purest white, and there were statues of angels and cherubs scattered here and there. She ignored all of the beauty, hurrying onward.

Finally she saw him; her papa was seated on a bench dressed in pristine white wizard’s robes, his hair gleaming and his face unblemished and showing none of the pain she had seen on his face back on the bed. “Papa!” she said, rushing to him, her face suffused with joy.

He looked at her, startled and surprised. “Angel! Angel, how…? How are you here?” Draco asked her in a soft voice.

She ran to throw her arms about him. “Papa, I’ve come for you, I’ve come to bring you back…”

“I need to come back, love, but I can’t. My body is tired and all worn out. I can’t live in it anymore…” he said, allowing the child to crawl into his lap and putting his arms about her.

“I can fix it papa; I know I can if you let me try.” she gazed at him pleadingly. “Daddy needs you and I don’t want to go back in those foster homes I can’t…”

“You will never go into foster care again, Angel. Your daddy loves you and your daddy wants to be with you…” Draco soothed, giving her a soft kiss on the top of her head and holding her tight. “You will always have a home with Harry and also with my father and mother…”

“Daddy is broken without you.” she whispered, not surprised to find that she was crying now. “Daddy needs you so much…”

“Broken…? What do you mean, broken…?” he asked her in a worried tone.

“I can see it, he’s all broken inside, he’s too sad and too hurt. Daddy is like Mama was… if you leave us forever he wont be able to do things right and they’ll take me away… I love Nonno and Nona but I want to be with you and daddy…” she said in a heartbreakingly sad tone, clinging tight to him. “Please papa… I need both of you…”

Draco held her close several long minutes but to little Angel it felt like an eternity; she wanted so bad to simply try to fix her family. “What can you do, little one, to make anything better?” he asked her.

“I can fix things. You saw me, Papa, with the flowers… let me fix you like that.” she said with the confidence of a child that she could achieve anything that she could envision.

Draco stroked her hair with a tender hand, gazing a long moment at the little girl who had brought so much joy to their lives. Angel must have been who James had talked about when he had said that someone would be along to fetch him and bring him back. “Yes, love. I want you to try. I need to come back.” he said.

She hugged him tight, her eyes bright with happiness and tears. “I can do it papa, I know I can!” she said happily, then she slipped down off his lap and hurried off with a purpose. She needed to find her way back, to get back and fix things… but how had she gotten here?
The little girl slowed down, looking around herself. The garden was gone now; faded away into the fog. Her papa was gone, she was alone again. How could she find her way, she didn't know where she was! Fear began to well up in her heart... she had to find her way back or they would both be lost...!

"This way." a soft, kind voice spoke. "Come along now." she turned her face to her right and saw a shape in the fog. She started toward it at a half-run; maybe he could help... As she neared she saw a man that looked like her daddy, but different somehow. He smiled with a very kind smile and reached a hand to take hers.

"Can you show me the way back?" she asked him, gazing up at the man who was her grandfather in life.

"I can. And you are right, my dear. You can help him. You can make it so that Draco can go back to Harry. Its not his time to be here, and not yours either. But then, you were always the one to leap headfirst into any kind of situation to save someone else, Lilly..." he said with a soft grin.

She gazed up at him and her smile grew. "They need each other." she answered. Lilly... that name was her name too, as much as Angel was her name, she knew that...

"I'll get you back, nothing to worry about." James assured with a smile.

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Narcissa had come round and now sat on the small love seat with her husband, leaning in his arms and softly weeping in her grief. Harry had yet to show anything outwardly, head bowed as he sat beside the bed, Draco’s hand within his, and he had not said a word.

Angel, who had been settled next to Draco, stirred. She opened her eyes and shifted slowly to her side, reaching out and placing one hand over Draco’s chest. She closed her eyes again.

Through his fog of grief and pain, Harry felt a stirring of something… a power he had never felt before. He opened his eyes, raising his head slightly. He gazed at Angel and Draco a moment before he noticed that Angel had moved. “Angel…?” he whispered, voice broken and barely above a whisper.

“Wake up papa.” Angel whispered softly. “Papa, wake up…” she focused all of her mind and spirit on her goal; bringing Draco back to her father.

“Angel, Papa is gone.” Harry murmured.

“I’ll get her, Harry.” Lucius said, feeling conflicting emotions. His little Angel was all right…! He rose and started over to the bedside.

“No Nonno… let me be here… I need to help. Papa wants to come back…” She got up on her knees and kissed Draco’s lips softly. “Come on Papa, wake up…”

Draco’s eyes fluttered then opened slightly. “Angel… you did it…” he whispered.

Narcissa gasped at his words, staring over at them with her trembling hand over her mouth. “Draco…!” Lucius stared at his son in shock and amazement. Harry’s eyes were riveted to Draco’s face.
He was still pale, but his eyes were open and a soft smile touched his lips as Angel hugged him tightly. Weakly, he raised one hand and patted her gently on the back. “Easy, love… its going to… be all right…” Draco murmured.

His husband’s movement snapped Harry out of his shocked immobility. “Draco…!” He whispered, fresh tears rolling down his cheeks, hardly daring to believe his eyes. He felt Draco’s hand move in his own, squeezing his hand gently. “They… they said you were gone…” he whispered.

“I had to come back, for you.” Draco smiled softly at him as Angel sat up, a bit wobbly. Lucius immediately scooped the girl up into his arms to hold her close. Harry gave a cry and scooped his husband up into his arms, weeping as he held him close in his arms. Draco hugged him back, murmuring soft soothing words, just happy to be able to be with Harry again.

Narcissa hurried out of the room and returned a moment later with an astounded Mediwizard, who went to the bed.

Draco looked up at him with a faint smile; he was lying on the bed with Harry now curled up beside him, held in his arms. “Hello, Mediwizard Kilpatrick…” Draco said. “Could you bring us our son?”

After mastering his shock and disbelief at Draco’s sudden recovery from the brink of death, the Medi-wizard checked the blonde wizard over thoroughly with both a physical and a magical scan. Harry watched with a protective glare, monitoring closely as the checkup proceeded. Since Draco had awoken, his husband had not only remained in the room with him, he had remained in constant physical contact with him. Their son lay in a small cradle beside the bed, easily within reach.

Mediwizard Kilpatrick straightened, looking pleased yet a bit confused. “Well, Draco, I’m pleased to say physically you’re nearly perfect. You’re weak and will need several days to weeks to fully recover, though…”

“Nearly? What does that mean?” Harry asked, eyes narrow.

“What we call his power regulator has been damaged by this…” he answered Harry, then returned his attention and conversation to Draco. “If you did become pregnant with another child it would surely kill you, as the baby will get all of your magic. Your body will hold nothing back. If you were extremely lucky, you would survive but it would likely drain your magic to a point where it would no longer be usable. Basically you would become a squib if it didn’t kill you.” he said softly.

Draco looked crestfallen, but Harry did not. All he cared was that he had all of his family back and intact. “I can’t have any more children…?” Draco asked in a saddened tone.

Mediwizard Kilpatrick gave him a sympathetic pat on the hand. “I know how much you wanted a large family, Draco, but this baby is going to be your last.”

“Its all right, Dragon.” Harry said reassuringly, smiling at him warmly. “We have enough children now, don’t we love?” Harry said.

“Yes, I think so…” Draco smiled lovingly at Harry, then gave him a soft and wicked grin. “If we have more, YOU’RE carrying them.” he added, then looked back at his healer. “Can I hold my son now…?”

“Of course you may.” Kilpatrick smiled warmly at him. “To ensure that you’ll be all right, we’d like
to keep you here for the night…” he started, but was interrupted before he could complete his thought.

“No. He’s coming home with us.” Harry said immediately as he reached into the crib to lift the baby, then carefully transferred their newborn son to Draco’s arms.

“It would be better if we had him here.” Kilpatrick explained.

“It will be better for him and for all his family if he comes home. He’s coming home.” Harry answered easily.

“I want to send a nurse to be at your house, then, to ensure his continued safety and health, then.” he said stubbornly.

“Fine.” Harry agreed.

Draco cradled his son carefully and delicately, gazing down at the little chubby cheeks and wild blonde hair. “You’re so beautiful…” he murmured.

Harry settled on the bed beside him, his arm about his husband, then gave a bit of a chuckle. “You know, Draco… this reminds me of an old muggle movie…”

He looked at Harry curiously. “My holding our newborn son reminds you of something muggle…?” he asked with a bit of a frown.

“Yes; an old movie, though we don’t quite fit the parts. You have your children, I have my children… and now we have our child. Yours, Mine and Ours…”

Draco half-chuckled. “Perhaps I’ll watch this muggle movie of yours if Father will allow a telly into the mansion…”
“I don’t feel right going over just now; take these over for me Ronnie.” George said softly, setting the large vase of lilies down on the table beside the front door. “Tell Harry… tell him I’m sorry it happened…”

“Okay, George.” Ron agreed, looking at the flowers with a bit of a frown. “All right, tell me exactly what is it that they do? They’ve got your company logo on the vase…”

“Nothing weird or strange, I swear it to you. If they do anything weird you have my permission to kick my ass, okay?” George managed a weak grin. “They’re spelled to last for months and they also change if the occasion warrants. I made them for you to give to them anyway, when their son was born. They were yellow and red roses then, for friendship and love. But they changed when Draco… when he…” George let the sentence die; he was still having trouble dealing with the fact that the blonde wizard would no longer be around to tease.

“All right. I’ll take care of it. I need to get ready to go.” Ron said, and George gave his brother a hug and then stepped back outside to apparate away. Ron turned back inside, closing the door. He had come home and decided that he needed to give Harry all his support right now; he was nearly ready to go. He would be there when Harry got home and he’d be there as long as he needed to be to get his friend back on his feet.

Ron slipped on his best jacket and glanced over at Charlie, who stood at the fireplace watching his husband. Since Ron had returned from the hospital, shortly after they had been told of Draco’s death, Blaise had almost been inconsolable. He had collapsed in grief, almost blaming himself for what had happened to his best friend. He kept saying how he should have gone with Ron to the house, he should have been there and Draco would have been out of danger. “I hate to leave Blaise like this.” Ron murmured softly, worry for his new lover battling with his own worry for his best friend’s sanity with the loss of Draco.

“Go, Ron. Harry is your best friend and he’s going to need everyone who cares for him right now. I’ll take care of Blaise.” Charlie said softly. Blaise was silent now, staring out the large bay window at the garden without really seeing anything.

“All right…” Ron agreed, buttoning his jacket as he turned to go. He halted, staring in confusion for a moment. George had left a vase full of delicate and pure white lilies but what stood in the vase now were not lilies nor was there anything white. The flowers were fully bloomed roses, velvety blossoms of a rich red color and interspersed through the fragrant blossoms were yellow roses, giving a visual splash of contrasting color. Ron blinked, and then moved to them. “Charlie…?” he called.

His brother looked over. “Yes…? Hey, they flowers…” he frowned.

“Draco is alive.” Ron murmured.

“What…? You said…”

“Our twin brothers may be idiots, Charlie, but they don’t screw up things that they present to the public.” Ron pulled one of the roses out of the vase and hurried to Blaise’s side. “Blaise… look at this…” he had to put it directly in the dark-skinned man’s path of vision before he blinked, staring at the flower.

“A rose…? Sweet Ron, but I don’t really want…”
“It’s not for you, Blaise. It’s a magic flower; it means that the doctors made a mistake, it means that Draco is alive…”

“How can a flower…?” He looked confused, a little of the pain fading from his face.

“George and Fred.” Ron answered briefly.

“He’s… he’s not dead…?”

“He’s not.” Ron said, handing Blaise the rose.

Blaise gazed at the flower, hand trembling. “Are you sure…? Please, Ron, I couldn’t take it if he was really…”

“I’ll go. I’ll find out. But I’m sure he’s alive; I’ll take the roses over for them. I’ll fire-call you and you can come over and help make things ready for Draco and the baby.” Ron leaned forward and gave Blaise a soft kiss on the lips. “Go with Charlie and have a nice bath. I’ll come and get you soon.”

Blaise gave him a tremulous smile and Ron winked, then turned and strode out with a much lighter step than he had previously. He pulled his wand and used a floating spell to make the heavy lead crystal vase lighter and hurried out.

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Ron knocked on the door of the mansion and waited. He was about to give up when the door was opened by a very disgruntled Jerrod Warrington. “What is it?” He asked with a scowl. He looked like he had been working in the lab; there were fresh stains on his leather apron as well as foul-smelling burns. “Some of us actually have work to do, you know.” he added sourly.

“I’m not here to argue with you, Warrington; I have a job and don’t need to justify anything to you. I just need to know if Harry is back yet.” Ron answered.

“No; he stayed at the hospital. Lucius is back, though, and so is Narcissa. Do you want one of them?”

“I just brought flowers to celebrate the birth of their son. I don’t want to disturb either of them; it is rather late.” Ron began.

“Who is it, Warrington?” Narcissa asked, moving into sight.

“Weasley.” He said. “Rose’s father.”

“Ronald!” Narcissa said with a smile, moving forward to draw Ron in past the doorstep. “Welcome to our home.”

Warrington, scowling, moved off. He wasn’t going to try to be sociable; he had work to do.

“Thank you, Mrs. Malfoy….” Ron answered formally, giving her a bow.

She laughed softly. “After all these years, Ronald, you can call me Narcissa.” She reminded.

He smiled at her. “I’ll try to remember that. So tell me, how are Draco and little James?” Ron asked.

She looked surprised. “You knew that Draco is all right…?”
“It’s complicated, but yes; and I’m very happy to see that I was right. Oh; and I’ve brought some flowers…” he added unnecessarily; the bouquet of roses that he had hovering just behind him was rather difficult to miss.

“They’re doing very well, as is little Angel. The medi-wizards wanted to keep the three of them overnight to ensure that they are healthy. Thank you so much for asking, and these flowers are absolutely stunning.”

“I could take credit for them but I won’t; they were sent by my brother George.” Ron smiled, moving to set the flowers down on a table. “Is this all right…?”

“That’s perfect; I’ll move them to Draco’s room later.”

“Is there anything we could help with?” Ron asked. “You know, to get things ready for them to come home. Blaise would love to help too, and I think it would be good for him to do something for his best mate.”

“Of course, we can do a bit of decorating with flowers and soft pillows in the bedroom to make things comfortable; the medi-wizard said that he didn’t trust how quickly Draco recovered and wants him to stay in bed for a few days once he comes home.” she explained.

Ron smiled. “I’m sure that Blaise and I can come up with something to make Draco feel comfortable.” he assured.

“I’m certain you can. That sounds simply wonderful; bring him on over. We hope to have Draco home before late tonight; Lucius has just left to talk to the administration at St. Mungo’s hospital.” She smiled. “I would appreciate any effort you make; I’m so busy with the twins and little Mallek that I don’t have time to do much…”

“Not to worry, Mrs. Mal… I mean, Narcissa. Blaise and I will take care of everything to have it all ready for Draco. It will be our pleasure.”

She smiled warmly at him. “Thank you, Ronald dear. I’m sure if you need anything that either Toodles or Warrington will be able to assist you.”

“I’ll call for Toodles if I need anything.” Ron answered with a smirk.

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“Two days, Mr. Malfoy. I want you to ensure that your son remains in bed for a minimum of two days.”

“Does that mean that he is not to have exposure to sunshine…?” Lucius asked with a smirk.

“This is serious, Mr. Malfoy. Your son’s recovery was… unprecedented. I do not care to see him back here with a relapse. He is not to exert himself in any manner or form whatsoever.”

“Even if he wishes to even use the loo he shall have assistance.” Lucius assured firmly. “No expense will be spared to ensure the safety and good health of my son and grandson.”

“I don’t have a doubt about that, at all. I’m assigning a nurse to your son’s case; all she will need is a chair to sit beside him and monitor him anytime that he is left alone.”

“Good. So I can take him home?”
“Yes, but I don’t want him transported by floo powder or side-along apparition; he doesn’t have any magical strength at all.”

“I have arranged other transportation.” he assured. “I will take Angel with me as well as my grandson, neither of them have any type of health problems that you can help with.”

“Very well.” Kilpatrick agreed, moving back to his desk, placing his right forefinger on a roll of parchment. “Take this to the nurse; they will release them all to your custody.” He said as his insignia appeared upon the page.

“Thank you.” Lucius took the paper and tucked it into an inside pocket of his robes, and then moved out of the office.

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Lucius tenderly scooped Angel up into his arms; the girl did not even wake but she settled against him with a smile. He kissed her hair tenderly and turned away from the bed, then gave Harry a questioning look. “Are we ready?”

“Yes, Lucius.” Harry agreed, giving the man a smile. He was waiting there just in the hallway for Lucius to join them. Draco was seated in the wheelchair once more looking more than a little irritated. He wanted to hurry up and get this transfer done so he could hold James again. Harry had spelled the baby’s carrier to be feather light and that was the only thing that Draco had been allowed to carry; Harry had loaded everything else into a trunk and spelled it to float after them as they left the hospital.

Outside waited a very modern, sleek car with Severus Snape standing beside it. “Come along, I haven’t all night Lucius. I have to get to work by five tomorrow so I can work on my projects…” he said in a snarky tone, though he did have a faint smile touch his lips when he saw the baby carrier.

“Good evening, Severus; glad you could spare the time.” Lucius said, moving to get into the car and settle Angel in the vehicle. Draco started to rise and Harry prevented him from rising. Draco looked up at him. “I’m just a little weary…”

“And none of us are going to take any chances with your health, my dragon. You need time to get your strength up again, and you’re going to let us take care of you.” Harry said firmly, leaning forward to give him a kiss before he magically transferred his husband from the wheelchair into the seat of the car. The baby was strapped between them in his carrier, and Harry loaded the rest in the trunk.

“I will meet you at your home.” The nurse said, taking the wheelchair a few paces back from the curb.

“We will be expecting you, madam.” he agreed and closed the door. Without another word, Severus checked everyone’s restraints then got into the car to drive to Malfoy Manor.

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Ron sat at the small table beneath the window, watching as Blaise worked on decorating the bedroom. He had created a welcome home banner for his best friend that would magically dissolve after twenty four hours as well as several hovering magical lights about the room. He had ensured that the crib for the baby was directly on Draco’s side of the bed, and that the nappies and bottles shining and clean were ready and within reach from the bed. Extra pillows were added to the bed,
and bright colors all about the room. The scent of flowers filled the room as well; there were flowers all over the place. Ron grinned softly; Blaise had become more and more himself as he worked to make his friend’s homecoming special.

“I owe Dray so much, Ron… our school years really were hell. I don’t think I would have made it through them if it wasn’t for Draco. He helped me deal with everything and kept me from doing anything stupid…”

“I believe it… Harry and I were tight like that too.” Ron said, rising. “You think you’re going to be done soon? They should be here any minute…”

“Do you think I’ve forgotten anything…?” He asked, looking around worriedly.

Ron chuckled, opening the box of white chocolate raspberry cheesecake and putting it on the cake stand and setting the glass cover over it. “This ought to be the final touch.” he said. “You know, you can over-decorate Blaise.” He teased.

“I did not over-decorate…!” He objected, and then realized that Ron was teasing. He chuckled as well, relaxing. “Very funny, Ron.” He said, moving to him and slipping his arms around him. Ron hugged him gently.

“Get a room.” Draco drawled, making them both turn and Ron step away with a furious blush. “Your own room would be preferable…”

“Draco, I don’t think that I’ve ever been happier to see you.” Blaise said, smiling at him. “Welcome home.” He said as Harry pushed the chair over to the bedside.

“Don’t even try to stand, Dray.” Harry warned as he gestured for Blaise to come over to assist.

He sighed, but did not even try to rise. “All right. I am completely in your hands.” He allowed Harry and Blaise to lift him out of the chair and transfer him into the bed. “Blaise, you did all of this for me…?” He asked as Harry pulled the blankets up for him.

“Ron helped, but yeah.” Blaise smiled. “Can’t do enough for my best mate.”

The next morning Draco pushed himself to a sitting position in his bed with more than a little effort. Merlin, he was weak and he ached! He took a moment to catch his breath, glancing over at the nurse who had been assigned by his mediwizard to watch over him. She had been up all night taking care of him and had just now drifted to sleep in the chair near the window. She didn’t look comfortable at all but he wasn’t going to wake her. He slid his feet out of the blankets and pushed himself to the edge of the bed.

“What is Master needing to be doing?” a squeaky voice asked in an almost accusing tone. Draco jumped guiltily, looking to his right to see Toodles standing near the bed, gazing at him with her wide saucer-shaped eyes, head tilted slightly to the side and her arms folded.

“I just need to talk to father…”

“I is getting him. You is to be staying in bed doctor says. You is being staying in bed.” She said firmly. “I is not losing my Master Draco!” She folded her stringy little arms, narrowing her eyes at him.

“Is father home…? I do need to talk to him. I know Harry is at work…”
“Master Malfoy is home.” She nodded emphatically, smiling again. “I is telling him to come and seeing you.”

“Good… I promise to be good and stay in bed.” Draco said, slipping his legs back up into the bed. The house elf tugged the blankets back into place, and then vanished. The sound of her leaving woke the nurse, who looked over with a startled, exhausted expression. Draco gave her a soft smile. “I’m all right, really… if you just put the baby here where I can reach him, I can take care of him while you sleep a bit.”

“I think they forgot to send my relief…” she said, sitting up and stretching.

“I’ll have the house elf bring in one of the nurses father has hired for the children. I really don’t need that much looking after.”

She chuckled softly at his claim of innocence. “Really, now? I’ve put you back in that bed three times just this morning, Mr. Malfoy. You need to stay in bed for at least two days minimum; that is the healer’s orders.”

He sighed in frustration. “I know what he told me. But I’m not hurting that badly and I just want to get up for a while…”

“I will arrange then, son, for you to come out to the garden with us and watch the children play.” Lucius said, capturing both their attention. He strode through the room, as always resplendent and dressed in robes of finest cashmere. “You can go and have some rest, Nurse Padsen. I will monitor my son’s health for the nonce.”

“I will fire-call the hospital to send another nurse… thank you, Mr. Malfoy.” She said, rising with clear weariness.

“It will be several hours before another nurse is required.” He assured, glancing in the cradle at the peacefully sleeping infant before he moved to go and sit down on the bed beside him. “Toodles said you needed to speak with me but you should be resting, son…”

“If you make me lay down another minute, father, I think I’ll simply go stir crazy. I ache, yes, but the doctor even said that there was nothing he could find wrong with me. I’m more than capable of talking to you. I have something to tell you, but… I don’t think you’re going to believe me.”

Lucius raised an eyebrow at his son as he moved over and took a seat on the edge of the bed. “Is what you have to say so shocking?”

“It’s a bit fuzzy and getting fuzzier as time goes by… but you may think that what I have to tell is rather shocking. I saw James, father.” He answered.

“Of course you did. He’s lying right over there sleeping like a little angel.”

“Not my son, father. James Potter. Harry’s father; I saw him.”

Lucius’ face went blank, as it always did when his father chose to hide his emotions. “James is gone, Draco…”

“He’s dead, yes. But he’s waiting for you, and he told me that if you came to join him too soon he wouldn’t speak to you for an entire decade.”

A faint smirk touched his lips. “That does sound like something he would say. But why do you say you saw him…?”
“He wanted me to tell you something about your daughter.” Draco reached for his father’s hand, resting his over his father’s.

“It was a girl…? I was right…?” Lucius had his head bowed.

“You were right, father. He told me to tell you that Kitty loves you and that the baby girl was born healthy, he said, with blonde hair and his hazel eyes.” Lucius didn’t answer, silent as he sat there. Draco gave his father’s hand a gentle squeeze. “Father…?”

“My Kitty said that, did he…?” He said, voice revealing what his expression did not. His voice was slightly shaking.

“He called you his Peacock too.” He added, hoping his father would believe him.

“Only James ever called me that.” Lucius murmured softly.

“I think you and Harry should view the memory in the pensive. The more time goes by, the less I recall of the details.” He said. “James had something to tell Harry too but it’s all so… it would just be easier and that way.”

“I’ll bring the Penseive stand in here.” He assured in a much calmer and steady voice.

“Thank you father.” Draco said, eyes moving to his son. He smiled as he gazed at the tiny baby.

“My grandson is a very healthy child. James would be proud that he carries his name, I’m certain.”

“He’s just perfect and already nearly as big as the twins…”

“He’ll likely out grow them” Lucius agreed, glancing about at a sound behind him. Harry moved into the room and to the bedside.

“Are you hungry love…?” Harry asked as he moved to Draco and kissed him. “I can call Toodles to bring in your lunch.”

“Maybe, in a while.” He said, not feeling hungry at the moment. “How is Angel…?”

“Poor little thing used up all of her magic.” Lucius answered. “She’s still asleep. The medi-wizards said she would likely sleep more than be awake for the next several days. The rest will only do her good.”

“Good… I brought her a treat from work.” Harry said with a soft grin.

“Father, could you bring in the Penseive? I’d like to do that as soon as possible.” Draco started.

“Penseive…?” Harry frowned. “You shouldn’t be doing any magic, Dray. You heard the doctor…”

“Extracting thought doesn’t take much effort.” Draco began.

“Your doctor said no magic.”

“This is important, Harry.” Lucius said as he turned and walked from the room to fetch the bowl. Harry took a seat on the edge of the bed. “Why should this be so important…?”

“I didn’t exactly die, Harry, but I did go far enough to meet someone important to both you and my father.” Draco said softly.
“What…?”

“I want you to see, Harry. He’s not upset about us, he’s happy. And he remembers his relationship with my father without the twist they made to his mind…”

“You spoke with my dad?” Harry asked softly.

“I want you to see.” Draco repeated. “Let me do this, Harry. I promise I won’t do anything else magical, I swear it. For at least two full days.”

Harry stroked his cheek. “All right, baby. Just this one thing, all right?”

“I swear.” Draco smiled, giving him another kiss.

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Harry and Lucius descended together into the memory, trailing along behind Draco when he first sighted the chairs and that ghostly fire. When Lucius saw the specter of his lost love, he was unable to even make a sound; his throat closed with grief and longing. It wasn’t fair that they had been separated so long because of a stupid pre-arranged marriage. James should have been his!

Harry moved onward, several steps away from Lucius to watch the events unfold, standing just behind Draco’s wingback chair. Lucius moved to beside the chair that James stood in, gazing down at him with clear pain and longing in his eyes that faded a bit and was replaced with a smile when James called him a peacock. It was true; James did remember him as they had once been. And James was really waiting for him… His expression darkened a bit when the fact was revealed that only Lucius’ father had been the one to take James away and subject him to whatever he had endured while their daughter had been born and taken away from them both. He had to find her.

Harry gazed at the man in the chair with his easy smile, gentle humor and relaxed demeanor; he couldn’t help but reflect on his youth and how different things would have been if his father had not died. He had to pull himself away from useless introspection to focus on the message being spoken. Lucius had been his father’s true love. His father had been taken to a mountain villa by Abraxus… maybe there would be some clues or someone who knew something out there still, even after all these years. He filed the thought away for future reference. Then came the discussion of Draco’s need to return to his life to point out something to Harry; he could change the marks himself. Harry was almost shocked that he had not already thought of it. Mallek was his clone; his power signature was the same as Harry’s. The spells and charms to alter that thrice-damned Dark Mark were available in Lucius’ library; he could make life livable for the kids; and he could control Erik if need be… things were looking a lot more positive for those children now.

Then the question of Mallek came up. Harry felt his heart skip a beat; Draco had left his life behind but remembered to ask the one question that Harry most wanted to hear answered from his father. He almost laughed at his father’s vehemence against Severus Snape. Well it was clear that wouldn’t do. Give him to Lucius was the only suggestion his father had.

The visit was much too short for the liking of either Lucius or Harry; they would both have loved to have spent much more time just seeing the man that they both had cared for deeply in their own ways. Draco got a hug from James and was on his way again. Harry and Lucius moved to each other again and slipped out of the memory.

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Both of them sighed softly as they drew their faces up out of the Penseive bowl, both very thoughtful.
as they considered what they saw and what they had heard.

Draco watched them from his bed, his son cradled in his arms, feeding the infant.

“You were right, son.” Lucius said softly. “I did need to see that myself.”

“So did I… thank you, love, for sharing that with us.” Harry said, sitting on the bed beside Draco and kissing him tenderly.

“And now you have a lot of work to do, don’t you?” Draco said with a soft grin after returning the kiss.

“Yes.” Harry smiled. “Hope you don’t mind lover.”

“I’m supposed to vegetate, remember?” Draco smirked softly. “But you had better get your ass in this bed when its bedtime, understand me?”

“I’m not Hermione; no book is good enough to keep me away from my husband.” Harry said with a smile, eyes going to the baby. “You know you make the most beautiful babies, Dray…” he murmured.

“You had a bit to do with his beauty, Harry.” Draco chuckled.

Jerrod Warrington added the final ingredient and watched anxiously as he stirred carefully the brew that he had been working on for days. He had been working nonstop on his assignment of undoing the hereditary concealment potion and this was his fifteenth attempt… three had turned into useless black goo, four had exploded, and the rest had been interesting attempts but really did nothing at all he needed them to. One was, he was certain, a quite deadly poison. He watched with sinking hope as again the color began to change, this time to a strange grey color with balls of bright blue half an inch round floating in random spaces.

He grimaced, staring at it a long moment. What in the name of Merlin’s bloody blue balls was he doing wrong?! Tried reversing the potion, tried changing how it was brewed, tried reversing the method that the potion was brewed, tried different time variations… nothing was making any sense.

“You’re my father, aren’t you?” A quiet voice asked from the doorway. He jumped at the voice, and then looked over to see Alyssa, holding her Chthulu doll in her arm, gazing at him. “I heard them talking. You’re my father?”

He flushed red, using a cleaning spell to banish the failed potion. “Who was talking…?” He asked quietly. He’d asked Lucius to keep that quiet… was nothing he asked, not even the smallest thing, to be respected?

“The nannies; Nanny Bridget says that you are my father. Are you my father?” She asked softly, tilting her head to the side.

“I’m too busy to have a child, and you’re too special to be mine.” he said, turning to start all over again, though it had been nearly a full day since he had bothered to eat and longer than that since he had slept.

“Lord Malfoy is a father and he’s busy.” She answered, tilting her head to one side. “Am I not worthy of having a father…?”
“You have one, My Lady Alyssa. George Weasley is your father…”

“You have one. I have two also but you don’t want me.” She answered sadly, stepping in. “I’m sorry they made me practice on you, Professor Warrington…” the little girl said with true regret in her voice.

“That wasn’t by your choice… Alyssa, you ought to go and play; the potions lab is no place for a pretty little thing like you…”

“I want what Angel has. What Alerick has; I want two parents.” she said, gazing up at him. “Tell me the truth; are you my father?” He heard her voice change timbre and he knew that there was no way to lie to her; the girl was exerting her powers of control over him.

He closed his eyes. “Yes.” He answered in a quiet tone. “I am… I was used to create you.”

“Are you sorry they made me?”

“What? No! You’re everything they wanted you to be and more. And you’re strong, strong enough to do whatever you need to do. I’m proud you’re so special, Alyssa.”

She approached him, her large round eyes glimmering with tears. “Then why do you not want me? Must I belong only to Lord Father Weasley?”

“I can’t be around him love. He and I…” he started, then sighed softly. “We just don’t get along. I don’t know how to be a father anyway…”

“He doesn’t either. He brought me a silly doll with a fancy dress on and fancy hair… but I don’t play with dollies.” She said with a bit of scorn.

“He’ll get better at being a dad with time… he has to get to know you, my little Lady Alyssa.” he assured, moving to kneel before her as he often did when teaching her. “He is your father, and you need to learn to listen to him even if you don’t like what he is saying.”

“If I have to don’t you have to?” She asked. “I want you to talk to him, Professor…” she said, hugging her stuffed toy representative of the destroyer of souls.

“Talk to George Weasley? We’ve nothing to talk about.” He said. “That’s just being silly, my little lady.” He used his wand to scourgify his hands before he knelt to be eye to her. “You should be with the others, not wasting your time in here with me.”

“There’s nothing to do, sir.” She said, pouting. “They won’t give us lessons or classes and you’re too busy to teach us…”

“I have to do this for Lord Malfoy; it is my goal to get this reworked.” he said, looking quite disgruntled, looking back at his table.

She pouted a moment more, and then hugged her Chthulu. “You need to talk to Lord Father Weasley.” She repeated, gathering all of her siren powers and influence as she had learnt to and using that power to force the man to bend to her will. “I want two fathers too. You need to talk to him, Professor.”

He grimaced, eyes closing, feeling his willpower shoved aside for the wishes of this child who had more power in her little finger than he had ever hoped to have. “I will fire-call him, all right…?” He asked, hoping she would leave it at that.
“I want you to talk to him face to face.” she corrected.

“I will invite him over if Lord Malfoy approves. I am his bonded servant, my Lady; I must get his permission. Please, don’t force me into anything more…” he whispered quietly. He knew perfectly well what was happening to him and what the child was doing; he’d felt this dazed sensation more than once and maybe it was his siren blood that made him capable of retaining knowledge of exactly what was happening. He was aware of each and every time that little Alyssa had manipulated him.

She threw her arm about him and hugged him. “All right… will you walk me back out to the others…?” She asked, looking at him with completely innocent eyes.

“Sure…” he said quietly feeling her influence fade. He rose to his feet and she twined her hand into his.

Lucius sat in the ballroom turned playroom, musing over the message that he had gotten from his past love as he watched each of the new children now members of his family. They were all quite different little characters; there would be a big challenge for he and his wife as well as Draco and Harry to get some of these children under control.

Of the seven children that had come to Malfoy Manor following the raid on the clinic, five remained. After careful interviewing and reviewing of all the information gleaned through memory probes, veritaserum checks, and interviews of family and friends of the parents of the children created with the stolen Malfoy and Potter sperm, only two had come from homes where they were not abused nor neglected in any way. Those who had returned were Tristin Baddock and Alexander Jugson. Their parents were instructed to bring the children by a minimum of twice a week for playtimes with their siblings and they had agreed to do so.

Each of the children had been raised in very different ways; Lazlo and Elston were very possessive, aggressive, and borderline violent children. Thin, emaciated little Fallon, a little over a year old, only wanted love. He would cling to anyone who would hold him, and everything and everything that came near the little boy would either be eaten or shoved into his mouth. Fallon had been walking since he was nine months old, the reports said. Chubby little Astrid, the polar opposite of Fallon, was happy to just sit and play with whatever she could reach; she made no attempts to do more than crawl though she was nearly eighteen months old. Dorcus was a maddeningly curious child who was constantly testing doors, doorknobs, cabinets, opening boxes just to strew toys all over then move on to the next adventure. She was in constant motion and if the nannies did not keep constant watch on her, she would be out the door to investigate the rest of the manor. Dorcus had escaped already three times this morning.

Lucius shook his head with a look of distaste at the name; he had a new name in mind but of course he had to present that idea to Draco; he wanted to name the girl Camilla. It was a good name, and had strong roots; he remembered it from a book he had read and it had been the name of a fleet-footed warrior woman.

Lazlo played by himself most of the time, as the other children had discovered that if they tried to play with anything he wanted to play with he would shove them aside or scream and yell at them until they went away. Even Elston had stopped trying to play with him and he had gone on to push around and bully Fallon and Astrid.

Mallek was playing right now with a bright red ball, throwing it away as hard as he could and giggling happily as Alerick ran after the ball and brought it back to him. Lazlo watched them play, eyes narrowed, and then approached when he saw his opening. He rushed forward and shoved...
Alerick roughly to the ground, snatching the ball up with a laugh of triumph that lasted only a moment.

“No! Hurt mine!” Mallek said, angrily, thrusting a chubby accusing finger toward the attacker of his consort. Like extensions of his arms, both Erik and Erin surged forward, hands glowing to attack their three and a half year old half-brother; before Lucius could react they had slammed the young bully back against the wall with a combined blast. Two of the nannies screamed and scattered; the head nanny moved to shelter Mallek with herself. Lucius moved forward and Erin turned on him, her hands glowing, her face as blank as her twin’s. Erik advanced on the defenseless and now wailing Lazio, murder in his eyes.

“Sectumsempra!” Erik snarled, pointing an empty hand at Lazio; who began to scream and writhe. Lucius saw no other option; he threw a shield over the defenseless child to block the spell, prepared to feel the full brunt of the assault from the girl.

“Protego! Erik, stop it!” Warrington snapped as he ran in, leaving Alyssa standing at the door, wide-eyed. The twins hesitated, looking back at Mallek in confusion.

“Bad! Hurt mine!” Mallek snapped again, getting to his feet and toddling over to Alerick.

“I’m all right, Lord Mallek…” he said, getting up to his feet. Mallek wrapped his arms about him, glaring furiously over at Lazio.

“Stop this!” A third voice barked and the twins dropped their hands, the power fading from their hands immediately. Erik looked over at Harry in pure surprise and confusion. Harry frankly didn’t care if he made the toddler angry; he would use every tool he had at his disposal to make sure that these kids hurt no one else. Mallek glared at him, lip sticking out as he pouted, cheeks flushed with anger.

“Hurt mine.” he insisted, pointing at Lazio. “Bad!”

“He will be taught differently but you must not send those two to punish him for you!” Harry snapped at the child with angered eyes; he knew exactly how horrible that spell was. He hurried to the side of the injured child. “Damn it all…!” he whispered, surveying the damage done to the little brown-haired boy.

Lucius started over to join Harry but Mallek demanded him to stop. “No! Mine hurt!” he insisted.

“Alerick was only knocked to the ground!” Harry growled, trying to keep his temper. Mallek couldn't understand, but Harry certainly did. He'd used that spell himself without knowing what it was for... and had nearly killed Draco with it. How the bloody hell had Erik known how to use it?

“I am all right, Lord Mallek.” Alerick said, trying to appease him.

“Does he need the hospital?” Harry asked softly. The boy clung to him, sobbing harshly. There were two deep cuts on his face bleeding freely, and one across his upper arm and chest. Lucius’ spell had prevented further damage and perhaps even the death of this boy.

“No; Severus taught me how to handle this.” He said quietly, using his wand and murmuring the soft words necessary to close and heal the wounds.

The room was deadly silent except for the continued whimpering of Lazio as Harry scooped up the boy in his arms. Lucius turned and gestured to the nannies. “Take these children back to their nursery, please.” He ordered, and none of them objected. Alerick was still trying to reassure his Lord that he was all right as they four of them, with Alyssa trailing along behind, were ushered quickly
from the playroom, leaving the other children staring after them in stunned silence.

“I’ll put him to bed, and then we need to talk.” Harry said softly, turning to go as well.

“Indeed we do, Potter.” He said quietly. “And although I do not wish to involve him, we must ensure that Draco’s opinions are considered in the conversation as well.”

Harry nodded and moved out quietly. Warrington only just then realized he still had his wand up and he flushed, lowering it.

Lucius glanced at him. “Excellent timing, Jerrod.” He said, glancing down to see that his robes had been sliced, but he was completely intact.

“Oh, yeah, sure.” He said, kind of discomfited with the compliment. “The kids have kind of gone off like that before and I always seem to be in the right place at the right time…” he said with a timid grin.

“Any progress yet on your project?” He asked, using his wand to repair the rips in his robes.

“Some… but no full success yet.” He admitted quietly.

“We need that fix now more than ever.” He said quietly. “You are to work on nothing else today except that, and if you do not have success today you will be working with Severus Snape until that answer has been achieved.”

He blanched, but nodded. “I’ll get right on that sir.” He said, though he knew that the instructions forced upon him by his daughter would need to be followed up on before he would be able to get any rest. He turned and hurried out to begin all over again.

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“This is the second time their powers have come to bear against others.” Harry said quietly. He and Lucius had returned to Draco’s room, the younger blonde wizard propped up on pillows and the other two seated on either side of his bed. “Something must be done…”

“I don’t want their powers blocked… making them into squibs is a horrible punishment for doing what they have learned to do.” Lucius said in objection, though he did look quite thoughtful. “Although I must admit; Sectumsempra is a seventh-year spell, and a very dark one at that. No four year old should be able to do that spell, and especially not as wandless magic.”

“Then don’t take their powers.” Draco said, seeing the answer clearly. “Take the knowledge.”

“Take their knowledge…?”

“Not all of their knowledge, father. Simply removing the memories of the training that Parkinson had them put through should be enough. They have undergone a lot of unnecessary training and it won’t hurt them to lose it for a while.” Draco reasoned.

“Let them have the chance to be children, and to have a childhood with all its normal bumps and bruises, hum?” Lucius said thoughtfully. “Interesting…”

“And I can change their marks… I can link the blockage of the knowledge to levels, to be released as they reach that year in their training at school, or to when they have achieved a certain level of adeptness on their own without that maniacal training. I can link that into the marks, I have an idea how to alter it already…”
“How will you alter it?”

“How Hopefully I will be able to do that tonight. Toodles ‘fetched’ me a book on it from the library at Hogwarts; it has a lot of information on the marks and how to control them. I’m going to alter one if I can but I need someone to experiment on to ensure I’m doing it properly and I don’t wish to harm the children.”

“How interesting that Toodles seems to find it all right to ‘borrow’ anything you wish or need.” Lucius smirked. “As for the marks; I have another possibility for you. Warrington bears the dark mark as well; he was never bound to the Dark Lord, but has been bound to our little Dark Prince.”

“He does…? Well I’d rather experiment on him than on one of the kids.” Harry admitted in a thoughtful voice. “I’d better get to studying that book… I’m sure that Severus would know how to bind the levels of knowledge.”

“He has already mentioned to me that it needed to be done, the night that my grandson was born.” Lucius said, not wanting to directly reference the momentary death of his son. “I will call him immediately to discuss what must be done.”
Malcolm Parkinson unfolded the copy of the newspaper he had picked up on his brief trip out of the hotel room he had felt forced to hide in since the seizure of the children. The headline was what had caught his eye when he'd been out getting something to eat under careful concealing spells. The headline read "RAID ON CLINIC EXPOSES PLOT TO STEAL WIZARDING BLOODLINES!"

Damned fools, that's what they all were; this so-called writer had no idea what he had truly been after. He moved to a seat at the table, taking a few moments to read through the article. He was not surprised to find that it detailed the facts of the clinic's business and all that idiotic foolishness that his daughter had indulged in. The children had gone to their ancestral families if there had been any abuse suffered at the hands of their parents. So Malfoy and Potter had the children now.

He glanced through one of the doors in the small flat; it was one of two separate bedrooms off the living area. In one of the bedrooms was August Bebel; he had not allowed that man to stick his narrow nose out of the door since they had holed up here. Bebel was his key to being able to start over; he needed him. Bebel had not complained; Malcolm had him well under his control. In fact, August had dove directly back into his work again; he was trying to recreate his work once more. He had the first bedroom converted into a lab and was working nonstop.

In the second room a bed visible from the table; Pansy lay in a spell-induced coma-like state until he needed her again. He scowled at her. Why was she such a stupid girl? Why had she not inherited her mother's cunning and intelligence? His wife would have been a proper partner and support for him in his work... if only the Dark Lord had not seen fit to kill her. He sighed softly and looked away from his daughter. There was no use bringing up past pain; he had enough to focus on right now.

He took a few minutes to rip the paper up into tiny strips before he threw it in the trash. He didn't care one bit about the clinic, but the children... they had stolen his precious children from him. His life's work stolen out from under his very nose; he had never suspected that anyone would ever find them where they had been sequestered. Because of the raid of the clinic his last embryos to re-create the Dark Prince were forever out of his reach. All of August Bebel's notes and work gone. Why...? Because that over-sensitive and ungrateful little bitch Weasley had supplied the Aurors with every bit of information. And that damned fool Warrington had probably been the one who had given the dark circle up. He had only learned of the destruction of the hideaway when a report of a devastating explosion had been reported over the Wizarding Radio. He was sure that Malfoy must have somehow been involved but no one had survived the violent conflagration. His little valley had been turned into little more than a blackened crater.

Not everyone had been destroyed, though. Jerrod Warrington had not only survived, he had been seen to be in quite good health. He had seen Warrington himself in Diagon Alley, flitting about and spending Malfoy's money on potions supplies.

A smile touched Malcolm's lips. What a perfect place to begin getting back on his feet. Jerrod Warrington was his first target. Taking him would serve three purposes; first, it would deprive Malfoy of a tool and a servant; second it would restore his own servant, and third he would have a chance to vent his anger on someone. That fool was still bound to him and could be forced to do his will fairly simply; it was only a matter of getting close enough to give the orders and instructions. Pansy could be of use to him right now despite the fact that Jerrod knew her face and did not trust her. She could go out under a glamour and the Imperious command; she would be able to fetch the fool back for him. Then he could return the man into his service... though he might just decide to kill
him outright for his obvious betrayal. Working for that rich fool Malfoy indeed.

Oh, yes, he had his plans. And once Warrington was squared away, he would make both Potter and Weasley pay for taking his world away from him. He would take theirs away from them.

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Warrington slipped on his cloak and shook back his hair. One trip to the store, one last ingredient... this potion was working precisely how it should. Finally! The color was perfect, a deep blue with tiny flecks of gold. It just needed an hour or more to cool before adding the final ingredient, fresh reishi mushrooms. Once he had that last ingredient he could test the potion as he had tested the first potion; on his own self. Once he was sure that it functioned as it was meant to, he would use it to restore all the children to their families.

Following that, he would most likely be asked to destroy any trace of his potion if he read Malfoy's intention correctly. All that work gone... and no one would know that he had created a potion to bypass the traditional hereditary trace potion. No one had ever managed that before. He sighed and turned to leave the potions lab and was startled to see a child in the doorway again.

It was not Alyssa as he had half expected, come to fuss at him for not speaking with George. It was Harry's daughter Angel. What in the world would she want to come and see him for...? "Mr. Warton, sir?" she began in a timid tone.

He frowned; he didn't like how exhausted the child looked. "It's Warrington, and you ought to be in bed little girl. You look like you could sleep another week..." he said, moving to her.

She rubbed her eyes with the backs of her hands, then gazed up at him. "Can't sleep... I need to tell you; don't go. Please stay here."

That got his attention. "Not go to the store...? Why?"

"I dunno." she said, looking a little confused. It was all a bit fuzzy...

"Did you have a bad dream, little lady?" he asked her and she nodded, her vivid green eyes looking huge in her pale face. He patted her awkwardly on the head. "You mustn't worry about me; I'll be just fine. You go on back to bed, all right? I'll have your house elf bring you some milk and cookies."

"Well... okay..." she said hesitantly, allowing herself to be guided back away from the door. Warrington escorted her back to her room and called for the promised milk and cookies before striding out, intent to finish his business. Rather sweet of the little girl to worry like that, especially since he'd hardly even set eyes upon her since he arrived here. No wonder Lucius cared for the girl so much...

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Angel finished her cookies and drank nearly half of her milk before a wave of weariness overtook her once more. She felt calm and really couldn't remember why she had been so upset. She sighed and settled to her pillow, allowing her eyes to close.

Immediately she was swept into the dream once more... she knew she had just dreamt this because she recognized it all. It was like she was sitting down and watching telly at the foster's old home, watching a movie that she couldn't turn off. The street was strange, not straight and well-ordered like the streets of London but strange in an interesting kind of way.
Every shop had strange things on display that did unexpected things. She had been there once with
her Nonno but they had gone into the pet store and had not lingered on the street.
Mr. Warrington emerged from a shop that had really weird stuff in the windows; things that blew up
and fixed themselves and what looked like candy but she thought she could see the word "poo" up
on the wall too, inside the place. He looked angry and seemed to be in a hurry, mumbling about
books.

She knew what was coming, the bad person was waiting just up ahead in the dark place! "Mr.
Warton... Warrington...! Stop! They're gonna get you...!" she called out but he did not hear; he kept
walking closer and closer and then she saw it; the hands reached out of the dark and he was grabbed;
his body stiffened and his face froze in pain; he fell toward the hands and was dragged into the dark
alley.

Angel sat up with a gasp of fear, her little heart pounding. Jerrod Warrington should not have left the
manor; bad people were looking for him and they would take him away forever if they didn't do
anything. She pushed the blankets back and slipped from her bed. She had to get help, she just had
to. She hurried out of the room, forgetting to get either her robe or slippers in her haste.

"Nonno...?" Angel asked timidly, peering in the door of the nursery for the twins.

He looked around at the voice from just setting the baby boy back into his bed to sleep. "Angel...! I
didn't know you were up, my little love..." he smiled at her warmly.

"Has Mister Warrington come back yet?" she asked softly.

"Jerrod? I actually wasn't aware he had left; last I knew he was working in the potions lab." he
answered truthfully.

"He went to the store to get something. I don't think he's back yet..." she looked frightened and
exhausted.

Lucius covered little Remus with his blanket and went to her, scooping her up into his arms. "Now,
now, he's a grown man and sometimes shopping takes a bit longer than planned, that's all love..." he
soothed, wondering what had gotten her so upset about a shopping trip.

She shook her head, clinging to him. He was very concerned to feel that she was trembling. "It's not
just shopping Nonno. It's more, it's something bad...." she whispered, afraid that he would not
believe her either.

"Why do you say that?"

"I keep seeing it when I go to sleep, and you can't let it happen, please... Mister Warrington goes out
and the shadow people come after him, Nonno. The shadow people come and take him away and
hurts him. I don't want him to be hurt Nonno..." she blurted it all out. "He's on a that street with
candy and ice cream and bats and owls where we got Tia and it's not a dream..."

"Sounds like Diagon Alley, Angel." he answered. "Will it make you feel better if I summon him
back home?" he asked her.

She nodded solemnly. "Yes, Nonno..."

"Then I will simply have him return here." he smiled reassuringly at the girl as he carried her out of
the room.
Jerrod examined the bottle of Reishi mushrooms very closely; he did not wish to open it because extreme delicacy of this particular ingredient. It must be fresh cut and sealed; not old or wilted in any manner. The caps looked crisp and fresh, no soft edges in sight, no bruising at all; but then most of the ingredients he had bought at this particular store were of the upmost quality. "You said this was harvested last week...?"

"Late last week; in fact, only two days ago." the clerk at the counter agreed, watching the man examine the goods with a very careful eye. She smiled slightly; she liked dealing with men who knew what value was found in a potion and quality ingredients. She was only in her late twenties and had seen him several times here at the shop; she found him quite an intriguing person though he never spoke to her of anything but potions and potions ingredients.

"Hum... should be precisely what I need, then." he barely gave the woman a glance, more of his attention on the several ingredients he had selected. "Put these on Lucius Malfoy's account. I need to have them delivered to Malfoy Manor immediately. I have a few more items to pick up..." he said distractedly.

"Of course, sir." she said, and started to speak more but he was already at the door and out before she could form the thoughts. She sighed and shrugged. Maybe next time he'd come in she'd be wearing her sexier blouse...

Warrington drew a notepad and pencil out of his pocket, scratching off the items from his list. He now had everything he needed to create enough of the potion to ensure that all the kids at the house had their heredity restored.

Unfortunately he didn't bother looking around to see if anyone happened to be walking by at that moment and he walked directly into another pedestrian. They bounced off each other and both went sprawling to the ground in a tangle of robes. "Bloody hell...! Sorry..." he mumbled as he disentangled himself from the other wizard, who sat up and gave him an unsure look. Jerrod groaned inwardly; of all the wizards and witches strolling up and down Diagon Alley, why did it have to be him?

George Weasley picked up the book he had been carrying. "Jerrod Warrington; I certainly didn't expect to run into you today..." he commented with a smirk. "Are you okay?" he asked.

"Yeah." he grumbled, getting to his feet, not looking at him.

"Good; sorry about that, just going too damned fast, I suppose." he said, standing as well and dusting off his dragon-hide jacket. "You must be busy, I'll just let you get on with it." he said, starting to turn away.

"Wait." Jerrod heard himself say; he didn't want to talk to this man but now that they were face to face he couldn't put it off any longer. He could feel the siren's command his daughter had given to him surging up to full strength. Avoiding contacting Weasley had allowed him to ignore it but now he had no choice. He had to talk to this man, there was no way around it. "I... we need to talk. About Alyssa."

"Are you certain? The last time we did that we had a shouting match." George smirked.

"She's not just your daughter, she's mine too whether we planned her or not." he said, chewing on his lip for a moment. "She needs to have two parents to help her get past the crap they stuck inside her head, I..."
George glanced around, holding up a hand to silence the other man. "Look, this is much too public a place for a conversation like this. My store is just a few more doors down. We can have a drink and at least act like we're civilized, hum?" he suggested, turning to walk down the block. Just down the street Jerrod could see very clearly the large sign advertising Weasley's Wizarding Wheezes.

"I do have a LITTLE time..." he acquiesced, moving along with him, shoving his hands deep inside his pockets. Neither of them noticed that they were being watched, someone lurking in silence in the dark shadows of the alley watching their every move.

Warrington followed George into the store and was struck by the almost garish displays and loud noises and pungent and sweet smells that assailed him the moment he stepped inside. George didn't try to talk over the noise, he simply gestured him to follow. Fred was at the cash register; he looked curious and George gave him some sort of signal, pointing up at the stairs. Fred nodded and turned back to the customer he was dealing with. When the two mounted the small staircase behind a curtain the noise level was vastly lowered. "You actually make this crazy stuff...?" Warrington asked.

"You'd be surprised how just a little joviality can put the meaning back into people's lives. We make a pretty damned good living off this 'crazy stuff', actually." he answered, not offended by the comment at all and taking it in stride. "Fred and I are always doing surveys to find out what people want. We're constantly developing new things..." he explained as he led him up the stairs and through a hallway crammed with boxes and shelves that they could barely fit by.

"Do you clean, occasionally...?" Warrington asked a bit sourly.

George chuckled softly. "Oh, once a month or so... we're building up stock for the holidays and haven't got our storage system expanded yet. It's not so bad; I could find anything I needed in here in about ten minutes or so..." he said as they emerged into a small but comfortable sitting room. "Here we are..." he said, moving to a wall and gesturing with a wand. The bookshelves slid forward and apart, revealing a hidden bar stocked with damned near everything a wizard could ever desire to drink. "What will you have?" he offered.

Jerrod sighed; he really didn't want to be here. Maybe a drink would help him to relax just a bit. "Nothing too strong; I need to finish a potion for Malfoy once I get back." he said, still standing and feeling nervously like he should be gone.

George nodded and poured him a small glass of red currant rum and the same for himself. He handed one glass to Jerrod as he moved past, taking a seat in one of the two armchairs by the little window. "Come on, sit down, I'm not going to bite you." he commented. "You may not, but the chair might." Jerrod said; he had approached the seat but halted with the first sign of humor on his face that George had seen. He looked at the chair to see a set of teeth similar to what muggles had - wind up teeth with feet - but this one had fangs. And it was opening its mouth wide, orienting itself toward Warrington ready to bite anything that came into reach.

George laughed and snatched the toy teeth off the cushion. "Yes, that definitely would have bit... takes a special charm to get the little bugger to let go too. I bet Fred planned on that one getting me later tonight." he smirked as Jerrod paused, lifting the cushion to check for any other nasty surprises before he sat down. George sat patiently but Jerrod just sipped his drink, staring at his own shoes. After a few minutes, he cleared his throat. "So, what is it you wanted to talk about...?"

He couldn't just sit here; he had to say something. "Alyssa. Alyssa wants us to talk." he answered.

"All right, you got me where you want me. What about Alyssa?" he prompted.
"We need to work together somehow. She... found out about me; the nannies were talking about it in front of her even though they were strictly forbidden to do so."

"Good." George said firmly.

Warrington was surprised and confused enough to look up and meet the eyes of the other man. "Good? What the bloody hell is good about that?" he asked.

The red-haired wizard eyed him calmly with a bit of a grin. "You're close to my age. No romantic interests, no focus outside your work... you need a kid. Even Severus Snape, that old stick, has a pair of lovers and stepson to keep him happy."

That comment got a rise out of him. "I am NOT Severus Snape...!" he bristled. George laughed. "I'm quite aware of that, Jerrod." he answered. "Calm down, I didn't mean anything by it."

"You aren't exactly surrounded by screaming brats yourself, Weasley." he said, preferring to use the more formal last name. "You aren't married, and from what I understand your mother had quite a few children." he commented, trying to make this redhead feel as uncomfortable as he was about this situation.

"And so should I?" he asked, drawing the obvious conclusion. "Lack of desire and effort, I suppose. Not to worry though, there are more than enough of us to carry on the family name. My sister has four kids and Ron has one, I've lost count of Bill's brood." he smirked. "Besides, I have a daughter now, don't I?"

Jerrod shifted uncomfortably in his chair. Yes, George had a kid, with him. "She doesn't like dolls." he said out of the blue, unable to think of anything else to say.

"She doesn't...?" he asked, frowning a bit. "I thought all girls enjoyed dolls..."

"Your sister Ginny didn't."

"Fred's fault." George answered immediately. "He came up with the idea to charm her doll to bite her if she touched its face. She didn't play with it long and didn't ask mum or dad for any others..."

He looked shocked. "You did that to your little sister...?"

George shrugged. "She transfigured the waistbands of our underwear so they fused with our skin. I figure we were even." Warrington took a sip of his drink; he would never thought of doing either of those things to anyone...! He wasn't sure that this family of Weasleys was entirely sane at the moment. "But I'd never do that to a child now." George said firmly.

Jerrod was somewhat mollified. "Alyssa told me that you couldn't be a good dad because you didn't know what she likes and doesn't like." he said.

George leaned forward slightly. "So teach me." he suggested.

"What...?"

He smiled at the other wizard's surprise. "I said, teach me. Teach me what my daughter likes and doesn't like. You know all that about her, don't you?"

"I know all of that about all five of them." he said crossly, not liking at all that he felt like he was getting put on the spot. He was very uncomfortable about this whole situation and how it was
making him feel.

"I'm serious, Jerrod. I need to know about the girl..." George started.

He set the drink down. "I don't think I should stay; I've got to go..." he said, scowling.

"Why? Lucius Malfoy can summon you if he needs to, I can read a binding scar as easily as the next wizard." George said, eyes flicking to the scar visible on the other man's wrist. "After all, you're the one who said we had to talk."

"You're getting too damned personal; I don't like it." he scowled.

"No more personal than you're getting with me." the redhead answered.

"It's none of your business why I don't have kids or a wife!"

"Perhaps it isn't. Look, I'll make it even; I'll tell you why I don't. I'm not into birds; never have been for anything serious." George admitted. "They're fun, but I need something and someone that's more than just fun."

"That's not my problem!"

"Isn't it?" he asked pointedly. He knew what he was seeing in the man's face before Jerrod had gotten all angry; the man was interested but clearly afraid to admit it.

Warrington got to his feet. "No, it isn't!" he said, feeling very angry and not sure why. "I'm into birds...!"

George tried not to grin; he could see it as plain as the nose on Warrington's face. "...but birds aren't into you?" he finished for him.

"You, George Weasley, are a total and insufferable git!" he growled, shoving to his feet. "I was wrong; I don't have time for this." he said, stalking back toward the door. George did not stop him as he stalked out of the room, down the hallway, and into the shop again. Fred was at the counter waiting on a customer but Jerrod ignored him completely, pushing past a few customers in order to get out of the shop.

Once outside he took a shaky breath. Damn it all he hated for people to bring that shite up... he was happy. "I'm a happy bachelor, let it go and leave me the bloody hell alone...!" he grumbled as he paused to get his bearings. The bookstore; that was what he needed now; he turned and hurried in that direction. When he was passing the alley again he felt something reach and seize him, and he fell into the alley and out of consciousness.

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"Wake up, you useless worm." a female voice growled close to his ear.

Warrington fought his way back to consciousness, dazed and confused. He was bound hand and foot, and was unable to move a single muscle in his body. He was tied on a bed and his hands felt sticky with something... blood...? Why couldn't he move...?

"Father will be so happy to see you." The female voice continued in an acidic tone as she stroked his cheek with one fingernail. He forced his eyes to focus on her and he felt as if his heart stopped completely. Pansy Parkinson smiled and slapped his face lightly before she turned away from him. "Not many things make father happy anymore..."
He felt all the blood drain out of his face at her comment. Her father... Merlin why hadn’t Lucius simply killed him? It would have been better if he had. “I’m the reason he’s pissed off, Pansy. Why don’t you do him a favor and kill me?” She might get angry enough to kill him after all, if he worked her up enough. Unless her father had her under imperious... why would he need to do that?

“Don’t be an idiot. I tried to kill you already.” She spat at him over her shoulder, pure hate in her eyes. "I can't kill you or you'd never have woken up."

"Why isn’t your father here?” he asked, trying to keep her talking.

"He's coming. I'm to hold you here until he comes. Now shut the hell up before I silence you, fool.” she snarled at him. "My life is a living hell because of you. I want to see father slice you apart, bit by bit. I hope he keeps you alive for months and slowly tortures you to death."

"Nice.” he said, allowing his eyes to close. "Good to know you've stayed sweet..." he said sourly.

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After receiving assurances from her grandfather that he would take care of finding his errant servant, Angel allowed herself to be put back to bed. Lucius set the house elf Toodles to watch over the girl with strict instructions to assist the girl to remain sleeping if necessary.

He then used his bond to call to Warrington and waited; he was rather surprised that he got no response. He was about to call Severus when the coals in the fireplace animated.

"Mr. Malfoy...?" George Weasley's disembodied head gazed at him out of the coals.

"Ah, Mr. Weasley. What a perfect time for you to call." Lucius took his seat before the fire; he would take advantage of this.

George looked a bit confused. "Huh...?"

"My bondservant Warrington has gone shopping at Diagon Alley..." Lucius began.

"Yeah, I know." George answered. "That's why I was calling, to tell the truth. I think maybe that I owe him an apology. He left here about twenty minutes ago; he's not back yet?"

"He's not here." Lucius answered, frowning.

"Weird." George commented. "I could look around town for you if you want." he offered, looking concerned.

"Do that. I will probably be there shortly myself."

"All right." George nodded. "If something has happened I know a few people who keep their eyes open who owe me a thing or two..." the disembodied head in the fireplace said. "I'll let you know if I see or hear anything."

"Ask people who were around your shop." Lucius suggested. "I have reason to believe he was taken just after he left there."

George nodded and the fireplace returned to simply being a fireplace once more.

Lucius rose to his feet and picked up the jar of floo powder.

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“Have you asked the child?” Severus asked when he was told of what was happening.

“The child…? Angel has gone back to bed…”

“Not Angel. I’m talking about Warrington’s daughter.”

“Alyssa? No, why would I ask her about him?”

Severus sighed softly. “The child has, I believe, both Selkie and Siren blood? She has practiced on her father. Considering the fact that the guardians know and are adept at using Sectumsempra, I don’t find it beyond the realm of possibility that Alyssa has been trained in the skills of her blood. That is, after all, the reason that they selected Warrington as her father.”

“And she may have the calling ability.” Lucius said, comprehending. “I know she has the ability to control Warrington even with his blood nearly as pure as hers.” He called for a house elf to fetch the girl to them quickly.

Moments later Alyssa appeared with the house elf, which quickly vanished from sight once more. She looked a bit confused and unsure as she gazed at the two, but the expression was quickly hidden from the both. “Lord Malfoy… you wanted to see me?” She asked quietly.

“Yes. Tell me what you are trained in, child. What skills of your Selkie and Siren blood that you have mastered so far?”

She glanced at Severus a moment, unsure about what she was allowed to talk about in front of him. Then she looked back up at Lucius. “I’m not really supposed to talk about it, Lord Malfoy…” she said softly.

“The old rules have changed, have they not? In that valley you were treated as an instrument, a tool to be used when they felt you were needed. Here you are allowed to choose your own path, and to choose when and where that path will take you. Here you are allowed to have parents.”

“But… but they don’t want me.” She murmured, looking down.

“George Weasley does.”

“But Professor Warrington doesn’t.”

“You know about him?” Severus asked.

“The nannies talk to each other; all I had to do is listen.” She said, not looking up. “I asked the professor and he said that it was true.”

“Do you want him to be your father, little one?” Severus asked quietly.

Alyssa gazed up at him with sad eyes. “Yes, I do, sir.”

“Tell us then, what you know.” Lucius said.

She nodded, gazing at Lucius when she answered. “I haven’t learnt how to see the future or the past; I was just starting my training on that when I came here… I can manipulate people, sir, to do what I need them to, even my fa…” she stopped herself; he didn’t want to be her father. “…even Mr. Warrington. I can get him to come to me any time I want and it doesn’t matter how far away I am. That’s why they moved me to live with him before the others. But sometimes I mess it up and I end up going to where he is…”
“If you want your fathers, do what you do and call them. Bring them both here.” Severus said.

“I’m not supposed…”

Snape scowled at the girl. “You may lose them if you do not!”

“Severus!” Lucius cautioned, seeing fear in the girl’s eyes.

“What do you mean? What does he mean Lord Malfoy?” She asked, hugging her toy tightly.

“Call to Warrington. Call him with all your might and bring him to us.” Lucius said, not wanting to frighten the girl with possible death or dismemberment of her father.

She glanced at Severus again and took a deep breath, her eyes unfocusing as she began to summon her father. Both men felt a surge of magical power. Lucius reached toward the girl, unsure if she would be able to pull her father back or if she – as she put it – might mess up and transport herself to her father.

Suddenly before her appeared one robed figure; George Weasley. He looked about confused, but Alyssa did not move, her little fists tightening. “I want my daddy, I want my daddy…!” she whispered, a tear on her cheek.

A moment later Warrington appeared; face bloodied and bruised, robes almost shredded off his body. He had straps on both hands and feet, and curled up when he realized he was free with a soft moan.

“They hurt you…” Alyssa whispered, gazing at him with wide eyes showing surprise and horror as she moved to him, her toy hugged tighter in her arms than ever before. No one had ever hurt the Professor before...

“Bloody hell!” George said, moving forward as well. “What happened…?!?”

He noticed Alyssa and attempted to pretend that he wasn't hurt at all, starting to push himself to a sitting position. “It was Parkinson. Pansy was waiting…. I wasn’t paying attention, didn’t see her. Sorry…” he murmured. "It's really not as bad as it all looks, Lady Alyssa..."

“Stop that, Jerrod. Just lie still.” Lucius said firmly.

“Yes sir.” he mumbled, sighing as he subsided and lay where he was, half-curled on the floor. "You know, Angel tried to warn me.” Warrington said. “She told me not to leave this morning…” he said softly.

“You should have listened to the girl.” Severus said with dripping sarcasm.

"She's a kid... how was I to know?" he answered.

Severus rolled his eyes and drew his wand, performing a medical scan of the prone man. “He has a broken left forearm, broken bone in that wrist. Right arm is all right. It looks like his shoulder may have been partially dislocated; several contusions and cuts to the face but no brain injury. Cuts across his chest and arms. His ankle may have been sprained, the muscles don’t look right at all.”

"That's not so bad, considering that Pansy did tell me she tried to kill me.” Jerrod mumbled with a half-grin.

Severus straightened up, slipping his wand away. “Your injuries are mostly superficial.”

Warrington began to rise again. “So I can get up…?” he asked. “I need to finish my work, I…”
“Are you mad, man?” George scowled. “I'm taking you straight to bed!”

Severus smirked slightly. “Mr. Weasley, he’s much too injured for games of that sort.” He commented.

George rolled his eyes. “You know what I meant!” he countered.

“You need to go to sleep and get better… please Professor…?” Alyssa said softly, her cheeks damp with tears.

Warrington looked at the girl and felt his heart melt. "Alyssa... I promise I won't work long, but I have a duty to Lord Malfoy..." he attempted to reason with her; he had to get this done, he didn't have a choice.

"Nonsense. You have time to rest..." Lucius corrected.

"Wait; you don't understand, sir. I've got it... almost, anyway. I've got the answer you needed from me." Warrington said with an obsessed light in his eyes. "You have to allow me to finish at least once, to assure myself that it functions if nothing else..."

George scowled, looking from Lucius to Warrington. "You can't be seriously considering allowing him to work in this condition!"

"I can, Weasley. And I will allow it..." he began but held up a hand to make Jerrod stop in his attempt to rise. "For only one hour, then you will go to bed for a minimum of two days." he ordered.

Jerrod looked frustrated. "But I have the answer...! I need to duplicate it and..."

"And I'm not so bad at potions." George interrupted. "Neither is Snape; we can duplicate anything..."

"It's MY potion!" he said, feeling he was losing his only accomplishment.

"I'm too busy to work on any potion anyway." Severus said, with a half-sneer. "You have this all well in hand; I was on my way to visit Potter anyway to discuss other matters." he said, turning away.

"One hour." Lucius repeated. "And you will not be walking, Mr. Warrington."

"How the bloody hell am I to get about then?"

"The hospital so graciously provided us with a wheel chair..." Lucius reminded.

"For your son..."

"Shut up and accept it, Jerrod. I've never heard of Malfoy changing his mind once he's decided about something. Tell you what; Alyssa can sit and ride with you and I'll push you around in the damned thing until your time is up." George suggested.

"But first you need a bath, Professor." Alyssa said, touching his torn robes.

He flushed. "Yes, I think a bath is in order..." he agreed.

Lucius had the house elves fetch the chair, then assisted with settling the man into the chair. "You will see a healer before you go to work as well, I will not have a servant of mine damage themselves permanently due to lack of medical care."
"Bath, healer, then work." he sighed. "All right, all right... but do I have to...?"

"You don't have a choice, Jerrod." George said, using his wand to widen the seat of the chair until the girl could fit. He then lifted Alyssa and carefully placed her on Jerrod's right side. She snuggled in close to him, careful of his injuries, gazing up at him worriedly. "There. Don't worry, Lucius, I'll make sure he does what you told him to do," he assured.

Lucius smirked. "I'm sure you and little Alyssa have him well in hand. Don't forget to call me to see your final results."

"Not bloody likely that I'll forget." he said with a slight grumble.

George pushed him into the bathing room and set Alyssa on her feet. "You run along Alyssa, I'll let you know when he can have you visit some more, all right?"

"All right, Lord Father Weasley..." she said reluctantly; she wanted to help but she went out of the room obediently.

Jerrod started to push out of the chair but George put a heavy hand on his shoulder. "No, you heard Lucius. You're not to walk..."

"I'm not walking, I'm getting in the damned tub!" he retorted.

"I'm putting you in the tub and getting these disgusting robes off you..."

"You are not!" he started to push at his hand and hissed in pain.

"Don't use that arm!" George let him go immediately. "Listen up, Jerrod. If I have to stupefy you and wash you down myself I'll do it."

Warrington scowled at him. "You wouldn't...!"

"Try me; I don't make empty threats." George answered; he saw the only way he was going to get through to this man was to be as gruff with him as he was being. "You want to bathe yourself? Let me help you get ready and get out." he growled, eye to eye with the injured man.

Warrington glared at him for several long moments, then sighed and looked away. "Fine." he grumbled.

George used his wand to carefully remove the shreds of robe hanging from his shoulders, then used a lifting spell to lift the man into the air and lower him into the water still dressed in his underwear. Once concealed under the water, he used his wand once more to strip the rest of the clothing off of the injured man.

Warrington tried not to wince at the water covering his cuts and bruises; the warm water didn't burn but it didn't feel too great at first either.

"I'll get your back for you; you're gonna have a problem with that." George said, getting the sponge and soap.

Jerrod started to argue, but he decided against it. What was the point? He silently leaned forward to allow it.

George froze for a moment, looking at the mark on his right shoulder; an unmistakable wicked looking skull with a snake twined about and coming out the mouth of the skull. The Dark Mark?
"You're a Death Eater?" he asked quietly.

Jerrod snorted. "Hell no. The Dark Lord didn't mark shoulders, did he?"

"No, but that is definitely a Dark Mark."

He sighed, looking back at him. "Do I have to explain to you too?"

"You said yourself we're both Alyssa's parents. I need to understand why the hell you have that bloody thing on your shoulder."

"I'm beat to hell and all he's worried about is the damned tattoo." he said, rolling his eyes. George began to carefully wash his back. "It's not for the Death Eaters, it's for the Dark Circle. I'm not the only one with one. Parkinson put it there to test its effectiveness. Works pretty damned well, actually."

"The Dark Circle... Dark Prince... " George mused thoughtfully, remembering. "Do you mean to tell me that that baby Mallek is your master?"

"In a word, yes." he said simply. "He can command me, but he hasn't the training yet to do that. I'm still in control of myself. But he's not the only one who holds my leash." he sighed.

"So whose lapdog are you, precisely?" George asked.

"Lovely choice of words." Jerrod grumbled, but he couldn't argue that it was not true. "Alyssa has been trained to be able to control me," he admitted; there was no point in hiding that any further. "And Parkinson can do the summoning through the Dark Mark."

"I'm surprised that he hadn't done that already." he began to rinse off his back; several of the cuts were still oozing blood.

"Malfoy's protections over this place prevent him from doing it. It's the only place I've ever been where I haven't felt that mark come alive whenever Parkinson felt like activating it."

"Then you need to stay on grounds here until he's dead." George said with a frown.

"Because of that mark? No one has seen it but you." he said rolling his eyes. "I have work to do, I can't hide out here like that. The kids, though, they need to..."

"The kids are marked too?" George's frown deepened.

"Not Mallek, but yes. Alerick, Erik, Erin and Alyssa have the mark too." he said, taking the sponge from George and beginning to wash his chest off, trying not to grimace at the pain he put himself through by simply washing. "It's not a big deal, really..."

"Not a big deal...?" George repeated in disbelief. "People were hunted down who had that mark after Voldemort was killed! If it wasn't the officials who got hold of them they were often found in pieces somewhere if they were found at all! And if those people over at the Ministry even get wind that anyone has that mark they're investigated and watched for the rest of their lives... Severus Snape works in a damned hospital saving babies and they STILL suspect him of dark workings!"

"I remember all of that, I was here in London just like you were, Weasley. That doesn't mean that any of that is going to happen to me. I don't disrobe in front of anyone, I don't go to beaches, I don't go to public spas; I don't do anything that might ever expose it to anyone. You're the only one whose seen it, though Malfoy knows it's there."
"How the bloody hell can you be so casual about something that could cost our daughter her life, and you yours as well?"

"What the bloody hell can I do about it, George?" Jerrod asked, glaring at him now. "It's there. I didn't ask for it, but there it is, plain as day. You know damned well the thing can't be removed, it's the same Dark Mark that Voldemort used."

"How did he mark you if you weren't willing?"

Jerrod simply held up his right hand. The bonding scars lacing up his arm were a plain answer. "I wasn't willing but I was bound to his will. So he was able to get around my unwillingness to allow him to test the damned thing on me before he put it on the Dark Circle."

George was silent for a few moments, then he sighed. "There has to be something we can do to get rid of them."

"Malfoy has someone working on that." he turned away from him, continuing to wash. He finally set the sponge back in its holder, as George said nothing else while he finished his bath.

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Despite his protests George did not allow Jerrod to get dressed in his normal clothing, as he had yet to see the healer. Instead he put him in a robe and nothing on his feet, frowning at the purple swollen ankle and arm. Once he had him dressed he called for a house elf to fetch a healer.

The healer did not take long; the scan that Severus had performed was precise and correct. The breaks in his bones were healed, and Warrington was given a potion to drink and another with instructions to take it and go to bed.

When the healer left Warrington summoned his robes and clean clothing and attempted to make George leave. "I can get myself dressed."

"So do it." he answered in a totally unruffled tone.

"Do you HAVE to watch?" he asked, irritated.

"If it makes you feel better..." he turned his side to the slightly younger man but did not turn his back. Warrington glared at him and proceeded to get dressed; his left arm was very weak and he was surprised how much effort it took simply to get his underclothing on. He sat on his bed, staring at his robes a moment before putting a grim set to his jaw and picking them up.

Before he was through he had to allow George to assist him in dressing; he could not stand on his sprained ankle nor could he use his left arm for anything at all. Warrington sighed finally. "All right, I'm dressed. Now go home and leave me alone."

"Not happening."

"Damn it, Weasley, the healer didn't say I couldn't walk. I'll just..."

"The healer didn't but Lucius did. Sit." George said firmly. "And I saw you; you can barely stand much less walk. You have a limited time to work, then you're going straight to bed."
"I may have to do what he says but I don't have to do what you tell me..."

"Don't make me call Alyssa in here." The redhead smirked.

Jerrod started to object again, but only scowled and sat down in the chair. "Just take me to the damned lab." he grumbled grumpily.

George just grinned and pushed him out of the room in the chair.

Pansy stared at the empty bed in shock. What in the hell had just happened...? Warrington was there when she went into the bathroom, his blood was still on the sheets. How had he gotten free? He must have gotten loose, that's all. She made a quick search of the dirty little hotel room and found no trace of him whatsoever.

Hesitantly she turned back to the bed, approaching it like it was hiding something. She still couldn't believe what was right before her eyes. She reached out and put her hand on the bed hoping to find he was simply invisible. No luck; her hand went down to the sheets, though they were still warm where he had been laying. He wasn't invisible, he was really gone.

It didn't take very long for her shock to transform into panic as she stared at the empty bed. What in Merlin's name was she supposed to do? She didn't fail, she didn't! She had caught the feckless bastard and had bound him here as she had been instructed!

He'd accuse her of failure... he'd torture her... or he'd kill her. That thought got her moving; she whirled on the spot and fled for the door. She didn't care if she was being hunted with a reward on her head by the general populace; she'd rather be in the hands of the Aurors than in her father's hands! She seized the door and whipped it open.

A blast of light flared out of the open doorway and she was thrown back across the room against the small table beside the bed. She cried out in pain, the wood cracking from her impact against it; she crumpled to the floor holding her injured side. Looking up at the doorway through pain-filled eyes she saw a figure framed in it; it was her father.

"Accio Wand!" he snapped before she could raise the wand; it flew from her possession into his waiting hand. He stepped in and closed the door behind him. His face didn't show any expression but that lack of expression sent cold fear shooting down her spine, paralyzing her.

"Father, I..."

"Where is he?" he asked in a voice full of malice and cold fury. "You failed."

"No! No, father, I had him here, I swear it! Check my wand, I captured him with a body bind spell, I knocked him out and I brought him here just as you told me to do, exactly as you ordered me father!" she answered immediately. "Please just check the wand, I..."

He held up a hand to silence her and she fell silent immediately. "Let me be sure I understand what happened. You captured him without injury, as you were instructed, and you brought him here and bound him to await my arrival."

She nodded quickly. "Yes! Yes that's right...!"

"And then you felt it necessary to beat him?" he asked coldly, eyeing the blood stained sheets and spatters on the wall. Not too much blood; it was clear she did no major harm to the idiotic fool.
She bowed her head, trembling. "I was furious about everything that's happened... I lost everything, even my damned freedom. They're keeping Grainger down in the Ministry until her hearing; there's no way that I can get to her to get my revenge on that bitch... I wanted to vent some of my anger, and... I'm sorry father..." her voice drifted off to a whisper.

"What happened after you beat him? Did you kill him?" he asked.

"No. I wanted to, but... but you told me I was not allowed to kill him." she said. "I tried... and I almost did. But I couldn't."

"Which brings me back to now. And this empty bed... I see you did indeed have him bound properly..." he said, picking up the end of one of the snapped bindings, examining the broken end. "Tied with the magically reinforced rope as I instructed..."

"I did EVERYTHING you told me to, father..." she said in an urgent tone.

"Then, my dear..." he turned back to face her. "...where IS he?"

She bit her lip, lowering her eyes. "I don't know. He was here when I went to the loo and when I came back he was gone... the bed was still warm. I had the room warded against apparition, but..."

"Your ward against apparition is still there." he answered, scowling. "You didn't search him, did you? He had a portkey..."

"I searched him." she countered. "He had nothing on him. Nothing at all."

"You missed something!" he snapped.

"I missed NOTHING!" she said defensively. "I checked him QUITE thoroughly before I allowed him to wake!"

He began to pace, furious that his plan had not met with success.

His lack of an immediate violent reaction gave her a smidgen of self-confidence, enough to speak up once more. "Maybe, father, they know something that we don't. You can't know absolutely everything..." Pansy said with a little of her old sarcasm showing through.

"Maybe, Pansy dearest, you should shut the bloody hell up." he snarled, turning on her, his eyes blazing with fury, his wand leveled at her.

"I can't shut up father! You have to listen! They got him out of here somehow without breaking any of the wards or protections! It's true, and even you have to admit it! They know more than we do, and we have to just get on with the rest of our lives... we have all that money, father, we could live very comfortably..."

"In hiding." he spat. "We should be living as rulers! In control of all we see, especially those blind witless idiots in the Ministry of Magic!"

"I doubt the Ministry figured out that I even HAD him!" Pansy said, getting slowly to her feet, one hand over her side which continued to throb sharply with pain. "It had to be Malfoy and Potter. Somehow they got him the moment my back was turned..."

"Which makes the blame for his loss clear, doesn't it?"

"Yes, I..." she began, then realized he meant that the blame was hers. "...what...?"
"You should never have turned your back." he snarled at her. "Now I will have to find another way to capture him..."

"Father, please, we can't... Malfoy isn't ever going to let him out again after this, you KNOW that..."

"Then we'll just have to go on with the next phase of my plan." he growled.

"Don't make me..." she whispered, pale.

"You're either with me or against me. Decide now, Pansy Parkinson." he growled, wand leveled at her, malice in his eyes.

"Please daddy..." she whimpered, cowering.

Her pleas had no effect on him; he spoke the word she feared to hear. "Crucio!"

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Lucius gazed at the chart that had just been created by Jerrod Warrington with quite a pleased smile. The chart showed a complete family tree as it always should have. The chart showed three names at the top of the chart; Narcissa, Lucius, and James Potter. The girl child that he and James had created together was listed there; her name showing as Ariandi Xal. Under himself and Narcissa, it showed that Alerick and Draco were brothers, and showed all of Draco's children.

Warrington smiled; at least he was capable of doing SOMETHING right. The fact that Lucius was pleased with him made him feel quite content. "I can brew enough to do the others in about nine hours... I'll get right on that."

"No, you are to go to bed. I know what the healer advised." Lucius said, rolling up the scroll.

"But..."

"I don't take arguments from my bondservants lightly, Warrington. You WILL go to bed. THAT is an order." he said firmly, eyes narrowed. Severus, sitting in the other chair in the sitting room, held out his hand and Lucius passed the scroll to him.

Jerrod subsided back into his chair, scowling. "Yessir." he grumbled softly.

"Toldja." George smirked.

"If you would do the honors?" Lucius gestured toward the door.

"No problem. Alyssa wants to help put him to bed anyway." George said, pushing him onward.

"Oh come on, leave the girl out of all of this!" Warrington complained as they went out into the hall and both of the older men could hear George snicker.

Severus smirked. "I think I see a romance budding." he said sarcastically.

"Let them be, Severus. Warrington will reject everything if he thinks anyone sees it before he does." Lucius said, taking his seat as well.

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"You don't have to put me to bed..." Jerrod tried to object. They had stopped by the nursery to pick up Alyssa and she sat now beside him again, happy as could be to ride along in the chair with her
"If we don't you won't go to bed at all." George answered with a grin.

"You need to sleep, Professor Warrington..." Alyssa said, gazing up at him.

He sighed. "I'm not particularly tired, Alyssa, but I will sleep." he said softly.

She smiled, hugging him as George pushed the chair into the bedroom. Alyssa jumped out of the chair and crawled up on the bed, pulling back the covers. Jerrod allowed himself to be assisted out of the chair and onto the bed, careful to put no weight on his sore ankle. He slipped off his outer robes, then just got into bed wearing his comfortable slacks and shirt.

"You can't be serious about sleeping like that." George commented.

"I am not undressing in front of the girl!" Jerrod growled.

"You don't have to." George said, drawing his wand. First he spelled the blankets to magically stay up off the injured foot, then he transfigured the clothing that Jerrod wore into silk pajamas. "There. That'll be easier to sleep in..."

Alyssa helped pull the blankets up and tried to tuck the blankets up around Warrington's chin. "You have to keep warm..." she said.

"It's not cold in here, Alyssa..." he said, but allowed her to act motherly toward him though he looked almost like he was in pain.

"Now that's quite the domestic scene..." a voice spoke from the doorway. All eyes went to the door where Harry stood. Alyssa froze where she was, staring at him with fear in her eyes.

"Very funny." Warrington said sourly as Alyssa slipped off the bed and hid behind George.

"Absolutely comical, Harry." George grinned, one hand resting easily on the girl's head, reassuring her. "You need something?"

"Yes... I hate to ask this but I need to talk to Warrington." Harry said.

"He's supposed to be going to sleep. Healer's orders." George said. "I was about to make sure he takes his sleeping potion."

"What do you need, Potter?"

"I should talk to you privately." he suggested.

"I'll send Alyssa on but I'm staying until he's asleep." George said stubbornly.

"Is this about the Mark? He knows about it." Jerrod said, sighing.

"I want to alter it." Harry said in agreement.

"Fine..." Jerrod started.

George bristled. "You're off your bleedin' nut, Harry. No way." he said firmly.

Harry looked at him in surprise. "What...?"
"Do you have any idea what he's been through today? He's been healed but the healer wants him off his feet and not using his left arm at all. He was kidnapped and got the hell beat out of him; he needs rest not to have some spell done to change anything..."

"It's not going to hurt him, George!" Harry reassured.

"Go right ahead, I'd rather you do that on me than..." Jerrod began but George drowned him out again.

"Are you certain? Absolutely certain?"

"Weasley, if you would let me have a chance to say something..." Warrington tried again but Harry and George were both ignoring him.

"I won't be ABSOLUTELY certain until I've tried, but this book here says that it's painless." Harry returned. "Come on, George, you know I wouldn't do anything to hurt anyone on purpose!"

"You're just going to have to wait until he has his rest!"

"George!" Jerrod snapped and everyone looked at him in surprise as if they just remembered that he was there and conscious. He looked quite angry. "Let him do it. Let him. I was the guinea pig for the placement of the damned thing. I'll step up and be first to get the damned thing changed to something else."

George was silent a moment, looking at the man in the bed, then he nodded. "All right." he said softly.
Flower Power!

Warrington lay on the bed on his stomach with the silky pajama top off. Alyssa was gone from the room; George had sent her out before Warrington would even consent to take off his shirt. He tried not to think about the pain that might be caused by Harry's attempt to alter the Dark Mark upon his right shoulder.

Having the damn thing gone was something he had believed would never happen; he was sure that if he had gotten free of the Parkinson clan someone would have noticed it. Simply having that mark, he knew, would have made damned sure that he would be condemned to live in some dark and dank cell in Azkaban forever. If Harry succeeded in changing the mark, he could actually live a somewhat normal life... as a bondservant, anyway.

George was standing nearby, watching, and scowling in disapproval. Harry simply ignored him; Snape could put on a much better show than that any day so it was easy to do. He played for a moment with the thought of recommending that George take lessons from the snarky old potions master if he wanted to get better at his attempts to glower and scowl.

Smirking faintly and pushing the thought out of his mind, Harry returned his attention to the page in the book that held the precious information on how to alter bonding marks. It did give a method of removing the mark but that usually involved removing the body part that had been marked; not a viable solution in this situation. Further study had found a section that stated that the mark could be changed, the lines of the mark could be manipulated with this gesture and the spell of "mutare", which Harry thought meant "manipulate" in Greek.

He spoke the word with an unintentional mispronunciation, then touched the mark ever so lightly with the tip of his wand. Jerrod hissed in a barely restrained gasp of pain, his teeth clenched. The outline of the snake bulged then the snake itself seemed to take on life, rearing up and ripping itself from the flesh of Warrington's shoulder; a snake of human flesh and blood with teeth of black steel leaving a bloody channel where it had once lay. Harry instantly backed away, speaking the word to end the spell. The snake subsided back onto his shoulder, though blood trickled from the edges of the snake's form.

"Holy fuck! That was the nastiest thing I've ever seen! What the bloody hell did you do?!” George demanded.

"Oh DO shut up Weasley." Jerrod grumbled. He took a moment to pull a pillow tight in his arms; if Harry did something like that again he was sure he was going to scream. He'd be ready for it; he didn't want anyone to hear him object to pain like that. "Come on Potter, try again." he suggested.

Harry hesitated and then tried again, being far more careful with his enunciation of the word this time. When he touched the pale skin Jerrod gasped in pain as the tattoo's lines swelled up like ropes, seeming to want to burst out of the skin, and then settled into painful looking welts after a fraction of a second. The Dark Mark had come to life; the skull part of the tattoo began to move from side to side, mouth opening wider in a silent scream as the snake squirmed, slithering in through the eye socket and out the mouth, flicking its tongue and baring its fangs at Harry menacingly. Warrington had gasped, his fists clenched and eyes shut tight to endure the pain but he did not move. Harry cut off that attempt quickly and the tattoo slowly returned to its inanimate state.

“Merlin’s bloody balls…!” George murmured, horrified.

Jerrod glared at Harry a moment over his shoulder. “Please. Don’t do THAT again.” He requested.
“I don’t intend to.” Harry assured, scowling at the book. “One more try, all right?” Harry was rather shaken by the fact that he was capable of bringing that thing to life.

"As many as you need Potter." He said quietly, though his shoulder now throbbed and his ankle was really beginning to ache despite the fact that George had carefully propped it up so that it did not lie at a strange or uncomfortable angle upon the sheets.

"One more." Harry said firmly. He put the book down and focused on the tattoo, his eyes narrowed so that all he could see was the mark. He raised his wand and pointed at, but did not touch, one line of the mark. He moved the wand outward while whispering "MUTARE". The line slowly responded to his guidance.

Harry worked for the next two hours making meticulous alterations to the tattoo. George watched as the sickening Dark Mark with so many horrible memories attached to it was slowly transmutated into a lotus blossom, open and at full bloom. Finally he sighed and lowered his wand, stretching his back, finding he felt extremely exhausted.

George had inched closer during the process to watch as the change occurred. He eyed the results with a smile. "That's kinda pretty now... never would have guessed it was a Dark Mark... not too masculine but it sure does look better..."

"I don't care what it is as long as its not that damned bloody skull." Jerrod mumbled, feeling drained and exhausted as well. He felt like he'd been beaten all over again.

"It still holds the same properties it did before. It binds him to the children." Harry said, rising, picking his book up off the bed. "It's going to take a lot more research to change the properties and its purpose..."

"I really don't care. Honestly, Potter. I don't mind being bound to the children at all." Jerrod mumbled, looking quite pale. "You can leave it that way as far as I'm concerned. Now can I move now? Please...?"

Harry slipped his wand away. "Oh, yes, of course..." he said, unable to help noticing the thin lines crisscrossing the back of the man he had just worked on. The lines covered most of his back leaving very little skin unmarked except where the altered Mark now lay. He couldn't help but wonder just what kind of a life he had endured. He knew he might never know because he never intended to ask.

"Oh, bloody hell, your ankle...!" George cursed, moving quickly to help him to turn over and to sit up. Jerrod allowed him to help him to turn over without any complaint, too tired and worn out to argue about that.

"I think I'll take that sleeping potion now." Warrington said, reaching for his shirt, his hands shaking.

"I know it hurt when I screwed up, Jerrod, but did the change to the mark hurt at all?" Harry asked.

Jerrod frowned softly, considering his answer before he gave it. "No. It really didn't hurt; more like... itched. It was a weird kind of feeling, kind of like something was crawling around or shifting just under my skin. I didn't notice any pain, but then again my attention is kind of diverted by other pain at the moment." he shrugged into his shirt as George pulled the blankets aside, fussing over the condition of the ankle. Jerrod ignored him, laying back on the pillows. He went to put an ice pack on it and it slipped, falling a bit hard on the swollen bruised area. "Ow...! Damn and double damn! George would you just let it alone?!" he snapped.
"Sorry; the damn thing is slippery... Look at that ankle, you should have it iced...!" George retorted, leaving the ice on it.

Jerrod glared at him, then exhaled, exasperated. "Would you just give me the damned potion? I want to be unconscious!" he said, sitting up slightly as he reached for the bottle on the bedside table.

George gently pushed him back on the bed. "Lay down already, you grumpy old man. I've got it."

"Would you just give me the damned potion? I want to be unconscious!" he said, sitting up slightly as he reached for the bottle on the bedside table.

George picked up the bottle and sighed, shaking his head with a faint grin.

Harry looked at each of them and grinned faintly. "You know, George, you two don't act like you just met."

"We haven't just met, really... he was in your class just two years behind us, remember? I met him at school loads of times. I won't go claiming that I thought anything good about him at the time. Actually..." he scratched his head. "Honestly I thought he was an absolute prat and I was sure he'd go Death Eater even if his father wasn't. Most Slytherins tried to. But I thought the same of Draco at the time." he smirked.

"Yeah. Me too." Harry admitted as he chuckled along with him.

Harry tracked down Lucius; he and Severus Snape were relaxing in the study chatting when he moved in. Lucius offered to get him a drink but Harry waved him to remain seated, getting his own drink before he went to go and have a seat.

"You look exhausted. I take it the alteration of the mark worked?" Lucius asked hopefully.

"I didn't get it on the first try, but yes, it worked." Harry said wearily. "And I think I have an extra twist we can use for the children, if Severus says it's possible." he glanced at the old professor, who merely looked curious. "I don't want to remove the memories and knowledge from the children's minds. None of them are mind-healers or work with the mind; I think that is what Mallek was going
to be trained to do. Who better to manipulate the mind than the leader?"

"Indeed." Severus agreed; that had been Voldemort's thinking precisely. "What 'twist' were you suggesting, Potter?"

"The tattoo and the memories can be linked to specific events in the children's lives. I would prefer that the memories come to them in a natural pattern and I intend to link the mark into it."

"What did you mutate the mark into?" Lucius asked.

"A lotus blossom." Harry answered.

Harry couldn't help but notice the slow smile spreading across the retired teacher's face. "Let me understand this... now, instead of referring to them as the Dark Circle, they are to be the Flower Power Gang?" Severus asked with a smirk.

Harry chuckled, trying to give Severus a dirty look for the comical comment but failing completely. "You've been watching muggle cartoons again haven't you?" he laughed softly. "NO, they're just going to be KIDS. Not a gang, not a circle, just kids."

"Flower Power Gang...?" Lucius repeated and chuckled softly. "Honestly, Severus, you're in quite a mood this evening...!"

Snape actually grinned, sipping his firewhiskey.

Harry shook his head; he wasn't getting involved in whatever they had been discussing before he came along. "The REASON I chose a lotus blossom, Severus, because of its historical significance. In feudal Japan, samurai warriors often had lotus blossoms engraved upon their weapons hilts and blades to remind them that life is more than war and death; there are good, true and beautiful things in the world. It represents good fortune, peace and enlightenment..."

"Sounds like a muggle movement back in the sixties." Severus half-chuckled. "A popular muggle singer made up the song 'Give peace a chance'..."

"Give me a break, will you?" Harry chuckled. "It also symbolizes rebirth."

"And these children are being 'born' into a new life... quite an appropriate choice, Harry, no matter what Severus says." Lucius smiled softly.

"That's not all I intend to do with the mark, either. Warrington's blossom will always be at full bloom, but the flower for the children will close with each memory that is locked away to be released by a future event until it is a bud. When we're done they will simply be children, free to grow and be happy. As the memories are restored, the lotus will open; it will help us all be able to track their actual progress with their powers as well..."

"Excellent idea; after all, Draco did come into his powers early and required some training before he ever reached Hogwarts." Lucius said proudly. "There's no reason that Alerick will not be capable of the same thing. I ensured when Draco showed that he was ready he had training that would help him at school including flying, karate, and gymnastics classes."

"Yeah, he told me all about the flying lessons." Harry grinned then sighed softly, looking at his drink a moment before he sipped it. "It takes so much out of me to do the alteration, and I think Warrington was wiped out too. It's going to take me the good part of a day to get each one of these damned Marks altered. It took nearly two hours to do Warrington's, and I expect it to take at least as long for each one of the children."
"The answer seems simple enough to me; a light dose of sleeping potion to each just before you begin working on it will help to relax them." Severus suggested.

Harry nodded in agreement. "Good idea; problem is Alyssa. She's still afraid of me."

"I hope to have that resolved soon." Severus said. "Her protections are as strong as the others, but if she goes into self-defense it could be far worse than anything that the others can produce. A siren's song is nothing compared to its scream when it attacks."

"Not to worry; she has a very strong attachment to Warrington, despite his misgivings about fatherhood." Lucius assured. "I'm sure she will behave with him present."

"I just wish there were some way that we could break that bastard Parkinson's ability to manipulate the mark as well. He can still use it to torture the children, were they ever to leave here..." Harry said, worried. "All he would have to do is summon them and the moment they walked out of here they'd be in horrible pain..."

Severus unconsciously rubbed his old mark, still hidden after so many years and barely visible on his arm from years of inactivity. "Yes, I'm aware he can use it for that."

"The answer is simple. We eliminate him. Once Parkinson is dead only you will be able to do anything with the mark, Harry." Lucius said simply, pulling out the scroll of his family tree again, his fingertips lingering on the name of his and James' daughter, Ariandi. "Then we can move on with our lives, and other projects that we wish to pursue..."

"Malcolm Parkinson may be utterly mad, Lucius, but he has managed to avoid even being seen since before the children had been taken. Even Pansy was not seen until she revealed herself to your manservant." Severus pointed out.

"We need to talk to him; pick his brain about anything he may have seen or heard while he was in their hands." Lucius said thoughtfully. "I'm absolutely certain that Malcolm won't stay in hiding for very long. I do believe he'll show himself at some point, trying to get revenge or even to snatch the children away once more. After all, Pansy did try to secure Warrington."

"So the children must not leave here until we are certain he's dead." Harry said.

Lucius nodded. "Just so." he agreed. "If you have the time, Harry, you can begin altering the children's marks tomorrow. Alerick will be an excellent first subject, I'm sure."

"I'll start with him then... right now, I'm going to go kiss my children good night and have dinner with my husband before I go to sleep." he said, rising and setting his glass aside.

Cormac McLaggen, Minister of Magic, was very comfortable in his position. He was good-looking, well-spoken and eloquent, and he found that the world of politics quite suited him. He didn't have much to do in order to be successful, as he was in office during such a peaceful time.

Unfortunately for him this mess with Weasley and Parkinson had come up and thrown a wrench in all his plans for the summer. He'd planned to go on vacation at the seashore and spend several weeks with his new girlfriend, and perhaps even get her to accept his proposal of marriage. Now all of that had to be scrapped.

He would be tied up now with court cases against Hermione Weasley at the very least. Once Pansy and Malcolm Parkinson were caught it would all come roaring back to life again; and he would have
to decide what to do with that foreigner, the German squib that Parkinson had brought into the country. The German Minister was already demanding that he be returned to their country when he was located; it seems the man had been up to no good in his own country a while. Why couldn't they all just behave themselves and stay out of trouble while he was in office? The only thing he was grateful for was the fact that it had all been cleaned up so neatly with only a few loose ends, so far.

Aurors were in and out of his office all the time now, reporting on what information they had deciphered from the mess at the clinic. So far everything that had been uncovered had coincided exactly with what Hermione Weasley had informed them of the night she turned herself in.

Cormac looked up to see his assistant move in, looking worried and nervous. "Minister...? You have... visitors." she said, glancing behind her through the door. He could see there were people out there but he couldn't spot anyone he recognized through the small space she had allowed it to be open.

"Visitors?" he frowned, turning his chair fully toward her. "I'm not expecting anyone; tell them to come back another time..."

She looked very uncomfortable. "I tried, sir, but..."

"But we won't go." A wizard stated, pushing the door open. Cormac recognized him; he had attended school with this wizard; his name was Ernie McMillan. He examined him a moment and decided that the years had definitely not been kind to his old school friend. "And we're not leaving until we speak with you."

McLaggen frowned; he didn't like ultimatums or being forced to do things he did not wish to. "And who exactly is 'we'?" he asked, rising to his feet.

Ernie glanced back out the door and gestured; the office quickly began to fill up with people as at least a dozen wizards and witches moved in. None of them looked happy, and they covered all areas of the Wizarding community. Purebloods, mudbloods and squibs; powerful wizards and weak wizards as well. The thing that made him the most uncomfortable was each and every one of them had a say in who remained in the office that he currently held.

"What can I do for all of you?" Cormac asked, leaning slightly on his desk and putting on a winning smile.

"We want our healer back." a woman stated in a clear tone, her hand resting on her swollen stomach. She was clearly quite well along in her pregnancy.

He gazed at her a moment. "Your healer...?"

"Yes. Hermione Weasley." she responded.

Cormac sighed softly, his smile slipping. He had been afraid this was coming. "I'm afraid that's quite outside the realm of possibility, Miss..."

"Look, Minister McLaggen." Ernie MacMillan scowled at his old schoolmate. He was clearly the spokesperson for the group, who were all glaring at Cormac and allowing Ernie to speak for them. "I know this is all a huge scandal and it has to be dealt with, but I really don't give a troll's fart about all that. All I know is my wife is pregnant after fifteen years of failure and the woman who is responsible for our time of joy is rotting away in some damned cell here in this building!"

Cormac McLaggen looked at the faces in the room; all angry and all determined to get the person he held in protective custody released back into the populace to continue caring for those she had
“I can’t do that, Ernie. Damn it, you know what’s involved, there are too many out there who want her head…!”

“Then assign her a bodyguard!” he countered. "Are you afraid she'll run and give you no one to prosecute? For Merlin’s sake, Cormac, use your head and common sense! Why in the bloody hell would she run? She’s not going to run! She didn’t run before, she TURNED THEM ALL IN!” he snapped.

“That’s not my problem and you know it! She has to be held responsible for what she’s done…!”

“Just because she gave herself up she’s going to take the brunt for everything that was done?!”

“You’re insane!” Someone else snapped.

“She never hurt ANY of us! And from what I read in the Prophet, she didn’t hurt anyone else either!” Ernie growled. “I want my healer released to care for my wife! She’s in a sensitive time of her pregnancy and does NOT need to be upset! She needs to be allowed to take care of my wife and their children as well!” he gestured to the others.

“I’m sorry, Ernie, I can’t…!”

“You can and you will! I swear, Cormac, if you don’t, I’m not the only one whose going to make damned sure that you don’t have another year as Minister!”

“Don’t you threaten me!” McLaggen started.

“This isn’t a threat, it’s a promise. And I’ve spoken with Damitri Zabini; he’s with us all the way.” He growled eyes narrow.

Minister McLaggen paled ever so slightly. “Zabini…?”

“Yes, his partner Terry is pregnant also and is very attached to Mrs. Weasley.” He answered. “He’s quite a sweet fellow and Zabini is really protective of him. You’d better get something done, Cormac. We all want to see something happen.”

“I will do what I can.” He said, sitting back down slowly. “But you will have to give me a day or two, at least…”

“Not two days. One day.” Ernie said firmly. He was done playing games. "And if your answer isn't what we want to hear, we'll find another way to get what we need, without your help."

Severus had come home in a very good mood and had spent a few hours curled up with both Remus and Tonks, quite a good night indeed. He did not usually share his time with Tonks but he had been feeling... well, playful. And the three of them had shared quite an exhaustive round of lovemaking. It had, overall, been a very relaxing and enjoyable evening.

Once everyone had started to drift off to sleep he slipped out of the bed and off to his own room, and to his surprise the others had followed him. "Going somewhere, Sev...?" Remus asked, moving to sit down on the settee to watch his lover.

"Back to Lucius' house." he said, opening the potions cabinet and studying its contents thoughtfully. "There's a lot to be done there."
Tonks watched Severus and decided that this was as good a time as any to bring up what McLaggen wanted her to. "Sev...? The minister wants me to talk to you..."

He looked at her curiously. "To me? What in the world would McLaggen want with me? I thought the Ministry washed its hands of me."

"They need someone who knows the medical field, and someone who knows about what was done involving the creation of all the babies..."

"Why?" he asked suspiciously.

"The Minister needs someone to keep a very close eye on Hermione Weasley while she is out in public..." Tonks began.

Severus frowned; he didn't intend to be anyone's nursemaid. "So have her work with a healer from St. Mungo's. Restrict her magic. Put a tracker on her that will only allow her to apparate back to the ministry. Chain her to a damned house elf with orders to teleport her back if she even HINTS at disobedience! You could even use Kreacher if the old beast is still alive; he'd probably love the chance to be able to discipline and watch after a witch!"

"All of that would be ways to track her, but..." Tonks began.

"Put her under the Imperious Curse if you have no other choice; I don't want to spend half my day looking after her!" Severus Snape scowled at her.

"None of that will ensure she is doing only the care that is required or appropriate for those she's tending to." Remus said softly, seeing where Tonks was going with her argument.

"Now you're ganging up on me as well?" he scowled at the two of them. "I have WORK to do at the hospital! And when I've finished there I have work to do at Malfoy Manor! I really don't need more work to do, I'm hardly at home as it stands....!"

"I'm not trying to force you to do anything, Sev." Remus said right away. "She could help you with some of your work, she was in training in the medical field. Maybe she can help you at the manor..."

"She never studied legilimency; she can't get into the minds of any of these children! She'd be all but useless!" he began.

"I don't think so; after all, she's studied psychology and the science of the mind." Remus countered. "She may be of more use than you know, simply with the work you need to do with those five kids. They have to learn how to be children, especially the oldest ones..."

Severus grunted; they were making sense and he didn't want to admit it. "They have siblings for that." he returned.

"Yes, and two of them are quite the bullies, I understand." Tonks responded. "Oh, do be reasonable, Sev! We're not asking you to look after the Queen of England, you know."

He couldn't help but smirk at her for that. "You know as well as I that the Ministry would never trust me to do that." he retorted, then scowled again. "Why are they trusting me to watch over her? I thought I was considered a dangerous wizard, only trusted to work with parents and babies and constantly watched, if I'm not mistaken?"

"Maybe they're changing all of that." Tonks pointed out. "After all, it was Minister McLaggen himself who suggested that you would be the best bet for this job..."
"More like the ONLY choice. He's got no one else that all of this makes any sense to, has he?" Severus said, realizing that he could make this work to his advantage quite well.

"It's muggle technology; most wizard healers have no idea how to even read it much less understand it." Remus commented.

"I fully intend to get everything I can out of this situation." he responded, smiling once more as he began choosing different potions to take with him.

"They could still call in Shacklebolt, you know." Tonks reminded.

Severus snorted. "Kingsley doesn't babysit." he answered. "Unless it IS a queen, or a Prime Minister. If you or those... monkeys... over at the Ministry need me, I will be at Malfoy Manor." Severus turned and a trunk floated out of a closet.

"You're going over this late? It's nearly midnight...!" Tonks objected.

"Lucius is expecting me. And the work I need to do with the little redhead Alyssa must be done at night; and I will simply sleep there after my rounds at the hospital."

"What's wrong with Alyssa?" Remus asked.

"The little girl has been... conditioned... by more than just mental means to be terrified of Potter."

"More than mental...? You mean they sexually abused her?"

"Wearing Potter's likeness, yes." he answered, now packing several changes of clothing quickly. "Their conditioning has left the girl particularly susceptible to nightmares and her last nightmare destroyed a good quarter of the nursery she was sleeping in... she loses control of her power in her sleep."

"How long will you be gone?"

"Until I'm done, I suppose... you can reach me there or send our house elf Azure to fetch me if you need me." he said, closing the trunk then spelling the thing to shrink to a manageable size. He glanced at them; Remus looked a bit mournful with his big brown eyes but gave no objection.

Tonks sighed, watching him. "So what do I tell Minister McLaggen?"

"I will consider it, and get back to him." he answered. "But do tell him to reconsider that werewolf legislation while I'm considering my answer." he said, moving over to give Remus a deep kiss and then a soft kiss to Tonks as well. Severus gave them a smile, turned away and threw the floo powder into the fireplace and was gone in a flash of green flames and swirl of black cloak.

Severus found his way into the nursery that was occupied by the five children of the Circle. The room was far altered from what it had been before. It was still large and spacious; in fact, the room and its little antechambers covered at least three times as much space. The room now had four chambers that were no less than fifteen feet by twenty feet in size that led off the main chamber, each with an arched open doorway that had no door. Each chamber had been given to a child, but since no one could get Mallek to go to sleep anywhere but with Alerick in the Dragon bed in the main room one of the chambers was not occupied by a child but by two of the nannies. The twins had the chambers on either side of the door and had insisted their rooms be arranged to allow them to see the door from their beds.
A nanny sat up next to the door also in plain sight of the twins; she looked up and bowed her head to Severus when he walked into the room. She had been instructed to expect him and to allow him to proceed into Alyssa's chamber; she made no move to intercept him nor to even question his presence.

He moved into the chamber half expecting the room to be pink as most of the child's clothing was; she had insisted it had to be decorated to her liking. The walls were deepest blue and had a distinct wave pattern to them. The floor was black and seemed to be studded with stars. The floor was covered by a deep green carpet; one almost had the impression of standing outside on a hill when you stood in the room, or perhaps even of being underwater.

Alyssa lay in bed, sleeping very fitfully; she was clearly in the grips of one of her nightmares again. Severus was rather surprised to see no sign of the stuffed thing that she carried about with her everywhere.

Severus crept toward the girl and for a moment felt utterly absurd, like a cartoon villain sneaking up on a helpless sleeping princess in his long black cloak and she in her pink gown. He shook off the notion and moved closer to the bed as quietly as he was able. He knelt beside the bed and drew his wand and pointed it at the girl; he had to get into her mind to help her to get out of the throes of her current dream. "Blentan." he murmured the words and he felt the disorientation that came from the successful casting of the dream blending spell, then he was inside the girl's dream.

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Everything was neat, perfect, and just-so tidy in the little castle room that he found himself in. He had not been to either of the places that this girl had been raised, but he felt completely certain that this is the room in which she spent a great deal of time studying. Alyssa looked so small, sitting on a stack of books at a desk to stare down at the pages of the book. She was clearly reading, whispering the words to herself as she read. There was no exit door to this room, only one door at the top of the stairs; somehow that door and this room vaguely reminded Severus of his own offices back when he had been Potions Master at Hogwarts. if it was, then that door there was the one that led to the Professor's private offices. His classroom, though, had never had these stark, white-washed bare walls and there had been a full wall of windows.

Alyssa raised her eyes to him and blinked, then looked completely confused. "You... you're not supposed to be here!" she whispered with a wary glance at the door at the top of the stairs.

"Oh? and where am I to be?" he asked her in a normal voice.

"Sssh!" she pleaded, her eyes filling with fear. "Please, sir, please... don't be loud, he'll come down, he'll come out..."

"He cannot hear me, little one. Only you can hear me, and only you can see me." Severus answered, but he used a much quieter tone.

She nodded, eyes on the door again. "Well... okay, but you gotta go away." she murmured, then began a soft chant of what Severus recognized as highly complex and high-level spells for enchantment and seductions; some that he himself had never had the time to learn or had reason to use.

"Why are you saying those words?" he asked to see if she knew what it was that she was memorizing.

"I'm supposed to say them so that I know them... they taught me how to say them and I practice them here... I must chant."
"Why do you do it? This is your dream... you should enjoy your dreamtime."

"I can't." she whispered fearfully. "If I don't he will come out and make me go to his office... if I do it wrong he will come out... I must study, sir..." she whispered, her fear growing. This man was making her not study and surely her Teacher would be out to correct her any moment.

"And what happens if he comes out?"

"He hurts me." she whispered, trembling at the thought. "He takes me to his office, and..."

"Why are you not studying?!" A voice snarled from the now partially open office door. “Alyssa!”

The girl flinched at the tone and the voice, tears welling in her eyes. “Please go away…” she whispered to Snape, closing her eyes and focusing down on her chants, but her voice faltered and trembled as she spoke.

Snape looked up the steps as the door on the landing opened. Framed in the doorway was a man that looked exactly like current day Harry Potter, but it was easy to tell he was not. He held himself not only with pride but with arrogance, every step a swagger, and he looked down at that little girl like a hawk eyeing a rabbit for its next meal. He had a furious snarl on his lips as he gazed down at the tiny little girl, all alone in her chair at the center of the tower room. “You lazy little useless creature! You’re not doing your chants properly again…” he said as he left the door open. He started down the stairs, a smile of wicked enjoyment touching his face. “And you know what happens when lose your focus, don’t you?” he was clearly anticipating what he was about to do with great pleasure.

“I’m sorry Teacher I promise I’ll pay more attention, I promise…” she whimpered, gazing up at him; she couldn’t even focus enough to continue her chants as he stalked down the stairs toward her at a very slow pace, menace and threat in his every movement. "Please... please don't..."

Severus found himself unable to even affect any part of the girl’s dream, forced to watch ineffectually as she was seized by the doppelganger of Harry and dragged up the stairs. Severus followed to find the room was not an office after all; it was a torture chamber with very specific devices meant to cause pain contained therein. There was only one way this little girl would even have any idea what these torture devices looked like, and that was if she had experienced them for herself. Those hanging on the south wall were crystal clear to see, sharpened blades and clamps and whips as well as other items. The north wall held more but the outlines of those items looked fuzzy; the details of each of them looking like smeared paint. From his previous work in dreams Severus knew this meant that she had never seen or felt those ones used before.

He could not bring himself watch the man torture the girl; he pulled himself free of her dream and returned to his own senses just in time to see the lamp beside the bed suddenly shatter into a million pieces of dust and powdered glass; the bed the girl was on vibrating and trembling. Snape shielded the girl to prevent her from doing further damage accidentally. Watching the dream, helping the girl to face her fears was not going to be enough.

Those damned, idiotic fools...! The conditioning of this child had been very abusive and he would have to help her to understand that she could affect the outcome of her dreams; that she could indeed have some sort of control. The way they had abused her and trained her was turning out to be a deadly combination. The abuse she had suffered was causing a lack of control in her dream state, and it would not be long until that loss of control spilled over into the conscious state. Then they would have a powerful siren on their hands with no ability to control it. Hopefully Warrington had some idea how to train the girl in her powers... they might need to begin her training all over again.

Snape heard a sound behind him and Erik was standing in the open doorway, glaring at him but he
did not raise a hand toward him. Severus sighed, irritated at the boy, but he simply moved to a chair and sat, his wand in his hand. He did not need to touch the girl to re-enter her dream, but he would not enter it with her so agitated. He thought for a moment then considered the guardian again. "I need you to wake her, Erik. She is having a very bad dream at the moment." he requested.

"She has lots of bad dreams; I had to wake her all the time back at the last house." Erik said, his scowl fading a little. He moved forward and whispered Alyssa's name, touching her shoulder. The waves of unrestrained power stopped as the little girl came awake, confused and disoriented and pale. "It's okay, Alyssa... it was just a bad dream." Erik soothed her in a soft tone.

"Thank you Erik." Severus said and Alyssa looked at him, unsure of him but showing no sign of being nervous at his presence. "You may remain if you wish, but there is no reason for you to." he told the boy.

"I want to," he said, folding his arms, so Snape simply ignored him.

"You were in my dream, Sir..." she murmured.

"I was." he agreed. "And I will be again. Your dream was horrible, little one. Why do you let him hurt you so?"

"He always hurts me." she closed her eyes, swallowing hard. "I'm a bad girl. He only hurts me because I'm a bad girl. And... and daddy doesn't want me 'cause I'm a bad girl..."

"Nonsense." Snape said immediately and the girl looked at him again. "Jerrod Warrington doesn't think he deserves to be the father of someone so special. He's afraid he'll make a mistake in raising you, little one."

She looked confused, then her confusion changed to sadness as she thought about it. "Then he'll never want me." she decided.

"Again, that is nonsense. He has no confidence in his own abilities; that does not mean that he cannot learn it as you have learned control over your own abilities." Severus replied. "Come now, you must sleep; your father will need you to take care of him in the morning and you must be rested to do so." he advised.

She sighed, resting back against her pillow. "I wish I could sleep with him." she murmured. "Nothing ever hurt me when he was with me."

"I will watch over you myself, Alyssa. Sleep." Severus said quietly.

"You won't leave? You won't let him in here?" she asked timidly.

Severus didn't have to ask who she was afraid would enter her room. "No one else will enter this room." he assured her in a quiet tone. The girl closed her eyes trustingly and settled to sleep.

Erik sat by the door and watched but Snape simply just sat and watched as the girl slowly drifted back into a sleep state. Eventually Erik slipped back out of the room and back to his own; Severus suspected the boy was staying up all night on watches again. He would have to inform Lucius of that fact... perhaps a nightly sleeping potion would be in order.

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Again Severus joined Alyssa in her study chamber, moving up quietly behind her desk. He did not speak, he simply moved up beside the child and knelt on one knee, eyes on the door.
"You're back...?"

"Yes. And this time I will not leave you." he said firmly.

"But you can't help me." she stared at the books under her delicate little hands.

"Not alone, Alyssa."

She looked at him. "What does that mean?"

"I can help you, but not alone. You must help me to help you." he offered her his hand. "Together we can stop this. Stop these nightmares. Stop him from hurting you or anyone else. That creature you call Teacher is not Angel's father, although he may look like him."

"But he is... they told me he is... and he's hurt me for real in my room and..."

"He is not Harry Potter. And he has only the power that you give him, little Alyssa."

She slipped her hand into his. "But he gets so mad, and when Teacher is mad I've been bad..."

"Teacher has no right to hurt you, even if you are bad." he said, covering her hand with his own, enclosing her hand. "You must fight him. Help me to stop him from hurting you."

She looked frightened. "I can't... he's so strong and so big and so angry..."

"And so helpless if you take that all from him." Severus interrupted. "I can fight him but only if you let me little one. You must help me to fight him; you have to want him to leave you alone forever."

"Alyssa?!" the voice from the room at the head of the stairs bellowed and the little girl flinched.

Severus gave her hand a reassuring squeeze. "I will not leave you." he promised again.

The doppleganger slammed open the door, eyes blazing. "You worthless little bitch, who have you brought in here this time?!" he demanded.

Snape took only one step forward and to his right, shielding Alyssa from the man's sight. "You've done all the damage you're going to here."

The man began to laugh. "You can't stop anything." he snorted.

"No, perhaps not. But she can." Severus said in response, not reacting to the man's amusement, watching his every move.

"I can't..." Alyssa whimpered.

"You can. You're strong or you wouldn't be a member of the Dark Circle, would you?" Severus asked her. The man was stalking down the stairs, his wand in hand, smoke emanating from its tip, which was glowing red.

"I am... I passed the tests..."

"You can do this. Make me strong, Alyssa. Let me stop him for you." he insisted. "Give me your strength!"

"I don't know how!" she cried, hearing the man stalking closer.
"Give me the strength! Stop pushing the power away!" Severus insisted moments before the doppelganger suddenly attacked. Snape barely had time to throw up a shield spell and began firing spells back, keeping Alyssa sheltered behind him.

"I can't, I can't..." she began to sob, sinking to her knees. He was going to get her again; he was going make this man go away and then hurt her bad for letting him in...

"Make him stop so Jerrod can be proud of you!" Snape demanded, using something he thought that would influence her. One of the man's attacks nearly hit Alyssa but Severus threw himself into its path, hissing in pain as his arm blackened from the wrist down.

Seeing the injury galvanized the girl into action; he was only trying to help her. "Stop it!" Alyssa shrieked. "Stop! You can't hurt him!"

"I can do anything I want to." he laughed, raising his wand to strike again.

Severus raised a shield but waited; he wanted to see if the girl would rise to the heights he hoped. The Weasley bloodline had so many damned Gryffindors she was bound to have that in her somewhere.

She stared at the man with fear in her eyes but made a hard throwing motion; a ball of energy was released from her hand and the man was slammed backward against the white stone wall. She squeaked in surprise, staring at her hand then back at the man who now had a smoking blackened hole in his robes in the middle of his chest.

"That's it, Alyssa. Make him stop! Make him leave your dreams! He's not in your life anymore, get him out of your life!" Severus encouraged.

"You can't do anything, you useless little whore...!" the doppelganger snarled, rising to its feet. The face was so twisted with rage it no longer resembled Harry; it seemed to be swelling and growing in power the more the girl displayed fear. It stalked toward them at a run now, head low, arms held wide, ready to pounce on them with its bare hands.

"Go AWAY!" she said again, making throwing motions with both hands. It cried out as it was slammed back into the bricks, this time, making an indentation the shape of its body. "Leave me alone!"

The creature took on an unmistakable demonic look now; skin covered in nasty looking knob-like protrusions and face twisted evilly, though it had shrunk in size. It was losing power...!

"Tell it to leave you forever, Alyssa!" Severus instructed.

"Go away! Go away and never, never, never come back!" she seemed to be gaining in strength and courage, and continued her throwing motions, driving the thing back up its stairwell. She even began to chase it, going to the foot of the stairs as it reached the top; one final strike and the thing vanished into a cloud of vile-looking dust.

She stared, eyes wide, disbelieving. "I... he's gone..." she whispered.

"You can do that every time he comes, little one." Severus said softly. "Make him leave. Make him leave you alone forever, for he only exists here. That thing is not Harry Potter; that thing can never come into this house and touch you again."

She ran to him and hugged him tightly, eyes clamped tightly shut. "Thank you thank you so much...!"
"If I were you, Alyssa, I would go up there into that horrible room and make sure none of that is usable again." he suggested with a soft grin, stroking her hair tenderly. The act of destroying the things that had been used to hurt her would have somewhat of a healing effect on her. "And remember he can never come back unless you allow it." He left her to do as she wished and slipped out of her dream and back to reality.

Severus took a deep breath, opening his eyes. Alyssa lay quietly asleep now, a soft smile on her face, a pillow hugged tight in her arms. He smiled softly and rose to his feet, glancing at his left arm. As he had expected, the injury he had sustained in the dream was still there; he would need to salve that immediately. He turned and moved out to allow the children to rest; he'd had enough for tonight.
Terry had come with Damitri to visit, bearing a basket of toys and essentials for the infant as well as several new outfits. Terry moved to Draco and gave him a warm hug, his eyes sparkling. “I’m so glad your son was born so healthy and strong… I brought him lots of things to wear and to play with…”

“And plenty of nappies as well, we didn’t forget the most practical thing. You’ll soon realize you can’t possibly have too many of those handy.” Damitri chuckled.

“Oh, Draco, he’s the most precious thing I’ve ever seen…!” Terry murmured, his eyes wide with amazement as Draco gently tugged down the soft blue blanket that covered the newborn infant to reveal the sweet curve of his cheek and his tiny hands curled up as he dozed.

Draco smiled warmly; he’d always been fond of Terry and thought of him as a younger brother. “Do you want to hold him?” He offered.

Terry looked rather surprised but extremely happy that Draco would even offer. “But he’s so small… could I really…?” he said in soft awe.

“Of course you may.” He chuckled softly. “I trust you, Terry.” He turned and gently scooped the drowsy infant up out of the bed and passed him to Terry.

“Oh my goodness he’s so tiny and perfect…” he said, handling the baby with ultimate care. Damitri watched him cradle the baby close to his chest with a smile.

“How much longer do you have until the baby comes?” Harry asked, smiling as he stood beside Damitri, watching the two men and the little infant as Draco showed him how to hold the baby.

“We only just found out about the baby last week.” Terry blushed. “The baby isn’t due until April.”

“And in that week, Terry has not only managed to redesign the spare bedroom into a nursery, he’s determined which pieces of furniture we will need and precisely where each and every piece will be placed.” Damitri said with a fond chuckle. “The furniture is on order and we already have half of the linens and curtains that we need to finish decorating.”

“Not all of it, Dimi…” Terry objected, a blushing a bit. “We haven’t painted the room yet because we haven’t settled on the right color combinations and since we don’t know if it’s going to be a girl or a boy, we can’t buy all the linens.”

“Maybe you’ll have both.” Harry teased.

“One baby is enough for me.” Damitri smiled proudly.

“I’m just worried how it’s all going to go… I haven’t been able to see my medi-witch since I got pregnant…” Terry said with a frown of worry.

“Your medi-witch…?”

“Hermione Weasley.” Damitri clarified, and Terry nodded in agreement. “She was very professional and very good with us. I think she spent extra time with us to make sure that Terry understood every step we were taking. It truly is a damned shame she was involved in this entire fiasco; I think she would have been a very successful healer when all her training was completed if she took an...
apprenticeship with someone over at St. Mungo’s…”

“She was really nice to me. I’m afraid to see anyone else.”

“Well, they’ve got her in protective custody I understand.” Harry said, relaxing at the small table with Damitri to allow the others to spend time with the infant. “It’s for her own safety.”

“I believe that… that Parkinson lady was a scary woman; I didn’t like her at all.” Terry said, stroking the baby’s cheek, barely able to take his eyes off the child’s face, only half his attention on their conversation. He smiled with delight when the baby gazed up at him and gurgled softly.

“She may be able to take care of you anyway, my Terry.” Damitri said, smiling as he watched his husband with the baby. “Several of us have gotten together and approached the ministry…”

“…and made my life more difficult as a direct result.” Severus Snape said, moving into the room, with a bit of a scowl.

“Oh… really? I don’t want to make anything harder for you…” Terry said, looking up. “I’m sorry Sev…”

Severus’s scowl faded. “It’s not too much, actually…” he temporized. “I just don’t like to babysit.”

“Have you seen the baby, Sev…? He’s the most beautiful thing I’ve ever seen…” Terry said, giving him a shy smile as he gazed at the infant, who was wide awake now and beginning to whimper. “Oh my… have I done something…?” Terry asked worriedly.

“Of course not, he’s just hungry, and might be wet as well. Let me check him…” Draco said, moving to gather the baby up.

“I’ll help…” Terry said, moving after Draco over to the changing table. Severus watched Terry and felt a little left out somehow; he sighed and turned away with a blank expression. Everything was as it should be...

“The Ministry is asking you to babysit…?” Damitri asked.

“Yes, in a way. I haven’t answered them yet but they have asked that I watch Mrs. Weasley as she makes her rounds with those she has assisted to be with child…” Severus explained.

“Really…?” Terry asked, gazing over at him, the baby forgotten for just a moment. “You’d do that for me? It would be so wonderful to have Mrs. Weasley watch over me and the baby…!”

“I haven’t answered, but yes they did ask that of me.” Severus asked.

Terry looked worried. “You don’t want to…?”

“I just need to check and make sure that it can fit into my schedule. At the very least I will ensure that she can take care of you.” Severus said with a bit of reluctance that he did his best to conceal. How could he possibly say no to Terry?

Terry laughed happily and moved to give him a hug. “Thank you Severus, thank you!” He said.

“So how will you be babysitting?” Harry asked with a soft grin; he knew that Severus was hooked into doing the job now.

“Mrs. Weasley is to be allowed to take care of her patients, but only those from the center that she helped to achieve pregnancy. She will help them along during their pregnancies. My job will be to
watch her and ensure she does not repeat any of the idiocy that Pansy Parkinson inflicted upon the wizarding populace.” Severus said in a sour tone.

“Oh, she’d NEVER do that!” Terry said firmly. “I know she wouldn’t…”

“Perhaps not, Terry, but the Ministry considers her guilty until proven innocent. You see, they don’t have either of the Parkinsons to put the blame upon, so Mrs. Weasley is an easy target for all of the blame since she turned herself in.” Damitri answered.

“That’s not right…”

“Terry, the Minister of Magic makes all kinds of mistakes.” Harry assured. “After all, he was sure that my Dragon was going to go dark and take off on some wild killing spree.” He commented with a smirk.

That confused Terry, who didn’t think that Draco could ever hurt a fly. “Why would he think that…?”

“Good question.” Draco said, rolling his eyes. “I never did anything that could be even considered dark on my own. And all I want is to be left alone to be with my husband and raise my family.”

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While the baby was being fed and changed, Severus showed the Zabini couple to the playroom. Terry gazed about the room at all the children, a delighted smile on his face. “Look at them all, Damitri…”! He murmured.

Next to the wall of gilded French doors that led out to the patio and the gardens, a table and chairs was currently occupied by Lucius Malfoy who relaxed as he watched over the children’s play. He would not allow another accident to occur within his house.

The five children of the Dark Circle remained close to each other near Lucius, Mallek happily surrounded by toys and Alerick seated close playing with him. Alyssa sat looking quite lonesome and unhappy without her stuffed toy, watching Alerick with what looked like envy. The two guardians sat slightly apart from the others, in their typical position between their Lord and anyone else. Erik sat empty handed, but Erin had a miniature toy broom in her hand, playing idly with it as she did her duties.

The other children ran and played all over the rest of the room. Close at hand beside Lucius was a hand-carved bassinet, shaped like a crouching playful kneazle. Inside that bed was little Remus Severus, peacefully sleeping under his blankets.

“Dimi? Would it be all right if I did something with the children?” Terry asked.

“Why don’t you get one of their picture books and tell them a story?” Damitri suggested. He knew that Terry was still working on mastering reading; he had experienced a horrible life before Damitri had found him but he was growing and opening up a little more every day.

“Oh, that’ll be perfect…” Terry said happily, giving his husband a kiss on the cheek before moving over to the one wall that held a fully stocked bookshelf. Some of the children wandered over to join him, curiously gazing up at him. Before long, he was seated on a cushion in the middle of the floor with a book and five children around him, making up a story to go with the photos in the book that he held.

Damiiri moved to join Lucius, smiling softly. “Good morning, Lucius.”
Lucius didn’t bother rising, gesturing to the empty chair next to him. “Hello, Damitri. I was wondering when you would be by to visit and see the new children.” Lucius smiled in greeting.

Dmitri took a seat in the offered seat. “I’ve been a bit busy trying to track down information on Parkinson… the man is a nutter but he seems to be one step ahead of us and three ahead of the Ministry.” He sighed, and then he couldn’t help but smile. “Besides, Lucius, I had to come today; Terry couldn’t be contained a moment longer.” Damitri chuckled softly.

Lucius smiled as well. “I can’t help but notice that he’s glowing. Being with child is wonderful for him, isn’t it?”

“I won’t argue with you there. I wouldn’t be surprised if he wants to come over and practice being daddy several times before our baby is born… you don’t mind, do you?”

“Mind? On the contrary, honestly; these children need all the attention they can get. Especially those five over there…” he gestured to the Circle kids; only Alyssa looked like she was interested in what Terry was doing but she did not go over to join them.

“I’m sure Terry would love to get to know each and every one of them.” He assured. The two sat in companionable silence for a short while; a drink appearing for the visitor on the table and another cool juice for Terry.

Lucius decided to broach a delicate subject he felt needed to be addressed. “I don’t mean to pry, and if I am just tell me so and I’ll leave it alone…”

“Now you have me curious. Ask.” Damitri encouraged.

“Just where did you find such a sweet little gender-confused squib boy?” Lucius asked.

Dmitri smiled softly; everyone seemed to ask the same questions when they met Terry. “He’s not a boy, Lucius. He’s nineteen. He’ll be twenty before the baby is born.”

“Nineteen?” Lucius asked incredulously, eyeing the young man sitting cross-legged on the floor with the children. “He doesn’t look a day older than fourteen, fifteen at the most…”

“He had a very difficult life, old friend; the things that my little Terry has endured have caused problems with his growth.” Damitri told him quietly. He wasn’t going to give all the details but he wouldn’t lie to his old friend either. “Honestly, he was meant to be a bribe.”

“A bribe…? The only way he could be a bribe to you is…”

“…is if he was meant to be a sex slave. Yes. That’s precisely what he was meant to be; a little puppet to serve my every sick desire.” He answered, sipping his drink. “I wasn’t pleased at all, but there was no way in hell I was giving him back to them. The weeks that followed were not a pleasant time; I don’t think that he would have survived were it not for Severus Snape.”

“Severus…?”

“He knows about what a submissive is taught, and he helped me learn how to care for Terry… when we have more suitable surroundings I will tell you more of what we went through, but suffice it to say that it was horrible for us all. Beyond his submissive training, he was also addicted to drugs.”

“Muggle drugs…? Were they mad…?”
“They didn’t care about what was good for him; they wanted to make him into an obedient slave who would do anything they asked of him. Absolutely anything.”

“At least I’m sure that Severus had no trouble getting the drugs out of his system…”

“True, but that in itself caused many problems. Withdrawal is not easy on a body. And Severus suspects that the drugs that he was on affected his magic, since he was started on them at a very young age.”

“Those bastards…” Lucius scowled.

“Not to worry; every one of them are quite dead.” Damitri said, sipping his drink once more.

Lucius let the silence stretch for a minute, unsure if he should ask of his old friend what he had in mind. He decided to go ahead; the worst he could be told is no and he would have to just delay his own plans that much longer. “Potter tells me that your agency is doing quite well; have you been very busy lately Damitri?” Lucius asked.

“Not overly so; to be honest, it’s been rather slow of late. The case that Mr. Weasley brought to our attention was our biggest case at this time. We’d solved most of the other cases we’d had, only a few loose ends to tie up.” He answered, sipping his drink, looking at Lucius curiously. “Why do you ask?”

“Because I wish to hire you.” He replied in a quiet tone.

Damitri frowned slightly. “You don’t have to hire me to look for Parkinson; we’re already doing that…”

“This has nothing to do with Parkinson or any of the mess he and his foolish child have created.” Lucius answered, reaching into an inner pocket and producing the scroll with his family tree that properly displayed the familial lines and proved that Alerick was his son. He carefully unrolled it and passed it to him.

Damitri looked curiously at him, picking up the paper and allowing his eyes to scan over the document. “Alerick is your son?”

“Yes, thanks to Parkinson. But that’s not what I want you to look at…”

He read a moment more and saw the link to James, and the child that had been produced between the two of them. “Ariandi…?” He said, looking up at Lucius.

“Ariandi. I want to know what happened to her. She vanished right after her birth.” He said softly. “I need to know where she is; if she is even still alive. Naturally I thought of asking Harry first, but I would prefer that he stay here with my son and the children for at least a few weeks. We came uncomfortably close to losing Draco during the birth.” He explained. “Can you help me?”

Damitri gave his friend a reassuring smile. “Of course I will. I can get right on this; like I said we don’t have anything at all that needs my direct intervention right now.”

Lucius took a deep breath and let it out slowly. “Thank you.”

“Not a problem.” Damitri assured, and then chuckled softly as he watched was going on. Terry still had an audience and Alyssa had wandered close enough to listen, but did not join with the others. She stood just barely close enough to hear, hugging herself with strangely empty arms, trying to see the pictures.
Off to the southern side of the room one of the nannies had been changing little Astrid and had turned away, believing the normally completely placid child would do what she normally did; just lie there and wait for her nappie to be replaced. The chubby little girl did something totally uncharacteristic at just that moment and rolled to her knees, crawling rapidly away with her eyes fastened on a bright red ball.

Mallek looked over and squealed with laughter, pointing. “Nekkid!” He declared at the top of his lungs, the word clear as a bell. The other children all looked over and the embarrassed nanny leapt to her feet and raced over to intercept the child. Before she could reach her, Astrid reached her goal and snatched up the brightly colored ball, then giggled in delight as she plopped down on her butt and began to gnaw on the toy.

Lucius chuckled as well, watching. “As you can see, it has been quite entertaining around here since the children arrived.”

“I can only imagine.” Damitri laughed softly, entertained by the antics of the children. “Are any of them showing powers…?”

“The five there, every one of them have shown nearly adult strength powers and the knowledge of how to use that power so far. The others… not much has shown yet. They are all quite young. The eldest two, that would be Lazlo over there…” he gestured to the boy playing by himself as far from five as he could, kicking a ball against the wall. “And the one to Terry’s right, his name is Elston…” the boy was poking at the boy beside him as they listened to the story. “I’m afraid all they have shown is the ability to bully other children.”

Damitri shook his head sadly with a sigh. “A shame when all a child sees is bullying and abuse; that is what they learn to reflect. Look to those who raised them to find the cause of that.”

“Unfortunately we do have some re-training to do on those two. I think that I saw the little streaker there summon something to her the other day… I must admit that this is the fastest that I’ve ever seen Astrid move…” Lucius said with a soft chuckle. “I would expect that of Camilla; if she wasn’t completely enthralled by Terry I’d be watching the door like an eagle-hawk. That girl gets into everything, and no lock we’ve devised can keep that girl in a room if she wishes to get out.”

“Really? Molly Weasley used to complain of the same thing and her twins. Always escaping and getting into everything, usually their father’s experimental lab. That might be a bit of magical will being worked, you know.”

“Hm. Hadn’t thought of that. I don’t sense anything when she uses her little ‘ability’ but I haven’t been watching for it either. I will definitely pay more attention to her on that point. And I do believe I’ll have a bit of a chat with Molly about her too.”

“The little one who crawled off starkers… she looks over a year old, doesn’t she walk? Is there something wrong with her legs…?” he asked.

“Her name is Astrid; she doesn’t walk a single step. We’ve tried to encourage her to get to her feet and the medi-wizard states that there is nothing whatsoever wrong with her legs. She crawls if she absolutely can’t live without something. Usually she just sits and grins off into space, and if she can reach nothing else she will simply sit and chew on her toes.” Lucius explained, and then he smirked. “Honestly, I suspect she is one of Lovegood’s brood, not Malfoy…”

That statement made Damitri laugh. “Be fair, Lucius. Some of your extended family members could easily be labeled as loopy characters…”
“All right, all right, I admit it.” He chuckled softly. “We have had a few who were thick as mince, but we take care of our less fortunate family members in our own way and don’t advertise their difficulties.”

“Family should always take care of family; that’s precisely as it should be.” Damitri smiled, watching Terry.

Jerrod Warrington checked his notes twice before he carefully added the final ingredient. With his luck the first success had been a fluke and he’d be days or even weeks just trying to replicate it.

To his complete relief, the potion assumed its proper color and texture once more. It hadn’t been a fluke; he would be able to reproduce the potion and reverse what he had done to each of the children on Parkinson’s order.


Warrington had almost managed to forget that George was still there. The simple praise made him close his eyes and take a deep breath. The red-headed wizard had stubbornly hung about despite Jerrod’s constant waspish remarks and clearly displayed anger. But at this point he found his patience had been stretched to the limit. He had endured enough mothering attention from George to last him a lifetime! He wasn’t used to anyone trying to look after him and it really IRKED him that Weasley wouldn’t take bugger off for an answer. “Although it’s absolutely LOVELY that you agree, but don’t you have anything else you have to be doing?” He asked in a gruff tone that was dripping with sarcasm.

George looked thoughtful for a moment. “Probably a few things I SHOULD be doing, but to be completely honest all of that can wait.” He answered with a grin and shrug.

“You can leave, George. Anytime.” Warrington scowled, turning to get his mushrooms. “You seem to have convinced yourself that I need…” He hesitated half a moment at a shooting pain through his side, cursed and then used the other hand to reach for them.

George snagged the bag first and handed them to him, preventing him from stretching too far. “Take it easy, Jerrod. I got that for ya.”

“Thanks.” He snatched the bag from him, scowling. “That’s really all I need. Why won’t you just leave…?”

“Why should I?” George asked curiously.

“Because I don’t like you.” Warrington scowled.

“If you didn’t like me you wouldn’t keep on being polite even when Alyssa was out of the room.” George pointed out with that maddening grin. “I remember you back in school; you had no problem at all in school telling people you didn’t like that you hated them. You keep ASKING me, and apologizing to me.”

Warrington hesitated; he didn’t realize he’d been doing that. “I’ve listened in on too many of the kid’s deportment sessions I guess.” He answered quickly, feeling himself flush. Damn it, what the hell was wrong with him?! “Would it make you feel better if I told you to get the hell away from me and leave me alone?”

“You know it wouldn’t make you feel better.” He smirked.
“I swear I’m going to hex you if you don’t get the bloody hell out of this lab!” He snapped, half rising to his feet despite his injured ankle.

George straightened from the table, holding up both hands open in a non-combatant pose. “Okay, okay, I’ll give you a break. I’m going to go see what Alyssa is up to.” He said, backing away.

“Wait.” Jerrod said, though even asking the red-haired man anything at this point pained him physically. George paused, though to Jerrod’s relief he didn’t say a word. “Go get the toy from my room and give it back to Alyssa. Tell her he kept my dreams happy.” He said quietly.

“Kept your dreams happy. Got it.” George grinned, and gave him a wink before he turned and headed out the door.

Warrington, though sorely tempted to hex the man from behind, turned his back as well and applied his frustration and anger to ensuring that the potion came out precisely right.

Severus Snape took a moment to survey the room he intended for use in working with the children’s learning memories. Everything was in place, protection spells well set, the room as non-threatening as he could make it. Satisfied with his preparations, he stepped out of the room and sealed the wand with a special locking spell.

He turned to see George Weasley, humming some nauseatingly cheerful tune as he strolled down the hall with his hands in his pockets. “Mr. Weasley, I would have thought you’d have gone home by now…” he commented; he couldn’t help but smirk at the man.

“Nah… I had plenty of things to do here to keep Alyssa happy.” He grinned, shrugging innocently.

“And to keep yourself happy as well?” Severus asked with a knowing smirk; he’d seen how George was interacting with Jerrod the day before.

“He had a broken arm and a sprained ankle. No, there were no adult games… really, Snape, you need to get your mind out of the gutter.” George said aloofly.

“You say that as if yours is the only mind that stayed clear of such thoughts…” Snape half chuckled.

“No harm in thinking about things.” He laughed as the two of them headed down the hall. “So what are you here for, you manky old bat?” He asked in a lightly teasing tone, using the old nickname that he and his twin had used for Severus back in school.

Severus snorted at that and decided to give as good as he got. “Well, unlike the incorrigible wrangler you are, I have work to do here; I’m not just taking up space in the manor.”

“Hey, I’m taking care of an invalid. The medi-wizard healed him up okay but that sprained ankle is giving him a hell of a time.” George said in innocent self-defense.

“Hum; I guess I’ll have to let you have that one.” Severus answered with a soft smirk. “His ankle was bad.”

“Besides, its loads of fun and things are a bit slow at the shop.” He snickered. “What are you doing ‘round here…?”

“I’m working with the children.”
“I know your bloody fantastic with memory charms. Is Legilimency is needed…?”

“No. Memory charms; very specific and highly focused memory charms with detailed ending dates.” He answered as they moved into the playroom.

Little Astrid had been scooped up and now wore a fresh nappie and a clean dress; she was happily munching on a cookie in one hand and gripping the toy she had chased after in the other.

Lucius and Damitri looked over as the two approached. “Warrington is hard at work again, Mr. Weasley?” Lucius asked.

George chuckled, shrugging. “You know how he is, I’m sure. The potion wore off at five o’clock this morning and he insisted on getting right to work. He still can’t walk properly on that ankle and he nearly hexed me for forcing him to use the chair.”

“Sounds like Warrington.” He smirked softly. “He has proven without a doubt that he is dedicated to his work, though…”

“More like obsessed.” George snorted.

“Lucius.” Severus interrupted; he had little time for their banter and needed to get started or move on to other things. “Which of the children will I be starting with? I need to get started.”

“I thought it would take you longer to get everything set up.” Lucius looked rather surprised.

“I know how to simplify the preparations needed; not much time is required for that at all.” Severus shrugged as if it had been no effort at all.

“Unfortunately, my friend, the children are not ready for you.” Lucius said with a shrug. “We will ensure that one of the guardians has taken the potion with their lunch. You must wait until after lunch to begin with them.”

Severus drew a deep breath and let it out slowly as he considered his options. “Very well.” He said with a nod. “I will have time for hospital rounds; I will return after luncheon.”

“You ought to stay for lunch; its going to be quite good.” Lucius suggested.

“Please, Lucius, I don’t need to be mothered. I have mates who worry quite enough about me.” Severus said sourly, turning to go. Lucius let him go without any further comment, sharing a grin and chuckle with Damitri.

While Severus was chatting with Lucius, George made his way to Alyssa, the toy hidden behind his back. “Hey there Liss…”

“Hello, Lord Father Weasley.” She said softly, turning to gaze up at him.

“I have a message for you from your father Warrington.” He said, kneeling beside the girl. “He said to tell you thank you very much, and that your little friend…” he produced the stuffed toy out from behind his back to offer back to her. “…kept him from having any bad dreams; all of his dreams were happy.”

She lit up, taking her toy from him and hugging it tightly. “Thank you… I knew he would help him sleep better…!” she said happily and he could see the happiness drain out of her. “I just wish he wanted me more…” she said softly, gazing at George.
He drew her into a hug. “It’ll all work out little one. I’m working on it, all right? Give me a bit of time.” He soothed.

She hugged him back, sniffing and wiping at her eyes. “Okay…” she said softly, though she didn’t look up. She let him go and turned back to join the others, hugging her toy close to her chest and kissing it on the head.

George rose to his feet and let her go, looking a bit concerned about her. Poor thing… all she wanted was a happy family. He turned and walked back to the table to see that Severus had already left. He cleared his throat as he approached to get Lucius’ attention. “Um, I have a question.” He said.

Lucius and Damitri both looked at the man questioningly.

George frowned softly; he didn’t want this to sound like he was rushing things. “Jerrod is bound to you, Lucius; I know that and I don’t have any problem with that. But… just how extensive is his bond? I mean…”

Lucius smiled softly; he was expecting this question from the redheaded wizard. “What Warrington does with his free time is of little concern to me; but be forewarned, the man seems to do nothing but work. He is free to choose any mate he wishes; I would not deny anyone in my service that opportunity.” Lucius answered.

Breathing a deep sigh of relief, George grinned. “Excellent.” He said.

“Even Severus noticed the budding relationship between the two of you.” Lucius commented, his smile growing.

George chuckled. “I’m that obvious, am I?”

“It’s hard to miss, actually, but somehow I don’t think that Warrington has noticed it as of yet …”

He shrugged. “He may not see it yet; he’s had a hell of a life from what I understand, I hope he’ll tell me more about it as time goes on. He’ll see it someday.” He said optimistically.

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Early the next morning, Hermione glanced about the office space she had been provided to work in at the hospital. It was quite a small room but large enough for an examination bed and all the tools she would need to do the work that she needed to do. The nurse who had escorted her hung about for a moment. “Will it do…? We have other machines if you need them; a sonogram machine…”

“She will have everything she needs provided as she requires it.” Severus said coolly, looking down his nose at the nurse. “She practices a more… holistic style of medicine.”

“This will do quite nicely; thank you so much…” Hermione smiled at the nurse reassuringly.

“Just… you know. Call if you need anything.” She said, giving Severus a nervous glance as she hurried out of the room.

“Honestly, Severus. She was just being helpful…”

“And she is a muggle nurse who does not need to know that you do not require such machinery to do your work.” Severus interrupted her, turning away. “I will be back to check on you shortly; you are to remain here and wait for your patients. You have eight, and all are scheduled to come and see you today.” Hermione watched as he swept out of the room; she couldn’t help but notice that his
hospital jacket seemed to billow and the corners snap just like his school robes had done.

She sighed softly, sinking to a seat on the stool, idly playing with the little intricate bracelet on her wrist. It was pretty, but it served a purpose. She could not apparate anywhere while wearing it, nor could she use the Floo network to travel anywhere.

But she was happy to be out of that room in the Ministry; quite happy indeed to be able to see new faces and to be back doing what she loved to do; help those she had aided to get pregnant to realize their dream of having healthy babies.

She pushed herself to her feet, gathering her wits. No use in woolgathering; she would have a patient to care for soon, she’d better make sure everything was ready for them. Before long, the first patient was shown to the room by Severus Snape. He showed them to the door then closed it behind them without a word, giving her a warning look. Hermione ignored it, moving to take Terry’s hands. “Oh its good to see you’ve been taking care of yourself…!” she smiled warmly.

Terry hugged her shyly. “I have to, for the baby… could you make sure the baby is all right…? I just…”

Hermione smiled reassuringly, gesturing to the bed. “Of course: I know you’re nervous, first time and all. Come along; let me give you a quick scan…”

Damitri watched as Hermione again showed every bit of the skill that she had shown before, giving Terry every bit of her attention and explaining everything that she did before and while she did it. She did a scan of the baby and showed Terry where to rest his hands so they would be over the tiny forming infant, answering every question and not hesitating to explain over in other terms if it seemed that Terry was the slightest bit hesitant about the answer.

“All right, that will do it for this time… Just keep eating well – not too many sweets now, and don’t fall for that whole ‘eating for two’ nonsense. If you really do eat for two people, you’re going to keep all that weight after the baby comes.” Hermione cautioned with a soft smile.

“I won’t eat too much.” Terry promised, sitting up and buttoning his blouse. “Can I see you again next week?”

“Not next week; I think you will be fine for two weeks. I do want to see you a little more often than some of my other patients; I want to make sure that the potions you’re taking to sustain the baby continue to work effectively.” She smiled at him. “The balance we have right now seems to be working quite well; the baby is healthy and is developing as expected.”

Terry slipped off the bed and moved to Hermione, hugging her. “Thank you…” he murmured.

She returned the embrace. “I’m happy that I can help you. Now don’t forget; two weeks from today I want to see you again, and you can contact Severus Snape to get hold of me if there are any problems.”

“Thank you, Mrs. Weasley.” Damitri smiled, reaching to shake her hand as Terry moved to him and snuggled close.

She shook his hand. “My pleasure. See you soon.” She smiled.

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“Mrs. Weasley, you must know how bloody inconvenient this is!” Severus growled softly, glaring at Hermione with narrowed eyes. “Can’t you wait until you get back to the ministry?”

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Hermione scowled irritably. “No, I most certainly cannot wait! If I could have waited I never would have brought it up to you! I’ve been locked in this room for four hours; I have to go to the bathroom. You can follow me if you want but I WILL lock the stall!”

Severus stepped back out of the way to allow Hermione to hurry down the hallway. He didn’t like allowing her to go outside the room that had been selected and specially charmed to cover her presence in the hospital. That overbearing idiot that had been placed in the position of the Minister of Magic had actually entrusted him with watching over Mrs. Weasley and he had no intention of letting her out of his sight. He had taken every precaution possible to ensure that she was secure. He hadn’t counted on restroom breaks, though.

He watched with growing unease as she went into the ladies’ room. He followed her to the door but allowed the door to drift shut behind her. Surely nothing would happen to her in the loo; she’d be just a few moments and then she could get back to helping the last of her patients. Following that, he would escort her directly back to the ministry and be done with her for at least a week. He was just being over-reactionary, feeling something ominous about a simple visit to the bathroom…

His hesitance evaporated in a moment when he heard a scream, cut off by a female voice snarling the killing curse. Snape took in all the details of the room in the span of a heartbeat: there were three women in the room. One was likely an unfortunate muggle in the wrong place at the wrong time; a woman he had never seen before lay upon the floor, her jaw slack and eyes staring sightlessly. He was certain beyond a shadow of a doubt that she was dead. The second woman was Hermione Weasley, and she was crumpled in the corner of the room with the tiles slightly cracked behind her, looking dazed and bound and gagged with magical ropes, a trickle of blood dripping down her forehead from a cut over her right eye. Standing over the two of them was a woman who, if Snape did not know better, he would swear was Bellatrix Lestrange when Voldemort had been alive. She was not immaculately dressed in wizarding style as she would normally have been; on the contrary she was wearing a muggle skirt and jacket with a plain blouse. Her hair, normally perfectly coiffed and colored a different tone every week, was back to its natural color and was coming loose of its bun. The loose tendrils formed in a wild halo about her face, some hanging unchecked into her eyes. Her eyes held no reason or logic; they burned with that same type of blind fury teetering on the edge of insanity.

Her expression changed from ultimate triumph to fury at seeing Snape; her hand instantly raised the wand to attack again, baring her teeth at him in a snarl. "Petrificus Totalus!" She snarled and the flare of red light shot out of the end of her wand, a much more powerful spell than she had ever been able to produce in her school years. Severus knew he could not underestimate her; although she had been a passably good student in school, once a person reached their snapping point nothing was beyond their capability.

Being quite practiced in dueling; Severus did not waste his power countering her first attack. He simply was no longer where she expected him to be when the blast of energy hit the door, icing it over with the spent missed spell. He then threw up a protection spell and cursed the fact that the room was so small; he had very little room for maneuvering. "You won't get away again, Parkinson!" he snarled at her.

"I'll do as I like and you don't have any choice in it. You'll never stop me! She's mine you bloody old fool! She BELONGS to ME!!" she screamed at him, throwing a cutting spell at him.

"You ruined yourself with your mad experiments and raping of wizards!" He snapped back at her, blocking the attack once more. If he could just force her to stay few more minutes, the Aurors ought to arrive...
"Father wants her and he WILL have what he wants!" She snarled back at him, trying time and time again to strike Severus but his dueling skill was just a hair better than her madness could compensate for. She threw spell after spell, clearly growing more desperate and furious.

She threw one more spell then snatched something hard and black off her bracelet; she slammed the little black ball onto the floor. The room vanished in a cloud of instant night followed by the spell Bombarda. The effects of the destructively explosive spell were not visible due to the magical darkness, but its power was clear. The sheer impact of the blast and the force of the explosion bowled Severus back against one of the sinks, showering everyone in the room with tiny shards of glass and stone and other debris. His ears were ringing, but he could clearly hear her begin to giggle at the destruction.

The pain caused by his impact with the sink might have slowed Snape, but he was not fooled or distracted by the Weasley's Wizard Wheezes product at all. He had a pretty damned good idea of what she was about to do and he wasn’t about to let her get away with it; Hermione Weasley, like it or not, was under HIS protection!! He heard Pansy curse furiously as her attempt to apparate away with her prey failed. The bracelet had done its job.

Immediately he lunged forward and grabbed blindly in the blackness, catching hold of a handful of fabric and clutching it tightly. He didn't care who he'd seized; he had no intention of letting go at all. He knew that if it was Pansy he had hold of, he was in a great deal of trouble; she had been pretty good in school at close-range hexes.

A wand appeared out of the darkness and struck Severus, leaving a bleeding cut across his jaw and left arm. He ignored the pain; he'd certainly endured worse than that. He seized the fabric with his other hand without losing his grip on his wand and braced himself, pulling as hard as he could. The wand struck twice more before he wrenched the fabric to himself and rolled away in the dark, glass shards crunching underneath them. It was Hermione he'd gotten hold of... and he had no intention of allowing Pansy to get his hands on the young woman again.

"No!!" Pansy screamed out of the dark. "Give that bitch back to me! She's mine!" she said wildly, letting Severus know he had been right. Pansy had tried to leave and drag the dazed woman out with her.

"Not bloody likely, Pansy." Severus snarled back, pushing the unresisting woman into a corner and standing between her and the rest of the room. Where the hell was the bloody ministry?! They should have been here when all this began!! There was supposed to be an Auror in the waiting room!!

"Then I'll have to kill you too." Her voice was suddenly calm and she began to laugh; the sound seemed to come from all around him; he couldn't pinpoint where the woman was. "You can’t touch me! You can’t even see me!" She said in a singsong voice followed by a mad giggle that she stifled. "This is over, Severus Snape... and you lose." Her voice went from singsong to that suddenly deadly. "AVADA KEDAVRA!!"

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AUTHOR’S NOTE: The term “wranger”, as defined by the following website: http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=wranger means a person who is descendant from an orangutan. I used this insult for George because the site specifically mentions Ron as played by Rupert Grint.
Evil crawls Out of the Woodwork

Hermione woke up in a hospital bed, her entire body aching and painful. She felt dazed and confused; she reached up and tentatively touched her forehead. It wasn’t bandaged, so she must have been moved to a wizard hospital… she knew they had high security rooms at St. Mungo’s; they probably had an Auror posted outside her door to watch her. Her head still ached horribly and she felt like she’d been beaten all over.

What the hell had happened…? It was all a blur. Something had made her fall; she knew she had fallen and struck her head on either the sink or the tiles on the wall, pretty damned hard… she’d blacked out for a moment or two. Everything after that was just… insane.

She imagined she’d seen Pansy, but not the Pansy that she’d known… this woman was nothing but spite and malice and hatred; filthy and pure insanity. That creature had attacked her from behind once the door behind her had closed… and… wait. There had been a muggle girl in there, maybe eighteen or so, washing her hands when she’d come in. The girl had smiled at her and gone on about her business while Hermione had gone to the back stall and opened it when another stall had opened… and… she’d hit the wall.

Memories slowly began to filter back to her, disjointed images that really made no sense to her at all. She was tied… but… but that was a muggle hospital. Only magic could… magic. Oh Merlin… It had been magic. She recalled a wizard’s duel going on all about her; she had returned the wand to Severus when she had finished with her last patient. She had been completely helpless… A woman had come out of the stall and used a stunning spell. She’d fallen and was bound up, magically bound from head to toe, even her mouth covered so she could not cry for help…

She had hit her head so hard on the tiles that she was seeing stars, but she heard the killing curse used and watched that poor girl fall to the floor, her last scream cut short by the evil green glare of that horrible spell. The evil witch had turned to face her then and Hermione was sure that she only had moments to live. The woman had been so demented, her eyes… she would never be able to get the memory of that woman’s eyes out of her mind.

Then the door had slammed open… she’d barely been able to focus on what had been happening. There was a duel then, unlike any she had seen since the battle against Voldemort and the Death Eaters… But she had to be imagining that; that bathroom had been much too small for what she’d thought she’d seen. It was Severus, she knew that… but… the woman… he called her… no. Hermione frowned as she tried to get past the confused jumble her memory insisted on being twisted into. He’d called her Pansy… it had been Pansy Parkinson; she had come to kill Hermione for turning her in.

But it couldn’t have been! Pansy was never that good at any type of dueling spells; she’d been completely hopeless dueling at school. And she’d never managed to master unspoken magic and the spells that the woman had cast with frightening speed were rarely accompanied by the spell’s verbal component. Then everything had gone dark; Hermione had thought for a moment that she finally passed out but she felt the two of them fight over her, then…

Hermione couldn’t remember any more. Severus had gotten her away from Pansy, she remembered that, and still felt the sting of where they had rolled through glass shards to evade her, but… but then what happened? How had she gotten here? And where was Severus…?
Kingsley Shacklebolt glared at the employees of the Ministry of Magic standing before him. The young man had just started in his position in the Department of Magical Law Enforcement at the beginning of the year; he never should have been put on this detail. The older woman had been an Auror long enough that she should have known better than to leave her partner alone in the hospital even for a few moments. They had been the ones assigned the duty of watching over Hermione even though she was in the custody of Severus Snape, as an extra layer of protection. “So perhaps you two can explain to me exactly what happened this morning at the hospital?” He suggested; his tone a low and dangerous growl. “There were two of you; you should have remained on post as you were instructed.”

“They didn’t stay in the room where Mrs. Weasley was assigned to be, sir… and we did not expect her to go farther down the hall for any reason. Mr. Snape did not inform us that she was deviating from the plan.” Trevor Walston said quietly. “I know that’s not an excuse…”

Kingsley snorted derisively. “Bloody well right it’s not an excuse. You’re both too damned young and inexperienced and should never have been trusted to oversee this situation.” He grumbled, sitting back in his chair. “So why did it take you so long to respond to the situation?”

“We responded once we heard the explosion sir; she must have had the room silenced so that we couldn’t hear…” the younger man began.

“There was no silencing spell when the Department of Magical Law Enforcement showed up with their memory charms to do the cleanup.”

“I had stepped out, sir.” The older witch admitted quietly. “There had been no sign of Miss Parkinson and I did not think that a moment or two…”

“And where was your partner?” he leveled cold eyes on the young man, who flushed deeply and was unable to meet Kingsley’s gaze.

“His girlfriend works at the nurse’s station on level two, sir.” The woman said quietly.

“Not my girlfriend… and at the rate I’m going not bloody likely that she’s going to be. I took her a drink, sir, I was away only a moment.”

“And now you both know that a moment is all that is needed. One moment and you could easily have been the reason for grief in more than one family.” He growled. “Tell me what happened next?” he prompted.

“I responded to the bathroom door, and Trevor responded to the outside of the bathroom.”

“Parkinson had exploded a hole big enough for me to come around from behind and I was… well, it was a much shorter distance for me to just head out the door…” he said, flushing hotly. “She’d used an Instant Darkness Powder and she had some Seeing Glasses on, the type they sell over at Weasley’s Wizarding Wheezes to see through the powder’s effects.”

“And how did you know what had caused the darkness?”

“I’ve used it myself, sir. It comes in handy really, when you need just a moment to get what you need to done.” Trevor answered, confident in his reasoning. “I used a vanishing spell to clear the blackness right when we heard her use the killing curse at the two on the floor…”

“And you?” he asked, looking over at the woman.

“I had to protect them, sir… I didn’t have any choice.” She answered quietly.
Kingsley sat back, frowning in thought; he needed no further explanation as he knew the outcome of the situation. “Both of you are on suspension pending an investigation. I’m leaving your discipline up to the Minister of Magic himself.”

“Yes sir.” The Aurors said quietly.

“Get out of here. I’ve done all I can here for the night; I’m going to see Tonks.” He said, rising with a grunt of effort and a bit of a wince. He mumbled a soft curse at his body for its weakness and moved to the fireplace; he activated the floo network and was on his way.

Kingsley made his way through the halls of St. Mungo’s, trying not to think of his own frequent visits here for various ailments. He needed to find Tonks and make sure that everything was all right. He got directions and eventually made his way to one of the waiting rooms. Remus sat quietly on one of the benches, his face looking more careworn and tired than ever. His wife sat close to him, cradled in his arms, her face streaked with tears and her hair a deep blue. Tonks was held in his arms, sitting close to him, tears rolling down his cheeks; they’d been like this since they had been called to come to the hospital.

“Any news?” Kingsley asked quietly.

“None yet. They’ve had him behind closed doors for over an hour.” Tonks whispered.

“But no news is better than bad news.” Remus said, trying to be optimistic, glancing at a closed door. “They’ve been coming and going out of that room every couple of minutes, but no one says a damned word to either of us.”

Kingsley scowled. “I’ll get them to talk to you.” He growled.

“No… no please. I want them to try everything they can and I don’t want anything interrupting them…” Tonks said, gazing up at her old comrade. “Please, just let them work…”

Reluctantly Kingsley nodded. “Very well… have either of you eaten?” Remus shook his head, his lips touching his wife’s blue hair. She did not answer at all, not even looking up at him. “You need to eat…” he began.

“Kingsley; I’ll be sick if I eat anything.” Tonks murmured.

“You haven’t been feeling at all well lately, have you?” Kingsley frowned.

“It’s been a little stressful. I’m fine, it’s just stress.”

“You did promise to see a healer.” Remus said softly in a concerned tone, stroking her hair tenderly. “We ARE at the hospital…”

“I won’t leave. I don’t care if I die here I won’t leave.” She murmured.

“This IS a hospital, and this waiting room could be used as an exam room if necessary.” Kingsley said.

“I’m fine. Just… I just want to sit here that’s all. They’ll be out any moment, they really will…”

“…absolute rubbish, I am FINE!” A voice from beyond the door snapped quite angrily and all three of them looked over at the door, which was being pulled open. Severus Snape came through the
door, glaring over his shoulder. “I will not be poked, prodded or put up with any more of this for a moment more!”

“Severus…” Remus breathed, relief seeming to make ten years slide off his face. “Oh Merlin…”

Tonks said nothing, coming to her feet and rushing to him, seizing him in a tight embrace, her hair brightening and revealing her relief and joy. He halted to keep from being bowled over by her, rather surprised. “Tonks? Remus…? They sent for you…?” He asked.

“They told us you were in a magical coma.” Remus said, rising. “We wouldn’t have stayed away for anything…”

“It was the backlash of Pansy’s spell; she tried to use the Killing Curse on me.” Severus said quietly; he had not realized how bad off he had been. “But I stopped her; I know I got that mad harpy of a woman; Pansy. She’s dead?” Severus asked.

“Yes.” Kingsley said firmly. “She is, without a doubt, dead.”

Severus sighed deeply, holding his mate tightly as Remus came and wrapped his arms about them both. “Good… that’s one less lunatic to worry about out there…” he said firmly. “Let’s go home…”

“Mr. Snape!” Medi-Wizard Trellin came out of the room, scowling. “We are not finished with you, sir.”

“Oh, yes you are. I’m in quite capable hands, I assure you, and my mate has as much experience at caring and tending to hurts and ills as any of you in this entire hospital!” Snape retorted, settling one arm about Tonks and the other about Remus. “He is quite skilled, my Remus. But you are all so damned prejudiced against his ‘disability’, as you like to put it, that you refuse to see beyond it.”

“Severus, it’s all right. I’m used to it.” Remus said soothingly.

“You shouldn’t have to ‘get used’ to anything, Remus. You were a brilliant Defense Against the Dark Arts Teacher. You have a knack for healing and for defensive spells; you should be absolutely anything you want to be, and the idiots at the Ministry treat you as if you’re a leper.”

“That’s the Ministry, I…” Trellin began.

Severus was having his say even if he was never allowed to set foot in this blasted hospital again. “He is a werewolf, yes, but he has NEVER injured anyone while in his shifted form! Greyback is long dead and I would thank you all to stop treating him as if he is that maniac come back to life!”

“I am NOT against you on this; I would quite enjoy having Remus Lupin come in and work with me, if only the hospital would allow it.” Trellin answered in just a sharp a tone as Severus had used on him. “I’m not administration, though. And you need to be cleared before you go home; even Remus has limitations on his capabilities and both of your mates need you to be healthy.”

Severus hesitated, scowling.

“Just a moment or two more, that’s all we ask of you.” Trellin said quietly.

“Oh just go along with him Sev… and have him check Dora while he’s at it…” Remus suggested.

“Remus, this isn’t the time…” Nymphadora began.

Severus raised an eyebrow at her. “This is precisely the time for such things. I will agree to go if you
She gazed up at him and sighed, leaning her head back against his chest. “You know I won’t argue with that; I want to be sure you’re going to be okay…”

“Of course, as do I with you. Healer? After you.” Severus gestured to the door he had just left. The wizard led the way back into the room and Remus started to let them go but Severus was having no part of that; he kept a firm grip on his male mate as well. “See you later, Kingsley. I’ve got things under control.” Snape assured, pulling Lupin into the room along with them.

“So I see.” Kingsley chuckled, turning to go his own way.

Malcolm Parkinson checked his reflection in the mirror; he’d altered himself enough so that he didn’t even recognize his own reflection. He’d had enough of waiting; it was time to go and find out what had happened to his daughter. He swept his cloak on and hurried out the door. It seemed to take forever to flag down one of these ridiculous muggle cabs and ride into London. He didn’t bother with paying the driver, using a confundus spell on him to make the driver think that he had already gotten his pay with an average tip.

He eventually got himself to the street he had sent his daughter to; why had that little bitch not come back? Had she managed to gather together the willpower and strength to break through his control through the Imperious curse? Or had she failed again and was afraid to return to him? No matter; he would track her down and get her back where she belonged; at his side and at his beck and call.

As he approached the hospital he slowed his pace; the building was a veritable hive of activity. He recognized several Aurors and also members of the Ministry of Magic.

Well, that was to be expected, had his daughter managed what she had planned.

He didn’t stop moving, kept walking and pretended to favor his right arm. He’d injure it if he had to, to get himself inside and find out what exactly had happened.

A couple of wizards stood outside the doors and each of them were holding probity probes. He smiled to himself and continued onward, their wands wouldn’t find anything on him. His wand wasn’t on his person and he carried nothing magical at all; if that was all they had for security here it would be simple work to get past.

Inside the emergency room seemed to be full of only muggles, all sitting around and waiting for something, probably to be seen. He followed their example, though it galled him to do so. He went to the counter and scrawled some idiotic made up name, then turned to look for an exit deeper into the building. Restroom, ah, that was the ticket. He moved through a door and went back into the hospital. The ladies’ room had a sign on it claiming it was out of order. Pansy had said she was going to wait in the bathroom, she was certain that Hermione would want to use the restroom at some point or another…

He drew near and slowed, pretending to nurse an injured leg.

Two members of the Ministry were outside the door talking.

“She blew a hole in the wall; we’ve nearly got that repaired. She really didn’t do much damage to the room; most of it was to Severus Snape and Mrs. Weasley…” another said quietly.

“What did they do with her?” the first asked.
“Her body was taken to the Ministry.” The second answered. “The others were taken to St. Mungo’s for treatment.”

“I heard Snape took a lot of damage…”

“They both did. Never would have guessed that she had that much skill.”

“Doesn’t matter what skills she had; she won’t be hurting anyone anymore.” The first one responded with a satisfied tone. Those words took a moment to sink into Malcolm’s mind as he ambled on into the men’s room.

She… they couldn’t mean Pansy. They couldn’t. She was much too resourceful to allow anyone, even that arrogant bastard Severus Snape to overpower her. She was too clever, she was… he stumbled and fell against the wall.

“Hey… hey mister; are you okay?” Someone asked but he barely heard them as the full impact of what had happened struck him, momentarily crippling and blinding him.

His daughter… they meant that she was dead… first his wife taken from him by Voldemort’s misdirected fury, then his created sons snatched from him by those bastards at the Ministry and that arrogant fool Malfoy, now his daughter was dead and out of his reach forever. It was all out of his control; everyone was stealing his life away from him. He felt no responsibility at all for what had happened; it was not his fault! Now he had nothing left. Nothing to live for, nothing to defend…

He pushed the hands away of the muggle trying to help him back to his feet and burst into an unsteady run. His steps became more sure as he fled, not even knowing or caring where he was going. He burst past the guards at the door and did not care that they were shouting at him. Nothing mattered. He had to get somewhere and devise a plan. Anywhere, somewhere far from here, he would keep running until he had left it all behind.

He may have had his last living relative snatched from him, but he was not finished; oh, no. He would make them all pay for what they had taken from him. The Dark Lord was beyond retribution as he was dead, but there were several he intended to make suffer for what had happened to him and his family. Severus Snape; there were ways to make that man suffer. If only he could figure a way to get his son back; his precious little Dark Prince. He would make them pay.

He would find a way to settle the score with them all. And the most obvious targets for his new unbridled fury were Severus Snape, Lucius Malfoy and Harry Potter.

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August Bebel paced back and forth in the hotel room with growing impatience. He had not eaten in over a day, and the water and coffee in the room could take him only so far. He was starving and he was having an incredibly hard time focusing on his work. He had substandard equipment and all his notes were gone… Parkinson expected him to somehow recreate the embryos with nothing, nothing at all. But he had been trying.

Parkinson had been constantly casting he imperious curse on him to force him to work nonstop, but the man had been gone for hours. He couldn’t concentrate with his stomach feeling like it was gnawing on his spine. One of residents in a neighboring room had brought in Chinese food and he could smell it clearly through the walls. Merlin that smelled fantastic…

For perhaps the millionth time in his life he wished he were a wizard; he hated not having any powers. Malcolm was really emphatic about the fact that they were being hunted but August had not
seen any such thing; it had been really quiet and they had not moved at all. He had not seen any newspapers but then he had been much too busy to look at anything but his work.

It didn’t matter; he was going to get something to eat. He had no way to conceal himself, nothing had been provided for him. There was no cloak here for him to use or any sort of potion. He really needed to get some food; any food at all would do. He spat a curse and snatched up the keys and what little pocket money he had and hurried out the door.

Hopefully he’d get back before Malcolm returned, and the other man would be none the wiser. He closed the door behind him securely, gathered his coat close about him and hurried out.

He made his way out of the hotel, looking about. It did not take him long to see a little café and he moved hurriedly through its doors, intent on nothing more than getting one, perhaps two plates of food to fill his aching stomach.

"I hate to disturb you, Remus, but I need to speak with Tonks. It is rather urgent." Kingsley said in his quiet tone, his head hovering in the fireplace. He'd felt a fire call would be much more appropriate considering what this household had been through.

"She is resting, and unless the ministry is ON FIRE I will not have her or Severus disturbed...!" Lupin answered crossly, his eyes flashing dangerously. It was much too close to the full moon and he was having difficulty controlling his emotions today.

"The ministry is not burning, but this could actually be more important than that. You see, Remus, we've captured August Bebel." He answered.

"Bebel...?" He looked confused for a moment, not recognizing the name of the man; then it was clear that recall of the man's place in the scheme of things swept over him. "Oh... oh Merlin." He murmured. "All right; I will tell her. But I can't promise she'll come. It's been one hell of a day and we're all exhausted..."

"Exhausted, perhaps, but not asleep Remus." Nymphadora corrected, coming up behind him, slipping an arm about his waist as she gazed down at the fire. "Problems, Kingsley...?"

"Not a problem, my friend; a success. We have August Bebel in custody."

"Brilliant! I'll be right there." She assured. "See you soon." Shacklebolt smiled and his face vanished from the fireplace.

"Dora, you aren't going." Remus frowned at her.

"You worry too much; I think you've forgotten to take your potion in all of the excitement." She said, stroking his cheek. "I'm going to make sure that you get it from Severus before I leave. Don't worry so; I'll be perfectly safe. It's inside the ministry and I won't be alone when I question him. Besides, love -- he doesn't have any powers; he's a squib."

"Magic can be done without a wand." He reminded.

"I know that as well as you do. Don't you think they'll have checked him for any sort of dangerous devices before they even brought him inside?"

"I know your Aurors know what they're doing, Dora. I know they checked him over, but that doesn't mean I have to like it..."
"It's my job, and..."

"…and you must, of course, perform your duties to the utmost. We would expect nothing less of you, Dora." Severus commented as he came out of the bedroom.

"And what are YOU doing up? You're supposed to rest today, you're wearing yourself down to nothing." Remus scowled at him.

"I've taken a restorative." Severus answered smoothly, holding out the potion to control Lupin's werewolf side when the moon came to fullness tonight. "I do believe our Dora is correct. You need to take this, I see you forgot it this morning and I've been seeing much too much of the wolfling gold in your eyes today."

He sighed, not liking the situation at all. "You still shouldn't go, either of you. You both should rest today. Whatever it is you're working on will be there tomorrow..."

"I want to be there when Bebel is questioned." Tonks answered. "Pansy may have been stopped but her father was the mastermind behind it all and I'm sure that there's more to this entire mess."

"Those little Guardians in Lucius' home could attack another child if I do not continue my work with him." Severus responded. "Next time I don't believe the one they choose to attack will survive."

"I'm going with one of you." Lupin said stubbornly.

"Take your potion, Lupin, and you can come with me." Severus answered.

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"I've done nothing wrong." He said quietly, looking upset at being pulled away from his meal - his second plate - at the diner. He had been forced to take veritaserum the moment he arrived and it was in full effect. He was secured in the interview chair often used for meetings of the Wizengamot; his arms and legs fastened with magical bonds to the arms and legs of the chair.

"You created infants with sperm taken without knowledge or consent of the fathers. You were part of a plot to create a new Dark Lord." Tonks scowled.

"I helped to create babies, this is true." He said agreeably, pointedly ignoring Tonks and speaking to Kingsley Shacklebolt only. "I was working with a man who had an inspired vision; is it his fault that you cannot comprehend the value of his work?"

"Value?!" Tonks growled in surprise.

"Why, yes. Value. Someone with such strength, trained and protected, would easily become Minister of Magic, and would be capable of regaining control of our population. You cannot deny that you must have many members of your Magical Enforcement Department go out every day and stop foolish performances of magic. Someone powerful as the one we were grooming would have no need of such a thing; he could handle enforcement himself."

"...what...?"

"Perhaps it was wrong how the seed was secured; I will not argue with you on that point. But the securing of the necessary items was not of my doing and not within my control. I used only what I was given, and performed alteration and fertilization and implantation... I did nothing more than Mrs. Weasley did and she was not hunted as I..."
"She turned herself in to END this madness."

"She was as blind as the rest of the world. Even his own daughter did not comprehend the beauty of his design. The simplicity of it..."

"What the bloody hell do you mean by that? Simplicity??"

"Why of course. What would be needed if a leader were so powerful? We would not need all this ridiculous bureaucracy you have here. All that would be needed would be the young Prince and his entourage..."

"How would that be better?" Kingsley asked, prompting the man to continue to speak.

"How could it not? Your government here is as bad as ours in my home country. People vying for power, people getting hurt or forgotten or simply brushed aside when policy changes... I was born to magical parents and have never developed my powers. I was treated as a muggle by my home government; we are not even allowed to touch anything magical there..."

"This is not Germany, Mr. Bebel."

"Perhaps not," he said, glaring at the black man with flashing eyes. "But what do you do with the non-magical members of your society? You label them as squibs. If they are lucky they are married into magical families and embraced by your culture. If they are not they are forced to live as muggles and are sneered at by wizards and witches alike. Even your schools do not allow for non-magical children to learn any sort of potions or magical vocation; though we cannot DO such things we certainly can TEACH them!" he snapped. It was clear this had been a sore point with this man for a very long time. "Only Malcolm Parkinson saw my capabilities; saw what I could do and how I could be of benefit to him. and to the wizarding world. I showed him how I could gather power and only he saw that I could be great in my work. I gained training in potions from wizards as well as training in chemistry from muggles; I have the best of both worlds and only suffer limitations in my level of magical ability. Power can be stored you know, and used for other purposes. I used stored power to work the magic necessary to do the alterations to the seed and eggs..."

"Stored power? You mean, of course, blood magic?"

"Blood magic," he sneered at the term. "You speak with the fears and limitations of wizards wrapped prejudices of the middle ages!" He scoffed. "Magic gathered by the loss of life and pain need not be by violent means! One simply has to be present when life is lost to gather the power. Even Merlin used such methods, it has been documented!"

"Do you deny killing was done to gather this power?"

"I did not kill them. Other people were given that task, not I. Warrington was assigned to terminate many of the mistakes that were made."

"Terminate the mistakes?"

"At first my experiments were... not successful. Most died on their own, before they were fully matured enough to be born." He shrugged.

"This had no effect on you? Didn't you care?"

"Care? They were not even babies; they were not even human at all. I should care about wasted tissue with no life?" he asked, clearly having no emotion about that at all, and then he sighed. "It is necessary to sacrifice to enable progress to occur... only great progress can be made if life is lost.
Surely you understand that? These... failures... were a necessary step to achieve the perfection I reached with the Circle." He waved his hand with a complete lack of emotion or concern, but then looked a bit worried. "You have not killed them? The children still live, do they not...?" He asked.

"They live, but their torture and mistreatment is being blocked from their minds." Tonks glared at him.

"How they were raised was not my concern; I was concerned with magnifying their powers and strengths." He relaxed once more.

"Enlighten me as to how these children were to change our world."

Bebel gritted his teeth, trying not to answer, causing himself great discomfort. "The Prince was to unite all the governments."

"How?"

Again the words came out despite his best efforts to stop them; his knuckles were white where he gripped the arms of the chair. "He would choose leaders for each of the countries... the enchantress would ensure that they remained completely loyal to the Prince and no other, maintaining his control over them and keeping them under his power, and enable him to rule equally and fairly over all the wizarding communities about the entire world."

"So your enchantress has formidable powers?"

"More than she herself knows, and more than that dolt Warrington will ever be able to explain to you. She is able to completely control a wizard who tested genetically to be more than a quarter selkie and half siren with minimal training." He snarled, hating that he could not keep from speaking.

"Dangerous." Kingsley murmured.

"Brilliant!" He snarled back at him. "How else to ensure that the leaders remain loyal? Parkinson is not a madman; he is a visionary! You at the ministry are the ones who are mad, expecting your system to continue to function as it stands! The populace cannot possibly choose the proper wizard to lead the Ministry; the wizarding public in general is a collection of idiots and fools who are easily led astray by a handsome face and a catchy pitch line! How many truly effective English Ministers of Magic have there been? You can count them on one hand! Bagman was a joke - he ignored the constant reports and allowed the return of the most dangerous wizard of all time! His replacement was no better, and the fool who runs things now is more interested in his girlfriends and maintaining the status quo than in what is going on in the ministry!"

Kingsley was not about to debate about the efficiency of any of the Ministers of Magic; this could very well be an interview viewed by the Minister himself. "So you agree that He Who Must Not Be Named - Tom Riddle -was dangerous."

"Yes, he was very dangerous." he agreed.

"Then why did you try to recreate him?"

"I did not recreate him. All traces of his body were destroyed as was that of his father and mother; we did search before we began the process."

"Again, I ask. Why try to recreate him?"

"I never tried to 'recreate' him, you bloody fool! That was never my goal and never the goal of
Parkinson, he hated the Dark Lord for taking his wife from him. My goal, which I did achieve, was to create a new Lord. Genetically he was powerful enough to unite the world..." he insisted, as if trying to make Kingsley see his point. "He could have been our salvation, now in Malfoy's hands he's going to be the same as his brother; nothing worthy of paying attention to beyond a legend and a prophecy and what could have been." He growled.

"There's been no prophecy of a return of the Dark Lord." Tonks scowled at him. Bebel was much too happy to be able to keep his mouth shut for the comfort of either of them; there had been no question in the statement Tonks had made and he did not have to answer but it was clear by his smile that he knew something. Tonks and Kingsley exchanged a glance. "Has there been a prophecy of someone rising to control all the Ministries...? Of a Dark Prince rising?" Kingsley asked pointedly.

Again Bebel fought to keep silent, grinding his teeth together. "Yes." The word was forced magically out of him.

"Have you seen or heard this prophecy?"

"Not directly, no."

"Who has?"

"Malcolm Parkinson." He growled, the words through clenched teeth.

"So you were operating under the word only of Malcolm Parkinson that this would come to pass?"

"He shared his memory with me. Malcolm treated me as a fellow wizard, not as some useless castoff because of my lack of powers!" He snapped.

"So you saw this prophecy through Malcolm's memory... did he use a Penseive?"

"Yes." He mumbled.

"Who made the prophecy?" he pressed further. "We can simply pull the memory from your own mind, you know. Don't force us to take that step."

"Harkiss." He tried not to speak once more; the name was almost unintelligible.

"Harkiss? Cecily Harkiss is a Seer?" Kingsley asked directly.

"Yes." He hissed.

"Hm. We ought to see if we can contact Miss Harkiss..."

He glared at them, wringing his hands and trying to free them from the magical chains that bound him in place, pulling hard enough to make his wrists redden and now begin to trickle blood.

"Where is Malcolm Parkinson?"

"I don't know." He answered quickly.

"You don't know... that means he left rather unexpectedly, did he?"

"No; I expected him to go when his daughter had not returned. He puts such store in her skills and abilities, I don't understand it at all... I kept telling him we did not need her. She had never been useful before and his hanging on to her was only going to harm our cause. She is the one who stole; neither Malcolm nor I did that. You've nothing to charge us with, my own government will have me
extradited back home and I will be free to continue my work…”

"Let's re-word that, shall we?” Tonks interrupted him before he could work up a real speech. “Where did Malcolm Parkinson have you stay these past weeks?” she said in a calm, clear tone. They had a chance to catch this bastard with this little lapdog’s assistance.

"Freil Hotel, Room 319." He answered with much more reluctance.

"And you've a key?"

"My left coat pocket."

Tonks secured the key, smiling in satisfaction. "Very good... we'll just see if your little master has come home since you stepped out for a bite and see if we can't bring him to justice as well." She said, thoughtful.

“No! You can’t! You mustn’t stop him, don’t you understand?! He’s working to BETTER our communities, to make our lives more meaningful…!” he managed to pull hard enough to tear the flesh of his wrist, his hand and the binding becoming covered in blood.

“Petrificus Totalus!” Kingsley snapped and the man froze in place, his objections silenced as well as his struggles; his bleeding magically stopped as well.

“We have to secure him, even tighter security than Mrs. Weasley. I have a request from the Unspeakables to review the information stored in this man’s brain.” Tonks said, gazing at the man a long moment.

"That might not be a very good idea; we want his knowledge to vanish." Kingsley said quietly. "We do not want this to ever occur again, even from within the ministry."

She turned away. "Agreed. Let's get him placed under a temporal stasis spell." she suggested.
Damitri had dedicated the last three weeks to chasing down every tiny snippet of information he could regarding James Potter's final week or so at school, just before he left Hogwarts for Easter Holiday. He was beginning to grow rather frustrated at the lack of information he was finding in his search. No wonder Lucius had lost patience searching on his own, and why every year around Easter he displayed signs of such despondency. He thought there were no leads left, but Damitri was not about to give up.

Lucius had begun working at Hogwarts the year after his graduation as a special tutor in Transfigurations, helping students who were focused on learning as much as possible to prepare for their OWLs and NEWTs. He had been offered a similar position by Horace Slughorn but had refused; he had reportedly had no taste for the manual labor required to produce quality potions and preferred to leave such work to others.

One of those few who remembered any sort of relationship between James and Lucius had been the Madam Poppy Pomfrey; the school nurse who had served in the infirmary during those years. She stated that James began coming in for regular checkups of his pregnancy early in his fifth school year and she, of course, had given him the best care she had been able to provide. She had asked who the father was, but he had refused to divulge the information. It had taken threatening to tell his parents of his pregnancy before James had finally shared with her the truth. Poppy had, of course, been appalled that a student and a teacher had become intimate and felt it was necessary to at least let the Headmaster know. As the student involved actually seemed to benefit from the relationship, he had found it unnecessary to intervene as long as they were discrete.

The blossoming love affair between the fifth year student and the young assistant teacher had been developing through James’ fourth year and on into the summertime; the day that they had become intimate must have been the month before the start of the new school semester.

James’ year-mates, specifically Remus Lupin and Sirius Black, remembered little about the details of the affair. James had managed to keep his relationship with Lucius Malfoy out of the knowledge of even his closest friends. They did remember visits from the older blonde wizard and small hints here and there of some sort of friendship, but any visits ceased completely in the sixth year. Until Damitri asked them for the details, both admitted that they had never thought about it beyond that year.

Interviews with various teachers still living turned up very little additional information. Some teachers recalled that James had been pregnant but others had paid little to no attention to the situation. They only confirmed what Lucius had told him; that the young man had been with child when he left the castle but was not when he returned and had no recall of even being with child.

Since he found nothing with that direction, he turned instead his attention to the house elves. He decided that since the Wizarding population had taken no notice that he should instead turn to question those who also went regularly ignored. Wizards rarely appreciated the attention span and the value of information that House Elves could provide.

Before any of them would speak a word to him, the house elves had to be instructed by Lucius to be completely honest and to answer any questions that Damitri might have. Damitri spoke with each and every one of them, asking simple non-threatening questions about the family and which house elves had been working for the Malfoy family back then. Of the house elf contingency that manned the manor’s many duties; two remembered the pregnancy of James Potter. One remembered two separate visits by James and the other had been assigned by Abraxas to work in the castle.
The house elf who had worked in the castle, under direct orders from Lucius, told in a trembling and very nervous voice about frequent visits from James Potter to Lucius' rooms, and tending to them both to the best of his abilities. He could give no reasoning for James' sudden reversal of feelings; his information was not useful at all.

The one who remembered James at the house had something no one else had been able to give him. As a personal servant of Abraxas Malfoy, he knew of a name of a person who had ceased to visit the manor after the Potter boy had stopped visiting the young master. That name was the first solid clue that Damitri felt he had gotten; Douglas Caruthers.

For the next step of his investigation, Damitri decided to see if Abraxas himself could assist in solving this little riddle. He went to the north wing where Lucius himself rarely visited, since that wing was the one that his father had chosen to dwell in during the final years of his life. Had Abraxas, in his final years, left something there as a taunt for his son who had lost everything? Narcissa had escorted him to the office for Lucius refused to set foot here.

"Lucius has been through all of that a thousand times, Damitri, I don't see how looking again is going to find anything at all." She said softly, resting one hand on the doorframe to her father-in-law's old study. The house elves kept it free of dust and everything was in place. Just standing in this door and looking at all the furniture she could almost see her husband as a young man, standing defeated and bowed as he endured the remonstrations of his authoritarian father. The painting over the fireplace of Abraxas Malfoy gazed down his nose at them with his arrogant sneer on his face; it almost seemed that he knew he had beaten his son in a way that he would never recover. That painting had never deigned to speak with Lucius since his death.

"I doubt that he ever would have found anything in here, no matter how long he searched." Damitri answered, taking down one book at a time and checking through it carefully. "All it really takes is a good concealment spell..."

"I know... good luck, Damitri. Lucius has taken Angel shopping for the newest baby that ought to be born sometime next week." she said, meaning of course one of the young mothers that had been taken in that was pregnant.

"I'll let you know if I find anything," he said, turning to face the elegantly appointed room. There was a huge amount of things to go through; there was no doubt about that.

Damitri sighed softly as he moved forward to the desk. "You always looked on your own, Lucius, not with the assistance of others. And your father was a master of deception and mind magic..." he said to himself, as he was quite alone in the room.

"Of course I was." The painting agreed readily.

He glanced at the painting. "I don't suppose you could help me out." he suggested with a wry grin.

The painting shrugged. "I see no point in either aiding or blocking your attempts to help my son. But I will tell you that you are on the right track. Why waste time and magic concealing from the entire world? There's only one who I did not wish to find things. I was sure that Lucius would never call anyone in to look for what he'd lost..."

"So you DID do a simple concealment..." Damitri began to use his wand to do a slow scan of the room, searching for any sort of magical trace. He paused over several places and did find some items; a neck chain, a simple gold ring with Lucius' name engraved within it, and a folder holding some paperwork. He piled up the items he found then began another search, checking every item and nook and cranny. He discovered a hidden compartment behind one of the bookcases, locatable only by the
faint magic trace of the items concealed there, and almost concealed by the spell books that were on the shelf before it.

He worked a while to release the lock, trying several methods but nothing seemed to work. Finally he tried a repulsing spell and the door of the small space was all but blasted into unrecognizable shards. There was nothing to damage inside; all that was stored there was a small rack that was used for the storage of memory phials; quite empty. Damitri kept several of these himself to keep his own stored memories organized. So Abra-zAAs had kept those memories, outside of his own mind so Lucius would NEVER access them. Had he destroyed them? Certainly he couldn't have; just looking about this room the man never got rid of anything that could have a use sometime in the future.

Several more scans of the room found nothing else. He gathered up the few items he had and sat a while in the chair to think. There had to be somewhere else he was not looking; something right in front of him that he was missing.

Well, perhaps he had put them in the most obvious place; his own tomb. He wanted next to search the tomb of the man himself, Abra-zAAs Malfoy.

The tomb was an impressive affair of black marble and ostentatiously designed, but he had little interest in such obvious displays of wealth. He had found the proper tomb and first took precautions; this man had died of Dragon Pox. Not deadly to dragons, it was very quickly terminal when contracted by humans. No one truly knew the endurance of the disease's spores. He cast an imperturbable charm on himself then opened the sarcophagus that had sealed away the diseased body and bones of the man since his death.

Preservation spells had clearly been used; the man almost looked like he was simply sleeping. His face was clearly ravaged by the disease that had taken his life; pockmarked with the pox. His skin had begun to dry and sink toward his bones giving him a gaunt and skeletal appearance. It was clear to see still, though, that Lucius did indeed resemble his father a great deal.

Abra-zAAs' hands were folded over what looked like a book that rested on his chest. Not trusting simple appearances, he cast the revealing charm once more and it was actually a box. Elated at his discovery, he used a levitation spell to lift the man's dead decaying fingers and another to slip the box free without touching it. He let the box drift to the floor before he used another spell to open it. Inside the box, held upright by a framework of latticed wood and resting on a pillow of satin, stood his final and most spectacular lead; the box was filled with memory phials.

The house elf had given him a name; the memories of Abra-zAAs Malfoy had given him a destination. Damitri followed the leads through several small towns in England until he found someone who remembered the individual he sought had moved somewhere in Switzerland. From there he had followed the elusive trail to the Netherlands, to a small town just down the mountain from where he was sure that the child of Lucius and James had been born.

Now he stood in a quiet little cemetary in a field behind a small church. He reached out and ran his fingers over the name on the headstone with a soft sigh. Millicent Caruthers, the headstone stated, died less than six days ago. Millicent had been the sister of the man who had been present for the birth of the baby; according to his research her brother lay in this cemetary as well. He had been hoping to get some information from her, to fill in some of what others had not known.

This family plot displayed the end of the Caruthers family line; her older brother’s grave was beside hers and the youngest brother’s grave was beyond theirs. He examined the date of death on the other headstones. The youngest brother had passed away over fifty years ago; he could not have been the
The eldest brother on the other hand, had died only a week after James had been taken from his home that Easter holiday. He frowned slightly and drew his wand, aiming at the headstone. Could there be something hidden there? He murmured a soft spell to reveal hidden magic. Nothing was revealed, but when he performed the same spell on the headstone of the sister, another line was engraved magically and concealed from those who did not think to reveal the hidden line.

Below her name and the burial dates were the words ‘Beloved Sister.’ He felt a smile touch his lips. There was only one person who could have put that there… and that meant the elder brother Douglas could not be truly dead.

His investigations and multiple leads had led him here, to this small town retirement home for wizards in a quiet little backwater town. The wizard he had sought was round-faced and his crinkled sunken eyes were round as well, and at his advanced age the size and shape of his head with his large almost pendulous ears and round-ended nose almost made him look like a child's caricature of what a person would look like.

"You're sure you don't mind talking to me? I know you lost a family member recently..." he said tactfully.

The elderly wizard who lay in the bed gazed up at Damitri with a bemused smile on his face. "I lost my wife eight years ago; I have no idea what you're talking about..."

"The staff said you went to a funeral recently."

"Old friend, actually; she was a sweet old lady but mad as a hatter. She was really something in her prime, though," he shrugged. "She was telling me the week before she died that she wished she'd just snuff it and get it over with... she was over a hundred, you know, and she was the only one who bothered to visit me in this blasted prison they call a hospital. I could use a bit of company for a change, it's been weeks and I can't stand most of the staff here..."

"They say you're a mite balmy yourself, truthfully."

He chuckled slightly. "Not balmy, just extremely particular about several things. I think I've earned the right to demand things to be as I please. Got to have my tea for breakfast, nice and hot."

"That explains why I heard the nickname of 'the Mad Hatter' for you." Damitri smiled.

"Yeah; I think I've heard that one. I think I like you." He said with a bit of a chuckle. "So tell me, what is it that drags a sharp-looking boy like you all the way from London to this backwater nothing hospital?"

Damitri smiled back at the man. He wasn't young by any stretch of the imagination but this man was so much older than he, at least fifty years, so he would imagine he was just a boy to him. "Do you mind if I sit down first?"

"Oh, please have a seat, sit as long as you like. I might fall asleep on you though, I have a tendency to do that pretty often lately. I don't get visitors often anymore, but any of the nurses can tell you that much." He said waving at a chair with a heavily wrinkled hand.

Zabini bowed his head respectfully and took a seat, pulling it close to the bed before he sat down. "I know who you really are," he said quietly after he was seated for a moment or two. "You faked your
own death, thirty-five years ago. There was a horrible potions accident; the lab imploded. There wasn't much left to examine, but there were traces of a body. It wasn't you, Mr. Caruthers."

The old man laughed merrily, his eyes nearly lost in the wrinkles on his face. "Lab experiment...? Me? Haven't done your background checks, have you boy? I'm a squib! I don't even own a wand, how the bloody hell would I be doing a potions experiment...? And why are you calling me Caruthers? My name is John Chapman. Name is on the plate thing outside my room if you want to check it."

"The remains of your wand, Mr. Caruthers, were found in the debris. But you weren't because you weren't there."

He snickered. "I can't wait to tell the fellows that I was some sort of a mad scientist wizard who blew up in a potions lab." he said, eyes twinkling. "Tell me more; I gotta have details if they're gonna believe me."

Damitri couldn't help but grin at the man's merriment, though he was truly hoping it was a smokescreen. Could it be possible that he had actually forgotten who he had been...? "You weren't any sort of a mad scientist, Douglas. You are the last of a rather wealthy line of wizards, and you graduated rather near the top of your classes at Durmstrang, where your parents decided you should be educated..."

"Me? Near the top of a class of Durmstrang? Merlin's Blue Balls; I was a bloody genius!" He giggled.

Zabini laughed softly. "Not quite a genius, but very good in the healing arts and particularly in transfiguration. These skills got you little recognition at your school; if your parents would have sent you to Hogwarts your life would have been quite different, I think."

"My life would have been different if I had gone to ANY Wizarding school. But transfiguration...? Was I an animagus? If I was that clever I would have been, but not registered of course..."

He smirked. "You were an unregistered animagus, yes. Don't you recall? You didn't want it to be common knowledge that your animagus form was a pigeon."

That got him chortling. "A pigeon? One of those horrid flying bird dropping factories...? Gads, I never would have changed again if that was the form I had to take!" he daubed at his eyes; he was laughing so much they were tearing up. "Oh, Merlin, you are the funniest boy I've ever met...!"

"Glad to entertain you sir... from what I understand you have quite an altruistic nature..."

"A what?"

"A giving nature. Not thinking of yourself before you think of others." he explained patiently.

He shrugged noncommittally. "I'm not sure what you're talking about. I ran a muggle magic shop for thirty years, taught a lot of muggles how to do sleight of hand. It's all I can do anyway, I got quite good at it."

"You did that, yes..." Damitri began.

The old man pushed himself up onto one elbow with quite a bit of effort. "So tell me what this Caruthers did to make him so important that someone goes lookin' for him thirty five years after he croaks off?" he asked.
"I'm a private detective." he answered. "I was hired by a man to find a child."

"I only had one and she's not exactly a kid anymore," he said, eyes narrowing. "Who the bloody hell is tryin' to poke around at my girl's life? That's MY daughter and no one has any business pokin' into her life!"

"No one is. Mr. Caruthers..."

"Chapman!" he interrupted.

"Mr. Chapman." he said in agreement, mollifying the man somewhat. "I don't know if you're aware of this, but Abraxas Malfoy died of Dragon Pox over thirty years ago."

"Did he? Well that's what he gets for mucking about with dragons, I suppose." He grunted, lying back down onto the bed with a slight groan. "Bloody hell I hate being old..."

Damitri gazed at the man, believing he saw much more behind those eyes than the simple persona he was projecting now. "Thirty five years ago Abraxas Malfoy brought a sixteen year old boy to your cabin in the mountains..." he said softly.

The man in the bed closed his eyes, but a muscle in his jaw twitched. "Ain't got no mountain cabin!"

"...and from that boy came a child; an infant. Abraxas wanted it killed and forced you to deliver the child..."

"That Caruthers man did that? Go look for him then! Doesn't sound like he had anyone's interests in mind but his own!"

"The girl that was delivered was not unwanted, no matter what Abraxas Malfoy told you. She had two parents; one had his mind twisted by torture to think that he had never had a child; the other thought she had been killed at birth. Her father has been looking for her for thirty five years, with spell and tracking and blood potions... everything he could do..."

"Not everything, if the father was truly a Malfoy..." the aged wizard snorted.

"On the contrary; he did everything a young man estranged and at odds with his own father could do." He answered quietly. "You, on the other hand, vanished with the baby..."

"It weren't me!"

"I have all the time in the world, Mr. Caruthers." Damitri said softly. "I need to get the truth, for an old friend. I looked into your school records; you were good in things that Abraxas would have valued for this. And I also know that there is no way that you could bring yourself to kill an innocent, despite your Durmstrang education."

"Caruthers is dead. He died a long time ago." he said, turning his face away. "Go away, young man. I'm tired. I want to sleep."

"He died the day you appeared, coincidentally. I think you were him, once upon a time. You found yourself alone with a new baby, so you had to find a wife. It did not take you long to find one; a pretty muggle girl from the village. She didn't need any sort of potions or spells, she really did love you didn't she?"

The old man cracked open an eye to look at him. "She fancied me, she did... I wouldn't have used
anything on her…”

“But you did.” He said softly. “You confounded that pretty little thing into believing that she had given birth to your daughter.”

“I never would have harmed a hair on her head!”

“Of course not; you didn’t harm her, not ever. The confundus didn’t hurt her, just gave you a way to care for the baby.” He said soothingly. “I know you never meant to hurt her.”

The old man subsided, still frowning slightly. “She loved our baby. She was OURS, not some random boy who came to some cabin…”

“Did you have any idea who that ‘random boy’ was?”

“He called him…” The man started, then groaned slightly and closed her eyes as he realized he’d just given away the truth. “Oh, bloody hell.” He grumbled.

“It’s all right.” Damitri reassured. “What did he call him?” he encouraged him to go ahead and speak.

The old wizard grimaced. “I don’t… I mean…” he attempted, then sighed. “He called him a harlot, a catamite… I think he may have called him James or something…”

“He was Harry Potter’s father.” He said clearly. “James Potter.”

The old man stared at him, disbelief on his face. “What…?”

“You didn’t know?” He asked softly.

“No, I… I didn’t.” he murmured, looking rather shaken. “That was… I mean, he was Harry Potter’s father…” he repeated as if trying to wrap his mind around it all. Damitri waited patiently for the man to gather his thoughts and make up his mind. Finally, in an unsteady voice, he began to explain.

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Damitri returned to visit the elderly wizard several more times over the next two days, listening to the old man reveal as much as he could remember about the birth of the little baby girl and what had occurred directly after. On the second day he did finally admit that he had once been called Caruthers, but figured since more of his life had been lived under another name he shouldn't claim that name any more.

The details that Caruthers provided filled in the last details of that night. One of the places that Damitri had searched had been the crypt of Abraxas Malfoy himself with Lucius’ permission, and he had located there several phials of memories. With those memories and the details provided by Caruthers, Damitri knew now exactly what the night of his daughter's birth had been like for James. The last detail now, was to track down Adrianna herself.

-------------------TIME SHIFT TO THE PAST-----------------

April 13, 1976

It had been a very pleasant spring; cool misty mornings that cleared into bright and warm days. James had reveled in every moment of it. Everything seemed so beautiful; his mother's garden and the grounds were in full bloom and the fragrance of flowers was everywhere. He threw open the windows and sat on the windowsill, smiling as he took it all in, one hand slowly caressing his
swollen stomach. He was in love, he was going to have a baby, and when the year was ended he was going to be bonded and to hell with what was proper.

He remembered how Christmas break had been; his mother shocked and his father highly uncomfortable with the prospect of his son having a child with anyone just after he turned sixteen, especially not a Malfoy. That had been a rather tense holiday, but he had talked to them every day about how Lucius behaved around him and how different he was in private. He'd continued to reassure them by letters daily and now, at Easter break, his mother was eagerly anticipating the baby's arrival. His father was more cautious in his enthusiasm; he kept worrying about what Abraxas Malfoy was going to say when the truth came out, because Lucius' public betrothal to Narcissa Black had been in the papers just this past Christmas as well.

Mum had set aside two full rooms in the big old house for the baby; one was for a nursery and the other a playroom. Both were stuffed with toys and things and all that was left was the waiting. Mum was sure it was going to be a boy, but Lucius was sure it was a girl. James didn't care which it was; he was busy envisioning how happy his life was going to be once he was free of school and able to do as he wished. Lucius was already looking for a house for them, somewhere over in America.

James' smile widened as he thought of Lucius. Tall, slim, handsome Lucius... He rose and moved to the desk, taking a few moments to write out a note to his lover.

I miss you Lucius, and wish the holiday were over already. Mum is making such a fuss over me and the baby. I wish it was just the two of us already; well, three with our little one. I can't wait until the baby is born, just two more months! Write soon - Your James.

He slipped it into a message tube on the leg of the owl that was perched beside the window and watched the bird fly away with it, taking a moment to imagine his lover's face when he read the note. Movement below him drew his eye down and to the front of the house; someone was arriving. His smile faded. Bloody hell; was that Abraxas Malfoy...?

"My son has a binding contract, and it cannot be broken, Potter." Abraxas said quietly, a muscle in his jaw twitching as he fought to control his temper. He must not reveal his true anger over the entire situation to this old fool; he would never allow him to take the boy in hand and do what must be done if he knew how much he truly hated that boy. "The birth of this child cannot happen. Your son will not be harmed, I promise this to you upon my honor as a Malfoy and a Slytherin."

Mr. Potter frowned, not liking the situation at all. "But it's a baby, Abraxas... you can't just get rid of a baby..."

"It will have no claim upon my household, nor yours if you disinherit it." he answered, indicating he intended to allow the child to live. He narrowed his eyes, focusing all his power to insinuate his own mind within this man's mind. If he could just get in without being noticed...

"It doesn't seem the right thing to do at all." he mumbled, scowling slightly. Abraxas did not blink nor break eye contact. "But it is the right thing to do. The child will not be missed by James, I will see to that. Your son will return to you hale and sound and he will continue the schooling that he needs so much. You must agree that your son should continue his training at Hogwarts through his seventh year, yes?"

"Oh, yes, yes of course he should keep going to school..." Potter said in agreement, not realizing that thoughts were being implanted into his mind. "I'm hoping he will straighten out and be a prefect next year; he has the strength and the mind to do so."
"Perhaps he can even be Head Boy." Abraxas agreed. "But that cannot happen if things are to proceed without intervention. Your son will leave you and your wife; perhaps even leave the country before he even finishes school..." he chose his words carefully; he was making no reference to the result of the relationship between their sons.

"But Abraxas, James is so happy. I could never..."

"I'm not asking you to do anything, Potter. What I will do will actually make your son better off in the long run. My son has his life already set and will be married before the year is done. Simply give me permission to take matters in hand. You will see; your son will be quite happy to return to his normal life, as if none of this had ever happened."

"And you won't harm him?" he asked.

"I will protect his health as much as I am able." he promised vaguely, intent on plucking certain thoughts away from the old man's mind and implanting others, keeping him talking as he worked. No baby. There is no baby. Your son has been never truly been pregnant... there is no baby. He meticulously removed all images of a baby or his son fully pregnant from the older man's mind.

"You must agree that your son's attachment to my son is more than inconvenient; it interferes with a contract I hold with Mrs. Black and I do not relish the thought of crossing that woman. You understand my situation; this marriage was arranged when our children were infants..."

"Oh, yes, yes, I know Mrs. Black very well she is quite a highly-strung woman..." he said instantly with a grimace, having had more than one run-in with the extremely vocal head of the Black household. "Very well, Abraxas, I do give my permission. But I want my son back within two days, no more. My wife misses him so when he is away at school..."

Abraxas smiled. "Of course, Potter. I don't think I will need to have him away for long at all." he assured. "I'll certainly have him back for Easter Sunday."

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James fell to the ground, his entire body in shock from the after-effects of forced side-along apparition. He retched, feeling horrible and wretched, his baby kicking in discomfort as well. He had gone out to his parent's garden and was seized from behind and swept away from everything he knew; they had already apparated twice now. He hadn’t even had half a minute to throw up before they had been off again.

He was so disoriented and ill from the apparition he had hardly had a chance to look around. He took a moment to do so now; they were now in a deserted field, the grass everywhere still dead and the chill bite of winter still gripping this country. James shivered, wrapping his arms about himself in misery. He was not dressed for the cold and he was so worried about the baby. Apparition was dangerous when you were pregnant; everyone warned against what could happen to the child if you did it incorrectly.

"How could my son ever fancy anyone like you?" Abraxas asked in a cold tone, eyes narrow as he watched but did not aid the young man. "Get up. We have a long way to go."

"What...? No... no, I'm not going anywhere with you..." He began but Abraxas spat a curse and seized him, apparating away again.

James lost count of how many times they apparated; everything was lost in a miasma of confusion and sickness. He was almost happy to see the little cabin nestled between the trees, surrounded by a thick blanket of snow. He had no idea where they were or why, but he knew it was important to get
inside. He was only wearing a light shirt and pants, and no shoes at all.

James hurried toward the building and was allowed to do so, but when he hesitated in the doorway he was shoved roughly from behind. "Get inside, you useless little harlot." he snapped.

The teen staggered forward into the room, barely keeping his balance. He put one hand on his rounded stomach, terror building inside him but he fought to keep it in check. He mustn't allow himself to get so afraid that he lost his ability to think! He had his wand, but he knew that spell from Abraxas could easily kill the young life inside him. He would have to wait for the proper moment to draw that wand and with a quick attack, escape.

"Stupid, idiotic, thoughtless INFANTS!" Abraxas thundered, glaring at James before he stalked past the boy. "How long did you and my foolish son think you could HIDE this from me?!

"We weren't hiding anything; I simply don't like to be around you!" James retorted defiantly, pale and shaken, arms around his stomach. "All the teachers at school knew, as did my parents! How is it our fault you pay no attention to your son other than to further your own glory?!!" He knew that Abraxas had his wand out but had no idea if he would use it, or how.

"Crucio!" Abraxas snarled, sending James to the floor writhing in agony. Abraxas held it on him for nearly a full minute, watching impassively as screams were ripped out of his throat before he allowed the torture to end. "You will not speak to me so, you little catamite. If your father weren't a valuable man to have on my side, I certainly would have killed you the moment I found out you were carrying my son's child." he snarled dangerously. "Now get up!"

Weakened from the apparition travel and the torture, he fought to get enough strength back into his arms and legs to rise to his feet. "My father will have a contract put on you for doing this to me." He said quietly, not raising his voice this time. He’d learned his lesson; he wasn’t going to do that again and risk any more damage to his baby.

"Your father gave me permission to take you, little fool." He retorted with a sneer. "You have no one to turn to. Lucius doesn't want this baby; he's been leading you on. You’re a child; a toy to him. He's always loved Narcissa and will be marrying her in the summer."

"No...! He and I are going to be bonded in June..."

Abraxas laughed callously at his defense. "Absolutely not, James... I'm sure you've read in the Daily Prophet how the wedding plans are progressing. That could not happen without willing participation from Lucius." He watched James closely and was quite pleased to see the lad seemed to be in more pain than the torture spell would leave upon him. The miscarriage had begun; excellent.

"He's just doing that to make you happy." James said, and then winced in confused pain, his stomach contracting painfully. "Oh... oh fuck!" he hissed, eyes closing as the first contraction hit him.

"You should have used the floo network, Mr. Malfoy." Another man spoke up, off to the side. James forced himself to look over, seeing a man of no real distinction besides his rather well-cut robes. He had a round face, round eyes, even a round nose. His eyes were a strangely bright shade of blue, but his build was rather short and thin. "Apparating is dangerous for the baby..."

Abraxas whirled on the man, scowling at him darkly. "There is no baby; it never existed!" He snarled at him. "Get the room ready, Caruthers. I will not have my plans for my son's glorious future squelched because he is besotted with childish dreams of love." He glared at James and stalked back to him, pointing his wand at him. "Go. Now, or you'll suffer dearly for resisting, as will your offspring."
When James hesitated just a moment more, Abraxas smiled in satisfaction. He wanted to have an excuse to curse this little catamite again. "Imperio!" he snapped. "Now get on your feet." He commanded. James shuddered, but came slowly to his feet. "You will obey my every command. I don't care how many times I have to use the Imperious curse on you, boy. I WILL have my way!" he snarled, directing the spellbound young man up the hallway and following him, giving him no chance to resist.

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Abraxas said nothing, lip curled with clear distaste as he bound James to the bed magically by one leg and one arm. "You will lie there until you are commanded to do something else, by me." He commanded. He then turned to the other person in the room. "Take the parasite out of his stomach, Caruthers." He ordered.

The round-faced man paled. "You know Durmstrang doesn't have proper classes to train healers, I'm not really trained to do things like this...! If he starts bleeding I won't be able to do much to stop it...!" he objected. "Abraxas, I could kill him trying to do this!"

"Either you remove it, or you allow it to die and allow the parasite to take its cursed catamite father with it." he said with an evil smile. "Nature has already begun its course; the beast is too young to live on its own and will die at birth. Now remove it! I gave my vow I would return a living son!"

James' mind screamed with panic. No! They were going to kill his child! He focused and struggled mentally to move... he only needed to move a little... just enough to get his wand. He would rather die than lose his child and his link to Lucius. He felt his fingers respond and slowly began to move them toward his wand pocket on the leg of his pants. No one noticed his movements; the round-faced Caruthers was bustling about, opening James' shirt to check his stomach and probe at already sore and aching muscles to check whatever mad thing he was checking.

James felt his fingers touch the wand and his heart soared. He would not lose his child; if the babe died so would he, defending the infant. He drew the wand out of his pants pocket and slipped it beneath his back to conceal it. Another contraction struck and for a moment he could not think, could not focus on anything but the pain as it washed over him, leaving him exhausted and drained when it ended. He could hear them talking but he felt so drained...

"He is nearly ready... the baby has already moved to position..." Caruthers said quietly.

"Do it." Abraxas commanded, moving out of the room. He did not care to view the birthing; he would rather just cut it out with a spell and dispose of the dead tissue, for that was what it would be if he did this. But then, so would the boy. He did not know which method his companion would use; the birthing either required being cut open carefully, as muggles did, but with magic to stem the bleeding, or a highly skilled wizard was required to perform a temporary transfiguration of the male genitalia to female genitalia that would last only until the afterbirth had been passed. He didn't care which was used, but he knew that Caruthers was skilled enough to do what was necessary. And Caruthers owed him enough to have to complete this without complaint.

James looked at the wizard standing over him, stripping his lower body and covering it with a blanket in a very professional and disconnected manner. "Please... don't do this; you don't even know me and I've done no harm to anyone... don't kill my baby..." he whispered, tears welling in his eyes.

"This isn't just about you and who you choose to sleep with anymore, boy. And at this moment this has nothing to do with Abraxas Malfoy, either. If I don't deliver your baby right now, young man, you're going to die along with your baby. Let me do my work, understand?"
"No, please..." James began, and then cried out as another wave of pain hit. "That pain you're feeling is a birthing pain, boy. And if I don't do what I have to, you'll die from the pain alone. Your baby will be born tonight, nothing will change that now." He said, drawing his wand. "Könförändring." he stated in a calm and powerful voice.

**Swedish for "Sex Change" according to "FreeTranslation.com"**

James felt a wave of power wash over him, but felt nothing at all. He was both confused and terrified; he knew they meant to kill his child and he had no idea what the bloody hell that spell had been. He took a shaky breath, letting his eyes close. “What are you gonna do…?” the sixteen year-old asked in a quiet, unsure tone; he really didn't expect any answer at all.

“Me? Nothing, just yet. It's going to take a while for things to happen. You're going to do all the work, all I'm going to do is deliver this baby of yours. Now this may take a while; I'm going to let the baby come naturally.”

“Naturally…?” James stared at him in horror. “How the bloody hell am I going to deliver a baby naturally?”

“You've female bits now; the spell will return you to your normal self when the birthing is over.” He answered, draping a sheet over James’ legs, concealing the change from the boy. “Now just relax. This can take hours and I'm not letting even Abraxas Malfoy hurry this along.”

Reluctantly, James tried to relax. Under the blanket, he had his hand on his wand; he had no intention of releasing it. He intended to blast Abraxas straight through the wall if he even tried to touch the baby.

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Hours later James was still fighting through the waves of pain. Abraxas had come in several times only to be told in a voice that accepted no argument that this birth was to proceed normally.

"Just take the damned thing out!"

"You want this boy to recover quickly? You want him healthy to return to his family? Then he has to go through this in the normal manner to allow his body the positive energy to recover!" he snapped back. "I don't tell you how to do what you do best, Abraxas. Don't try to tell me how to do my work!"

Abraxas scowled, glaring at him. "You can't hurry it along at all?!!"

"No, Mr. Malfoy, why don't you just go home and check on your wife and son? I doubt this baby will be born before midnight; I'm thinking more along the lines of dawn for the final push. Come back by full morning and I will be done with all I need to do." Caruthers said in an even tone, using every bit of his ability to convince others to do as was needed on this man.

Mr. Malfoy's scowl deepened, but he turned away. "I will return to finish with this little catamite by nine in the morning; if the thing has not emerged by then I will remove it my own way.” he stated as he walked out.

James lost track of the time; every minute seemed to stretch into hours. Simply breathing seemed to be a worse torture than the Cruciatius curse had put him through when the contractions hit. He wept in pain, demanded that this Caruthers do something to make the pain easier. Caruthers simply shook his head, sitting beside the bed maddeningly just out of reach. James begged and pleaded the man to bring Lucius to him, but nothing seemed to chink the man's impassive exterior as he waited for the
birthing to progress far enough. He tried to endure the pain to the best of his ability but swung between crying for Lucius and wanting him here just to hold him while the pain rolled over him and wanting to blow Lucius’ bits off for doing this to him. The length of time between the waves of pain seemed to be only moments before he was hit with more pain…

Caruthers stayed quietly by his side, tending the teen and ensuring that he remained hydrated and by feeding him chips of ice and he gave him a stimulant when he seemed to be weakening too far to go on.

James lay back upon the sheets dampened by his sweat, his hair sticking to his brow, turning his eyes to the window. He’d thought a year must have passed, this pain was absolutely horrible. He’d never had greater respect for his mother than at that point in his life. The sun had not risen; it would be a while before Lucius' father returned. “Will this ever end…? I never knew it would hurt so much…” he whispered in a shaky voice.

Caruthers shifted the blanket for what seemed to be the thousandth time, but this time he kept the blanket up. "No one's ever really prepared for it; we're men. We don't handle pain as well as women do, and any man who tells you he can hasn't experienced what you have. You're nearly done, lad.” He said in a gentle voice. “Now; when I tell you, you must push.”

“Push?”

“Bear down with everything you have, and help your child come into the world.” He said, locking eyes with the exhausted boy. “You must push. I can’t do this for you. If you don’t push, you’ll both die, you don’t have a choice anymore.”

James simply nodded, swallowing, his throat horribly dry and sore.

“Alright… push now.” Caruthers instructed. The teen pushed up to his elbows and bore down, pushing as hard as he could, crying out as he did so. “That’s it… a few of those and you can sleep…”

“I can’t possibly do that more…” James mumbled, falling back on the bed. The pain wasn’t lapsing this time.

“The head is nearly clear, PUSH!” he commanded, glaring at him.

James pushed again, feeling something strange happening and almost unbearable pain as he bore down. Then there was a sudden relief of pressure and he almost wept for the momentary lapse of pain.

“Yes! That’s it! I have the head clear… one more to get the shoulders…” he instructed.

Though he was sure he had nothing left, James tried once more. He knew he didn’t push as hard but the cessation of pressure as the baby slipped out of the birth canal did bring him to relieved tears. “Oh Merlin…!”

“There you go… all the fingers and toes… not a bad looking infant, overall…” Caruthers murmured, though he did not lift the baby nor did James hear any crying.

“Is it okay…? Is it a boy or girl…? Please, just… please…” he whispered shakily, reaching for the child.
“The baby is perfect, and very healthy.” He said, cleaning the baby busily. Before he cut the cord, he pinched the baby’s foot to make it cry. James found himself relaxing on the soggy sheets, beginning to weep. “She’s got quite a bit of hair…” he said, wrapping the baby up.

“Can I hold her?” He whispered, though he expected to be denied that one kindness. To his surprise and delight, Caruthers placed the newborn into his arms. James found his tears increasing as he held the delicate newborn baby girl in his arms. He touched her cheek with a trembling hand. “Oh… my little girl… your father knew you were a girl, he just knew…” he told her, trying to take in every detail of her little pink face, her tiny hands… he was only going to have her a short time. “You’re everything I ever wanted, everything we ever wanted…”

Caruthers did not disturb him, proceeding with the delivery of the afterbirth and ensuring that the spell he had cast to change the teen’s genitals reversed itself. He then used a spell to clean the sheets before he lowered the blanket again, moving up to the side of the bed.

James held his baby closer. “No… you can’t, please don’t take my girl, she’s not his to take away…!”

"I don't have any intention of harming that innocent child, boy," he said softly, and for the first time James could see pity and empathy in the man's eyes. "Right now, at this moment only, you have a choice. If you keep that baby in your arms, she won't have a prayer at surviving this day. Abraxas will use the killing curse on her the moment he sees she is breathing." he told him in a quiet tone. "But if you give her to me, lad, I swear to you she will live."

"What the hell kind of a choice is that? I want to keep her and I want her to be alive! My mother knows she's coming; she has a whole nursery set up. What the bloody hell is he going to do to my parents?!" James demanded, staring up at the man.

Caruthers had no answers to give him, just a solution and quietly awaited his decision. James began to cry brokenly, knowing he really had no choice; he had to give his girl up. With great reluctance, he handed the bundled child over to this strange man. “When will I see her again?”

“You will never see this child again, son; it's better that way. When Abraxas has finished what he intends to do, you won't even know she exists.” He said softly. “But I will ensure that she is kept safe, and he never finds her. I will never allow him to take your daughter’s life from her.”

James had tearfully nodded, but had lain back on the bed, feeling empty and hollow and full of grief and pain. He was losing everything and he had no choice. And his father had allowed this… why would his father approved of this?!

Caruthers looked at the face of the baby, then turned and hurried out of the room. James would never see the baby again. He had fallen into a restless pained sleep then, gaining little rest.

When he opened his eyes Abraxas was standing over him. James did not care anymore; he tightened his grip on his wand. “Expelliarmus!” He snapped. The flare of red light blasted through the layer of sheets and blankets, striking Abraxas full in the chest and sending him flying. James tried to snatch the wand that was shot out of the older man's hand and soared through the air toward him, but the bindings holding him to the bed kept him from reaching it and it tumbled to the floor.

“Accio wand!” Abraxas snarled, out of sight of the bound boy on the floor.

James felt his own wand ripped from his hand, and it flew out of his reach and out of sight. His last
defense was gone; he’d not yet begun to learn wandless magic at school.

Slowly Abraxas Malfoy rose to his feet; he was a menacing black form with a smoking blackened patch clear upon his white surcoat, his face twisted with fury. “You’re going to pay for that, you dirty little catamite. And I can enjoy this because I’m going to ensure that you don’t remember any of it.” He smiled evilly as he magically bound James’ other limbs, securing him in place on the bed.

“You’re a sick bastard; I’m glad that Lucius is NOTHING like you!” James snarled defiantly.

That made Abraxas laugh. “And you think that you know him so well.” he sneered at him. "Lucius is going to turn out just like me, as I am the mirror image of my own father. And there is absolutely nothing you can do that will ever change it.” He said, leveling his wand at the boy's chest. "Crucio!" he snapped, and then laughed as he enjoyed the boy's screams.

Abraxas Malfoy apparated to the outer gates of the Potter's grounds, bearing the weight of an unconscious boy in his arms. He'd taken many hours to prepare this boy for his return to his family, and would be quite delighted if he never laid eyes upon him again. He had drained his supply of forgetfulness potions and had used obliviate several times on the boy, choosing selected memories to eliminate. Now he simply felt exhausted and would be calling for some assistance for his journey home; it would be better if he could talk Potter into allowing him to use floo powder to travel home and not risk splinching himself by travelling without enough magical power.

He pushed through the gates and walked with a as quickly as he could toward the house. The spell he had cast on the boy to make him lighter to carry was beginning to wear off and it would not do to drop the boy on his front lawn; that was not the image he intended to present. He was to be seen as the rescuer, not the abuser though he had actually caused all the damage this boy had to recover from.

He was nearly halfway down the walkway, his feet crunching on the gravel path when to his great relief he saw the house, the door flying open. Three house elves bustled out, a pallet of a mattress and blankets hovering in the center of the trio. He was more than happy to lay the boy on the floating mattress and allow the elves to cover up their young master, whispering amongst themselves. He ignored them; house elves were inconsequential little rats and not worthy of note. He stretched his weary arms, glaring at one of the elves.

"Fetch your master immediately." he ordered one of the house elves, who vanished with a loud pop.

He allowed the house elves and their floating burden to take the lead, following them as they magically carried the pallet to the house. By the time he reached the front step, the elderly Mr. Potter was at the top step, looking at his son with horrified worry. "What...? What happened to my boy?!" he demanded, glaring at Abraxas. "You said you would keep him safe!"

"So he was, until less than an hour ago. I'm very sorry, Mr. Potter, but it seems our sons do not like each other at all. I did not know the depths of that animosity until just today." he said, knowing he had already manipulated his memories so that there had been no pregnancy in his mind.

"What happened?" He asked, gazing down at the peaceful sleeping face of his son, highly worried. The boy did not show any physical injury...

"I'd finished our business for the day and had taken the two of them to Diagon Alley to do a bit of shopping; you see James said he wished to purchase something special for your wife for Easter. I left the two of them for only a moment; when I returned Lucius was nowhere to be seen and your son was unconscious."
"Did you find your son?"

"I thought it more important to tend to the health of your son. I could find no injury on him but there is clearly something wrong. I know that your wife was a healer at St. Mungo’s; I felt she would wish to tend him herself; she is certainly more than capable of caring for him as he needs to be. I know he is your only child and heir; you would want him home with you as I would want my son home with me."

"She has kept her skills sharp since she retired from St. Mungo's when James was born." he said, looking up at Abraxas. "Do you know what was used?"

Abraxas sighed, putting on his 'worried father' expression. "I must admit I have seen my son studying more than is his habit, among my more advanced books. I do not know why he would target your son for experimental practice with such spells, if only I had known I would never have left them alone together. I suspect he used one of the darker spells; a power-drainage spell that struck him in the abdominal region. There is no mark on him, as you can see, and he does not seem to be in pain at the moment. Only sleep will cure power drainage; could be as many as two days, but his stomach region seems especially sensitive." he explained, then glared at a house elf. "Take him to his room!" he ordered. "Useless little beasts." He mumbled under his breath.

"Your son cannot simply go about injuring young wizards...!" he said, angry at the thought. Lucius was out of school by several years already, and James was only in fifth year. How could he think it would be all right to attack someone who had not yet reached the age of majority? "Your son is an adult and mine is not! I will have him brought before the Wizarding Council...!"

"I am aware of the discrepancy, Mr. Potter, and I assure you that the punishment I will be giving my son for his actions will far outstrip anything that the Ministry of Magic could do to him." he said, projecting quiet and calm. The last thing he wanted was to involve the Ministry at this point. Lucius would love that but he would not allow it to happen. "Please believe that my son will experience the worst punishment he has ever endured; he may be a grown man but he is still my son. And for both our sakes, do not allow my son onto your property any further. I would hate to have a repeat of this event."

"He will not cross one inch of these grounds!" Mr. Potter said in an angered yet worried tone. "You keep him far away from my home!"

"I shall do all I can, but as you said, he is an adult. I advise you keep your son home until next semester to ensure that he does not attempt to associate with him at school, as he does work there with the Transfigurations teacher. As a member of the school board and I will ensure that he receives all his assignments here at your house, and I assure you I will have him employed elsewhere before the end of the school year as well." he assured.

"Oh, well... yes, thank you... that is very generous of you, Abraxas."

"It is the least I can do." Abraxas smiled; everything was working out according to his plan. The baby had been disposed of, and the implanted memories within the boy's mind should be activated and rooted by what the father would tell him when he woke. Excellent.

At that point Mrs. Potter came down the stairs, nearly in a panic as she saw her precious boy, her only child, lay unconscious and being carried up the stairs. Mr. Potter moved to her, his arm about her as he soothed her and explained what had happened.

"But where's the baby...?" she asked, confused and upset.
"There isn't a baby, dear..." he said soothingly. "Come along, James needs our attention now." he said, leading her after the boy.

"I must be going to find my son; I'd like to check my home first. If I could use your fireplace...?"

"Oh, oh yes of course; right through there." he gestured to a room, preoccupied with his son and wife.

James awoke in his own bed, looking up at the canopy over it and feeling greatly comforted by the familiarity of it all. He started to drift back asleep again, but his mind had completely woken up and would not allow his eyes to close. He frowned, feeling like something was... wrong. But he couldn't put his finger on it.

He looked over as his mother came into the room, carrying a tray of medicines and other items. She brightened as she saw he was awake. "Oh, James, thank goodness. How are you feeling, dear?" she asked, hurrying to his side and setting the tray down on the side table.

"I'm fine, mum, I... I feel a bit off, but I'm fine, really. No need to worry..."

"You've slept two full days. Mr. Malfoy brought you home and you were unconscious. If you'd slept any longer I was insisting that we take you to St. Mungo's..."

"Malfoy...?" a rush of negative thoughts crowded his mind at the name but everything seemed horribly jumbled.

"Yes, dear; Abraxas Malfoy... he brought you home apologizing for his son, saying that his boy had attacked you in Diagon Alley, he'd come on you from behind..."

"His son? Lucius...?"

"He only has one son dear. Shame, really, I thought that boy liked you. Are you sure you're all right?"

"Um... yeah, I just feel a bit muddled." he said, frowning. Something was not right about all this. Something was missing but he had no idea what it was. The harder he tried to remember, the farther away any sort of an answer seemed to be.

"Mr. Malfoy said his son used a spell to drain your energy, son. Here, I want you to drink this, every drop..." she said, removing the stopper from the bottle of potion. "It's a healing draught, and quite a strong one..."

"I don't need..." he began, and then tried to simply sit up. The pain that lanced through him from the simple act of trying use his stomach muscles to sit up convinced him to lie still and NOT try that again. "Ow! What the bloody hell...?"

"James, you know I don't approve of that language!" she scolded.

"Sorry mum..." he mumbled.

"I know you're hurting, dear. Now you'll feel better if you take your potion. Come along, drink up..." she encouraged.

"All right, mum." he said, allowing her to administer the potion to him by helping him to sit up and...
aiding him in the taking of the potion. He sighed, closing his eyes a moment as the potion went into effect. "What day is it...?"

"Its the day before Easter, love. But you're not in any shape to return to Hogwarts to finish term. You need time to recover and I'm not sending you off to school to be nursed to health in someone else's hands." she said, arranging the blankets over him. "You always wanted to skive off school and go on a holiday with us; now is your chance dear. We'll be going away until you're strong again."

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Lucius Malfoy had returned to Hogwarts as was expected of him, quite eager to see James again. He had not heard from him at all during the time they had been apart other than that one note. That wasn’t all too unusual; actually. James often got too busy to remember to send letters. He settled into his room and called for a house elf, unpacking a moment before the creature appeared.

“You is calling?” the house elf asked, bowing to the floor.

“Yes; take this message to James Potter.” He said, pulling an envelope out of his bag.

“James Potter is not being here, Master.” The elf answered.

“Not here? Why isn’t he here?” he frowned.

“I is not knowing, Master… is Master needing anythings else…?”

“No, no that will do.” he said softly, confused. He walked to the fireplace, ignoring the loud noise of the house elf vanishing from his quarters. He threw floo powder into the fireplace and said “Potter Cottage” before he began to put his head and shoulders only into the green glowing flames that flared to life.

He found himself face to face with a member of the Ministry of Magic’s Floo Network Regulators. The woman was very old and her face had a pinched expression as if she had just eaten something intolerably sour. “You no longer have access to this home, Mr. Malfoy.” She said in an official tone.

“What? Why?” he asked, his confusion only growing. “James would never…”

“I do not make up the rules, Mr. Malfoy!” she interrupted him. “But you are NOT allowed to contact this household via the floo network. An order has been registered with the Floo Network Authority and you no longer will have access. Good day.”

“Wait!” he began, but she just harrumphed and was gone from the fireplace in a swirl and flash of green sparks that extinguished the magical flames. Lucius stared at the empty, cold fireplace for a long time, unsure of what exactly to do from now. What he done…? Why was James angry with him? Cutting him off from the Floo network was almost a slap in the face… did James’ parents suddenly change their mind about the baby? He had told Lucius that his parents were so excited about the coming child…

Whatever had happened had nothing to do with school, he was sure of that. James hadn’t had any troubles here when he had left, no one would know what had occurred. There was no reason for him to stay here; he certainly couldn’t stay here and tend to tutoring and assisting the teacher if his future and his child were in jeopardy. He left his things and threw another fistful of floo powder into the fireplace, stepping into the swirling vortex of green flame and was gone from the castle.

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He stepped out of the fireplace and set off to find his mother. He found her in her solarium, sitting in the early morning sunlight with her fine needlework and her little circle of friends. “Mother, I need to talk to you…” he began.

She smiled up at him, her needlework continuing on at her side magically. “Oh, Lucius; how wonderful.” She said. “We were just discussing your wedding…”

“Can I speak to you in private, mother?” he asked urgently.

She gestured to the sewing as she rose, it fell neatly back into its basket. “Of course, my son. I will return, ladies.” She said as she took her son’s arm and walked out of the room with him.

He remained quiet until the door closed behind them in her room. “Mother, have you heard anything about James Potter…?”

“James? Why no. Why do you ask?”

“Mother, I told you, he and I were going to leave for America…”

“Don’t be silly, son.” She laughed softly, looking away from him but he did not miss the slightly glazed look in her eyes. “You’re going to have your wedding in only a few months. Narcissa is going to look so beautiful in my mother’s gown; I’ve had it fitted and…”

“Mother!” he interrupted, earning her a surprised glare from him. “Mother, he didn’t show back up at school and I can’t reach him…”

“Mother!” he interrupted, earning her a surprised glare from him. “Mother, he didn’t show back up at school and I can’t reach him…”

“Well perhaps its time you turned your attention away from your little fling, son. You’re to be married soon…” she said, reaching for the door.

He caught her hand, pulling her around to face him. “What the bloody hell is wrong with you mother?!” he demanded, staring at her. “You know it’s more than that to me! I love him!”

His mother looked angry now. “Let go of my hand, Lucius.” She said quietly and he immediately did so, very confused. She rubbed at her wrist. “You are not one of the rabble you deal with every day, Lucius. We are wizarding royalty. We can visibly trace over ten generations of pure wizarding blood through our family tree…”

“James is a pure blood…”

“James Potter is a child!” she snapped in a low hiss. “You have a responsibility to your bloodline and your family, and you will be wedded as has been planned. Your father wishes it so, your grandfather wished it to be so, it will be as they desire. After the wedding is the time for such trysts and foolishness, not before! And things like this are to be done in complete discretion!”

Lucius stared at his mother in disbelief. She was supportive of him only last week… “Father… what did father do to you?”

“This has nothing to do with your father; this has to do with you! Stop acting moonstruck and go back to work. You have students to tend to as well as a job to keep; I will take care of all the details of the wedding…”

“I’m not getting married, mother!”

“And if he still cares for you, you can see him again once you’ve conceived a child with your wife! You WILL get married, Lucius. You will.” She said, turning away and taking hold of the door knob
“James and I are having a baby!” He snapped at her, trying to get through to her. She hesitated at his words, and then turned back to him. “A baby…?” James is a wizard, dear. That rarely happens…”

“Well it happened, it’s a girl. She’s due in June. I have to find him; I have to get him to safety, before father…”

Her face went blank a moment, and then she frowned at him. “Enough fairy tales, Lucius; you’d have told me if there was a baby; there is no child to be thinking of…”

“I did tell you…” He insisted.

She shook her head. “You never did. Lucius, I haven’t time for this. I have to get back to my guests…”

“I need your help…” he started, but she had moved out of the room. She wasn’t listening anymore. Lucius stared after her, then spat a curse and stalked out of the manor. If he could have found his father at that moment he would have challenged him to a duel.

He apparated off grounds the moment he reached the gate; appearing outside the grounds of the Potter’s land. He strode to the gate and pulled on it; the gate did not budge and he got a mild shock simply touching it. He stepped back, startled. A spell of protection against him…? He tried again, and then began pacing down the length of the fenceline until he could see the house.

He knew well how the house usually looked; with windows flung wide to the early spring days and curtains blowing in the breeze, brightly lit inside as if the sun shone out of every room. Mrs. Potter did like her home bright and airy… but it was closed up. The windows were all closed and the curtains hung like funeral drapes. Everything was as dark as a tomb.

It was nearly midnight before he returned to Malfoy Manor. He didn’t know what else to do; he couldn’t possibly work. Maybe he could talk to the Ministry and get them to help him find James; they would know where he was because of the Trace… He would have to wait until morning, though.

He moved into the house, striding quickly through and up to his own rooms. He slammed the door behind him.

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The next three days with his father out of the house on business, he spent out at the Potter’s land, watching and waiting. Nothing changed; the place was dark and empty as if completely abandoned by its owners. He rarely ate and began to drink to get to sleep at night, and spent his nights in his room with the door spelled shut against his parents.

It was nightfall on the fourth night when the visitor he had both expected and dreaded showed up; Narcissa Black. She was his best friend since their infancy, being only a year younger than he. She was his confidante, his support, and his dearest friend… the only reason he dreaded seeing her is their parents were forcing them to marry.

Narcissa bit her lip when she saw him sitting beside the fireplace and staring at the empty square, looking defeated. "Are you all right, Luc...?" she asked softly, moving to him and kneeling by his side.
"No Cissy, I'm not... something is wrong. Horribly wrong." he said softly, not looking at her, letting his eyes close. "The Potter house is abandoned; nothing has moved there in days. I know it for a fact; I’ve been there the entire time and nothing... nothing... Something has happened and I have no idea what and no way to find out...!"

She rested her slim hands over his, looking worried for him. "I've been to the Ministry, my friend, when I got your owl. I found out they've simply gone on holiday, to the seashore. I'm not certain where, but they do not plan to return until after the summer is over." she said softly. "James is healthy, I was told. Miss Bones saw him at the ministry, just before the family left the estate."

"What about the baby?" he asked in a voice laced with fear and worry.

"He is not carrying a child anymore. No one knows what happened." she whispered softly. "I've spoken to many different people but... I can tell you that he didn't go to St. Mungo's. His mother used to work there before he was born, though; maybe she... took care of it..."

"She was ours... he would have come to me. He would have told me. He wouldn't treat me as if I was a leper trying to give him some sort of bloody disease!" he said in an almost desperate tone.

"Miss Black." Both of them jumped to hear Abraxas' voice from the doorway. He was supposed to be out this week on business. "Although I appreciate your concern for my son, he and I need to have a... discussion... about his refusing to report to work."

She looked over at Abraxas then lowered her eyes as she rose to her feet. "Of course... I will talk to you soon, alright, Lucius...?"

"Yes; thank you Narcissa." he said softly, sliding the letter away in his pocket. His father wasn't going to have any clues from him; he'd destroy the last communication he had from James before his father touched it. She rose quietly, bowed to Abraxas in the proper manner, and then slipped out of the room, her feet making little to no noise as she left. "I'm not going to work, father." he said softly.

"You will go to work. You have a job and a career to start before you can retire to play your little games. You will not shame the Malfoy name by sitting around here all day long..."

"Malfoy name. If renouncing everything meant I could be happy that's exactly what I'd do." he said bitterly.

"Renouncing the family name will change nothing. Why don't you understand? Your little love affair with Potter is over. He and his father have filed a formal restraining order against you for harassment and they have even gone away to give you time to gather your thoughts..."

"Restraining order? But... that's not possible." he gazed at his father in shock. Abraxas produced the paper wordlessly from his pocket. "It was served this morning, and as you would not come to answer the door, I accepted it in your stead." he handed the document to him. Lucius' eyes ran down the paper to the signatures at the bottom, his finger moving to drift over the second signature. James Potter. James had willingly filed a restraining order against him...? "Get your head out of the clouds, Lucius, and back to your real life. Narcissa is the one who came to console you today. Narcissa is the one you will be spending the rest of your life with. Narcissa is going to be your wife."

Lucius found himself at a loss for words. He could not deny what he saw right before his eyes. If only he could just talk to James, just once!

Abraxas watched his son then found himself smiling. No argument meant that the boy was finally
accepting the facts of life and he would finally get on with business. "You will be returning to work on Monday, Lucius; even if I have to drag you in there like a spoiled brat." He turned away to leave Lucius alone with his thoughts. He had not lied to Potter either; his son had been quite severely punished for 'what he had done' to that Potter child.

~~~~~~~~TIME SHIFT BACK TO PRESENT DAY~~~~~~~~

Lucius relaxed back in his favorite chair before the fire, running his finger over the ring that now hung on a chain about his neck. It had been the ring that he had given James, one that his young love had worn when he had left the castle for Easter break but had vanished upon his return. He frowned slightly in thought. “Well it’s nice to know the entire story.” He said quietly.

“I’m not finished yet.” Damitri assured. “She is alive; she had a good childhood safe from the manipulation of your father and the obsessions of the Dark Lord.”

“That’s the only consolation I take from all of this… you have not found her?”

“I have put out every lead I can; if nothing pays off soon I will return to the town and see if her stepfather cannot get her to come and speak with me and in turn, you.”

“You think she may not wish to meet me?” Lucius asked.

“She may not even know you were her father; the man who raised her did not even want to divulge that she was not his. Your time spent in Azkaban during Draco’s final year in school was not kept quiet, Lucius. Once she knows the entire truth, she may not trust you.”

He sighed softly. “At that time, I didn’t trust myself. All I could think about was the safety and security of my wife and son…”

“I will see what I can do… don’t give up hope, old friend.”

“To hope.” He said, raising his glass to Damitri, who raised his glass to join in the salute.

“To hope.”
Learning and Tolerance

Lucius moved into the nursery, gazing at the children in their little groups. The Dark Circle was incomplete today; Alyssa was off somewhere else leaving the four together. As always, the two little guardians did not play; Erin had a small ball in hand but was not playing with it; Erik sat near the Prince looking as if he was about to pass out on the spot, battling to keep his eyes open. Alerick was playing ball with Mallek, rolling the ball back and forth. The other children were on the other side of the room, playing a game of chase and tag, supervised by the nannies, the sounds of giggling and laughter echoed across the room, a sound that soothed Lucius' heart and made him feel better about the world in general.

Severus Snape had suggested intermittent and sometimes extended periods of separation for the boys; it was time that he began to implement that advice. Lucius was still considering creative ways to get the twins separated from their beloved little Lord; lately they had been more than normally obsessive about watching him every moment of the day. Severus was supposed to be by later today to begin work on isolating and locking away the memories of their training, and all of the adults involved agreed that the best route was to begin with the twins, Erik in particular. The dark-haired guardian had been dosed with a sleeping potion at breakfast and now, twenty minutes later, he looked as if he was fighting hard to remain awake.

Lucius strode over to the foursome and the play stopped, all of them looking up at the tall man. "Narcissa is going to be off shopping today, Alerick. I will need you to assist me in the nursery with the littlest children." Lucius told the boy.

"As you wish, Lord Father Malfoy." he agreed, rising to his feet and giving the elder man a respectful bow. "I will help as you command..."

"No, mine...!" Mallek said with a bit of a whine as he grabbed hold of Alerick's sleeve, pouting at the adult who had the audacity to order his friend away.

"I'm not leaving, my Lord Mallek; I'm just going to help the Lord Father." he reassured the babe, turning to give him a hug. The twins glared at Lucius but did nothing toward him. Alerick soothed and talked to Mallek until the boy released him, then he moved to join Lucius.

"He will be back with you for lunch." Lucius told Mallek as he turned and led the slim blonde boy out of the room.

Mallek looked torn between being angry and being upset, his lower lip stuck out as he watched them leave. One fat tear rolled down his cheek and he mumbled "Mine..." softly before throwing the ball away and beginning to whimper, fat tears rolling down his cheeks.

Erin moved to him, unsure what to do, awkwardly touching his arm. The little prince pushed her away and pointed at Camilla and babbled demandingly, tears rolling unchecked.

"Her...? But she's not one of the circle... are you sure my lord?" She asked, looking over at the girl.

He stamped his foot in irritation and pointed again. Erin turned and hurried over to the other girl, while Erik tried to rouse himself enough to stand steadily at the Prince's side.

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Alerick was quiet as he followed Lucius down the hall back up to the east wing where he and Narcissa had their rooms, along with the twins. "What will we be doing, My Lord Father?" He
finally asked curiously.

“You will learn what it is to take care of someone who truly depends upon you for everything, Alerick.” He answered.

The young boy tilted his head curiously. “I have never tended to babies, my Lord Father…” he admitted. “Even in my other home I was not expected to help at all…”

“They were not allowing you to be a true man, then. To be served is a privilege reserved for few, for Malfoys of course, but you must never take complete advantage of such a privilege. You need to know how to do many things, my son.” Lucius explained.

“But if we have servants why do we bother to do such menial things? Servants serve; that is their purpose in life.” Alerick answered innocently, gazing up at his father.

“There will be times you wish to do these things for yourself. When the child is your own, it does not do for any other to tend that child except for yourself.”

“You tend infants, my lord?”

“Of course. And you shall as well today.”

Draco sat in his room with little James cradled in his arms wrapped in his blanket, humming a soft tune to the infant who was contentedly sucking on his pacifier, quite content and feeling that all was right with the world.

He looked over as the door drifted open; a little girl, the one that his father had renamed Camilla toddled in giving him a big sweet smile. He wasn't surprised to see her; he'd heard about her escape penchant from his father already. He was had not expected, however, to see who was right behind her.

Mallek peered into the room. "Rick...?" He asked with his big green eyes full of worry and fear.

Draco sat up slightly in the chair. "Mallek...? What are you doing on this side of the house...?" he asked.

The dark-haired boy gazed at him, his lip trembling, and he toddled to him as quickly as he could, clinging to his leg, beginning to cry. His emerald green eyes, so like Harry’s, were full of tears and fat tears rolled down his chubby cheeks.

Hanging back in the doorway were both Erin and Erik. Camilla moved on past, curiously heading for the bathroom.

There was no way Draco could ever resist that sad little face; he had to do something to make the boy happy again. "Oh... what's wrong, Mallek...?" Draco asked, shifting James in one arm and reaching down to pick up the trembling little mirror image of his love. He lifted the boy with one arm and cradled him against his side. Mallek clung to him, sobbing only increasing, his tears staining Draco's silk jacket. “Easy now, its all right... everything will be all right...” Draco said softly as he settled the child comfortably in one arm while holding his own son in the other. No words he said comforted the boy so he decided to sing the boy a soft lullaby that his mother had sang to him when he was a child.

Hush now, my baby, the daylight is done
Your scales catching moonlight instead of the sun
So lay down your head till the dawn comes anew
For here there be dragons to watch over you.

Dream now, my baby, of life in the clouds;
Your head held so high and your wings spread so proud;
For I know a secret I promise it’s true
Here there be dragons and one of them’s you.

Twelve years, I grant, was a long time to wait
But I knew you’d get here I knew it was fate
But sometimes a dragon takes longer to birth
Because to create them it takes the whole earth

Within you, the fires of Africa glow;
The east Asian winds; Scandinavian snow
The mountains, the forests, the rivers, the skies;
The whole of creation is there in your eyes

Hush now, my baby, and dream how you will
You have your whole life for your dreams to fulfill
And don’t be afraid of the things you dream of
For here there be dragons below and above
You’re a dragon, you’re life; you’re a dragon, you’re love.

(This song is by Tom Smith and it is entitled “Dragon’s Lullabye”. We bought it on I-tunes.)

Harry, meanwhile, had been finishing his bath in the bathing room connected to their bedroom. He looked up as he pulled on his shirt at a slight noise at the door; Camilla was toddling in through the door, her face excited with the prospect of exploring yet another new room. He chuckled and scooped the eleven month old up in his arms, tickling her. “What are you doing in here, you little escape artist?” He said in a fond voice.

“Out!” She giggled, eyes sparkling.

Harry laughed and moved out of the room halfway through Draco’s song; he stopped to listen to the song and his husband’s melodious voice. Even Camilla stopped squirming long enough to listen.

“That’s beautiful, Dray.” Harry smiled as he moved to join Draco, giving him a soft kiss on the lips.

“Mother used to sing it to me… it has calmed him a bit…” Draco said, smiling at Harry a moment before he kissed little Mallek on top of his head. “I’m not sure what’s wrong with him though. I think he got Camilla to get him out of the room without being seen.”

"My Lord Prince Mallek wants his consort, Lord Father..." Erin answered in her quiet voice, gazing with confusion at the boy who usually showed only anger or joy. This sadness put her into uncomfortable and unfamiliar territory with her Lord. Erik, unnoticed, had quietly sank to his knees, sitting beside the chair and leaning his arm and head on the seat of the chair.

"He wants Alerick...? Where’s he gone off to?" Draco asked.

"Lord Father Malfoy took him away to help him with the littles." she answered, looking at her brother worriedly. "My Prince wished to find him..."

"Erik...?" Harry moved to the boy's side, more concerned about the boy who usually was the most
alert creature on the entire mansion grounds. Erik had drifted off where he sat, his mouth part, clearly sound asleep.

"Is he okay, my Lord...?" Erin asked timidly.

Harry checked the boy, and then smiled softly. "He will be fine; they both will, Erin. Nothing to worry about." he assured.

"You really do love Alerick, don't you little one?" Draco asked, stroking Mallek's hair.

The boy refused to release his grip on him, whimpering sadly. "Want mine..." he complained.

"Want my Rik..."

Harry set Camilla down and relieved Draco of holding two by scooping James out of his arm to allow him to properly soothe the trembling boy. "I think I need to go find out what's going on."

Harry said, kissing his son before he moved to gently put the sleeping baby into his bassinet.

"I can do that, Harry, honestly. I'm much better, even the doctor said I shouldn't have any restrictions now." Draco said, holding Mallek as he got to his feet with a bit of unsteadiness. "There we go; no, don't worry..." he assured Mallek, who clung to him with fierce determination. "I'm not going to put you down."

"It's a good thing that James just went to sleep." Harry said, scooping up Camilla before she managed to get back into the bathroom, then moved over and scooped up Erik as well. "I'll get these two back to the nursery."

"And I’ll find father and see what to do with our little man." Draco said, giving Mallek a soft kiss on the top of his head.

"Sounds like a plan... You little escape artist; we’ve got to find a spell that will keep you in a single room, don’t we Camilla...?" Harry grinned at the girl, who giggled happily, grabbing hold of Harry’s nose as he carried the two out of the room.

Draco chuckled softly as he carried Mallek the other way, Erin following him with longing glances back at her brother. He decided that he should check the nursery of the twins first; Lucius was usually there in the mornings taking time to tend to the babies.

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Alerick gazed down at the tiny little girl he held in his arms, completely enraptured by her as she fed, gazing up at him.

Lucius smiled, watching very carefully; he knew that there was no way this boy had ever received any training on raising children; on the contrary he’d been instructed to never do anything considered menial for himself. Until he had come to the mansion he had never dressed himself, had never even brushed his own hair. Here he was learning to take on such tasks for himself before the nanny was allowed to do such things for him.

“How quickly will she grow, sir?” the boy asked.

“She will not grow as quickly as some might like but much too quickly for my liking. She’s already double the weight she was when she came home.” He said with a fond smile at the infant.

Alerick set the empty bottle down without taking his eyes off the infant’s face, using the towel as Lucius had instructed to dab her mouth. The baby was drowsing, nearly asleep in his arm. He had
helped Lucius to change the child’s wet nappy and now to feed her.

Lucius smiled at the young boy, who was trying hard to do everything as he was instructed. “All right, now you must help her to burp.”

“She can’t burp on her own?” He looked at the girl in surprise. “I thought everyone could do that.”

“She’s not able to do many things on her own, and a bubble in her tummy will make her feel sick and in pain. We must burp them.” Lucius said, turning little Remus Severus and moving to help Alerick turn little Lilly in his arms holding her carefully and patting her to burp her.

“She’s so tiny…” he murmured, handling the little girl like she was made of spun glass, looking at Lucius constantly to reassure himself that he was doing this properly.

A whimper from the door caught both their attention and Draco pushed the door open, stepping in with a still weeping Mallek cradled close in his arms. “There he is, Mallek… see? He’s just fine.” Draco said.

Mallek looked about at his consort, trembling, lip protruding, his sweet little face tear streaked. Alerick gazed at him, his eyes sparkling. “Look, my Prince, it’s a baby!”

Mallek began to squirm to be put down, pushing at Draco. “My ‘Rik…! Not baby! Mine!” He said in an angered tone as Draco put him down to the floor.

“Mallek, Alerick must learn to assist others as well as you in life.” Lucius said firmly.

The toddler, nearly to Alerick’s side, halted to look at him, frowning. “Mine…!” he insisted, turning to Erin. “Want mine! Now!” He commanded, stamping one foot on the floor. Erin stepped forward, the power springing to life in her hands but she was unsure what to do. The baby was on the consort’s chest, how was she to make it leave without hurting Alerick…?

Alerick looked frightened. “No, my lord please, I will put her down, please don’t harm the baby…”

Lucius simply interposed himself between Alerick in the rocking chair and Erin. “We’ll have none of that, young miss!” he said firmly, eyes narrowed. She gazed at him, the power fading from her hands as she looked back at Mallek for instruction.

Mallek sniffled, gazing at Alerick. “Mine…” he pouted.

“He is your friend and companion, Mallek. But he is my son, and you must learn that his time cannot all belong to you.” Lucius said firmly.

He allowed the toddler with the wild black hair to move to Alerick’s side, frowning at the baby with clear jealousy. Erin hung back, unsure of what to do and rather confused by how the day was going so far. “Baby bad…!” Mallek grumped.

“She is Lilly, my Prince… she is much younger and smaller than you…” Alerick tried to show his Prince the baby, but Mallek did not look impressed, jealousy clear.

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Severus Snape stepped out of the fireplace, dusting his robes off. He had managed to have a fairly decent night’s sleep, despite all the problems he had to focus on.

He had sent word to Lucius by owl this morning to give Erik a potion in his breakfast to make the
boy sleep. He wanted to finally get started on the complicated yet delicate operation of isolating and
sealing away some of the dangerous knowledge that was inside that boy’s mind.

Merlin’s beard; it boggled his mind to think of the knowledge that lurked within such a tiny child’s
mind. Just past three years old and he had known not only the verbal component of Sectumsempra
he had known the wand movement and gestures as well. How had they taught him that spell? It had
been one that Severus himself had created; how many more unsavory spells lurked within that mind?

If only he could get his hands on the man who had been teaching this boy daily… but that wasn’t
possible. He understood from Lucius that the man had been… disposed of.

He brushed away such thoughts; wishing to speak with the man who was dead was
counterproductive and he simply had too much work to do. He strode through the house toward the
playroom with his cloak billowing out behind him sweeping the floor as he walked. He was certain
he would find the child there sleeping, succumbed to the potion that Lucius undoubtedly had ensured
he had taken. He slowed, rather surprised to see Harry coming down the stairs with the sleeping boy
on his shoulder.

“So Severus? Good morning…” Harry greeted.

“Ah, I see the potion has functioned as planned. If you will just pass the boy to me I can get directly
to work…” he said, moving to meet Harry.

“Working on the memories?” he asked.

“What else, Potter?” Severus asked, rolling his eyes as he took custody of the boy.

Harry paused. “I could call in to work and do my work on his Dark Mark while you work on his
memories…”

“A good plan; you go take care of that while I get this boy settled and prepare for what I need to do.”
Severus said, moving down the hall and going into the same room he had used before; the pentagram
remained upon the floor.

Severus gestured with his wand and transfigured the chair in the center of the diagram into a soft
child’s bed, then summoned two chairs for either side of the bed. He laid young Erik down on the
bed and removed his shirt, then turned the child onto his stomach, arranging his limbs so that he
would be sleeping comfortably.

He then took one of the chairs, gesturing and a small table slid to his side. He set two phials of potion
on the table and a small bag then turned toward the boy.

When Harry came into the room Severus was already beginning his work; the boy lay peacefully
sleeping with the retired potions master at the head of the bed in his chair, eyes closed and fingertips
in contact with the boy’s scalp.

Harry said nothing, moving quietly to his place, drawing his wand as he took his seat. He simply
began to work on the mark as well.

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“Draco? Love, I’m glad I caught you.” Narcissa smiled, moving into the room. Draco had just
scooped Mallek back up and was preparing to return him and Erin to the playroom for the nannies to
prepare them for lunch. “I would like to take Angel out to do a bit of shopping for her newest
brother.” She told him. “And I think Angel wants to purchase something for Harry’s birthday as
well.” He confided.

“I’ll just fetch her for you, then, shall I?” Draco offered.

"Thank you, love." she smiled at him sweetly as she turned back to the door. “And do have her bring a light jacket; we've been having a bit of humidity lately.”

“Of course, mother.” Draco smiled back at her and turned, making his way down first to the playroom to put a very grumpy Mallek and a confused Erin in the hands of the nannies. He then returned to Angel's room and halted in the doorway. He couldn't help but smirk at the scene that lay before him.

In the middle of the floor, seated cross-legged on the floor, was Jerrod Warrington. Although he was dressed in his usual dark blue robes, Draco would never have expected the man to look as he did at this moment.

He was shrouded in a huge pink fluffy towel that draped over his back and around his shoulders. Draco was given the impression that the man’s head was poking out of the top of a pink teepee. His hair… no one word described the man’s hair. It wasn’t even all one color; it was blue in places and pink in others, and a stripe that hung between his eyes had somehow been turned green.

Huge pink rollers were wound up and clipped in other parts of his hair, and he had two ponytails with big red bows, and one was in loopy curls. Behind him stood both Angel and Alyssa, giggling as they played “hair stylist”.

This was the first independent play that Draco had seen any of the children of the Dark Circle partake in since the circle had been brought together. Alerick had played with Angel before Mallek had come, but had been inseparable from him since then. Alyssa seemed to be quite content making her birth father resemble some fantastic alien creature and Angel was doing her share of damage to the man’s hair.

He looked far from happy but did not even attempt to move away from the girls. Jerrod looked over, and then sighed, closing his eyes as his shoulders slumped.

"Angel? Nona sent me to fetch you; she wishes to take you shopping." Draco announced, preferring to allow his fellow Slytherin a moment of silence for the sake of his dignity.

"Can I go too?" Alyssa asked timidly, looking hopeful and excited.

"I'm sorry, Alyssa, but you can't. Not just yet." Draco said, and Angel looked crestfallen.

Alyssa looked positively heartbroken. “But why…?”

“You can’t leave the grounds for a while yet, little dove…” Draco began.

She turned away and moved around to sit in Jerrod's lap, burying her face in his chest. "Can't you take me daddy...?"

"No, I’m not allowed to leave the grounds either." he said, his arms slipping about the girl to comfort her. "It looks like we're stuck here together."

"It’s okay... if we're together." she said, voice muffled but definitely on the verge of tears.

"I'm sorry Alyssa... I'll bring you back something if I can..." Angel said, looking a bit sad at leaving her playmate behind as she moved to Draco, taking his hand.
“It’s okay Angel…” she murmured, not looking over at them, clearly upset but taking comfort in settling into the arms of her father. Jerrod looked a bit uncomfortable, but did not push the girl off his lap, simply sitting with his arms resting about her.

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“Master Warrington is in Missy Angel’s room…” the house elf said, looking very nervous as it gazed up at George.

“Hm. Well, I suppose I’ll just have to find him then.” He said, turning and starting off.

“But Master Warrington asked not to be disturbed, sir… he is with little Missy Alyssa…” the elf began timidly.

“My daughter.” George nodded, moving on unperturbed. “Don’t worry, I’m family to them. It’s all right.” He assured.

The house elf, having no specific instructions on what to do if anyone did care to disturb them, simply vanished to return to the kitchens.

George made his way through the house to the area he knew the kids were roomed, glancing in each of the open doors to see if he saw anyone. Finally he did spot who he was looking for. If Jerrod had not been holding Alyssa he might have burst out laughing at how the man looked; it was clear he had allowed the girls to do things to his hair that no sane man would permit. She must have ‘persuaded’ him to play with them. At least they hadn’t covered him in makeup.

He stepped into the room and cleared his throat. Both Jerrod and Alyssa looked over; the young girl brightened somewhat. “Look daddy; its Lord Father Weasley…”

“Please, just call me Papa George, all right?” he suggested, going down to one knee. The girl was really upset about something to judge by the tears in her eyes and the hangdog expression on her face.

“Yes, Papa George…” she pushed to her feet and hurried to him, hugging him.

He scooped her into his arms and held her closely, hugging her as his own parents had hugged him when something had upset or hurt him. “Easy, little Lissa…” he soothed. “Easy now. Tell me what’s wrong; I’ll see what I can do about it…”

Jerrod only scowled, clearly irritated that he had come back again. “I really should go back to my lab now… You’ll be fine with him Alyssa…”

“No, wait. I have something for the both of you.” George started.

“I’m not in the mood, Weasley.” Jerrod shot back, rising to his feet, looking comical with his wild hair of multiple colors and fat hair rollers.

“Please, daddy…?” Alyssa looked over at him, clearly about to cry again. “I don’t want you to go…”

Jerrod’s anger faded as he gazed back at the girl; he wasn’t sure if he calmed on his own or if she had made him calm down. “Fine… but I do have work to do and I’ve spent half the morning in here with you two girls…”

“Two? There’s only one…”
“Well spotted, Weasley; nice to see you can still count.” Jerrod said sourly. “This is Angel’s room; she left with Narcissa a while ago. That’s why Alyssa is upset; she wanted to go too.”

“Well the answer to that one is easy. We just take our little Alyssa out for a day on the town.” George grinned.

“Really…”? She asked, getting hopeful again. “Could we daddy?”

“Absolutely not!” Warrington responded with an angry scowl. “I swear, Weasley, you take her a step off these grounds and I’ll hex you myself! Parkinson is still out there and I won’t have the old bastard hurting her by activating her mark. Alyssa is worth a lot more to him and his cause than I am; he won’t hesitate to snatch her if he finds her out and about!”

Alyssa sighed sadly. “So I can’t go nowhere Papa George, because the bad man is still out there…”

“Maybe we can’t leave here, but that doesn’t mean we can’t have a jolly time here. Come, I’m sure we could find a fantastic game to play right here in the Manor.” George suggested.

“Could we?”

“Of course we can, no one is going to have anything to say about that. Now I want you to go find the washroom and clean up; I have a surprise for you and I won’t give it to a teary-faced little waif…”

She squirmed immediately to get down and he set her on her feet, chuckling softly as he watched her hurry off to clean up.

“I don’t have time to play anymore, Weasley.”

“You’re always so damned busy being angry you slap away every attempt at friendship… ever wonder if maybe that’s why you never got into any long-lasting relationships, Jerrod?” George asked, turning to face him.

“Maybe I wasn’t ready for anything serious.” He scowled, folding his arms. He wasn’t giving an inch to this tall redheaded man; he was tired of being pushed around.

He couldn’t help but smirk at the state of his hair. “Look, I can get that mess out of your hair and help you look more like yourself…and I have something for you as well.”

“I don’t want gifts from you.” He grumbled.

“I didn’t ask you. I got it anyway.” George shrugged, gesturing to a chair. Jerrod glared at him, but moved and sat in the chair with clear mistrust. George examined the mess from the back. “You know, Jerrod, you look like you’ve been attacked by an enchanted beauty shop…”

“Did you really have to tell me that? I’m sure I look ridiculous.” Warrington grumped.

George chuckled good-naturedly and started removing the curlers and pins and hair bows. “Well, there’s one consolation at least… they didn’t cut any of it.”

“I told them there wouldn’t be any cutting or I wouldn’t do it. It was more fun for them to play together and…”

“And Alyssa was actually playing with someone outside her little circle. It was very generous and actually rather sweet of you, Jerrod… I’d never have believed you capable of that from the guy that I
knew back in school.”

That comment made his scowl return. “Why would you say that?”

“Huh…?”

“Why don’t you think I’d play with the kids?”

George shrugged, looking rather thoughtful. “Well, the only place I really knew you from was the Inquisitorial Squad…”

“Draco was on it too.” He answered. “Would you make that same statement about him?”

“Well, no…”

“All right then; you’ve learned a lesson. Don’t judge a book by its cover. You never know what’s inside.” He said softly, his tone revealing some past hurt for only a moment. “Besides, when you were at school all I knew about you was that you were an absolute prat and played pranks on everyone you ran into…”

“Not everyone… we didn’t prank Harry.” George chuckled.

“But you did everyone else, even the ghosts and that irritating poltergeist Peeves…” he reminded, feeling rather uncomfortable with the other man’s fingers running through his hair, loosening the braids and removing the many hairdressing items still tangled up in it.

“Yeah… we had a hell of a time in school.” George grinned.

“I’m back Papa George… Oh, can I help, daddy…?” Alyssa offered, hurrying over to help eagerly.

Jerrod sat quietly, grimacing in pain quite often as his hair was extricated from the clips and bows and rubber bands. Finally he took a brush and began to brush it out. He’d get the colors out as soon as he could, right now he just wanted to be done with this mess. “Go on, give the girl her surprise; you’ve promised it to her already…” He told George grumpily.

“But I wanna see what he got for you first, daddy. Can I? Please?” Alyssa asked, touching his hand.

“I don’t want what he got for me, Alyssa. He’s going to take it back.” Jerrod answered calmly.

“Aw… Did you see it already? Can I please see before he takes it away?”

“He hasn’t seen it at all, little Lissa. Your daddy needs help learning how to be gracious when people offer him a gift. I’m sure you know how to be gracious… shall we teach your daddy?” George shot a smirk Jerrod’s way.

“I’d love to Papa… daddy’s taught me so much…”

“Then you get your gift first.” He said, going down on his knees and pulling a box from his pocket. “This is for you.”

She took the box, eyes sparkling with excitement but she did not forget that she was ‘teaching’ her daddy how to be polite and use his manners. “Really…? Oh thank you Papa, thank you very much.” She said with very precise and proper manners and then opened the little blue box. Inside laid a small teardrop pendant of Bavarian crystal, sparkling in the late morning light. “Oh… oh Papa it’s beautiful, thank you!” She threw her arms about his neck and hugged him tight, kissing him on the cheek.
“It’s a special pendant, love, and I made it just for you. Here, let me show you.” George picked the box out of her hand and opened it up, taking the necklace out and putting the delicate chain about the girl’s neck. “There… now pick up the crystal and gaze into it.” He instructed.

She looked at him curiously, and then did as he asked. She gazed over at him questioningly. “It’s all white inside. Shouldn’t I be able to see through it?”

“You would, if it were a simple crystal. But your Papa is cleverer than that. You are seeing what can be seen through my ring.” He moved his hand so the crystal on it was turned toward Jerrod.

She giggled. “Daddy, I can see you in my necklace!” She said, looking over at him with wide eyes.

Jerrod was forced to admit that the gift was a very smart one for this girl who seemed to crave to have a family about her at all times. “Clever gift.” Jerrod said reluctantly.

George didn’t allow his negativity to affect him at all, focusing on the girl instead. “This way if you ever get lonesome you can look into your pendant and see where I am. And I can look into my ring to see where you are. We’ll never be out of touch.”

Warrington couldn’t help but get in a snide comment at this point. “And here I was thinking your choice in rings was simply garish.” He smirked. George just gave him a smirk in response.

“Oh papa it’s the best gift I ever got…!” she hugged him tightly once more.

George chuckled, returning the embrace. “My pleasure, little one. My pleasure…”

“I must admit, that suits her much better than that doll you bought her the second day.” Warrington agreed.

“You have an advantage over me, Jerrod. You’ve known about her since her birth; I’m just starting to learn about her.” George grinned at him. “Now, can you be gracious and accept the gift I have for you?”

Warrington sighed, it seemed as if there was no way out of it for him, he would have to at least look at what George had brought him. “Just don’t expect me to go all bubbly and jump on you and hug you like Alyssa did.” Jerrod returned sourly.

Alyssa giggled. “You’re silly Papa…”

“Yes, that he is love.” George agreed, pulling out a larger box that was clearly a jewelry box.

“Don’t even think I’m going to accept any kind of a ring from you, George Weasley.” He said, immediately defensive, giving the box a suspicious look.

“Don’t be daft; I wouldn’t buy a ring for you. You work with potions and it would just be in the way. Besides, I know better than to move that quickly.” George smirked. “Just open the box.”

Hesitantly Warrington took the box from him and opened it. Inside laid a classic-looking silver man’s pocket watch. Engraved upon the cover to the watch portion was a Japanese symbol, and Warrington had no clue whatsoever what the damned thing stood for. He looked at George questioningly. “A muggle watch…?”

“Not quite.” George reached over and hit the release for the clasp and the watch popped open. Inside was a watch on the right side, but the left side had a little mirror. From that mirror he could see an image of what was in the room; he was actually seeing himself from a different angle in the mirror. It
didn’t look like any mirror he’d ever seen before. “It’s linked to Alyssa’s pendant as well; you can check on her anytime and not disturb her playtime or her nap.” George explained.

“Is it now? Humph.” He grunted, studying it. Silver was an excellent choice of metal because it would not react to many of the substances that he worked with in his potions making every day. And a watch of his own could help him to keep track of brewing times and ensure that nothing brewed overlong. This was actually quite a clever gift, and one that he could use.

“You’re supposed to say thank you daddy.” Alyssa whispered urgently in his ear as if reminding him of something quite important. “And tell him you like it.”

“You’re welcome.” George answered, smiling. “Now come on, Alyssa. Let’s let your daddy get back to work, while you and I find something to do. Maybe I’ll take you for a broom ride around the grounds, how does that sound?”

“That sounds great, Papa George.” She said, finally looking happy as she took his hand.

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“Ooooh, it’s so pretty, Nona!” Angel beamed up at her grandmother, carefully holding the little cherub angel rattle she had found in the store. “Can we buy it for the baby…?”

“Of course, my dear. The baby will need plenty of toys to play with once he is a bit older. Right now we need to focus on clothing for him as well as nappies…”

“And warm blankets, and a good bed, and a table to change on too…” Angel said, proud that she knew what was needed.

“Yes, my little Angel, they certainly do.” Narcissa smiled indulgently down at the girl.

Angel carefully put the rattle into the basket, then looked up at her grandmother. “Nona..? May I please buy something special for Alyssa? She wanted to come, but Papa said that she couldn’t come with us. She was very sad…”

“Of course we can. We’ll head over to find something suitable once we’ve finished here.” She reassured, leaning over to kiss the girl on the forehead.

“Thank you Nona!” She beamed at her happily, taking her hand.

The two spent over an hour in the infant section of the store, finding this item and that for the baby that was due to be born soon. Narcissa took care of paying the bill, then led her little granddaughter onward to the next store to find a suitable gift for little Alyssa.

“Can I go look over here Nona?” Angel asked, gazing down the aisle of books and stuffed animals.

“All right, dear, but stay inside the store.” Narcissa advised, seeing a display of toy brooms and children’s cauldrons. She had discussed several times over the past few days with all three of the men in her life, Lucius, Harry and Draco, the fact that the older children could indeed do with a tutor to work on things that they SHOULD be learning… “I’ll be just over here for a moment…”

“Yes, Nona.” She smiled at her, moving off down the aisle, her eyes bright as she looked at all the toys and things, trying to figure out what would be good for her new friend, her cousin Alyssa.
Malcolm Parkinson moved into a potions store, glancing about, well disguised with his own spells and confident that he would not be recognized. He walked to the register and eyed the clerk for a moment. “You had some news for the Park…?” He asked quietly.

The clerk, a young man of maybe eighteen, clean-cut and wearing a store uniform, looked at him oddly. “Yeah, I do, but who the bloody hell are you?”

“None of your business.” He snapped, then caught hold of his temper. It would not do to give himself away even to this useless peon. “What news?”

“I seen Miz Malfoy, she’s here in Diagon Alley.”

“We don’t care about her, that’s not…”

“And she has a little girl with her.” He interrupted.

“A girl…? Where are they?”

“Pay up first.” He held out his hand and Malcolm placed a small bag of galleons into it.

The young man opened the bag and carefully counted all the coins, then smiled as he pocketed it. “She’s gone into the variety shop three doors down, just left the store there across the way and went down there about ten minutes or so ago…”

“Excellent.” He said, turning and walking out swiftly. His features had been changed by the potions he was taking but he was running out of his supplies… his gold was running out and he was unsure of exactly what Pansy had done with the hundreds of thousands of Galleons she had squirreled away… he would have to find it, and soon. He ignored everything else the shopkeeper had to say as he hurried out of the building and across the street.

Angel bit her lip as she tried to make up her mind on a gift for Alyssa. She knew the girl didn’t like baby dolls but she did like to do things for her daddy, and since she couldn’t leave the mansion she couldn’t get anything for him. She didn’t notice the man moving up the aisle at a slow pace, because he was picking up and setting things down.

Malcolm glanced at the girl, unable to keep his face from creasing into a confused frown. This was not Erin, nor any of the circle children. Who was this waif, clearly dressed in expensive clothing such as a Malfoy would be entitled to? He could easily see that she was Potter’s offspring; same green eyes, same nose, same tone of hair. He’d seen Narcissa a moment ago down the next aisle, she’d come around twice already to check on this little girl. Well, if she meant that much to her, she must mean something to the Malfoy line. And that was enough for him.

He moved a bit closer, seeing that the girl was examining several types of cologne. Strange choice, since there were so many different toys and dolls and things that would have attraction for any little girl. He wasn’t going to wait a moment longer; if she was worth enough to Malfoy he might have a chance of getting his precious Dark Prince back.

Narcissa rounded the end of the aisle to see this odd little man standing beside Angel suddenly turn to her and seize the girl, who let out a little scream. The man drew a wand and Narcissa realized he was about to apparate away with the girl.

“No!” she cried out, lunging forward and to seize hold of the edge of his robes.
The clerk, running over to response of the scream of the girl, saw the three spin away out of sight as Malcolm Parkinson apparated away from the store with little Angel in his grip and Narcissa clinging desperately to his robe.
Lucius and Harry United in Fury

***AUTHORS' NOTE*** Hey all; we're being affected by the "Ice Storm of the Century"... We're holed up in a hotel room because our home has no heat and no water for the past three days, and that's really bad for my four year old. It's hard, we've got four kids in here with us. That'd be great inspiration if I was writing about the kids running around, but I'm not. Talk about cabin fever...!

I'm trying to keep writing, though... I've already started the next chapter. You guys keep our spirits up when you review, we love all of you. SisterSlytherin is changing up some of the story on me but we'll work out the kinks and try to get it up quick.

“Crucio!! Interfering BITCH!” Malcolm snarled, using his wand to hit Narcissa with the curse the moment they landed from the apparition. She cried out in pain but did not relinquish her grip on his robe in the slightest, her body jerking in reaction to the torture, eyes rolling back in her head as he sustained the torture.

“No! Stop it you bad man!” Angel cried out, having no intention of allowing this to continue. He ignored her though he held her in his arm so she doubled up her little fist and hit Malcolm in the nose with all the strength she had in her body. “You leave my Nona alone!” she yelled at him. The jolt of pain of being struck broke his focus on maintaining the curse.

He turned eyes burning with fury on this little brat he was holding, only a heartbeat from throwing her away and killing her right now. He seized her jaw in his hand, his fingers leaving marks on her chin as he forced her to meet his gaze. “You won’t touch me again if you know what’s good for you, you worthless little freak!” He growled at her.

The child gazed back at him with defiance and little fear, holding herself as far from him as he would allow. “You better let me and my Nona go! Nonno and Papa and Daddy are gonna be really mad at you!”

He turned his wand on her, lip curling in a snarl. Lucius was going to get this little brat back in slightly worse shape than he’d lost her in. He opened his mouth to curse the child but Narcissa yanked hard on his robe, starting to get to her knees. “No! Leave her alone!” she demanded.

Malcolm glared at her and raised his wand, apparating away again. Maybe he’d get lucky and Narcissa would lose her grip.

The moment they neared the ground Malcolm knew he wished to take no chances with her being able to do anything. She wanted to be a prisoner; he didn’t have any problem with that at all. He immediately performed “Expelliarmus!” and snatched her wand up, shoving it inside his vest.

Narcissa only had a brief glimpse of where they fell to the earth; a large dingy building and a damp street before he snapped “Obscuro!” And she was blinded by the jinx from Malcolm.

“Bloody interfering woman!” he snapped, glaring at her. Angel, momentarily forgotten in his grip,
turned and bit the forearm of the man’s wand hand as she could.

He snarled an oath and threw her to the ground, not dropping his wand. “Crucio!” he spat the curse and found himself smiling as the little girl immediately began to scream in pain.

“No! Stop it! Oh Merlin, stop it Parkinson, please!” Narcissa threw herself toward the voice of the child and covered her body with her own. Angel clung to her, trembling and sobbing harshly.

Malcolm, feeling his point had been made, relented and released the curse. “If that little bitch touches me again I’ll kill her, I don’t care what value she may have to me!” Parkinson snarled, glancing at his forearm, which was bleeding with very clear curved marks from her little teeth.

“Get up. Pick up the little beast and get on your feet!” Parkinson ordered, not getting close to them again.

Narcissa got slowly to her feet, holding the shaken and weeping child close to her as she forced her shaky legs to support them both. Travelling by sidealong apparition followed by being struck with the torture she had endured was not easy on her body. She was not a young woman anymore. “How am I to walk blinded…?” she asked quietly, not wanting to anger him further.

“Walk!” He snarled the order, pressing the tip of his wand directly into her spine.

Unable to see, Narcissa had no choice but to proceed forward. She made certain each foot was planted firmly before she moved her weight onto it, extending one hand before her to ensure that she caused no further harm to Angel, whispering soft soothing words to the girl. She had to be strong for Angel, to take care of her, to protect her as much as she could from Parkinson.

Malcolm prodded her in the spine to hurry her up but she continued to walk carefully. They passed through a door and she heard it clang shut behind them and a bolt slide home, followed by a spell to bind the door shut against all intruders. She felt the wand again in her back and when it moved to poke her in the left side, she started to turn right. He did not correct her but he moved it back to her spine when she had turned enough.

Eventually they passed through two more doors before the wand stopped prodding her; a door slammed behind them. Narcissa allowed herself to sink slowly to her knees, holding Angel close.

“It’s all right love… they’ll find us… somehow, Lucius will find us…” she whispered, trembling, trying to keep from crying herself. Her vision was not returning; she knew she would be without any sight until she was rescued.

She held the girl and whispered a soft lullaby to her, holding her in her arms with her back propped against the wall. After a while she heard Angel’s breathing change from the hiccupping of suppressed sobs to the even breathing of sleep.

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Lucius moved into his study to find Severus Snape already settled into a chair by the fire with a brandy in hand. He chuckled softly. “You’ve finished already…?” he asked.

Severus snorted. “Hardly. I’ve bound most of the more deadly spells he knows, secured them away until seventh year is complete or if a situation arises in which his own life is in peril. There is plenty he knows that should not be common knowledge for a child his age…”

“What sort of spells was he capable of doing?” Lucius asked quietly.

“All three of the Unforgiveable curses, plus several I created myself and a few that we had not
known about. He not only knows these spells, Lucius; he was required to practice and perform each and every one of these spells on small animals until the spell was perfected.”

“Sounds like Durmstrang training.” Lucius observed rather distastefully.

“Of course it does; the teacher that Parkinson chose to teach offensive spells was one retired from Durmstrang. One of the more unpleasant spells that was not unforgiveable rips the victim’s innards directly up and out of their mouths… the victim, I understand, chokes on their own intestines.”

Lucius grimaced at the mental image. “I’ve read about that one. Unpleasant doesn’t even begin to describe it. He was skilled at that spell as well?”

“Yes, with deadly precision.” Severus said quietly. “I have locked that one away from his knowledge until he actually learns of it on his own, which isn’t likely unless he gets into dark studies. I know that particular spell is in two texts in the forbidden section of the library at Hogwarts.”

“Indeed… perhaps those books should be removed…” Lucius mused with a thoughtful frown. “Your old schoolbook left in the hands of that school caused quite enough damage…”

“I did not leave my schoolbook at the school; old Horace Slughorn took it with him.” Severus said, remembering needing to heal Draco after Harry had attacked him in sixth year with Sectumsempra. “I hadn’t been able to afford my own textbook that year and I had to borrow one of his books… he said I could have it, after all…”

“All in the past, my friend; all in the past.” He soothed, taking another sip of his drink. “Well, it’s nearing dinner… will you be staying?” He offered.

Severus nodded, giving him a faint smile. “Yes, if you don’t mind. I think I should really remain here on the grounds until I have finished this work with each of the Circle children.”

“Is there any reason you would need to stay close?”

“I want to ensure that none of the memories ‘slips’…”

“I don’t mind at all, truthfully; we are rather outnumbered by children around here after all…”

“I will not be changing nappies anytime soon, Lucius.” Severus answered, frowning.

Lucius chuckled softly. “I wouldn’t expect you to, old friend.” He assured. “You know that we have more than enough rooms for you to stay quite comfortably…”

“Since you have given the rooms I usually use to Warrington, I suppose I will have to stay on the next floor; the sound of squalling children does not enhance my ability to sleep.” Severus said sourly.

“I am a bit surprised, though… Your mates don’t have an issue with you staying here for an extended time?”

Severus sipped his brandy, irritated by the memory of the row he had suffered through with each of his mates separately and then with both of them together on this very subject. “Saying that they simply have an issue with my being here is a massive understatement.” He said with a sigh. “Remus is irritated at me for even suggesting that I stay here for a while and refuses to even listen to any of my explanations for why I must remain close while I ensure the work does not come unraveled. As for Nymphadora…” he shook his head, revealing that he was rather confused about how she was behaving. “Suffice it to say that she truly hasn’t behaved normally since that night that Erik attacked me and sent me to St. Mungo’s. She’s very excitable about everything…”
“Well you WERE in a magically-induced coma for hours.” Lucius pointed out. “They do have more than a legitimate reason to be concerned about your health.”

“They haven’t that much reason to worry, Lucius; I’m not working with any of these children conscious. I will be certain that each of them is asleep fully before I attempt to do anything with them; it worked quite well with Erik and I see no reason that it cannot be done the same with each of them. The only one I see that might be a problem is Alyssa; her siren and Selkie blood make it dangerous to give her the same sleeping potion.”

“And they did not understand that you will not be in harm’s way any longer?”

“Apparently they don’t wish to hear that part of the explanation. Dora in particular wants me to break off all work with the children and force you to find someone else to tend to them. We had a rather heated argument about the whole thing two days ago. I tried to explain to her that you wouldn’t want someone else knowing so many of the intimate details of the situation that would be required for someone to effectively do the job…”

“Exactly right; I would prefer to keep the existence of the Circle quiet until we have them behaving as normally as possible… did you work it out with her?”

“No. I tried for two days, and I finally just told her I would be here for a while, and she would just have to learn to deal with it. She is, of course, welcome to visit me here?”

“Naturally…”

“Thank you. I seriously doubt that we will see her here, though; she’s simply livid that I refuse to give in and agree with her side of it all and that she and Remus have little effect upon the choices that I make.”

Lucius frowned. “You aren’t going to go home and work it out?”

“Time will work it out. I will be here a couple of weeks and when she sees that nothing happens, it will be clear that I was right. Then we can sit down and have a reasonable conversation about all of this.” He said with a shrug.

“You’re playing a dangerous game, Severus…” Lucius said warningly.

“Dangerous game…?”

“Yes; making your mates angry with you. I did that for a while when I supported the Dark Lord. Of course we both know that Narcissa was right all along…”

“Are you saying that they’re right about the children? That they are too dangerous for me to work with?” Severus asked.

“They are dangerous, yes, but I’m not talking about the children. I’m talking about your mates.”

Severus looked at him curiously. “I don’t see this as a problem, honestly. I swear, Lucius, since your son got married to Potter you’ve become as big a meddler as Dumbledore was. Let me handle my own relationships and my mates, all right?”

Lucius chuckled softly, relaxing in his chair with his drink as well. “All right, if you swear to never compare me to Dumbledore again.” He agreed.

Severus chuckled as well. “It’s a deal, my old friend.” He agreed.
“Master Malfoy; a box has arrived by owl.” a house elf’s squeaky voice piped up at Lucius’ elbow. By the time the two looked in that direction there was no trace of the elf who had delivered the box.

Lucius turned his eyes to the table at his right; a platter had been placed there with a box that was three inches wide and eight inches long. He frowned slightly and picked up the box.

“Expecting a special delivery?” Severus asked.

“No, not at all… Warrington isn’t working on anything that I’m aware of either…” he said as he unwrapped the plain brown paper to find a box within. He opened the box and stared at its contents as if he couldn’t connect what he was seeing with reality, his face going blank.

“Lucius…?” Severus looked at him, concerned.

Lucius used his wand to levitate the contents of the box. A broken wand floated into view along with a white hair ribbon that had splatters of blood upon it tied about a lock of wavy black hair. His face drained of all traces of color.

“Narcissa and Angel…” Severus whispered, rising to his feet. “Is there a note?”

Lucius looked and gestured again, shaking his head mutely. A small crystal floated up out of the box; a memory crystal.

Severus reached out to take the crystal. “Shall I activate this?” He asked softly, and Lucius nodded, still unable to speak.

The memory sprang up from the crystal like a three dimensional image, showing a scene that focused only on the three key players in the scene; Narcissa, Angel, and a strange man they had never seen before. Narcissa lay upon the ground, her eyes staring and unseeing, screaming as she writhed in pain, the man’s wand leveled at her. There was a scuffle and Angel was thrown roughly to the ground and the man used the Cruciatus curse on the six year old girl as well, smiling in grim satisfaction. Narcissa crawled blindly over to shelter the girl with her own body before the curse was lifted and allowed the girl to cry and scream in pain, finally able to get enough breath to do so. The crystal went dark.

“Malcolm bloody Parkinson… that bastard could make himself look like anyone with his potions and spells…” Severus murmured, white-faced as he stared at the memory crystal.

Lucius could not speak, his throat choked up with fear. What had Parkinson already done to them beside torture them and blind his wife…? What had he used to take her sight, was it reversible…? Horrors of torture and maiming danced through his mind and he found himself near panic.

“Lucius, we have to…” Severus started, turning his gaze to his friend, seeing the blank panic in his eyes. “Lucius, pull yourself together, they need us!” He said louder, reaching over to shake his friend.

Malfoy looked at him with haunted eyes, some sense beginning to come into them. “Severus… we have to get them back…”

“Of course we do.” He said. “But we have to find where they were taken. Find what we can, and find them. Potter is a private investigator and Angel is his child; he will help to find her as I suspect Zabini will not hesitate to assist either…” he stopped talking because it was clear that his friend was no longer looking at him; his gaze was going past him.

“Angel...!” Lucius said in a voice that reflected horror.
Severus followed his gaze to see a little figure standing just beside the fireplace, looking a little confused and unsure. It was Angel, her hair without its ribbon, dress dirty, her lip split and bloodied. Severus could easily see every feature of the fireplace through the body of the little girl.

Although they were outside in the garden, both Harry and Draco heard the furiously snarled bellow of his father coming from within the manor right on the heels of a surge of uncontrolled magic so powerful that the foundation of the entire Manor trembled. "POTTER!!"

Harry felt his face lose a shade of color. He sighed softly. "You know, Dray, I've faced a lot of powerful men in my life and not one of them really scared me at all... But your father has always had the ability to scare the bloody hell out of me...” he said, rising to his feet.

"Father works rather hard to maintain that persona; too... something must be horribly wrong..." Draco said, rising as well.

The two hurried into the manor; they could hear a ruckus from the children’s wing as it seemed every one of the children was wailing in fear. Draco looked that direction worriedly but kept going with Harry.

The image of Angel watched worriedly as Lucius paced furiously. Severus had quickly left the room moments before the other man had lost his grip on his temper. He entered the room again moments before Harry and Draco came in as well.

"Father, what...?"

"You, Potter, are going to help me hunt down that thieving murderous son of a troll Parkinson! I want his head! I want that bastard to suffer for daring to TOUCH my family!” he snarled, his eyes burning with righteous fury.

"Nonno, you're scaring me..." Angel whispered, half-hiding behind the chair, gazing up at the man, attracting the attention of her two fathers.

Harry and Draco stared in shock at the specter of their sweet little Angel. “Merlin… sweet Merlin no…!” Harry whispered, gazing at her, feeling his knees suddenly lose all strength. He would have fallen if he had not seized the back of a chair with nerveless fingers. His daughter was a ghost… he’d lost Angel too.

"Angel...? What's going on father...?" Draco murmured, trembling as he slipped his arm through Harry’s, giving his husband support.

Severus had an answer and he had no intention of allowing his friend to rage needlessly a moment longer. He approached Lucius, seizing his arm. The two locked gaze for a moment and Severus found himself looking into the furious gaze of his friend whose lip curled in a snarl as he attempted for a moment to pull his arm free.

Severus refused to allow his hand to be shaken off, using his strength gleaned from years of chopping, squeezing, and wrenching useful potions ingredients out of things to hold on tightly. For the span of a heartbeat Lucius considered attacking his old friend for even touching him.

"They're not dead, Lucius!” The dark-haired wizard stated in a very calm, firm voice, refusing to let his eyes leave those of his friend’s.

Harry looked over at Severus as well, like a starving man yearning toward food. “Not dead…?”
"You're mad!" Lucius snarled. "Angel's ghost is right there!" he pointed an accusing finger toward the girl. “How in Merlin’s name do you propose to explain that away?!"

"No, Lucius; stop being a blind fool and simply look! They're alive!" he pointed an accusing finger toward the girl.

"How in Merlin's name do you propose to explain that away?!"

"No, Lucius; stop being a blind fool and simply look! They're alive!" he insisted, raising his hand to point at a rarely-viewed painting on the back wall of the study. “Look for yourself!” Severus demanded.

It was a wizard painting of a huge tree; its leaves gleamed green and were tinted with the silver of reflected moonlight. Lucius finally shook his hand free and turned, stalking to examine the painting. The room fairly vibrated with his fury as he stared at the tree.

It was no normal tree in this painting; Lucius' great-great grandfather had commissioned it to be painted by one of the greatest wizard painters in history. This tree showed several generations of the Malfoy clan. Each individual name was inscribed upon a branch on the tree, and each living member had a branch with plenty of rich green leaves that drifted in an unseen breeze. As an individual passed from this life to the next, the branch they 'owned' died off as well. Its leaves faded with severe illness and blackened. With their deaths, the leaves simply drifted to the ground leaving the branch bare. To prevent the tree from showing an entire crown of desiccated branches, the painter had included a twist to the magical spell that animated the portrait; the tree would show dead family members for only ten years after their passing. There was only one branch that was dead and bare, showing no leaves whatsoever; it was the branch with the name of Andie Malfoy-Potter.

In contrast to that branch, the branches with the names of Angel Malfoy-Potter and Narcissa Malfoy were still green and clearly strong. "Your family tree doesn't lie, Lucius; you know it shows only the truth now that Warrington has cleared up the mess that he made with his potions."

"I never noticed that painting..." Harry murmured softly. He felt some color returning to his face at that revelation. She was ALIVE...

Lucius touched the painting, gazing at the names, then he turned back to look at the translucent little girl. "Then how are you here, little one?" He asked, with a herculean effort to restrain his fury as to stop frightening her.

She hesitated in answering, daunted by his displays of fury that had just passed. "I don't know Nonno... I just needed to come get you so you can save Nona and me." she said softly, moving out from behind the chair to gaze up at him.

"How is she doing this?" Lucius asked, a muscle in his cheek twitching from the effort of controlling himself. He looked at Harry, eyes narrowed. "I thought her mother was a muggle, Potter!"

Harry didn’t answer immediately, taking a few long moments to gather his wits. He was feeling like he was in shock right now. Angel wasn’t dead, but she’d been kidnapped by that twisted bastard Parkinson. The last thing that she needed was for Harry to fall apart at the seams. She would need her father to be as cool and to use every ounce of his professionalism as he could in order to be able to reach her quickly. "I don't know anything about her mother, really..." Harry admitted quietly.

"What? Why the bloody hell not?! Severus, I want Hermione Weasley here immediately! Get that mudblood witch here, now!" He growled.

"Now YOU'RE the one who's balmy, Lucius." Severus responded, turning away to gaze at Angel thoughtfully. "After Pansy's failed attempt they won't even let anyone see her, much less allow her out of the Ministry..."
heart being slowly shredded; looking at the child and being unable to help clean the dirt off her face or treat her bruises was tearing him apart inside. "Angel, is there anything you can tell me about what happened? About where you may be...?"

She frowned in thought, putting one finger beside her mouth and holding her elbow with her other hand. "We were shopping and already got the baby's stuff. I was looking for something for Alyssa and this bad man grabbed me... he took me away like you did when we went to the store to get Tia. It got all blurry and I heard Nona yell, and then we were in a big open place. He hurt Nona and I hurt him back..."

"You hurt him...?" he asked.

She nodded, looking a little frightened about her action yet proud of herself for defending her grandmother. "He was hurting her so I punched him in the nose and told him you and daddy and papa were going to be really mad at him..."

"Good girl." Lucius wished he could gather the child into his arms but she was untouchable.

"And then we went again but she didn't let go she had his coat thing and when we got to where we were going he made it so Nona couldn't see and he took away her wand and I got real mad and had to stop him..."

Harry was standing beside Lucius now. "You hurt him again? It's dangerous to make that man angry, my Angel..."

"I bit him and he..." she trembled visibly. "He hurt me when he said crisso and it hurt really bad but Nona made him stop." Tears rolled down her pale dirt streaked cheeks. "He put us in a room and went away; Nonna said he locked it with magic."

"I have the minister." Severus straightened from the fireplace.

Lucius rose. "Talk to your father, Angel. I will be just a moment..."

"Angel..." Harry knelt now. "Tell me everything about where you are..."

"It's just a room daddy..."

"Yes, it's just a room love. But what do you see? What do you hear in that room? What do you smell? Is there dust in the room? Anything you can see, anything you can tell us will help us find you and Narcissa." Harry said in a soft, urgent tone.

"Lucius Malfoy, I haven't time for your political games today." Minister McClaggen said with clear impatience. He'd been dealing with several rather powerful witches and wizards today as well as the muggle Prime Minister, all wanting to hurry or delay the court date about the entire fiasco over at the clinic and he was already exhausted; it wasn't even noon yet...!

"This isn't a game, Minister." Lucius said, allowing his intense contempt for this man show in the sarcasm applied to the title he felt he had done absolutely nothing to earn. McClaggen been nothing more than an attractive figurehead in the position for the years he'd held the seat; Gilderoy Lockheart would have been as effective and the man would never have more than half his memory back. "I wish to arrange the transfer of temporary custody of Hermione Weasley to my home."

Minister McClaggen scowled. "Not possible." he said flatly.
“Make it possible. She has information I must have.”

“I will not put her in your hands…!”

"It doesn’t matter what you will or will not do; the mudblood will come to my home one way or another." Lucius growled.

McLaggen glared at him through the floo. “You’re famous for being a manipulative bastard, Malfoy, but I will not be browbeaten by you! You’ll say damned near anything to get your way, and we both know it!”

“At least we know you paid attention to something and aren’t a complete twit.” Lucius sneered.

That got the Minister angry; he was tired of being dealt with as if he was a simple child! Malfoy had no right to treat him this way. “I will not allow this! Merlin’s beard, the next thing you’re going to say is Parkinson has snatched one of those children or something…” he scowled.

“He has!” Lucius snarled.

“What proof do you have of that?! I’ve heard no report of any such thing!” he snapped back.

“When was the last time you checked your desk?” Lucius asked haughtily.

“None of your business, I’m quite busy and what I do on a daily basis is of no concern of yours!”

“Check your desk!” Lucius snapped and the man hesitated. “Do it! You’ll find it there; your people aren’t as incompetent as you are!” Lucius commanded in pure irritation. “Not only has the man you cannot seem to even locate – much less capture – managed to kidnap my granddaughter, he has taken my wife as well!” He growled, eyes narrowing.

“How in the bloody hell could that have happened? I thought you were taking personal responsibility to protect those within your family!”

“My wife went shopping with a granddaughter not involved in this mess but that does not lower her value to me! You WILL give me what I wish or I’ll go before the entire Wizarding Council!”

“Malfoy, you have very little influence within the Wizarding Council anymore. When I was in school you may have had them all in your pocket but no wizard in their right mind would put you in another position of power in the Ministry, so you can stop thinking I’m going to believe that you’re going to usurp me!”

“Perhaps I couldn't. But even you cannot deny the simple fact that the entire wizarding council has been offering your position to Harry Potter for over a decade. One word of assent from him and I can guarantee you that he WILL be replacing you." Lucius snarled quietly.

"Are you threatening me?!!" he demanded, bristling.

"I don't have to threaten you, boy." Lucius sneered at him. "You know the facts as well as I do. I require Hermione Weasley to be here immediately at my manor. Send a guard to be her keeper; I don't care what you have to do. But you will send her."

The Minister glared at him petulantly, knowing that Lucius was right. Potter could have had this job the day that Scrimjou left, but he hadn't wanted it. Would he change his mind with the support of his father-in-law...? He wouldn't... would he...? "I can't let her go without a full escort; she's a key witness in the entire..."
"Then send a bloody escort!" He snapped, losing his temper. "Send every Auror you have; send Unspeakables, send the entire muggle Army, I don't bloody care! I just know damned dwell that you had better bloody well do SOMETHING and do it NOW!" Lucius thundered angrily. "My wife and grandchild have been taken hostage in broad daylight in the middle of Diagon Alley by the one wizard considered most wanted by the Ministry of Magic! Where is the security we all are due as law-abiding citizens? You have a responsibility to me as a member of the wizarding community, Minister, whether you like it or not! Once I let the papers know of your lax security all hell is going to break loose in a manner you have not seen since the return of He Who Must Not Be Named...!"

"All right!" he snapped back at him, his voice cracking slightly in his haste to answer. "All right, damn it to bloody HELL Malfoy...!" He said, cutting off Lucius' threat of exposure. "Let me contact the Aurors and I will get back to you..."

"No, McClaggen, you have no time. I require the services of that mudblood witch here immediately. I have a situation and she may have information that I need."

"What? Are you trying to tell me she may know where your wife and grandchild are?!" He was flabbergasted. "How...?!"

"No, I’ve said no such thing. You have overestimated her involvement, as usual." He sneered. "I want her delivered to my house, I don't give a bloody damn what escort you choose to send. They will remain outside my home unless they are members of my immediate family for I will not lessen my protections on my home for anyone, not even a member of the Ministry."

“But why do you want her? You clearly don’t give a damn about her, calling her a mudblood...!"

“I call her what she is, that’s all. It’s up to you to take offense from a word that I find describes her perfectly.” He shot back.

"You can't expect me to simply leave her in your custody!" The minister blustered

"Then leave her in Potter's direct custody, he's at my home as well!" He snarled at him. "And if Potter is too much of a threat to you politically send Zabini, I really don’t care! I want that mudblood here in ten minutes or I swear to you on my family name that I will contact every reporting agency in this bloody continent about your incompetence to lead the Ministry and the Wizarding world!"

The minister tried for a moment to form a response, but then he just gave an angry huff that made the fire flare up and sparks soar up the chimney as he withdrew from the fire call and was gone. Lucius turned away from the fireplace to return his attention to the situation at hand.

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"It's real dirty in the room, daddy." Angel was saying, her eyes closed and her face scrunched up in concentration. "And the dirt is really gray and kind of powdery; but when I try to wipe it off it just sticks on and kind of gets smeary..."

"Good; what else?"

"Well, there's a window but its real high up and Nona told me not to but I climbed there anyway. When I look outside I see lots and lots of green stuff, trees I have never seen except on the telly."

"Describe them, Angel." Lucius said quietly.

"Uh-huh; the kind with the big leaves and that has the big green things on them. Mommy told me they were big nuts or something."
"Coconut trees?"

"Yes, I think so. And there are birds too. I can see some big grey buildings and lots of pipes... it's all brick here daddy inside and out. There's a bad smell too, not rotten bad but like... um... like the smell when mommy's friend would light up his cigars, like the match smell..."

"Sulphur." Harry nodded, wanting as much as the girl could tell. "Excellent, Angel... is there anything else, anything at all?"

"Yes, and it’s hot too, like summertime. It was cool at home or when we were shopping, it's not cool at all. I took off my sweater when Nona fell asleep..."

"Warmer, and possibly volcanic. Anything else? Tell us about the birds you see, love. Maybe they could tell us more about where you are...?"

"There is one weird little bird… I’ve never seen a bird like that before.” She seemed to look over her shoulder. “I think it’s some kind of hummingbird…”

“Ah, a hummingbird. Describe it…”

“Well, it’s a really shiny yellow; it looks like its feathers are gold. But its body is all strange; it looks like a ball with wings and a really long beak and it flies like a hummingbird but zips all over. It’s got eyes that look like the pretty stone on your school ring, daddy. There’s one just outside the window...”

Round golden body, moves like a hummingbird and ruby eyes. “Snidgets.” Harry frowned thoughtfully, thinking of all the snidget reserves he had heard of. He had, as a much younger man, considered going to pilfer one of the little birds to see if it could avoid him better than a snitch did, but he had never gone beyond researching the location of the reserves.

“Do you know where we are daddy...?” she looked at him hopefully.

"I have an idea, but I don’t know exactly yet. I'll find you. I swear it, I'll find you."” He said softly, reassuringly to the child.

"Don't let him have Mallek daddy. Please don't let him; he'll hurt Mallek and make him all mean and he's just a baby..."

"We have no intention of doing that, Angel." Lucius assured in a quiet tone.

All of them looked as the fireplace activated; Tonks stepped through followed closely by Hermione. Severus took a step back, allowing his mate to continue with his official role; his and her argument was something that need not be dealt with here and now.

“Mimi…!” Angel said, a happy smile touching her face.

Hermione stared at the translucent figure of a girl, clearly assuming what everyone else had thought. “Angel…?”

“How the bloody hell is she doing this?” Lucius demanded, pointing at Angel’s figure.

“What…?” Hermione looked at him, feeling shocked.

“You heard me, mudblood, how is my granddaughter doing this?!” Lucius demanded.

Hermione was rousted out of her shock by his use of the socially unacceptable term. “Do not call me
that and expect any help out of me, Lucius Malfoy!” She hissed at him quietly, her eyes narrowing.

He narrowed his eyes as well. “Then explain this! You told Harry her mother was muggle…”

“I told him no such thing. I didn’t tell Harry much about her at all; he wasn’t exactly in a conversational mood at the time…” she retorted.

“Well we need to know. What is this, Hermione?” Harry asked quietly.

Hermione turned to him, faint tears in her eyes. She had wanted to speak with him for weeks, to explain… and just hearing that kind and gentle tone from him was enough to touch her deeply. To hell with Malfoy; she would help to help her old friend even if he never spoke to her again after this. “Melissa was a third generation squib. Even the ministry had stopped tracking her family to see if they were going to generate magical children. She honestly never thought that Angel would even show a trace of talent, as she never had. She was sure all of her ancestor’s powers had gone for good, but when Angel was born…”

“She showed up on the Hogwarts roles, didn’t she?” Harry asked.

“Enough explanation, tell me why she can do this!” Lucius growled dangerously.

Hermione simply ignored him. “Yes, she did. And she was rather confused when she got the congratulatory letter asking her if she wished to pre-enroll Angel for her eleventh year to begin school… She sent for me and I explained everything.”

“That must have been a bit of a surprise for her.” Harry mused.

“It was. She’d heard her great-great grandmother was a witch, but she thought it was only stories. She’d never been exposed to the magical world before my powers started to show in third grade…”

“What the bloody hell does that have to do with anything?!” Lucius demanded, beginning to grow quite angry at being ignored.

Harry glanced at him, then back at Hermione. “How does she have this power?” he asked. “Was her family just wizarding…?”

“No.” Hermione answered, continuing to completely ignore Lucius on purpose. He might get what he wanted from what she told Harry but she’d be damned if she’d answer one single question from that man who insisted upon calling her that awful wizarding slur. “We did some research into her family and I pulled up information on her forefathers… she is actually a descendent of the Everard Family…”

“Nonsense; they died off in the eighteen hundreds…” Lucius scoffed.

Hermione simply ignored him. “Her four-times great grandfather was Edmund Everard, eighth headmaster of Hogwarts. As the Ministry believed his magic died with him – every one of his children and grand-children was non-magical – they declared his family line dead. I kept all the research on it in my file in my safe at home. I’ll tell you how to get access to it, Harry; Ron already knows. He can get it for you. I intended to give it to Angel on her tenth birthday with her mom, to let her know her heritage and give her time to adjust to the idea of attending a wizarding school and being away from everything she ever knew…”

“She should have been told already, as should Harry.” Lucius scowled at her.

“…that way she could go to school and never have to deal with spoiled pureblood brats calling her
horrid and socially improper names such as MUDBLOOD by those she went to school with.” She growled softly, refusing to even look at Lucius.

“If you are so insecure as to allow a simple word to offend you, Mrs. Weasley, then you still have a bit of growing up to do.” Lucius sneered at her. “Now tell us why I can see through my granddaughter!”

“You should be happy that you can see her at all! Obviously she isn’t here or she wouldn’t be bleeding and not be tended if Harry had anything to do with it…!”

“Don’t be angry Mimi… Nonno, please, don’t fight…” Angel’s soft voice spoke up and they both looked at her. She had approached them and was gazing from one to the other. “I love you both and I want you to be friends… can you try? Please…?”

“Oh Angel…” Hermione reached toward her and her hand drifted through the translucent child’s cheek. “Where have you gone, baby…?”

“They want to find me Mimi; me and Nona…” she said, not trying to reach either of them as if she knew she could not touch them. She glanced back over her shoulder. “I… I think he’s coming back. I have to go. I have to watch over Nona…” she whispered, then turned and fled toward the wall. Her image vanished in a multicolored shower of sparks before she reached the wall.

“Who’s coming back? Harry, what’s going on?” Hermione asked, turning to her old school friend.

“They’ve been taken, Angel and Narcissa. We need to know what we can so we can find them…” Harry answered quietly.

“Spirit walking.” Hermione said softly. Angel needed her help, it didn’t matter if Lucius was being an asshole or not. A little girl and a woman she actually liked had their lives hanging in the balance and she would not leave anything that could help them out. “She projects her spirit where she wants to go, and she goes. Her mother only did it once, the night of the fire. She and her partner had gone to America that summer to see her parents. When she found me in Italy, it was the only game of the year I had managed to attend of Ron’s… his team actually won that night and I was at the celebration party… when she finally got my attention she was already dying. She begged me to get home and to try to help Angel… by the time I got there no one knew where they had gone. Both her partner and Angel were gone, back to England and I had no idea how to find them.”

“So her mother had the ability, just not the true strength.” Harry said.

“Yes. There was no way that any of us even guessed that her talent existed. There wasn’t a hint of it until her dying moment.”

“And you assumed somehow that my granddaughter would not be able to inherit this gift?” Lucius snarled, growing more angry and offended at the moment by being ignored.

“I trained Angel in how to control her wizarding power, just basics of course, enough that she could control what she was doing. She showed a talent for healing and mending things so I thought perhaps she might turn into a true Healer; we all know how rare they are…” Hermione continued her explanation without answering the older wizard.

“Answer ME, you insufferable woman!” Lucius snapped furiously; he had enough of her uppity attitude. He snatched her up by her blouse and shoved her hard against the wall, forcing her eyes to meet his.

He found that her eyes were full of pain and tears and just as much rage as his. “If I answer, I
guarantee it won’t be to you, Lucius Malfoy. I’ll give Harry anything he wants but I’m tired; sick and bloody tired of giving in to people who think shoving me about and screaming at me is going to get a damned thing from me.” Her voice was a low growl, her teeth clenched, her fists closed but she did not raise them to defend herself, her eyes meeting his unflinchingly.

“Let her go, Lucius!” Nymphadora said, approaching him.

“Angel wants us to be friends but I cannot even attempt it until you get your hands off of me.” Hermione said quietly, refusing to get ruffled. After what she’d been through lately it didn’t seem anything could get to her except being locked up in that room at the ministry again.

Lucius didn’t even look Nymphadora’s way; he curled his lip in a snarl and shoved Hermione away from him. She regained her balance quickly, jaw set, angry as he was now.

“Hermione.” Harry said, recapturing her attention. She took a deep breath and turned back to him. “Please; we need to know everything we can.”

“She never showed any signs of true spirit walking when I was training her.” She answered him without hesitation. “Her mother wrote me regularly; she told me that Angel was having very vivid dreams but I didn’t think of the whole spirit walking thing; it had last been seen four generations before Angel was born. Melissa didn’t even think that it was possible for it to have been retained by her family…”

“Is it a wizarding talent? I’ve never heard of spirit walking.”

“Not by British wizards, no, it’s not done. But it is done by wizards of other countries, though it is an extremely rare gift. It’s a bit rarer than being able to speak parseltongue…”

“I thought you said her ancestry came from the Everards?! Where do the wizards in her ancestry come from? Let’s have a straight answer for a change, woman! Out with it!” Lucius groused.

“Where, Hermione?” Harry asked, giving Lucius a look that asked him to PLEASE be patient. Lucius grunted and folded his arms, clearly quite angered over the entire situation.

“She IS a descendant of the Everard family. When he finished his time as headmaster, Everard went to America and returned with a native American who he took to wife. Her ancestors used a magic unlike anything we’re accustomed to; the Native American culture, unlike our British culture, has never forced wizards to go into hiding. Their magic is practiced, for the most part, right in front of the rest of the tribe and is accepted and welcomed as a normal part of everyday life…”

“Are you certain?” Harry asked, a bit amazed by that fact. “I hadn’t even heard that they had magic…”

“They do, but they don’t send their kids to schools. Magic is celebrated, magic is welcomed in their tribes; they are taught in the tribe by the Shaman, the wise man or woman, who also possesses wizard powers. Once I had the information of where her ancestor’s family came from, Melissa decided to take Angel to see the tribe, to see if they would teach her and allow them to remain together as a family as their teaching begins the moment the child shows talent. The shaman decided that Angel is so far removed from the tribe they did not agree to teach her, that’s why I was doing it. To prepare her for teaching outside of her family…”

“Why didn’t you tell me sooner Hermione?”

She looked down. “I was going to tell Melissa about who you were, whose sperm I’d used. But she died before I had the chance.”
“Likely tale.” Lucius snarled.

Hermione drew a deep breath, and then let it out, trying to ignore Lucius and keep him out of her focus. “I have everything you may need to know but all you need right now is that she is a spirit walker. I have several books on them at home…”

“Instruct my house elves; they will fetch the books here immediately.” Lucius commanded.

“Please Harry, just have Ron fetch them. He knows where I keep them; he thought I had some mad obsession for a few years. It’s about two dozen books, all together on the bookshelf; four of them are handwritten and very delicate. I want them preserved so Angel can have them to learn about her heritage.”

“I’ll give him a firecall, see if he can do it.”

“He should have a day or two off training right now…” Hermione said, greatly relieved. She didn’t want Lucius Malfoy rifling through her things; it was bad enough that everyone in the ministry had the access to every damned thing in her house every day.

“It’s a waste of bloody time…!” Lucius growled.

“Angel’s history isn’t going to lead us to her, Lucius. The information she gave us will lead her to her.” Severus finally spoke up. “She is on one of the Snidget Reserves; at least close enough to be able to have the birds fly up to the window of the building she is located in.”

“And she’s in a volcanic area; someplace with an active fume.” Harry said, rising and stretching, frowning slightly in thought. “And I have about four areas in mind that it could be.”

“You’ve researched…?”

“Back when I was quite young and stupid I researched where I could find live snidgets. I’d thought it would be a lark to go see if I could hand-capture one of the little creatures. Of course, I was distracted. A much more beautiful creature came into my life and took all of my focus away from that silly bird.”

“Draco.” Hermione said softly.

“Yes, exactly.” Harry agreed.

“Hmph.” Lucius grunted, slightly mollified by the compliment to his son. “So where the bloody hell do we look, Potter?”

Harry moved to the corner where a globe made of marble sat upon a pedestal, turning it to the tropical islands west of North America. “There’s a reserve in Hawaii near the Kilauea volcano, here…” he said, then turned it back toward Japan’s area of the ocean. “Another is around here, in the south pacific on an island called Ambrym; not many muggles go there because the volcano explodes quite violently with unpredictable regularity.” He moved his finger to a third area. “And the last possibility is here, in Papua New Guinea. There are a couple of live volcanoes there as well.”

“When do we go?” Severus asked simply.

“Severus, we have to talk…”

“Later, Tonks.” Severus returned. “You know this isn’t the time.”
“The way you do things there never WILL be a time!” She snapped back at him. Severus looked over at her, irritated, and Tonks was clearly as irritated at him.

“I think I’ll go contact Ron.” Harry said, glancing at the two of them. “The sooner we have those books and information the better.” He added, turning to go. Hermione, unsure of what she was allowed to do, sank to a seat in a chair, trying not to be noticed and get into the middle of that argument.

“We’ll be going before nightfall.” Lucius answered, turning and walking out to allow them to work out whatever they were going to. He didn’t care if Severus came or not; he would be damned sure one going to hunt down the bastard’s hiding hole and find his missing loved ones.
Rescue Party

Author's notes: Narcissa and Angel - kidnapped... how are they going to be found?

Severus folded his arms, scowling darkly at his female mate. He’d argued all he cared to at home about this and he’d had quite enough of it; he had no intention of continuing that conversation here. “Tonks, the lives of one of my dearest friends and their granddaughter hangs in the balance; there is no time for the same argument at the moment!” Severus asserted. “We have discussed this enough…”

She scowled back at him; she had no intention of backing down this time or letting it go. “Oh, there’s time. Lucius said you’re not leaving until sunset. As I see it that gives us hours and you damned sure can take the time to talk to me!”

“Talk? You have no intention of talking, woman!” Snape retorted. “Your goal in life lately seems to be to force me to bend to your will. I’ve done conceded to the wishes of both you and Remus over the years, giving up things that I desired because I wished to take care of you and Lupin because. I did that because I’ve WANTED to. Taking care of these children is something that I wish to do to help Lucius and Narcissa. I will do this, Dora, whether you want me to or not, I’m making a difference!”

She was not fazed by his argument. “The only difference I can see that it’s making is you are more and more absent from our lives. We NEED you around, Severus…”

That comment clearly ruffled Severus. “I think you’ve been listening to those fools over at the ministry too much. You’re starting to believe the claptrap going about that the only thing that makes my living worth enduring is the fact that I am unparalleled at potions making, aren’t you?” he asked with a sneer.

She scowled at him. “No, it’s not that at all, you know I don’t listen to those fools…!”

“Somehow I tend to believe that you do listen to it.” He retorted angrily. “My powers of working with the mind are equally as important as my skills in the lab. Without what I can do, at least two of these children would be unsalvageable.”

“I don’t see how…”

“No you don’t; and you don’t bother to find out, do you?” he asked, turning and stalking out of the room.

Nymphadora glanced at Hermione. “Can you stay here?” She asked.

“Sure.” Hermione said, nodding. “I’d rather be here than back at the Ministry anyway…”

“Good; I’ll just be a moment.” she said as she hurried out of the room after Severus. She saw him stalking down the hallway and followed, trying to catch up but he clearly had no intention of allowing her to do so, walking in his longest stride with his robes snapping about him.

When she finally did catch up to him he had entered the playroom and was near the center of the room, standing quietly and watching a group of children.
Mallek still was upset by the separation that morning and he sat in Alerick’s lap, holding his arms around him and glaring at anyone who came near. Alerick seemed quite content to hold his little Prince, singing him a soothing lullaby. Erin sat looking very lost and confused with her brother nowhere in sight. Alyssa sat with her stuffed creature in her arms near Mallek and his consort, humming along with the consort in an effort to comfort him.

Nymphadora moved to Snape’s side. “Those are the Dark Circle kids…?”

“They are. And if you force me to leave them without any help, Dora, I can assure you that young Erin stands no chance at life; she will be dead. Her twin brother will have less chance than she to live once it is known what he knows. The spells the two of them have been trained in are more than just deadly.”

She looked at him with a bit of surprise. “These kids know the Unforgivable curses…?”

“Both Erin and Erik were trained in all three unforgivable curses and more. They learned not only spell and motion, but practiced them as well.” He explained in a quiet voice, and then took a deep breath to push onward with what he had to say. He really did want her to understand. “Dora; I don’t have a chance to have my own children but I can SAVE these kids.” He insisted. “How can you look at them and deny that they have a right to a chance at life?”

“That’s not my concern, Severus.” Nymphadora said quietly. “I won’t deny that they deserve a chance. But why does it have to be you?”

“There really is no other choice for them.”

“Other people can do what you do, Severus.” she pointed out but he wasn’t going to allow her to continue that thought.

“I intend to provide them every chance at life that I am capable of giving. And there is no other choice, I’ve told you that. If word gets out about what they are capable of the Ministry won’t hesitate to have them eliminated as a danger to our society. I don’t think you care to know, but I’ve already done the touchiest work with Erik; he was the most volatile of the children. Alerick there, the one that looks like Draco, is the eldest and he has very powerful shields. He will be difficult too but I felt that the bodyguards needed to have their powers neutralized first.”

“Severus, you said you wanted to help them because you can’t have children of your own.” Dora said quietly, stepping closer to him. “I know you’re angry about the arguments we’ve been having, but things are different now. I just want you to listen.”

Snape sighed softly, but he did not take his eyes off the children. As he saw it, he was their only hope for any sort of a future. “I’m not angry, Dora.” He admitted in a quiet tone. “It’s you and Remus who are the ones who insist on being angry, but you won’t change my mind. I’m doing this, regardless of what you say.”

Nymphadora sighed. “We need you, Severus. And I will NOT have you absent when my time comes.”

“What are you talking about?” He frowned slightly. “I’m not essential in our household; you and Remus are quite capable of getting along without me, you’ve done so before. Besides, I spoke with Lucius and he assures me that it would be fine if you came to stay with me while I get things done here. I have to do this, Dora…”

She scowled at him. How could he be so dense? “I’m not trying to talk you out of anything!” she
said crossly. “I just think you’d want to be there through my pregnancy!”

Severus looked at her, eyes narrowing slightly as he studied her face. “You’re with child…? Have you told Remus yet…?”

“I will. But I wanted to tell the baby’s father first.” She said quietly, her hand slipping over his. She gazed up at his face and saw that he still did not comprehend.

“Remus isn’t here, Dora, how can you…?” Severus began but she interrupted him this time, putting a finger to his lips to stop him.

It was clear she’d have to tell him directly. “You’re so brilliant with your potions but Remmy and I have to explain every little thing about relationships to you.” she said with a soft smile. “This is OUR baby, Severus; yours and mine.”

“Mine? But… how…?” he murmured.

She couldn’t help but smirk at his startled expression and the simple question. “If I have to explain that to you, Severus Snape, there’s no hope for you.” She commented, giving his hand a gentle squeeze.

Her sarcasm snapped him out of the stunned moment. “When did you find out?” he asked, still rather amazed.

He was a father?

She gave him a soft smile. “Only yesterday; I told you I had an appointment with my medi-wizard.”

It was his turn to use the sarcasm this time. “You have an appointment with your medi-wizard every other month, how was I to know this time it wouldn’t be routine? You go regularly and you never get news like this!”

She chuckled. “You have a point there, old man.” She agreed.

He touched her cheek, “How far along are you? When…?”

“Don’t you dare tell me to go sit down and put my feet up, or fuss at me to be like some little old thing with the vapors, Severus Snape.” She laughed softly. “I’m only a month along, Remus hadn’t even noticed my change in scent yet though the medi-wizard says he should within a week or so. My mediwizard says I am very healthy and the baby has a good firm start. And now that I’ve told you, I can finally let Remus know as well; I know he’ll be a lot more supportive of me than you seem to want to be…” she teased.

“Our last conversation didn’t exactly involve a child.” He retorted, pulling Tonks closer to him, gazing down at him. “You’re sure it’s mine…?”

“The timing makes it undeniable. Remus was feeling poorly last month; remember he had a particularly bad session because he had neglected to take his potions…?”

Severus knew that was definitely a fact. Remus had not been himself for two or three weeks…

“Yes.”

“We both know when he gets like that he much prefers your attentions over mine. And he was very true to form for over two weeks; he wanted to hold me but not to do more. During that time you and I were together.”

“Yes, but just twice…”
“And once is all it takes.” She rested one hand on his chest. “It was just time: time for us to have our child, now that Teddy is all grown and out of the house.”

An expression she did not expect crossed his face; concern. “Are you ready for this?” He asked softly.

“Do I have a choice?” She smirked at him.

He frowned at her reaction. This wasn’t a joking matter; he’d seen plenty of pregnancies go wrong in older women in his work at the hospital. “I’m serious, Dora. Neither of us is young…”

She interrupted him yet again. “Maybe not, but James Potter’s parents were twice our age when he was born. I really don’t see what the problem is.” She said, rolling her eyes.

That soothed him a bit but he was still rather troubled. The complications involved could be very dangerous for her or could cause damage to the unborn child. “True, but I want to be sure that you know what we’re getting into, starting with a child… are you ready for this…?”

“I know what I’m in for; I carried and gave birth to Teddy. I was there for the burping, and the nappies, and all of it. You’re the one who came in once he was a toddler and got to play daddy. I fully expect you to be a sharing partner in raising our baby. The three of us will be able to handle anything.” She said with pure confidence.

Severus smiled softly and stroked her cheek with a work-calloused hand. “Yes; that we can.” He agreed, allowing himself to feel the joy of the situation.

Hermione lifted up a book that was in the middle of the stack of a dozen or so books that were stacked upon the table in Lucius’ study. “The information is all here; I wrote it down so that I could explain it to Angel when she was old enough.” She opened the book to leaf past the first few pages.

Lucius caught a glimpse of a dedication to Angel in the front of the book then inside were wizarding photos surrounded by beautifully written scrolling calligraphy. One photo was of a healthy round-faced little baby girl sleeping on her tummy on a furry rug with a full head of dark curly hair. Another shot of a woman’s hand open, and the tiny baby’s hand resting in hers, grasping a finger to show how tiny the baby was.

“I made it into a baby book for them both, so they could talk about the pictures and the story it told while they discussed her newfound powers.” Hermione explained in a soft voice, touching the edge of a photo of a beautiful young woman with long dark hair and large brown eyes.

“That’s Angel’s mother…?” Harry asked. He was standing beside Hermione, gazing down at the book.

“Yes.” Hermione said, then sighed and turned the page. That friend was lost to her forever thanks to some horrible stroke of fate. She flipped through several pages then stopped on one with an Indian woman standing beside what was clearly an English manor with an elderly wizard. “That woman there is where she gets her power.”

“And where she gets her beauty.” Lucius said quietly, allowing himself for a moment to admire the exotic beauty in the woman’s face.

“She was a tribal shaman. Not all tribes allowed women to reach this point in their training, but she was, from what I understand, exceptional. Edmund Everard, after he retired from his post at
Hogwarts, went to America to explore. He found Miakoda there and the story was that she had been married into a neighboring tribe, and her husband and the rest of the tribe had been wiped out by smallpox. Everard found her alone in the encampment attending to the needs of the dead. He aided her in sending them on according to her traditions. He spent months there and eventually asked her to be his wife and come back across the pond with him. She accepted."

"Obviously." Lucius said drolly. "I want details on the skill she has, not a family history, I can find that in any wizarding history book…"

"No, Mr. Malfoy, you can’t find this in history books. They kept her origins quiet and it took me months of digging to find her name, and her original tribe. Miakoda even changed her name from her Native American name to hide her true history. She blamed the English settlers for the death of her first husband and she was probably right about that. The history books all say that the last wife of Everard was a woman named Elizabeth."

"Can’t blame her there; the settlers nearly wiped out loads of tribes over there I understand…” Harry commented.

"The TALENT…?" Lucius interrupted impatiently.

Hermione rolled her eyes and turned the page; it was covered with detailed sketches showing how spirit projection was done. “This shows how it’s done; she goes into a focused trance and reaches out, and when she can touch what she wants, she is there. It can be done in the final moments of life too even if the person has never done it before; it’s instinctual. It can be trained, and focused to allow for ease of using the skill at any time but that is training which I don’t have any details about. The living members of her tribe chose not to train her, though once they find she has this skill that choice may change. They may ask for her.”

"They can ask all they want. She’s my granddaughter.” Lucius said with clear possessiveness. “Now what the bloody hell does this all have to do with finding her?”

Hermione gave him an irritated look. “You’re the one who asked me for this information!” She retorted.

“Can she lead us to her?” Harry asked.

“I don’t think so. But it’s rather amazing that she can focus on what is around her there while she is projecting here. Normally one is in a trance to do spirit walking, so I guess anything is possible.”

“This is a waste of time.” Lucius straightened, turning away.

“Hermione, she knows and trusts you. If she comes back get any information you can from her on where she is; I’ll take my cell phone so you can call and let me know if she comes back.”

“Sure.” She agreed quietly. “You know I’ll do anything you need me to…”

“Thanks.” Harry turned to follow Lucius. Ron, who had been standing quietly in the corner with his broom in hand, moved over to give his wife a warm embrace before following the others out.

Lucius led the way out of the room, summoning his broom to hand as he walked. “Let’s go… we can each take an area and search. We’ll find them faster that way…”

“And then what?” Severus asked pointedly.

“You even have to ask? We bloody well kill that bastard for touching our family.” Lucius snarled.
“He’s not a bad wizard skill-wise, Lucius; even though I would say that on a regular day he isn’t a match for any one of us. The trouble is, I don’t believe that man has been sane in quite some time and there’s no telling exactly what he is capable of.” Remus said quietly, having a feeling that he knew where Severus was taking this. He was still a bit giddy from the announcement of another baby; he didn’t think that he’d hear the sound of unsteady little baby feet wandering around the house again. He was even happier that the baby was Severus’. He had responded to Severus’ request for assistance, agreeing that Nymphadora did not need to be involved in the search at the moment.

“I’m pretty sure I could handle the old bastard.” Harry growled softly. After all the things that Parkinson had done to his family he would LOVE to get his hands on that man…

“Will you always be so cocky, Potter?” Severus snorted, and then shrugged. “I suppose some things will never change,” he commented dryly. “But personally I have reason to keep from being killed at this point in time. I had enough trouble with his daughter; I don’t care to take any chances with the father.”

“That’s not the same; she caught you off guard…” Lucius grunted, not wanting to give any of that family clan credit for any type of skill.

“And her father knows we will be coming after them. He will be ready for us with more than one type of trap I’m certain. I agree with Remus; we need to stay together in each area for the search; at least close enough to respond should any one of us find them.” Severus said firmly, knowing that he was going to get complaints from the others.

“What? No! That will take far too long! Teams of two at least…!” Lucius objected immediately.

“He’s right.” Harry said softly and Lucius looked at him in surprise, scowling. The younger man shrugged, knowing that his father in law would be angry no matter how he explained it. “Each of these reserves is at minimum fifty miles wide. Even on my broom I couldn’t cover that myself in less than a day, if I wanted to cover every inch of ground. And Angel told us it was a jungle-type area; old abandoned buildings like what she said they were in will be difficult to see in a quick fly-over…”

“Even the way YOU can fly, Potter.” Severus agreed. “Perhaps we should call in some favors with your Quidditch playing friends and have their help as well.” Severus suggested.

“Already done; Ron brought back his broom with the books that Hermione sent him after.” Harry answered, and then looked back at his father-in-law. “We have to do this right, Lucius, or we’ll have a good chance of flying right past them and never finding them at all.”

“I don’t like it but we need to get started; three continents to search for my family and every moment is another wasted…”

“Then let’s not waste another moment.” Harry said, taking his broom in hand.

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Angel tugged at the door again, more angry than she was frightened. “You bad man! Bring back my Nona! Bring her back!” she said, and then finally gave up, falling to a seat on her rump beside the door, tears rolling down her cheek. “Bring her back… please…” she mumbled.

After a few moments she pushed back to her feet and kicked at the door, then went back over to the wall with the high window. It had been mostly boarded over, but it was cracked and let in plenty of light to show her just how old and empty the room was. There were actually cracks in the bricks that made up the walls and in one or two places the vines pushed through the blocks themselves. The
room was intact, though; she’d already explored the whole thing when Nona had taken a nap.

She jumped, reaching for the edge of the window but she couldn’t catch it. She glared up at it, frustrated. She had to do something… she had to help her Nona and this bad man liked to hurt her and make her cry. She jumped again and caught the very edge, then scrambled with her toes to get a foothold on the crumbling bricks. She pulled herself up to stare out again at the trees; maybe there was something she could see that she could see that would let Nonno and Daddy and Papa know where she was.

She looked around and let go of the shelf and let herself fall to the floor when she heard the telltale sounds of the door unlocking. She scraped her left arm on the sill when she fell, but she did not cry out. She just tried to hide the injury and pulled her feet up under her so it looked like she had been sitting there the whole time.

Narcissa stumbled into the room, her hands out in front of herself to catch herself as she fell to her knees.

“Where is your husband?! He was supposed to answer that message I sent to him, to meet my contact in Diagon Alley over an hour ago! All I want is the boy back. The Dark Prince belongs to me! He is MY child!”

“I don’t know, I don’t… he would have been there, I know he would have.” She murmured.

The door slammed behind her and Angel could hear the bad man saying some words that one of her foster brothers had gotten his mouth washed out with soap for saying. She didn’t care, though, hurrying over to her grandmother. “Nona… did he hurt you…?” she asked softly.

“I’m all right love…” Narcissa murmured softly, giving her a smile but Angel was sure she wasn’t telling the truth. She turned and sat there on the floor, reaching for Angel and pulling her into her arms. “Are you all right…?”

“He don’t let me out of here Nona, I’m not as special as the other kids are.” She said, cuddling into her arms and hugging her tight.

“You are special, Angel. Don’t let him convince you of anything other than that. Always remember that.” She said firmly, wishing she could see, hating that she could not look the child in the eyes and reassure her.

“I know you love me Nona, and Nonno loves me to…” she murmured softly. “And Daddy and Papa…”

“And everyone else who gets to know you.” Narcissa added, stroking the child’s hair, taking her own comfort out of the simple action of comforting the child.

Angel sat quietly in her lap for a while, content to finally have her Nona back with her. “Is the bad man going to keep us forever…?” she asked in a soft, timid voice.

“No. He doesn’t want to keep us. He wants little Mallek. He thinks he has the right to be Mallek’s father…”

“But he’s not. Nonno told me that Mallek is my uncle and that bad man is not his daddy.”

“That’s exactly right, but it doesn’t stop him from believing that he truly has a right to take Mallek away with him…” Narcissa explained.
“He can’t…”

Both of them flinched and Angel gave a little scream as the window suddenly shattered; Narcissa held her close, sheltering her in her arms as tiny shards of old glass from the window rained down on them.

Angel gazed upward once the glittering shower faded. “Nona, it’s a tree. One of those nut trees with the big leaves broke the window.” She said as she looked over at the wall with the window. The top of a coconut palm that now was sticking partially into the window, completely blocking it off. “It’s sticking into the room now.”

“Nut tree? Do you mean coconuts, Angel..?”

The girl considered a moment, looking at the fruits that were still attached to the tree. “I think so but these are all big and weird and green. Coconuts aren’t like that, they’re round and brown and hairy…”

Narcissa smiled at her granddaughter’s innocent words and she felt for the wall, pushing herself to her feet. “If it is a coconut, Angel, the bit that you’re thinking about – the brown and hairy part -- lies inside the middle of one of the big green pods.”

“It does?” she asked, watching as Narcissa made her cautious way along the wall to the window where she reached up to feel what was protruding into the window. “Oh yes… this is a coconut all right…” she said, using her fingers to feel the shape of the nuts. She pulled one off with a bit of effort, hefting the seed pod.

Narcissa found herself smiling. The coconut in its husk had a good weight and she could get a good grip on it; Malcolm was in for a surprise when he came back. But she had other plans for this one. They had been locked in here all day and she knew that Angel had not had anything to drink; this fruit was a gift from Heaven. The girl had not complained but she knew that the girl had to be horribly thirsty, as she herself was. She knelt on the floor and began feeling the sides of the pod, finding where the stem attached. “Stand back, Angel.” She advised, kneeling on the ground.

She lifted the husked nut high and slammed it as hard as she could against the cement floor of their room. It bounced hard with a bit of a cracking noise, jumping out of her hands and narrowly missing her face. Angel hurried over to pick it up and give it back to her. Narcissa continued until she could get her fingers through the husk and peel it away, revealing a hairy dark round nut inside.

“There it is!” Angel said, smiling as she saw the very familiar shape of the nut that her mother used to buy.

“And it’s more than just a coconut, Angel.” Narcissa said, taking the nut in her hands and moving to the windowsill. She felt for the corner, and then turned the nut in her hand until she had lined one of the soft points up with the corner of the cement windowsill. She struck the nut lightly, then harder just until she heard the telltale crack.

“How can it be more?”

Narcissa tapped out another hole, and then held out the nut. “Come here and see.”

Angel moved forward curiously and took the nut from Narcissa, hearing the liquid sloshing inside. She looked up at her grandmother. “It sounds like water…”

“It’s called coconut milk. Go on, little love. Drink it.” She urged gently, reaching to pull another off the tree. She could only feel two more husks on the tree. She wanted to keep one for a weapon, but
they could dine and drink the other two. It would give them energy to endure until help arrived.

“I want you to drink too, Nona.” Angel said, frowning at her.

“There is more than one. Drink, Angel; please.” Narcissa urged the girl.

Angel drank finding the taste quite odd but very good, as she was very thirsty. She did not drink it all, seeing that her grandmother was not opening the other nuts yet. She moved back to Narcissa and pressed the shell into her hands. “Your turn.” She insisted.

Narcissa smiled fondly and reached to stroke the cheek of the child, then took the nut to drink a bit herself.
The Search

Author's notes: The search is on for the missing Malfoy/Potter family members... will they locate them? And what is Parkinson doing with them while the search ensues?

Hi readers! Only a few more chapters - almost got this one all wrapped up! We have a few more ideas and one story well under way that's quite a bit different from this one - check out the poll if you want and let us know if you're interested. Thank you all for your readership; we appreciate each and every one of you! SisterGryffin & SisterSlytherin

Angel sat quietly in the chair and gazed up at the two men in the room. The bad man had pulled her out of the room after stunning her Nona and this other man had been waiting in the outer room. She felt afraid for the first time; she knew exactly what they were talking about; the bad man was going to make her leave the Malfoys and her daddy and put her in another home.

The new man was short and had really brown skin with hair that was the color and texture of straw and looked like it had been pasted to his scalp with glue. He wore clothes that didn't look anything like any of the things that her father or anyone else she had seen, they must be very far from home.

"She's got some Potter blood in her. Looks like she'll grow up to be quite a beauty..." the man said, his rounded face clearly leering as he eyed her. Angel shifted uneasily, uncomfortable just from how he was looking at her. She turned her eyes away from his. "Tell me; is she one of those creations of your daughter's?" The man's voice was heavy with an accent that sounded very odd.

"No, she's not." Parkinson said flatly. He was still angered at his daughter's death; much too angry to feel grief yet because he had felt that he had been cheated out of his daughter's money and her assistance in the greatest work of his life. "This has nothing to do with her. Do you want her or not?" he glared at the other man.

"Easy, Parkinson; I know you have lost your daughter..." he attempted to soothe the older man.

Malcolm interrupted him immediately. "Leave her out of this, damn it! Do you want her or not?!" he demanded, barely restraining his anger. He needed this money; he had some with him but the rest was actually hidden away where he couldn't get to it right now.

The straw-haired man closed his mouth at the rebuke, and then gave a soft grunt of agreement; he simply drew a pouch off his belt and jingled it, weighed it in one hand, and then held it out.

Malcolm snatched the pouch and opened it, taking several minutes to count the coins. "Take the little beast with you." He said finally.

Straw-hair shook his head, eyeing Angel again. "I have to prepare a place for her... I still have one girl but do not have the second room prepared. She will fit in very nicely I think... quiet little child, you said?"

"Yes." Parkinson lied, turning from him and slipping the large pouch of money into a pocket where it seemed to vanish. "You can pick her up here as late as you want; I will not be here when you
return. She's your problem now." He agreed. He would have to move Narcissa and leave this girl here for her new owner. He knew what would happen to her, as this man was not only a known child molester and abuser but wanted for those things but he really did not care at all.

The straw haired man bowed to the bad man and walked out of the building. The bad man took her by the arm roughly, his wand in his hand. "Don't give me any trouble, girl." He growled as he forced her back to the room. She listened to the strange words he said as he opened the door, and then he shoved her roughly inside, slamming the door behind her.

Angel stumbled, falling to her hands and knees on the hard concrete floor, but she got up quickly and hurried to the side of her grandmother who was only now beginning to come out of the stunning spell. Angel was very worried about her; she looked so pale and every time the bad man hurt her she looked worse. She gazed into Narcissa's face and stroked her cheek tenderly, and then hugged her tight, trembling. The bad man was going to make her leave her family…

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Harry leaned into his broom harder, slicing through the maze of trees and jungle at almost blinding speeds. He used every bit of his visual skills to search for a building anywhere in this thick mass of greenery. Every once in a while he would catch a glimpse of Ron, keeping pace with him as he searched as well. It had been nightfall at the Mansion before they had set out; the decision was set to search in teams and to send up a signal if anything was found so the others could come to help.

They'd quite a crew to help; Ron of course had come, but also helping out were Lucius, Severus, Blaise and Remus. Severus Snape had volunteered as well which had taken Harry by surprise; he had not even known that the sallow-faced man had any skill at flying on a broom.

The first location they had chosen to search, simply by choosing the one with the smallest size, was the one on the big island of Oahu, Hawaii. Lucius paired everyone off into teams and the search was on.

Harry whipped the tail of his broom around and shot to his left; he'd seen a flash of grey there. He felt a thrill of hope when he saw that it was indeed a building; he drew his wand and flashed a signal upward to call the others but flew onward toward it himself. The building was overgrown with vines and greenery; the jungle was clearly trying to take the building back and reclaim the empty space within.

Drawing up before the building he drew his wand, casting the first nullification spell before his feet even touched the ground. The building's walls seemed to become stronger, less of a crumbling mess and much more intact. He touched down as Ron flew into sight. He waved him to land and be quiet, and the redhead indicated his understanding and complied, drawing his own wand as he touched down on the ground.

Harry whispered another cancellation spell in a stronger tone, using more power. The jet of light from the tip of the wand, silvery white, flowed forth over the building and spread out over much of the complex, sinking into the stones with tiny flashes.

"Anti-detection spell." Ron murmured.

"Hiding from wizards." Harry growled, starting forward.
"Just because that spell is here doesn't mean that Angel and Mrs. Malfoy are here…" Ron reminded.

"It doesn't mean that they AREN'T here either!" Harry countered in a low snarl. He WANTED to find them… he HAD to find them…!

Ron stayed close as the two of them started forward, moving quickly forward. Harry didn't let the fact that the building was brick or that the door was metal slow him down at all. He snapped his wand at the door and it dented; he snapped his wand at the door again once he reached it and the metal whined as it scraped and fell back, slamming back onto the wall behind it as it whipped open. Harry was inside a heartbeat later with Ron right on his heels.

The building was not sectioned off at all inside; it was one large room. Sunshine from the late afternoon spilled into the room, showing nearly every corner of the empty building. There was no sign of Narcissa or Angel, just a young boy who sat huddled in a corner staring at them with clear fear in his eyes.

"Bloody hell…" Ron murmured softly, lowering his wand, seeing that the boy had a chain about one ankle.

"What the hell…?" Harry said, moving forward with quick strides. Maybe they were here, hidden away somewhere…The boy whimpered and cringed away.

"Easy, little man." Ron said as he moved to the boy. "We aren't here to hurt you. Let me get that thing off you, eh?" He suggested. At first he had thought this curly-headed little brown-haired boy was about five, but a closer look he was certain that he was closer to twice those years.

Harry hesitated, torn between searching and helping this boy. Ron knelt next to the boy and looked up at Harry. "Go and search this place, Harry. Don't worry; I've got this guy well in hand." He assured in a quiet voice. "Make a round of the outside too; I've already signaled the others and they should be here soon."

Harry nodded sharply and strode away with a grim expression on his face. He had confidence in Ron's ability to handle the situation; right now his focus was on finding out if Parkinson had hidden his family here. He wouldn't put it past that slimy bastard to chain a boy up like that.

The redheaded wizard touched his wand to the steel band about the boy's ankle but it did not, as he had expected, release. Ron scowled and tried once more, to no avail. Not one to give in easily he instead used the spell to nullify magic and the cuff clicked and fell off the boy's chafed and injured ankle. "There you go… we need to get you home…"

"Got no home." The boy murmured, timidly rubbing his ankle. "This is where I got to be…"

"No one lives like this." He answered quietly to him. "Where did you live before you came here? How long have you been here?"

"I dunno…" he said, watching as Harry finished his circuit of the inside of the building, finding nothing, and strode out the door. "It's been a long time, lots and lots of days… he comes sometimes and gives me water, and… and…" his face turned red and he turned it away. "I was in a home; a group home. I ain't got no mom or dad or family at all who want me…" he added in a whisper; he didn't want to tell what the 'man' did when he visited for more than a few moments.

"You're done with all this, you hear me? It's over. If I catch who was doing this to you he's going to wish he'd never been born." Ron said in a soft growl.

"Why?" the boy asked then immediately looked as if he was frightened Ron would hit him for daring
"Because you're a kid. Kids need to be able to have a happy life." The redheaded wizard answered evenly. "My mum and dad had seven of us and none of us experienced anything like this. I promise you, I'll see you get a proper home somehow..." He wanted to pull the boy into a hug to comfort him but somehow he was sure that this abused child would take that in a way that he did NOT want his comfort taken.

"Okay." The boy answered, though he clearly expected nothing of the sort.

"They're not here..." Harry said with clear frustration as he moved back in the doors.

"Who the bloody hell is that?" Lucius demanded as he strode in; he'd landed just outside the door and strode in, looking at the boy then at the others.

"Mr. Malfoy..." Ron began.

"We don't have time to take care of every charity case we come across, we have to find my family!" Lucius snapped, irritated.

"Go on, then, I can take care of him." Ron retorted, scowling back at him and the two matched glares for a moment.

"Good idea." Severus interjected and Lucius turned his glare at him.

"What...?"

"Weasley can take care of this boy; it is clear he has no one else who will do the same for him."

Severus said, moving to check the boy's injuries with a quick scan. He did not like the boy's condition but it was nothing a few good meals and clean water would not cure at the moment.

"Meanwhile there is nothing to hold the rest of us here."

Lucius glared a moment longer then turned away. "So be it; we have many miles to cover before we're done here yet...!" he said, striding back out the door.

"You sure, Ron...?" Harry asked quietly. "The bastard who brought him here might come back..."

"He'll find an empty room. He doesn't have any broken bones; I can apparate with him. I'll rejoin you as soon as I can... you're going to the reserve in New Guinea next, right?"

"Right." Harry said, already halfway to the door. "Catch up when you can, mate."

"Of course." Ron said, turning his full attention to the boy.

Narcissa heard movement in the outside room and rose to her feet, the coconut she had refused to eat or even open for Angel gripped firmly in her hand. She lifted one finger to her lips; she knew that Angel was watching her closely.

Angel moved to put her back to the wall, both her hands over her mouth to ensure that she followed her grandmother's instruction.
Narcissa moved to the door, placing her back against the wall right beside the door. She had spoken with Angel and although the girl had been afraid of being sent to another foster home, Narcissa had known that there was more to it. Parkinson had sold her granddaughter into that other man's hands; and she wasn't going to allow that to happen. Blinded or not, she was going to take action.

Angel moved to the far wall, standing with her back to it, watching with wide eyes. Her Nona was so brave...

The door lock clicked and the doorknob turned; Narcissa bit her lip, impatient to strike yet knowing she must wait for the moment to be right.

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The reserve on the island had been the smallest of the choices they had; it did not take them much longer to complete the circuit of the remaining reserve. Ron had not rejoined them when they apparated onward to the next site; the reserve in Papua New Guinea. There, they discovered six separate buildings during their search. Three were broken down so badly that two had no roof at all and the third had only a frame and open sky. Not suitable for keeping anyone prisoner, especially a determined Malfoy.

The fourth cluster of buildings was not much more than a group of outhouses; they checked every one and found only a few plants that were not legal in the muggle world growing quite well in the buildings.

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The fifth had a good roof and strong walls; vines were growing over the building and it had been difficult to spot. "This is it!" Lucius whispered urgently, wand already drawn before he even landed.

"We've another reserve to search; this might not be…" Severus began, sending up the signal before he landed beside his old friend.

"It is!" Lucius snapped, though he did allow Severus to cast the cancellation spell and the second spell to release the door. When it did not result in the door being open, Lucius snarled "Bombarda!" and blew a hole in the wall next to the door and was through the hole within a heartbeat.

Someone inside screamed; Lucius found himself in the middle of a young couple's love nest. Two young people sat on a makeshift bed, blankets pulled up to cover them, eyes wide as they stared back at him.

Lucius had barged in with his wand at the ready, the tip of it glowing red with the spell he had prepared to release the moment he saw Parkinson. "Bloody fucking waste of time!" Lucius snarled, lowering his wand.

"I told you daddy would find out!" The girl whispered, clearly terrified.

Lucius rolled his eyes and moved out before anyone else could go in. "Search the outside; if there are
outbuildings we will check them.” He growled, straddling his broom and taking off without hesitation.

Blaise looked at Remus, who shrugged and they began to spread out again to search the complex of buildings. Their careful search, however, turned up nothing further of interest, only disturbing several nests of wild snidgets thriving in the shelter of the broken down buildings.

By the time the searchers reached the far end of the reserve Ron rejoined the group, clearly having flown directly here from the other end of the reserve in order to catch up with them.

Ambrym was the third location that Harry had determined could be where Parkinson had hidden the missing Malfoy family members. When they arrived at the apparition point it was clear that the highly active volcano was currently in full eruption; fortunately, the wind was bearing the toxic fumes away from where they needed to search.

"Mind the winds, gentlemen; if it changes we all need to use a mask charm to filter out the fumes." Snape advised as he mounted his broom.

"We'll be of no use to them dead." Lucius said, getting on his broom as well. "Enough wasted time, let's be off!"

The group broke up into their search teams and spread out immediately. They saw little of the beauty of the jungle or anything that it offered; they only had one goal in mind.

Harry saw the signal go up first; from the direction he knew it was Lucius who had spotted the building. He waved an arm to Ron and turned his broom; he saw his friend beginning to follow him as he leaned into the handle of his own broom, pushing himself to dangerous speeds as he hurried to join the others.

The door opened with the same briskness it always did and Narcissa felt the rush of air as the door swept past her. She brought the nut in her hands down where she thought the bastard’s head should be with every ounce of strength she had in her with a snarl of effort.

"Nona, no!” Angel cried out; the man coming through the door wasn't the bad man, it was her Nonno!

Lucius and Severus both reacted at the same moment with charms to physically shield the Malfoy patriarch from the descending nut, the tangible shield fending off the coconut and deflecting it away, sending Narcissa sprawling to the floor as she lost both her grip and her balance.

"Lucius…” she murmured, recognizing his voice.

"Cissa…!” he banished the shield and knelt to gather her in his arms; Angel ran to them and hugged
them both tight; Lucius' arm went about her and pulled the little girl into the embrace as well. Severus stood in the doorway, guarding them as the three embraced for several long minutes, Narcissa weeping in relief. They were saved…!

Severus let them have their privacy, watching as the others arrived. He gave them a brisk nod to let them know that they had found them and gestured to left and right to tell them to search for Parkinson. He remained standing guard as Lucius gathered himself together. He had been ready to fight to protect them, but seeing them and holding both his wife and granddaughter was all he wanted at the moment.

Harry and Ron fanned out to search the remainder of the hallway while Remus and Zabini took on the main room; all of them were ready for anything.

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"No sign of him." Remus announced as they moved back to rejoin the others. Harry gripped his wand tightly in his hand, frustrated and angered by Parkinson's absence. He had been looking forward to exacting some vengeance upon the man; so far he had not gotten any satisfaction at all in dealing with those who had hurt his daughter, his husband, his friends and his family.

Severus stepped back out of the doorway to allow them inside and Angel extricated herself from Lucius and ran to Harry. "Daddy, I told that awful man that you and Nonno would come for us! I told him and I told him..."

Harry lifted the girl into her arms and hugged her tight. "You were right, love; we came as quickly as we could. You were amazingly clever, giving us all that information."

She giggled softly, in splendid sprits now that she was safe again. "I had to save my Nona and take care of her..." She glanced at her grandmother and watched as Severus moved to Narcissa's side, kneeling and instructing her to take the healing potion that he produced from an inner pocket inside his robe.

He gave the girl a kiss on her head, stroking her dark curls. "You were brilliant." he assured.

She gazed at him, her mirth fading. "Do I... can I come back home with you, daddy?" she asked timidly.

That caught Harry off guard. "Why would you ask such a thing? Of course you're coming back home with us; its where you belong."

"The bad man was talking to another man and I think he wanted to be my new foster daddy... he paid the bad man and they said he would be back here to get me tonight..." she told him in a soft voice; she clearly had been shaken by the experience.

"You don't belong anywhere but home with us." Harry said firmly. "Your home is with our family, for now and forever..." he assured her and she hugged him tightly again.

"We have to get them out of here immediately; get them to safety." Remus said quietly, glancing toward the door cautiously. Parkinson could return at any moment.

"I absolutely refuse to allow that demented bloody bastard get away with this!" Lucius snarled as he
assisted his blinded wife to her feet. "I WILL have my revenge upon him personally!" His body was rigid with fury that only grew with each mark he saw upon his wife's delicate skin and each slight against his family that he heard.

Angel wiggled until Harry let her down to her feet, then she went over to Lucius, gazing up at him and tugging at the sleeve of his black wizard's robe to get his attention. "The bad man can't help it, Nonno... He's just a bad man who needs a mommy very, very badly..." she said in a very serious tone. Lucius was confused by the comment but Harry immediately connected the girl's words with the muggle movie 'Hook' and he couldn't help a bit of a chuckle.

"Please Lucius, I just want to go soak for a week in our bath..." Narcissa said softly.

"That's not going to be possible, Narcissa; you need to be seen by a medi-wizard to ensure that you regain your vision." Remus countered immediately. "The longer the curse that affected your sight remains in place, the more difficult and unlikely it is that it will be successfully removed."

"He's correct, Lucius. She must go immediately..." Severus said firmly.

"Then I shall have our personal family medi-wizard summoned to the mansion. She can be attended to while she is in the bath." Lucius countered immediately. "Harry, you will escort them safely home..."

"I'm not leaving!" Harry said with a scowl.

"I will not risk them by keeping them here!" Lucius snapped back.

Severus cleared his throat. "No need for such drama, gentlemen; I will see to the safety of Narcissa and Angel myself." he reassured. "And I will take Mr. Zabini and Remus with me as well to ensure there are no problems."

Lucius glanced at the three of them and then turned back to Severus. "Thank you; I can entrust their safety to you, my friend." he said with complete confidence. "But I will have a word with you first if you don't mind."

"Of course." Severus nodded.

"See that the medi-wizard is summoned the moment you arrive home. We will be along as quickly as we can..."

"Be careful, Lucius," Narcissa said softly, hugging her husband, trembling slightly. "He's truly mad... he had arranged to sell Angel." she whispered to him.

"Not to worry, my dear wife. We shall take care of him and everyone else who was involved." he answered quietly, his fury clearly burning in his eyes but his demeanor now calm. He was going to get to vent his anger on the bastard responsible for all of this and he knew exactly how to accomplish that.

Remus stepped forward and touched Narcissa's arm. "If you will take my arm, Narcissa, we will get both you and Angel off to someplace much more comfortable."

"Come to Uncle Blaise." The dark-skinned wizard said, going down onto one knee. Angel looked at her father, and then grinned and ran to his open arms.

"Can Rosie come over...?" she asked eagerly, glancing over at Ron as Blaise turned with the girl securely in his arms. It was clear that she was already prepared to put everything behind her. She was
with her family again and all was right in her world.

"We shall see, my dear." Blaise answered. "She's visiting with her grandmother right now but I'm sure that soon a sleepover could be arranged for you two."

Angel suddenly looked very worried. She'd made a promise before all of this had happened and she was going home without anything at all. "Oh no... Nona, I never got my special gift for Alyssa, I promised... can we go back to the store...?" she asked, realizing the fact.

"Tell me what you wanted and I'll fetch it personally." Blaise reassured her, touching her cheek to get her attention.

She looked at him, her eyes full of worry and regret. "I promised Alyssa I'd get something very special while we were out shopping. I was going to get her something for her to give to her daddy... she loves him a lot but he hasn't decided he loves her yet. She wanted to come with us but Nonno told her she couldn't because of the bad man."

"For Warrington?" Blaise said thoughtfully, glancing to his right where a flock of snidgets was flying in a maddening pattern.

"Uh huh..." she said sadly.

Blaise smiled and drew his wand, pointing it at the birds. "Immobulus." he commanded and the birds froze in mid-flight, kind of drifting in the direction that they had been flying at the moment.

"Wow..." Angel murmured, reaching toward one of the drifting birds but not quite touching it as it floated past her.

Blaise carried Angel over to the tree they had been diving about and looked into the branches where he located a nest. "Ah... this is something that you could never have purchased for her in a store... and Jerrod will be quite pleased to get this." he said as he used a levitation spell with his wand to lift fragments of a shell from a barely visible nest.

She half-giggled at how silly that sounded. "Why would Mr. Warrington want eggshells...?" She asked in a bit of an amused voice.

"Trust me, little love. He'll absolutely love them." Blaise was very careful not to touch the shells at all. "Reach into my breast pocket there; you'll find a handkerchief..." She did as instructed and before long Blaise had the shell fragments secured away in a bag made out of the piece of fabric. "Now; give that to Alyssa for her father and you'll find that he's very pleased with it." he assured as he turned her back to see Remus watching them with amusement on his face.

"Quite a rare item there; you're right. He'll enjoy that quite a bit. So are we nearly ready to go?" Remus asked. "Narcissa needs medical attention."

"Yes, of course." he agreed, moving to rejoin them, glancing back at the door. "Isn't Severus coming with us?"

"He'll be but a moment." he assured, glancing back as well.

As if he had been awaiting their cue, Severus emerged from the building, straightening his robes. "Let us be on our way." he said as he strode past them.
"All set." Ron said, returning into the room of the bunker, keeping his wand in hand. "The moment that he comes within fifty meters of this building we'll know; it will give you two plenty of time..."

"Thank you, Mr. Weasley." Lucius nodded, handing Harry a vial of a thick liquid of a pearly pink hue. "You did such a good job of impersonating my son that I think you should play this part..." he commented with a smirk.

"It wasn't hard to play Alerick... the hardest part was keeping myself from going after Warrington when we first saw him." Harry answered, examining the fluid a moment. They said you could tell the real personality of a person by what the polyjuice potion looked like, and Angel's looked like it wouldn't taste foul at all.

"As long as I get to make the bastard pay for what he's done, I don't care what part I have to play." Harry commented.

"He won't be expecting us to be capable of defending ourselves, as they did not." Lucius mused, gazing at his own phial of polyjuice potion; it was a leaf green with bright golden flakes hovering within. Amazing what a simple sample of hair could do with the muck-like look of the original potion.

"That foul bastard really needs to pay for all he's done. He and his harpy of a daughter tore apart my home life. And he's had a hand in mucking about in all our lives." Ron said as he tried to keep his own anger in check. As always, though, his mood was clearly written upon his expressive face.

Harry didn't want to tell his friend that he could not get the satisfaction he wished, but he had to caution him about making a wrong choice. "Ron, you have to remember that you're here for backup only. The only reason you're to even reveal that you're here is if something we didn't expect happens and we can't do anything. You need to stay out of it unless there's no choice, mate." Harry answered him.

"That's not going to be very bloody easy." Ron grumbled.

"No, it's not going to be easy, but you have to do it or you have to leave. Lucius and I have both filed official blood feud documentation with the Ministry of Magic; it won't matter what we do. If you use any Unforgiveable Curses you could be spending time in Azkaban and Rosie needs you to be home for her."

Ron's expression turned to slightly petulant, but he nodded reluctantly, clearly understanding what Harry was telling him. "Yes, I know; I have to think about Rosie before I do anything today..."

"Do that, Mr. Weasley, but also keep in mind that the ministry will not censure you for defending the life of another wizard against a wanted criminal." Lucius reminded. "We will ensure that he pays many times over for all he has done against our families."

"All right. Thanks." he said, taking up Harry's invisibility cloak and sweeping it over his shoulders. "I'll be out of the way, don't worry about me." Ron said as he vanished from sight inside the folds and hood of the cloak.

"Excellent idea." Lucius agreed, taking a moment to look about the room. That bastard had locked his wife and granddaughter in this room with no loo no way to keep warm or clean, and only one nasty foam mattress to lie upon. There was no clean water, nothing whatsoever to drink or to eat...
he would have to make sure that this man got everything he deserved.
Malcolm Parkinson stepped to the ground without a single misstep as he arrived back in the jungle clearing. He glanced about nervously; something didn’t feel right. Something didn’t feel the same.

He frowned as he tried to pinpoint what that might be, his wand held at the ready. It had rained, and the entire place smelled of wet dirt and plants, but nothing looked out of the ordinary. He walked slowly around the building, noticing that the wet ground had given way to the weight of one of these stupid trees and it had fallen against the window of the room he knew he had his prisoners in. The top of the tree now was hiding even more of the building and the window seemed to be completely blocked off, even more blocked than it had been before. Suddenly he had a thought; he had shown that stringy blond-haired bastard Jorge where he had kept his prisoners; he should never have left them unattended. He wouldn’t put it past him to backstab him and try to sneak in here and take the girl before it was time.

He muttered a revealing spell but found nothing was revealed by it. Scowling and feeling like something was off even more than ever, he started toward the building. He stepped inside and stood next to the wall a moment, allowing his eyes to adjust to the dim lighting inside the building. His feeling of unease grew and he muttered a soft curse under his breath. Nothing inside looked disturbed either but there was… SOMETHING!!

Cursing his own jumpiness and reactivity, he moved toward the door he was using as a prison, thinking that he had become far too paranoid since the loss of everything he had held dear. He consoled himself with the thought that perhaps now Malfoy would see reason and would return his rightful property to him. The Dark Prince was not a child, he was property and Malcolm was the creator and owner of that particularly valuable piece of property. He knew that the Ministry might give some of the others back to the men who had produced the sperm that had spawned them; that didn’t bother him in the slightest. They had been Pansy’s project of profit, not his of fame and glory. Let them all go back he really didn’t care. But the Dark Prince… he was not like the others and his heritage, once fully known, would cause more than slight ruckus among those prudes who sat panel on the Wizengamot.

He didn’t want to keep Narcissa; she far too much trouble. Years of living in the presence of that git Lucius Malfy must have taught her a thing or two; she had been a good student at Hogwarts, he
remembered, but occlumency had not been one of her skills. She had also proven to be entirely too strong-willed and was very difficult to manipulate. Placing her under the imperious curse had not had a strong effect; she had resisted to the last and only pain manipulation had finally dragged some of what he desired out of her. This morning he had forced her to write a letter to her husband asking him to please do as Malcolm wished and give up the Prince.

Not that anything had come from that Herculean effort and waste of energy; either Lucius Malfoy realized that the value of the boy he held was quite incalculable, or the rumors he had heard in school had been true and the blonde wizard did not care for his wife at all. He’d heard and seen nothing in response and he was growing frustrated. He didn’t like that little child either; the little beast had hit and bit him already and he hoped that Jorge would give her a very difficult life in return for her violence.

The tiniest sound to his left made him stop again; he turned toward the large empty room of the abandoned building, staring closely at every detail with narrowed eyes, the tip of his wand glowing a dangerous green with a spell at the ready.

A tiny round-bodied golden bird flitted up from behind a box, its wings little more than a blur as it hovered, staring back at him almost accusatorily; looking like it was simply hung in the air. He gave a snort of derision. “Idiotic birds… the Ministry should have allowed you to be hunted to extinction.” He growled, raising his wand at it, “Avada Kedavra!” He snarled. The flash of light enveloped the bird and passed it as well, and the tiny innocent bird was struck dead, falling over five feet to impact lifelessly on the cold stone concrete.

“Homenum revelio!” Malcolm snapped, and watched as the spell spread out over the room. Ron didn’t know the particular use of that spell, though he was sure he’d heard Hermione use it once or twice a very long time ago. Malcolm stared at the room, not blinking, expecting to see the form of a human outlined hidden within the darker corners of the room.

Hunched over and completely hidden from view by the invisibility cloak, Ron sat in total silence. He had stifled as much of that sneeze as he had been able to, but had made enough noise to be heard over the sounds of the surrounding jungle. He watched apprehensively but finally Parkinson turned away and continued toward the room that Ron had re-sealed once he had come out. He spoke the release command and took the doorknob in hand, opening the door.

He stepped in, pushing the door fully open. Although there was a rush of relief over the fact that his prisoners were still where they had left them, that relief was very fleeting. Yes, the two were there sitting side by side – which was odd – with their backs against the north wall as far from the door as possible. But something was wrong with the picture he was seeing and he felt his paranoia rising again and was almost on the verge of simply leaving them locked in this room to suffer whatever death nature had prepared for them. He throttled that urge down and cleared his throat, not lowering his wand in the slightest. “It is time to go. Say good bye to this child; she is no longer my problem.” He instructed, fully prepared for her to cause a problem over the waif.

“You have no control over where I go.” Narcissa/Lucius, wearing the polyjuiced guise of his wife, answered from her seat on the floor.

“Get up. It’s time go. Now.” He growled at the woman he saw seated with her back against the far wall.

“Sectumsempra!” Narcissa/Lucius snarled, surging to his/her feet, throwing the spell wandless. She cursed, misjudging her new center of balance and nearly falling down but her eyes never left her quarry.
Malcolm was taken quite by surprise by the two glaring facts: first that his adult prisoner was throwing a spell at him wandless and secondly that she seemed to be able to see perfectly well. His paranoia did serve him well at this point; by the time that Narcissa/Lucius had finished speaking the spell, he was no longer standing where he had been. He leapt back out the doorway and into the hall beyond. Angel/Harry leapt to his feet as well and both he and Narcissa/Lucius pursued their quarry. Malcolm slammed the door shut behind him before they reached the door and fled onward.

“Bombarda!” Angel/Harry snarled, making a throwing motion with both cupped hands; the door was struck with a massive blasting force that blew it completely off its wooden frame, throwing the door back to slam and embed into the wall across the hallway.

Without hesitation, Narcissa/Lucius surged forward through the remains of the door to see Malcolm turning was halfway across the main room; he still had his wand out and ready. Parkinson wasted no time on words, snarling as he threw another spell at them; a cloud of acid billowed toward them both.

Narcissa/Lucius threw an arm to the side and the acid cloud cleared to the left; Angel/Harry surged forward and performed another throwing motion; ice daggers appeared out of nowhere and shot with blinding speed toward Parkinson.

“Protego!” Malcolm snapped and the ice daggers were mostly stopped, shattering into a shower of sparkling shards. One managed to get through and sliced like a razor through his left arm, an injury barely an eighth of an inch deep. The blood only enraged him more; he surprised both of them by charging toward them, swinging his wand like a sword with a howl of rage.

The two leapt apart, which was precisely what Malcolm had expected them to do; he immediately cast a wind spell before they recovered their stance and drove the acid cloud back to surround Angel/Harry and simultaneously then turned and leapt forward at Narcissa/Lucius with a maddened snarl, no sign of sense in his eyes whatsoever.

Angel/Harry felt the acid of the noxious cloud burning her eyes/throat and was unable to speak to cast the spell to get rid of it. Without help she would have only minutes longer to live as the cloud ate her alive, literally starting to burn off and melt away flesh.

“Aguacero!” Ron cried out and Angel/Harry was driven to her knees by a sudden downpour of water that seemed to come from the air above her and was focused only on her. The red-haired wizard had used a spell to summon together the local humidity and concentrate it down as a literal downpour of water that not only neutralized the acidic cloud, it stopped the burning that the acid had caused and cooled her injuries.

“Thanks Ron.” Angel/Harry muttered as she got back to her feet on the slippery concrete; forcing her injured eyes to focus and get back into the battle.

Malcolm pursued Narcissa/Lucius about the room, slashing wildly with the wand with no regular pattern whatsoever, forcing her to retreat and simply block blow after blow. She snarled and threw up a protection charm then surged forward through it, turning the tables but not before Malcolm managed to land two hits on her arms, leaving the right one bleeding profusely as well as a cut on the bridge of her nose.

Malcolm noticed Angel/Harry coming up from behind and threw a protection between himself and Narcissa/Lucius almost simultaneously throwing a flame spell at Harry. “Conflagre!”

Angel/Harry was struck hard by the force of the spell; it was clear that Parkinson had been using very little magic lately because he had plenty to use today. If she had not just been doused by water, she probably would have been on fire by the force and heat of the spell; as it was, she was mostly
dried off and her clothes were smoking slightly as she got back to her feet again.

“You want Malfoy blood, do you?!” Narcissa/Lucius snarled and the blood drips that had hit the floor flew upward, transforming into little projectiles of deepest red. These magical bullets that shot forward at Malcolm the moment his shield dispersed; Parkinson almost immediately reacted with another defensive shield which did stop some of them but not all; one hit him in the thigh and another in the lower chest, embedding well under the skin.

Malcolm cried out and snarled “Bombarda!” using foolish amounts of power to strike back. Narcissa/Lucius’ shield prevented her from being burned by the spell but could not block the sheer power and explosive force of the blast; he was slammed back hard into the stone wall.

Angel/Harry leapt forward and slashed down with his wand; the cut across Malcolm’s face and shoulder made him scream out in pain. He snarled and threw up a dazzling charm, making it impossible for her to look at him and he turned and dashed for the door, surprisingly light on his feet despite all of his injuries.

Ron intervened again, seeing that Narcissa/Lucius was still getting back to his feet, clearly injured by the impact with the wall. He cast a simple trip-jinx that made Parkinson’s left foot stick to the floor momentarily and causing him to fall over, thus slowing him down.

Despite being dazzled, Angel/Harry snarled “Petrificus Totalus!” in an attempt to stop the older wizard from getting out the door, lunging forward to try to seize him. She’d underestimated how close she was and she ran into his back. Realizing this, she seized a hold of his shirt.

There was a flash of purple the moment before her spell shot out to envelop Malcolm that repulsed Angel/Harry violently away from him, causing the spell to go awry and sending her light frame airborne. The older wizard seized the doorframe and got to his feet to escape into the jungle, stepping out onto the loose gravel on the dilapidated wet road outside the building.

Ron wasn’t having that; there was no way this demented bastard was getting free! He quickly considered his options and came up with another that would be highly effective but not break his word of not interfering. He aimed carefully as Angel/Harry was still in close range, then barked the ancient spell. “Xeonllos Reversium!”

The spell worked exactly as he had intended; Malcolm fell to the ground in a heap and found he was unable to get back to his feet. He pushed himself up and stared at his legs; they were bent at the knee but the knees somehow had been spelled to the BACK of his legs instead of the front! Like a bird, his legs were bending completely backwards at the knee and he had no idea how the hell to stand up like this. “Finite incantatem!” he snapped, wand pointed at his strangely angled legs. There was no change; his legs still bent backwards at that weird angle.

Malcolm looked up at a crunch in the gravel to see Narcissa/Lucius standing over him, and Angel/Harry right at her side. “Expelliarmus!” the slim woman snarled and Malcolm’s wand was blasted mercilessly out of his hand and at the same moment the girl snapped “Incarcerous!” and magical ropes snaked out of nowhere, binding him from shoulder to ankle tightly. He had no chance and no way to escape now.

“Mobilicorpus.” Narcissa/Lucius said, and Malcolm was lifted into the air, and she guided his writhing body back toward the building.

“Let me go, you mad bitch!” Malcolm demanded.

“Silencio!” Angel/Harry snapped; she wasn’t going to let him say anything at all.
Ron was awaiting them both outside, just outside of the doorframe. He wordlessly pressed a potion into each of the incoming female’s hands.

“Thanks Ron.” Harry said quietly.

“No problem mate.” He answered, watching the body drift past him inside, waiting for the others to pass him completely before he closed the door to outside behind them.

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Parkinson was lying prone on the floor, stripped of his wizard’s robes and bare-chested. Magical chains had been summoned up out of the floor and bound him about the hands, upper arms, legs, ankles, and even one band was strung across his waist. He was going nowhere. The spell of silence had long since worn off, but Malcolm lay silently as long as they did nothing and ignored him. Each time he attempted to talk to them they had simply walked out of the room. He was beginning to believe that they were waiting for the Aurors to come and take him prisoner until they had resumed their normal forms.

“Its time for you to pay for everything you’ve done to my family.” Lucius growled. He had simply kept his prisoner bound long enough for the effects of the polyjuice potion to expire, revealing to Malcolm Parkinson exactly who it was that he was dealing with. Ron had taken the cloak off and stowed it before he had followed them into the room.

“You stole our dreams, Parkinson; you and your maniacal twisted daughter.” Harry growled softly. “I am not responsible for the actions of my daughter; I did nothing to you or your…”

“You and that German freak showed her how to do it! You gave her the tools and the equipment she needed to do it! You may as well have done every bit of it yourself, you twisted bastard!” Harry growled at him. “You deserve nothing short of death.”

“And he shall have it.” Lucius said coldly, glaring down at Malcolm. “Your fate has not been decided by Harry nor myself; it has been decided by you Parkinson. What you have done to others shall be done to you.” Lucius said in a dangerous, low tone. “You took the eyesight of my wife. You used acid to attack my son-in-law who you thought was my little granddaughter. You will suffer the same fate that you tried to visit upon them.” He said, standing over Malcolm and pointing his wand at the eyes of his prisoner.

He murmured a soft word and a thin stream of liquid formed on the tip of the wand. It splashed down directly into Malcolm’s eyes and his mouth opened as a scream of excruciating pain was ripped out of his throat. The acid goo that dripped from Lucius’ wand did exactly as he expected it to; the skin bubbled and sizzled and burned away, then the stuff proceeded to eat directly into his eyeballs, causing the orbs to burst and froth in bloody bubbles that burned the skin as it dribbled down the sides of his face. His back arched and he writhed, struggling hard against his bonds as he caught just enough breath to scream in agony again as both Harry and Lucius watched with grim expressions of satisfaction reflected on their faces.

Ron paled and stepped back. The blood feud wasn’t his; that was for sure, and he really had seen enough just by that of the punishment that Malcolm was going to have to endure. The smell of burning flesh seemed to cling to his clothes as he hurried out to fresh air as his stomach heaved; he barely made it outside before he threw up.

Harry glanced after his friend but Lucius didn’t care at all that Ron had rushed out for whatever reason. He had his quarry and he would be damned if he allowed him to live after all the things that
he had done to the Malfoy clan. He had not been able to exact vengeance upon Pansy but this was better; he would make sure that her father paid for every minute of lost time with his grandchildren and especially his granddaughter whose life had been taken.

Malcolm lay limply, blinded forever, taking long shuddering pain-wracked breaths. “You’re mad, Malfoy…” he whispered hoarsely.

“Of course I am, Parkinson. I’m not simply mad, I’m furious and I have every right to do anything I wish to you; I have blood feud filed against your entire family; with you and your daughter specifically. Your life was forfeit the moment that I set hands upon you.”

“So taking my life and be having as a murderous insane animal is going to make things better for you?” he demanded in an accusing tone.

“No, it won’t change anything that has happened. But it will make ME feel better, and it will show others what will happen if they follow your example and decide to FUCK with the Malfoy family.” Lucius snarled at him. “Crucio!” he snarled.

Malcolm was immediately wracked with pain and he began to scream in pain once more.

“Your family killed my daughter!” Harry snapped. He waited until the moment that Lucius released his torture spell to use one of his own; a particularly nasty spell that he had never had reason to use on anything living before. “You put the Dark Mark on four innocent souls! You stripped them of any chance of a normal life!” He said accusingly, then stepped forward. “Sponas!” he growled, using an old English spell to used to peel precise layers of bark off delicate trees without killing the tree. It turned out to be just as effective on human skin.

A thin line appeared in the flesh of Malcolm’s chest; Harry made a ripping motion with his wand and the skin was ripped away in a long strip about an inch wide but barely a sixteenth of an inch deep, very precise. The gouge ended up being nearly six inches long and instantly took to bleeding. Malcolm cried out again, voice growing hoarse, trying to form words that would not come. He was slipping into shock.

“One for each of them.” Harry snarled and then did the spell again, taking a second strip from the center of his chest.

Lucius watched in satisfaction as Malcolm suffered through the skin being stripped off his body. He allowed the man to have a moment to regain his breath, gasping as his chest oozed blood that trickled down his body. “You would have used fire on my granddaughter and wife.” He pointed out, and then hit the wounded man with a minor blast of fire; just enough to cauterize his wounds and blister the skin around, keeping him from bleeding further and at the same time causing more intense pain.

“You took away our children’s abilities to play and have a normal childhood.” Harry continued. “You crippled these children by teaching them spells that they should never have learned before adulthood. You handicapped them. For that I will ensure that you are handicapped yourself.” Harry gestured with his wand.

Malcolm felt excruciating pain on the tips of each finger and each toe; his toenails and fingernails were all ripped out of their beds, one by one.

“You were going to force them to age before their time.” Lucius accused. “You were planning to stretch those innocent children to fit your plans and designs; so you will be shown the pain of being stretched beyond what your body will accept.” A sweep of his wand and the cuffs on ankles and wrists began to migrate away from the rest of his body, stretching him as if he was on a muggle rack
in the Dark Ages. Lucius listened to Parkinson scream again with clear satisfaction.

“Stop…! Oh Merlin… please… just kill me….” Malcolm whimpered when Lucius allowed the pressure to ease a moment.

“You heartlessly killed several of my daughters.” Harry growled. “You expect me to give you any sort of relief? I’ll never have relief from my pain. You killed them; I’ll never have the chance to even see any of them.”

“They weren’t even human… they would not have lived…”

“Every one of them deserved a chance to live! You fed them poisons!”

“For science… Warrington…” he began, trying to implicate the man.

“Warrington is now my personal servant. You vastly underestimated his value when he worked for you; he is quite a useful fellow. You were a fool in more than one way, Parkinson.” Lucius sneered at him, waving his wand and pulling his arms and legs farther from the anchored center of the body. The ball joints of the large sockets groaned against the cartilage anchoring them in place, and then they began to pull free of that restriction, bones popping as they pulled free, muscles and tendons tearing. Lucius allowed the pulling to stop before flesh began to rip. The areas around his shoulders were purpling and bleeding internally.

“You stole my sperm to make little copies of me. You stole my right to decide how and when a child of mine will be born. For this you will lose any right to have your family line continue in any way.” Harry growled. “Sectumsempra!” he snapped, pointing at the groin of the man strapped down to the floor.

Multiple slices appeared across his legs and groin; slicing deeply into the flesh there and causing blood to well up quickly, spilling to the floor and pooling about his legs and crotch. Malcolm let out a bloodcurdling scream as the spell severed his penis and left only a tiny tag of skin connected of his scrotum.

Lucius pointed his wand at the area, “Episkey.” He said with a detested look; he had no intention of allowing this man to have the easy death that would be caused by loss of too much blood. Parkinson panted, his face contorted by pain that had not been helped by the healing spell. The parts that had been severed were not restored by the healing.

All of them heard a good deal of noise suddenly from the main room just beyond the hall. The timbre of two different men’s voices was clear to be heard; Ron’s voice was clear as well as another male’s.

“Silencio!” Lucius hissed as he cast the spell on the faintly moaning man. He then started toward the door with Harry close behind. They emerged from the hall with wands at the ready.

Ron was standing over the petrified and bound body of a man with stringy yellow hair, having just picked up his dropped wand.

Lucius smiled wickedly; this was the man who had wished to purchase his little Angel…? Perfect. Absolutely perfect. “You know, Weasley, I would never have believed that you had it in you.” He commented, a bit of a backhanded compliment.

Ron wiped a trickle of blood from his lip; he clearly had not escaped the battle without some sort of injury. “Harry and I worked on dueling for a while; we were both going to be Aurors but the testing showed me that I didn’t have the stomach for their questioning techniques.” He shrugged.
“Clearly.” Lucius agreed with a smirk.

“I wasn’t sure who he was but I figured if he was coming in here like he owned the place, that maybe he was the one that Angel was talking about.” Ron went on, his wand still pointed at his prisoner.

“Impressive.” Lucius grinned wickedly.

“Good show, mate.” Harry said, moving to his friend’s side, looking him over. Ron still was extremely pale and clearly he could get sick again at any moment, and his button-down shirt looked scorched and burned in areas. He’d been hit with something but was refusing to show it. “You have any of those healing potions left?”

“No; Snape only left one for each of you.” He answered.

“You need some medical attention I think.” Harry said quietly.

“I’ll survive. You two are too busy to pay attention to what’s going on out here.” Ron said evenly.

“We’ll set up a ward outside…”

“I’m not leaving, Harry.” The redhead had a clearly stubborn look on his face, folding his arms. “A ward is fine and dandy but you need someone out here who’s not drained who can keep watch. I’ll be fine. You may as well give up trying to get me to go.”

Lucius eyed the younger man then nodded and turned away. “Let him stay, Potter. We have business to attend to. He has no injury that is life-threatening or it would already be evident.”

“Go on, Harry.” Ron said firmly. “I’ll watch until you two are done.”

Harry paused a moment, then nodded. “All right.” He agreed, resting a hand a moment on Ron’s shoulder. “Let us know if anyone else shows, mate. Not everyone’s going to be as surprised as this bloke was.”

“I will. Go on, get done with this and get back. Maybe Hermione will still be there; I’d love to chat with her for a bit…”

“I’m sure you would. All right. We’ll get this wrapped up.” He patted Ron’s shoulder and moved after Lucius, who was moving the body back into the room to join their other prisoner.

Ron watched them only a moment and then turned to go back outside. He did not intend to hang around inside and listen to anything that was going on; he had already been sick once from the smell of burned flesh and that was enough for him. He was more than happy to stay outside and make sure that whatever was going on inside would not be disturbed.

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Harry was only a minute or so behind Lucius, but by the time that he entered the room the blonde man was unconscious and had been stowed in a corner of the room, out of the way. Lucius was standing over Parkinson with his wand and had used it to burn a good portion of his upper chest, the stench of burned flesh quite prevalent in the room. The prisoner’s burned out eyes stared sightlessly up at the ceiling, a dry sob coming out of a tortured throat. “Enough… Malfoy, enough… even the Dark Lord wasn’t this cruel…” he whispered.

"Before you die I want to know one thing." Harry said in a quiet, dangerous tone. "Why. Why the
Bloody hell did you do this to me and my family? Why did you do this to all of the wizarding families?"

Parkinson took a slow, shuddering breath; he was amazed at how clear his mind was in spite of all the pain. "I did nothing to harm anyone intentionally. It was more than that, so much more. I wanted to create a proper leader; I wasn’t trying to cause trouble I was trying to save the entire wizarding world..."

"Save them how, exactly? By cloning Potter? By killing innocent babies? By trying to bring back that maniac Tom Riddle?" he sneered.

"Riddle had the right idea but he went about it all in the wrong way. He made himself the apex of all power." He murmured in a defensive tone. "He had no true allies anywhere; no one he could trust and no one to support him. If he had a true support system then he would be sitting in the Ministry of Magic instead of that fool McClaggen..."

"We can all agree that McClaggen is an ineffectual dolt, but he was elected to his position by the Wizengamot whether you like it or not." Harry said.

"So you created babies from Harry's and my son's own essence?" Lucius probed.

"Yes, it was the obvious choice. Potter defeated the Dark Lord. Your son, his true soul-mate, would be the ultimate support for him. Guards, trusted guards were necessary and someone of great charisma to draw everyone willingly into the following..."

"A pretty pack of little tools to fulfill your plan and provide YOU with ultimate power, that’s what you were designing.” Lucius snarled.

"Not a tool… my son… my Dark Prince…” he began to sob in grief over the loss of the one thing that had meant the most to him. “You don’t understand…”

"I understand that you were willing to kill anyone or anything that did not suit your plans, including innocent children." Harry retorted.

"It was in the name of science; in the name of progress. The first were nothing more than deformed bits of skin and bone..."

"But the more recent ones, the ones you poisoned to death with dragon’s blood potions?" Harry reached into a pocket and pulled a phial out. "What about them?"

"The perfect balance had to be reached." he murmured, his voice growing weaker. It was clear the he was losing his mental focus and clarity.

"They were my grandchildren." Lucius snarled at him, lashing out with his wand again, leaving a gash in his side. He then whipped his wand to the slab of broken stone that had been the side of the wall, broken by their battle to capture their prisoner. He levitated that slab of mortared bricks Parkinson’s ankles. He made no comment this time to justify what he was about to do; he simply let the spell holding the slab of stone release. It slammed down with an audible crunch as bones instantly gave way and were crushed to nothing, vanishing beneath the piece of wall that weighed hundreds of pounds. Malcolm Parkinson screamed hoarsely, and then began to sob openly, begging them to kill him.

"Oh no. No mercy. You showed none, you'll get none.” Lucius snarled, giving the block a nudge and causing it to fall over and crush his lower legs and knees as well. Parkinson sobbed, trying to use his ruined arms and pull his hands free, his shoulders wracked with pain.
Harry seized the man’s jaw and forced him to take the bottle of red liquid in his hand. Parkinson choked on it at first, but eventually enough of it went down for it to begin to take effect. “Let’s see if you’re good enough for the ‘perfect balance’ you sought so hard to achieve!” He snarled.

Parkinson’s entire body shuddered and a trickle of blood came from the corner of his mouth as he coughed; the very concoction created for him at his own order that he had used to test the children for the proper mix of siren blood was eating him up from the inside out. He writhed in agony, choking and coughing up blood. Lucius watched in silence, watching as the potion slowly killed the man, burning as it proceeded through his internal organs.

Harry threw the vial aside, allowing it to smash against the wall as he turned his back to let death finally take the man. He had done all he was going to and now it was time to stop focusing on death. He was looking forward to getting back to his family and back to life.
Meanwhile, at Home...

Author's notes: Harry and Lucius are away exacting revenge upon Malcolm Parkinson; meanwhile life continues back at home.

“There you are little one.” Blaise smiled as he finished brushing out Angel’s hair. He had brought her home and taken the time to tend her few injuries, to get her in a bubble bath and wash her hair. He’d used a warming spell to get her curly hair dry and finally he brushed it all out. “All clean and ready for bed.”

She looked up at him. “I am sleepy, but I have something I really want to do…”

“The gift for Alyssa?” Blaise asked with a smile.

“Yes, Uncle Blaise… can I take it to her? Please?” she asked eagerly.

He chuckled softly and set her down on her feet and reached into his pocket, getting the item that he had gathered for her. “Careful now, make sure no one touches what’s inside, all right?”

“I’ll be very careful, I promise.” Angel assured, beaming up at him, her eyes sparkling.

He chuckled softly and kissed her on the forehead. “Go on, little one. I’ll get your bed ready for when you get back, hmmm?”

“Thank you, Uncle Blaise.” She said happily, flashing him a heartbreakingly sweet smile before she scurried out the door with her gift carefully held in both her hands. Blaise watched her go, wondering for the thousandth time how anyone could possibly hurt that sweet girl or find her any sort of a problem at all.

Angel peeked into the room that had been Draco’s as a child to see that Alyssa was perched on the settee in the common area of their complex of rooms, hugging her stuffed ‘Thulu in her arms, already dressed in her frilly pink nightdress. Mallek and Alerick were out of sight but she could hear a nanny working to get the two dressed in their room. Erik and Erin were both still dressed but sitting at a table having cookies as they awaited their turn to get ready for bed.

The redhead girl looked over and jumped down to move to meet Angel. “Oh, you’re okay…! I heard them talking and they said that the bad guy got you! I was so worried, because I saw what they did to my daddy and I was scared that you’d be hurt too…” she said, giving the dark-haired girl a hug.

“He wanted to give me away but Daddy and Nonno got there and Uncle Blaise brought me home.” She said, hugging the girl back warmly, happy that her friend cared so much about her. “I wanted to say that I’m sorry I didn’t get that present for you when we were shopping. I really looked and looked but I couldn’t find anything…” Angel began.

“That’s okay, I guess… after you left, Papa Weasley came over and he played with me until bedtime. It was okay to stay here, really.” Alyssa shrugged, looking at Angel curiously. The other girl was far too excited to be simply coming to apologize.
“But I did promise and my mommy always told me that promises are important. I tried and tried but promised and I don’t forget my promises. I couldn’t find anything for you but I thought that I might get you something to give to your daddy.”

“You did…?” She asked, looking very surprised and pleased. “My daddy will like it…?”

“Uncle Blaise helped me to find it and he says your daddy will really, really like it and Mr. Snape.” She said, carefully pulling out the folded up handkerchief.

Alyssa smiled at the last name. “I like Mr. Snape, he’s very nice and he helped me.” She said, remembering how he had helped her to get rid of the dreams. “What is it?”

Angel slipped the wrapped up handkerchief out of the pocket of her robe. “Uncle Blaise says you can’t touch it. They’re the shells of a funny little gold bird.”

“Why can’t I touch it?” she asked curiously.

“Uncle Blaise said not to, that they wouldn’t be any good if you touch them so I didn’t.” Angel said, glancing at the nannies, which were moving to get Erik and Erin and ushering them off to change. “I think that you should go and give it to your daddy right now.” She suggested.

“All right… thank you Angel!” She said, hugging her impulsively.

Angel returned the hug. “I hope it helps.” She said softly. “I want you to have your family too, both your daddies.”

“It has to…thank you so much.” She said, gazing at the item in her hands with clear hope.

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Narcissa stepped out of the bath, feeling along the rail on the wall until she located her plush robe, which she slipped onto her shoulders and wrapped up in. Severus had sent for the family medi-wizard the moment they had arrived but the healer’s assistant had responded, telling Severus that the medi-wizard was currently attending to an emergency regarding a troubled pregnancy and the birth of a baby.

Severus had offered to assist her with getting everything prepared for her bath but the house elves insisted on taking care of her. He had wisely allowed them to do so, instead going to check on the children.

The Malfoy matriarch made her way carefully across the bathroom and entered her bedroom, her hands held out in front of her. She found her table and her favorite chair and sighed as she sank down into it. She was home, she was safe. It was finally over.

There was a timid knock on the door and she turned her face in that direction out of habit; she could see nothing at all. “Excuse me, missus…?” A timid female voice asked.

“What is it?” Narcissa asked.

“My Lord would not rest without saying good night to you.” She said.


Narcissa smiled and held out her arms. “Of course; bring him to me, would you?”

“Here you are, my Lord Mallek…” the nanny moved in and set the little boy into Narcissa’s lap.
“Ma’ek’s mum-mum.” The dark-haired little boy said firmly, happily gazing up at her. “Mine.”

“Have you been a good boy, Mallek?” She asked him, her face turned toward him.

A frown touched his lips as he looked at her. “Mum-mum?” he reached up to touch her eye.

She didn’t even see his finger coming as she still had no vision, but she did react instantly, reaching to catch his hand when he touched her eyelid. “Oh, oh no Mallek, you mustn’t touch my eyes. I can’t see right now…” She said soothingly.

“Mum-mum look Ma’ek!” He insisted, reaching up to put one hand on each side of her face, turning it toward him.

She smiled indulgently. “It will be all right, little one…”

“No!” He said, pouting. “LOOK Ma’ek!” He said and Narcissa felt a flood of power wash across her face; her entire face burned a bit then tingled. Unsure what he was doing, she caught up both his hands in hers to pull them away gently but stopped, realizing that she could make out shapes and colors now… her eyesight was being restored by this insistent little toddler. “Mum-mum look!”

“I’m looking, little one…” she murmured, gazing at him in complete surprise, caressing the babe’s cheek. “How did you…?”

“These children are full of surprises, aren’t they?” Severus commented from the doorway. He had returned to check on her with their family medi-wizard just behind him.

Narcissa gave the boy a warm loving hug. “Oh, yes, they are…” she agreed.

Mallek hugged her back. “MY mum-mum.” He said firmly, eyeing Severus with more than a little trepidation. Every time that Severus had been around, something had happened that had NOT made the little boy happy and he did not have his guards around right now… he frowned at the man. “Bad man. My mum-mum.”

“I think I shall simply stand back here; it will make the child feel more self-assured.” Severus said, stepping back out of the way. “But perhaps it would be better if Mallek were returned to his own quarters while you are being examined, Narcissa.” He suggested.

“Come, my prince.” The nanny said, moving forward. “Your mummy must see the medi-wizard now…”

Mallek pouted, hanging stubbornly onto her robe. “Mine.” He sulked.

“Now now, little one. You go on with your nanny, and I will come kiss you goodnight in your bed in a few minutes, all right?” she suggested, gently disentangling Mallek’s fingers from her robe and stroking his cheek, turning his until his eyes met hers, loving every inch of that pale little face. She gave him a tender kiss. “Now then, no more fuss; I will be all right with my physician, little one.”

The medi-wizard made his way past Severus and to Narcissa’s side. “No harm will come to her, little man.” He assured in his best bedside manner. At Mallek’s very serious expression, he smiled. This was, after all, a Malfoy child even if he did not look like one and as such should be treated with respect. “You have my bond, young one. No harm will come to her while I am with her.”

Mallek stared at him a long moment, then nodded once sharply, as if giving this man permission to look after his mother, holding out his arms to the nanny to allow her to pick him back up.
“I will see you soon, young Mallek.” Narcissa smiled.

“Night night, my Rik now!” Mallek commanded; he pointing imperiously at the door once he was settled in his nanny’s arms. Obediently she carried him out of the room.

Alyssa pushed open the door to the lab and stood a few minutes, watching her father work on his potions. He was so focused he continued to work without even noticing that she was there. “Mr. Warrington…? Can I talk to you?” She asked in a soft timid voice.

He almost jumped, looking over at her with surprise. “I thought you were already in bed, Lady Alyssa…”

“May I talk with you? Please…?” she asked softly.

He pushed back from the table and cast a stasis spell on the potion that he was working on. “Of course you may, my lady. You know I am always at your command.” He answered. “Do you know if Weasley has left yet?”. 

She shrugged, truly not aware of the answer to that. “I dunno…” she moved into the room toward him.

He rose with a grimace of pain that he quickly hid. His body was still healing from the abuse that Pansy had put it through. “Come on; you ought to be in bed.” he said, walking with a bit of a limp. He moved to take her hand and to walk with her back to the nursery.

“I know that, but I have something for you.” Alyssa said, resisting his pull on her hand.

He hesitated, and then nodded. He may as well let her give him whatever this thing was; Merlin knows he’d never be able to tell her no anyway. He lifted her up to the edge of a clear table and sank to a seat on a stool. “All right, my lady. Tell me what is it you’ve found?” He asked, giving the girl his undivided attention.

Silently she held out the wrapped handkerchief. Frowning but very curious now about what she would have found lying about that she would have been permitted to give to him as a gift, Warrington took the kerchief of silk with the “BZ” insignia upon the corner into the palm of his right hand. Blaise Zabini…? What did he have to do with anything? He pushed the thought out of his mind and lifted the flap of the small packet.

The first gleam of gold and silver made him stop, his eyes widening. He looked at Alyssa then back into his hand. Shells. Not just any shells, but about a full five ounces of shards of the silver, golden-speckled shells of a Snidget. This was not only a rare, but also an almost unheard-of ingredient since the protection of the species. “Where… where did you get this?” he asked, looking at the little girl before him perched on the edge of the table. He found he was quite happy at the moment that he was sitting; this gift in his hand was worth a small fortune and if he had not already been seated he might have just fallen in shock.

Her eyes were large and glistening with tears as she gazed back at him. “I wanted to make you happy. Do you like it daddy…? Um… I mean… Mr. Warrington…?” she asked softly, hope clear in every word.

“You will never know how much I like this gift, Alyssa. I like your gift very much.” He said quietly. He was taken completely aback by the gift.
“Can I… Can I please have a hug?” She asked in a soft whisper.

He set the gift carefully aside; one touch from a human finger would ruin the shells’ most valuable properties. Then he rose to his feet and scooped her up into his arms. “Thank you, Alyssa. I don’t know how the blazes you got hold of them, but thank you.” He said, giving the girl the one thing she wanted the most; not only his attention but clear unfettered affection. She smiled happily and rested her head on his shoulder, contented to just stay there in his arms.

“Come on, my little Lady. You need to be abed.” He said gently, stroking her hair. She hung onto him so he just turned, limping carefully out of the room and back up the hall.

Warrington glanced around as he moved into the main chamber that the circle children were roomed off of. He could see that the other children were being settled in their beds; the only ones they had not separated as of yet were the Dark Prince and the Consort. If he had anything to say about it, that wouldn’t be happening anytime soon. They were so young and their closeness helped strengthen their bonds to each other. He returned his attention to the task of settling his daughter to her own bed, shooing off the nanny who moved forward to help him. He could handle this; after all, she was already dressed for bed.

By the time he settled her down into the bed, covered her up and tucked her securely in place, he took a seat on the edge of the bed. He was quite content to stay there a moment, his ankle throbbing.

She fidgeted under her covers, clearly wanting to ask for something but seemed a little unsure of asking, gazing up at him. “Daddy…? I mean, Mr. Warrington, sir…?”

“Yes, Lady Alyssa?” He looked at her. He was getting used to the thought of being called daddy by this redheaded little imp, but he still didn’t think that he was good enough to be trying to raise such a special and talented little girl.

“I heard Angel’s papa singing her a song when he put her to bed the other night… could… you do that for me…?” she asked hopefully.

Jerrod looked surprised at the request, but frowned slightly. “I don’t know any proper lullabies, my little Lady…” he admitted.

“Oh, come now Jerrod, you’re bound to know one or two…” another voice broke in. Jerrod turned to see George standing leaning on the doorframe. “Go on, she needs something to help her sleep. Sing her something.”

Warrington instantly went on the defensive, scowling at him. “I don’t sing. Even if I did, I don’t know any that are suitable…”

“Let her be the judge. She just wants you to be here a few moments longer, that’s all…” George reasoned.

Jerrod frowned at him, and then sighed. “Oh all right, curse it all.” He grumbled. He sighed and closed his eyes a moment, clearly struggling to pull up a very distant memory. “This isn’t really a suitable lullaby but I really don’t know any others.” He said in a vague defense before he began to sing. “My father used to sing it to me, some nights, when I was little.”

Alyssa watched him intently, clearly focused on his every word and movement. Ignoring George where he lurked behind him somewhere near the doorway, Jerrod tugged the blanket up a bit more over Alyssa’s chest and tucked in the sides, beginning to hum a soft tune. He began to sing for the
girl, more of a talking blues than anything that George would actually tuneful singing. That didn’t matter; Alyssa listened with rapt happiness shining in her eyes.

My dear, close your eyes for I’ve got a surprise, and I think it’s high time that I told you; This may fill you with fear but the demons are here and they’re dreaming of naughty child fondue. If you stir from your sheets, they will have such a treat; they will swallow you down like a bonbon. To avoid such an end, dear I must recommend that you stay in your bed until past dawn.

Down under your bed.
The demons it’s said want to make you quite dead; it’s not that they’re evil they’re just underfed.

Demons under your bed

Now here’s something more I’ve not told you before, my darling you once had a sister. She was sugar and spice, she was everything nice, and the demons could barely resist her. Now I’m sorry to say that we got up one day to discover we were down a daughter. So please heed my advice, you had better think twice before getting up to get some water.

Demons under your bed
The demons its said lurk until night has fled; with visions of eating you filling their heads,

Demons under your bed

And here’s something more, piled all over your floor and hidden from view there are land mines. So if you should step wrong you won’t have very long to be sorry you doubted my designs. Sure I planted the bombs, but don’t call for your mom, she’s the one who invited the demons, Now my dear hush-a-by, go to sleep, don’t you cry, or the demons won't wait 'till your dreamin'

Down under your bed,
The demons that fed on my father -- he's dead -- he fell on a mine and they ate him instead

Demons under your bed

Down under your bed,
The demons it’s said may not wait till you’re dead; so if I were you I’d be sleeping instead.

Demons under your bed, down under your bed.

***Author’s note: This song is by Tom Smith – it’s called Close Your Eyes. This can be found (along with other great songs) on TomSmith.com***

Warrington gazed down at her; even after that tune of impending death and mayhem she was smiling up at him happily, eyelids drooping, as she was nearly asleep. He brushed a bit of hair off her forehead and gave her a faint smile. “Good night, now. Stay in bed, you hear?”

“Yes daddy.” She answered, waiting for him to correct her and tell her for the thousandth time that he was only her teacher. To her pleasure he only smiled as he rose from the bed with a bit of a wince and did not deny the fact that he was and always would be her father.

“Good night, my little Lady.” He said, turning to go out of the room.

George was completely flabbergasted by the song he’d just heard sung to his daughter. He stalked after Warrington, following him down the hallway. “What the bloody hell kind of a lullaby was that?” he asked in a quiet tone.

“My father’s favorite lullaby.” He shrugged.

“Lullabies are supposed to put them to sleep not put them in terror of their lives! You put that girl to sleep with visions of fanged beasts lurking under her bed!”
“Nonsense; they’re only dangerous if she was naughty. She tries very hard not to be, or haven’t you noticed that?” Jerrod answered, limping as he pushed past the other man.

“Of course I have, but…”

“But nothing. She’s gone to bed without a fight or an argument. She’s in her own bed, not laying at the feet of those other two. That’s what Malfoy wants and he’s the boss, and her new independence is all the better for her. Right?”

“No, it’s not all right! Bloody hell, Jerrod, that song would give a grown wizard horrible nightmares and from what I understand Severus had to work with her to enable her to get rid of her last nightmares!”

Warrington rolled his eyes at that, moving down the hallway with George doggedly following along only half a step behind. “Oh come on, George, you insisted I sing the girl something! It’s just a song. And I swear to you my father used to sing it to me every night that he wanted to be alone with my mother.”

“That makes it better?!”

“No, but it makes it plausible. She was a siren; some of the creatures she knew could be thought of as demons. I believed every word of that song when I was a kid, at least until I learned impervious charms to keep things out from under the bed. You’d be amazed how clean it can be under a bed when you’re trying to make sure nothing can hide there.” Jerrod smirked.

“I’d bet it was… you couldn’t have fit anything under my bed when I was a kid.”

Jerrod chortled a bit at that admission. “I can truly believe that, having been in the back of your shop.”

George couldn’t help but chuckle at that. “It’s not so bad; we know where everything is, Fred and me. You’re more than welcome to come over and help me organize it sometime.”

“Thanks for the offer, Weasley, but I have far too much work to do here.” He said, turning down the hall for his lab.

He halted, scowling slightly when George reached out and caught him by the sleeve. “You’ve completed what Malfoy needed of you. Take an evening off. There’s nothing you have working in that blasted lab that needs tending at this very moment.”

Warrington’s look became mistrustful. “And what do you propose that I do with my evening instead?”

George wrestled down his instinct to propose something indecent or pounce on the man; he was absolutely certain that sex was not what Jerrod had in mind at all when he asked that innocuous question. Instead, he simply shrugged. “Just sit and chat with me. Have a drink and unwind.” He suggested.

“A drink. With you?” He asked, suspicion growing.

“Yes, a drink with me. Why not? I swear to Merlin that I won’t do anything. May all my hair fall out if I do.” George said firmly, flashing Jerrod a winning smile.

Warrington sighed, knowing he’d be nothing short of an ass if he refused. “All right, I suppose. But the only bar I know of is in Lucius’ study and I don’t go invading people’s private spaces. I suppose
I could have the house elves bring us something…”

“No need to bother even the house elves; there’s a bar in your room. I take it you haven’t you found it yet?” George said, releasing his hold on the man’s sleeve. He turned and walked side-by-side with him back to where his room was, near the room of the dark circle kids. He moved to the bookshelf and drew his wand, waving it at the upper shelves. They slid forward and separated, the books squeezing into an impossible slim space as they folded outward to show a bar made of carved wood and crystal backlit by mage lights that came on when it was opened. The bar had three shelves of alcohol, well stocked by anyone’s standards. “Draco has one like it in his room; Harry showed it to me a week or so ago.”

“Well I’ll be damned.” Jerrod mused, moving to gaze at the selections.

A few drinks later and the two were relaxed in the two chairs near the fire in quiet companionable silence. Jerrod glanced at George, feeling a little uneasy; taking another sip of the amber firewhiskey that was deceptively smooth. Lucius spared no expense on anything; even alcohol for a mere servant was of a very high quality. He worked up his courage to ask and simply stated what had been on his mind. “So, George, what exactly is it you want of me?” he asked quietly.

Taken by surprise by that question, George gazed back at him. “Well I should think you’d get the hint by now, but I’m patient…”

That got him irritated. “Get what hint? Merlin, all you do is hang about all day long and I don’t know how the blazes you get a lick of work done…” Jerrod grumbled.

“I get what I need done.” George answered smoothly.

“And you’re avoiding the question, Weasley.” Jerrod said, scowling at him again.

George took a deep breath, and then let it out. “I’ve tried to be obvious about it but you’re clearly worse off than my baby brother when it comes to relations and relationships. Hermione practically had to beat him over the head before he realized she even liked him…” he smirked, and then looked at him directly.

“I like you Jerrod. I think we could make a go of it…”

“A go of it…?” Jerrod repeated, and then he flushed, understanding finally. George was proposing him!! He shook his head. “It’s not possible, Weasley! I told you, I’m into birds, I…”

George just smiled patiently. “Yes, yes, I’ve heard it all before. But have you given blokes a try? Honestly there’s not much difference if the two involved care about each other.”

“I don’t care about anyone but the kids.” Warrington shot back. “They’re my focus and that’s all I need; and I can assure you that I don’t intend to have a relationship with any of them.”

George smirked. “That’s not what I meant and you know it.” he answered. “I was trying to get you to think more along the lines of Draco and Harry.”

He was confused again. “I am not Harry Potter.”

“And I’m not Draco Malfoy. But why does that keep you from even considering that you might have feelings for me?” George asked.

Warrington began to answer but found he hesitated. Why the hell was he so damned certain that he had feelings for him? “I… I don’t know, Weasley, just… I just can’t answer you. I’m not interested
“Not interested right now. I’m not talking something temporary, Warrington. We share a child. To me that’s a really strange thing…”

“Strange?”

“Yes… I never thought I’d have a kid with someone I never slept with.” He answered with a smirk.

“It was a scientific process…”

“Still a child.” He interrupted. “Don’t get me wrong, Jerrod, I think she’s amazing. She’s a stunning little girl, and her voice can take your breath away. She’s smart, and she’s so willing to do anything she can to just be a happy little girl. I’ve been here to spend some time with her in the past few days and she’s just so envious of Angel…”

“Angel? Why?”

“She has a family.” George answered, gazing at his drink. “She has two parents who love her dearly and would do anything to take care of her. Our little girl wants that too…”

“I don’t have any parents to share with her, I don’t understand what it is you expect from me.”

“Just give it a chance, would you?” George asked, setting his drink aside on the table. “Listen to me. Talk to me. Tell me some of what you’ve gone through to make you feel the way you do.”

Jerrod folded his arms, clearly closing himself off. He was not comfortable with this conversation at all.

“I’m not used to sharing shit like that, Weasley.”

“Go ahead and try it; you’d get a nasty surprise or two.” Jerrod glared at him.

That comment made the red-haired wizard laugh softly. “I have absolutely no intention of doing any such thing. I know what happened to Severus Snape when he did that to one of the kids; I could only guess what would happen to someone trying the same thing on you.”

“You know, Weasley, you’re smarter than you look.” He snorted, trying a backhanded insult.

George simply rolled with it, refusing to be insulted. “I know; it’s the key to my success. If they underestimate you they don’t watch you too closely.” He smirked. Jerrod looked at him oddly, and he couldn’t help but laugh again. “Come on, Jerrod, you’ve got to admit that you’ve used it to your advantage too.”

“I have.” He admitted, still scowling. He snorted and looked away. “You don’t make any sense, Weasley.”

“Perhaps not… but I’ve been told that things don’t always have to make sense.” George shrugged non-committally.

“I’m not going to be bullied into a relationship.” Warrington said immediately.

“And who’s bullying you? I’m just having a drink with you, and letting you know I want to learn more about you, and I’d like you to learn more about me.”
“Learn about me? Now there’s a waste of time; there’s nothing to learn. I’m just the guy that everyone uses. I’m a handy tool.” He shrugged.

“That’s the face you like to present to the world; there’s nothing interesting about me, go about your business and pretend I don’t exist.” He shook his head. “Oh, no, there’s a lot more there.” George argued.

“So tell me what the bloody hell is so interesting about me?” Jerrod challenged.

“I’ll leave out the fact of your looks because I think you’d likely throw that drink at me if I said it.” George grinned. “But there’s plenty more about you to be said. You found ways around your magical bindings to help people. You didn’t simply destroy the bodies of those who died. You could have just allowed yourself to be killed but instead you decided to help these kids have a real life…”

Jerrod grunted and looked away. “That’s nothing special, Weasley. You probably already know this, but I’m bound to them. Not just physically but emotionally as well. And I don’t have the luxury of having a choice whether to protect them or not, it’s an impulse now. I just do it.”

“That may be true, but I think there’s a lot more to it than that. What I’d like to know is why you allowed yourself to be bound to someone as clearly loopy as Malcolm Parkinson was…”

He thought for a long moment and then decided that there was no harm in telling George about it. Parkinson was a dead man, Malfoy would see to that. He sighed and relaxed back in his chair. “Now that’s a long and boring tale. Are you sure you want to get into all that?”

“I’m sure.” He assured, watching the other man’s reactions and feeling quite encouraged in his quest. Jerrod wasn’t rejecting him outright and that was a massive step forward for the man.

Jerrod frowned thoughtfully. “It was a mistake, really…” he said and then paused to finish off his glass. George tilted the decanter into his cup again and gave him a bit more. “I wasn’t looking to be bound to anyone. I was just at loose ends, really, in between this and that. Everyone I went to Hogwarts with was sure that I was a Death Eater because I was a Slytherin and on the crew with that Umbridge hag…”

“Yep, I remember that. You were a bit of a prat…”

“And you weren’t much better… though those fireworks you set off the last day you were there were actually quite stunning.”

George chuckled. “I loved how the dragon chased her all the way out of the Great Hall.”

“Priceless.” He agreed with a chuckle. “Anyway; I was having a lot of trouble finding any kind of job that I wanted to do. I met with that German bloke Bebel; he told me I’d be working to help him with potions. Sounded like something I’d like to do so I signed on… but I didn’t know the pen he gave me to sign was the kind that uses your own blood to bind you to the word of the contract.”

“What were you bound to do?”

“Nothing bad at first; he introduced me to Parkinson and he seemed to be a sane enough bloke when things were going his way. He wasn’t doing anything anyone would call illegal back then, but he had a challenge for me. I was bound by my blood signature to a geas; I couldn’t focus on anything else until I figured out how to make children invisible to the potion that details heredity.”

“Couldn’t even ask why he wanted it…?”
“No. I couldn’t ask anyone anything except to ask for more components. I was given free rein in a fully stocked lab, provided anything and everything I could imagine to work with, and I think they reinforced the compulsion on me daily because I don’t even remember the passing of time…”

George frowned. “Sounds like something Parkinson would do. Obviously you managed it, or the kids would have shown up…”

“It took me four years to finally get something that worked, took me another year to make it fully effective and permanent. During that time, somewhere, somehow… I don’t even really remember being bound to Malcolm… I vaguely recall something about needing to get back inside the lab. All I’m really sure of is that when I finished my work and the compulsion was lifted, I was bound to Malcolm’s command.”

“What a completely dirty, underhanded, manipulative bastard.” George growled.

“He was all that and more, but he was really the first person who believed that I could do something more than be cannon fodder.” He answered, setting the glass down, knowing he was more than a bit drunk at the moment. “Look… I think I should go on to bed myself, if you don’t mind…?”

“Oh, of course.” The red-headed wizard said, setting his glass down and rising to his feet. “I should head to the shop and see if Fred needs me to do anything…”

“How about three or four hours of cleaning?” Jerrod suggested with a smirk as he rose as well. He hissed in pain as his ankle gave way, when he collapsed and George was there to catch him.

“Easy there mate…” he murmured worriedly. “You’re doing too damned much on that ankle…”

“Its nothing, I’m fine…” he answered, trying to push away and straighten up, but his ankle simply refused to hold any weight at all. “Bloody buggering hell…” he growled, forced to cling to George for balance.

“Come on, you’re going to bed.” George said firmly, pulling Jerrod’s arm around his shoulders and ignoring any arguments.

“I’m a big boy I can put myself to bed.” Jerrod objected.

George only chuckled. “I’m sure you can, but you have had more than a bit to drink. Come on, I promise you’ll sleep alone, not that I WANT you to…”

“Alone will be just fine, Weasley.” He snorted but did allow George to help him hobble to the bed.

“I think we should call for the healers to come and look at your ankle again…”

“No need.” Jerrod sighed; lying back on his bed with his eyes closed a long moment. “This really isn’t anything new.”

“What…?”

“I told you. People considered me cannon fodder. Its an old injury now, Pansy just aggravated it a little too much and… well, sometimes it just won’t support my weight at all.” He admitted. George gazed at the man with more respect in his eyes than before. That only made Jerrod all the more uncomfortable and irritated. “I told you, its nothing…!” he insisted.

George set to work; either way this man needed to go to sleep. There was a lot more he’d like to ask and find out about Jerrod, such as where all those scars on his back had come from, but clearly that
was going to have to wait until the other man trusted him a lot more. “Well I’m going to ice down that ‘nothing’ and send for the healer anyway. Maybe something can be done and maybe not…” he spoke louder to be heard over Jerrod’s objections as he unlaced the other man’s boots, “…but you’re still going to be seen!”

“Bloody hell, Weasley, I really don’t need to be mothered that badly…”

“I think perhaps you do.” George retorted, carefully loosening the boot before even trying to ease the boot off.

“Ow! Stop! Leave the bloody thing on!” Jerrod hissed through clenched teeth.

“Okay okay, sorry…” George mumbled, leaving it alone. It shouldn’t be that bad; there was no way he wasn’t calling a medi-wizard now. He drew his wand and used it to make the boot several sizes larger before trying again, this time managing to ease the thing off the injured foot. “

“You WILL put that back to rights, Weasley; I’m lousy at that damned sizing spell…” Jerrod grumbled.

“Worried about these natty old boots, are you? How old are these things anyway?” he asked, eyeing the boot. The soles were worn down to almost nothing, the heel worn at a slight angle. The top of the boot had several tiny holes burned nearly through the leather, but none went completely through.

“They look ancient.”

“They were a gift from my father.” He retorted sarcastically. “Just fix the damned thing.”

George chuckled softly. “I’d rather just buy you a new pair.”

“I don’t want you to buy me new boots, these are fine…”

“One of these days you’re going to get a toxic ingredient to bleed right through these holes and into your skin. You need better boots.”

“I don’t have the time or the luxury to go shopping.”

“You live with Lucius Malfoy. The shopkeepers will bring the entire bloody boot shop HERE to sell you boots!” George chuckled. “You need dragon-skin boots.”

“I know, but…”

“But nothing. Even if you don’t want to be with me, you seem to be finally accepting Alyssa. She needs you to be here while she grows up; I’m buying you boots.” George said as he tossed the now oversized boot aside.

“Just boots. And only if you get Alyssa some too.” He returned.

“Now that’s not a problem.” George smiled at him, removing his other boot. “But do you really think she’ll wear them? They won’t exactly go with the clothes she usually wears.”

“Black boots can go with anything, can’t they? Hell, I’m the last one you should ask about fashion; I’m useless with that. I just wear my robes and that’s good enough for me. I’m not out to impress anyone.”

“I like the simplicity of what you wear; something complicated would look almost comical on you. But I think you should be wearing lighter colors, maybe something to go with your eyes…” George
commented.

“I’m not THAT drunk, Weasley.” Jerrod growled warningly, but he was blushing at the compliment. “Go on, go home and go to bed or whatever; I’m in bed and I can handle the rest of this on my own…”

“That’s never worked for you before, what makes you think it’s going to work now?” George grinned, but he did step back. "I'm still calling a healer for you." Jerrod sighed and did not argue the point any further.
Safe At Last

Author's notes: Pansy and Malfoy Parkinson, stealing sperm from unsuspecting wizards and creating their own little personal army, have been killed. The specially created children, the Dark Circle, have so many things to un-learn in order to become normal children that the task is daunting. Hermione still awaits her fate at the hands of the Wizengamot for her participation in the scheme. Safe at home, at last.

Harry sighed as he glanced at Lucius and Ron. His school chum looked exhausted and pale, every freckle standing out against his sunburned face. He was sure that Ron had been injured in that duel but he had been too stubborn to leave. He was determined to make Ron stay at the manor with a sleeping potion and a healing potion to boot.

Lucius seemed all right; he didn't know where that man got all his energy from at his age. It had to be because the man had long ago learned to hide any weakness whatsoever as a rather effective defense. Weakness made you a target and Lucius was not willing to be any sort of a target at all.

It seemed like an eternity ago that they had apparated away from the hidden bunker in the Snidget reserve. They had apparated once more before they had arrived in this small town just outside of Athens. Harry felt like his energy was running almost on empty and he could easily just collapse in bed and sleep for a week.

"We're using the floo network from here to get the rest of the way?" Harry asked as they entered the establishment. It was a clothing shop for men, and clearly catered to muggles purchasing high-end clothing.

Lucius glanced about at the suits with clear distaste, heading for the back. The clerk started their way but when Lucius drew his wand the man stopped and didn't even bother to watch as Lucius touched several diamonds on the wallpaper. Harry noticed it was the same pattern as the one used in the Leaky Cauldron in England to access Diagon Alley. A doorway flipped open, simply swinging inward to expose a plush room with several chairs and a table, and a large, walk-in fireplace. Lucius grunted slightly in approval and led the way inside; the door snapped shut audibly behind them.

"We will be using their fireplace to use the Floo Network, yes. But we will not be returning home." He answered.

"Not going home...? Why the bloody hell not?" Ron asked, irritable and wanting nothing more than to get back. "Haven't we done enough for the day?"

"Because, Mr. Weasley, Harry and I had a blood feud on file," Lucius answered. "We must go to the Ministry of Magic, immediately."

"The Ministry...?" Now Harry was confused.

Ron, on the other hand, seemed to suddenly recall something. "Oh... I've never filed one so I forgot about that bit..." he admitted, abashed.

Glancing from one to the other, Harry asked, "What bit? Is anyone going to bother filling me in?"

"Oh; sorry mate.” Ron looked properly apologetic. “You see, when you have a blood feud filed with the Ministry and you... well, you solve it by catching them, you have to go to the Ministry and have
your memories copied." Ron explained.

His explanation didn't help. "Why would they want memories of that?" He asked, still confused.

"Think about it, Potter." Lucius said in a tone dripping with sarcasm. "Why WOULD they want the memories?"

"Not for entertainment value." Ron mumbled. "That's for damned sure..." Thinking about the little he had seen was enough to make his stomach roll again.

"That would depend upon the wizard viewing it, Mr. Weasley. I assure you some would be quite entertained." Lucius smirked at him, amused that the redhead was so squeamish even after having fought in a war. He then returned his attention to Harry for a moment as he reached to pick up a container on the mantle; a golden urn traced about with scrolled etchings. "Of course, you would have known this had you been raised in a wizarding household instead of that muggle hellhole you grew up in."

"It may have been hell but it had its advantages, I've learned." Harry shrugged. There was no changing the past no matter how much all of them would have loved to do so. He’d long ago learned to look for the bright bits in his upbringing, as few and far between as they had been.


Irritated that Lucius had not bothered to explain yet, Harry took a handful of powder and followed. Ron was close behind, knowing he really had no choice as a witness to the blood feud. He would probably be questioned as well for his encounter with that straw-haired idiot too...

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Lucius awaited them at the other side, fastidiously dusting off his robes, standing just outside one of the ornate black tile fireplaces in the grandly ostentatious entry hall of the Ministry of Magic. Harry moved to him but did not have to ask for further explanation. "The ministry takes the memories, Harry, and they are broadcast for all to see." He told him calmly.

"...broadcast...?" Harry repeated in a shocked tone. Everyone he knew was going to see what he and Lucius had done to Parkinson...? Sure, he had deserved every moment of that but...

"Yes, Potter. Broadcast. What better way to let the wizarding world know what may happen if they have a blood feud filed upon them and they do not turn themselves in to the Ministry? I personally can't think of a better deterrent." Lucius smiled wickedly.

"It also stops things like what happened on the Isle of Drear..." Ron spoke up softly.

"Now I've heard of that place… isn't that where the Quintapeds are...?"

"Yes; their very existence is a result of a wizarding blood feud gone bad. Because the feud was not registered nor monitored, two very old wizarding families were completely destroyed. The island isn't safe for anyone else to live on and it has been made unplottable so that no one will find their way there, since the Quintapeds began to eat anyone who happened upon their island. Following that fiasco, the Ministry established their new guidelines so that it was clear once the feud was settled there would be no further retaliations." Lucius led them through the dark hallways to the lift.

"But... broadcast it...?" Harry wasn't happy about that but if it stopped others from trying the insanity
that Malcolm had done, it would be worth it.

The lift stopped at a floor and the gate opened to a witch in her mid-thirties, near the age of the younger men. Lucius, standing just inside the opened gate of the lift, simply gave the witch a glare down his long nose and did not so much as step aside.

The woman took a step back and waved them on, indicating she would take the next lift without a word, her eyes wide. Lucius allowed himself a self-satisfied smirk as the gate closed once more.

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Minister McLaggen was sent for immediately when the wizard at the desk that registered and tracked blood feuds realized who they were. They were forced to wait until he showed up, clearly hurriedly dressed but still nearly immaculate.

"Got him, did you? Bloody good show, gentlemen!" He beamed at them, nudging aside the man who had occupied the desk in the small office and taking his chair. His smile faltered at Lucius' completely flat, expressionless face.

"We are here, Minister," Lucius said in a cool tone, eyes slightly narrowed, “…as required by the Wizarding Blood Feud code to submit our memories for viewing. We are not here to garner your praise, nor are we here expecting idle and meaningless conversations, I assure you."

The Minister flushed slightly at the implied insult but instead forced himself to continue to smile. "Oh, of course, yes. I realize you must be positively dead on your feet after all of that…” he said in an overly paternal tone.

"I assure you, sir, that we are quite able to defend ourselves, should the need arise..” Lucius said, scowling at him.

That flustered the Minister even more. “Yes, um… well, Fletcher, do make yourself useful and fetch the phials, there’s a good man." McLaggen turned his attention to the task at hand, addressing the man whose office they had usurped. The Ministry employee hurried over to a cabinet, opening it and extracting two phials, returning them to the Minister, who took them with a flourish. "Ah, here we are..."

Lucius moved to the only chair that faced the desk and swept his robes aside, taking a seat and making it seem every bit like that simple chair was a throne. "I have no patience with you and your petty attempts at cosseting. Stop wasting our time and let us get this over with; I wish to see to the health of my wife and granddaughter." he growled.

"Now we must do this properly Lucius!" McLaggen scolded, trying to seem like he was being firm and in control of the situation but instead coming off as simply annoying.

"Mr. Malfoy, if you don't mind." Lucius answered with a scowl at the minister.

“As Minister of Magic you really ought to be more respectful to the members of the community, McLaggen.” Ron commented, looking exhausted and irritated at the delay. He didn’t feel well at all and standing here was just making him more irritable by the moment.

The Minister looked over at him, irritated by the interruption. "THANK you, Mr. Weasley, I am quite aware…!"

“Get on with it!” Lucius snapped, immediately catching his attention again.
“One moment, Mr. Malfoy!” he said, flustered and growing a bit confused. “Mr. Weasley, you had no blood feud, did you…?” He glanced at the clerk, who shook his head to indicate that there had been no filing with the Ministry by anyone in the Weasley clan.

“Don’t be daft; I had no reason to file…”

“Mr. Weasley was not involved in the culmination of the blood feud!” Lucius was growing angry enough to allow irritation to show on his cool expression.

McLaggen’s attention was snapped back to Lucius at his comment. “Then why is he here?” he demanded.

“I captured a baby-rapist!” Ron growled at the man, wondering if the man was going to get whiplash soon from snapping his head from person to person as each individual spoke. “I thought I might have to talk to an Auror or something. I’d much rather be home if you want to know the truth!”

“Fletcher, send for an Auror to speak to Mr. Weasley immediately. He should not be here for the extraction…”

“I was there for the real thing; it seems absolutely inane and ignorant to make me leave to draw out a memory.” Ron snarked, turning away and reaching for the door. He was heartily sick of McLaggen pretending like he was so superior to everyone else in the room. “But I’ll wait outside if it will make you hurry up.” Fletcher, just ahead of Ron, slipped out the door quickly and Ron glanced back. “Guess I’ll see you later Harry…”

“You will go to the mansion, Mr. Weasley; I wish to assure that you are attended to by my own medi-wizard.” Lucius instructed firmly.

Ron looked surprised, and then shrugged. “If you’re sure…”

Lucius returned his attention to the Minister; he had no reason to reassure Ron that he was, of course, certain. “Can we get on with this, Minister?” He demanded as Ron moved out of the room and quietly shut the door behind him.

It was nearly two hours later when they were allowed to leave. Minister McLaggen himself was the one to draw out the memories and preview each one; by the time he was finished he looked even sicker than Ron had just before he threw up the first time. McLaggen’s hands shook slightly as he prepared the document to confirm the death of Malcolm Parkinson. “I think that we can all agree that this feud has been completed tonight…” he murmured.

“On that subject, you are vastly mistaken.” Lucius answered with a sneer. “What gives you the idea that I wish to close this Blood Feud?”

The minister was taken aback for a few moments, mouthing words but nothing came out. Finally he found his voice. “What…? But Malcolm Parkinson and Pansy are both dead…”

“A fact that I am quite pleased to state that I am aware of, Minister.” Lucius couldn’t help but smirk. “But there is no way that you will get my signature or seal on any document that closes this feud.”

McLaggen paled further. “But Parkinson and his daughter are gone… who do you plan to go after…”?

Malfoy’s smile turned deadly. “There will be no Parkinson family tree beyond this generation. You see, Minister, I have the right and fully intend to kill that tree; every branch, limb and root.”
“But the other members of his family… you can’t do that, it crosses the lines into other wizarding families!” the Minister objected, flabbergasted.

“You sound as if I have not considered that fact. I know who his family members are. And I will NOT allow any of them to repeat the madness of the head of that clan.” Lucius gathered his robes about him and turned for the door. “My registered blood feud was with the ENTIRE Parkinson clan, including any who are related to him but have married into other names. I can assure you, I will act swiftly and without hesitation to quell any insanity I see crop up in any of them.” He said coldly.

Harry found that he had no greater amusement at that point than the completely gob-smacked expression on the Minister of Magic’s face.

“When will the viewing be?” Lucius asked, not bothering to give the Minister any time to recover and thoroughly enjoying his discomfiture. “I’m assuming it will be broadcast at a full panel of the Wizengamot?”

“Oh, yes; that is, after all, the law.” The Minister said, trying to gather his wits once more.

“Full panel?” Harry repeated.

“Of course. As well as anyone else that is interested in seeing the memories…” the Minister said, taking the memory bottles and carefully placing them down on the desk. “The announcement for the viewing will be advertised in all the major newspapers, and of course as a headline in the Daily Prophet itself. The viewing will be precisely a week from today.”

“We shall be there.” Lucius said, striding out of the room with a flourish of his robes. Harry followed, much more subdued now. There was to be a full public viewing of the memory in front of the entire Wizengamot and he would have to be there...

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Ron had been ushered off by a team of two young Aurors. He couldn’t help but think how bloody young these two seemed; neither of them even looked old enough to have finished Hogwarts much less the arduous training required of Aurors. It was clear that he might even be their first case. He was questioned for what felt like hours and the questions just repeated over and over. He had been bone-tired and aching from that duel when he had gotten here, and now he was exhausted and his patience was completely gone. This was all taking far too long.

“Hold up, hold up, would you…?” He interrupted the current question which he was sure that he had already heard three times.

Both of them looked at him with expressions of clear suspicion. “It’s not normal to allow you to speak without us asking a question sir…”

“I may have crapped out of it all, but I did go through some Auror training.” Ron answered, feeling cross and really not in any mood to be polite to these two. “I promise you I do know the procedure and you’re in the wrong here. I haven’t done anything I shouldn’t have and you’re going overboard. I’m trying to keep you from embarrassing yourself.”

“What are you saying…?”

“Bring me your supervisor. Please. Before I bloody well go insane in this mad little room.” Ron answered. To his great relief, one remained to monitor him as if he was some wanted fugitive while the other scampered off.
He returned with someone that the redhead wizard was quite happy to see; Kingsley Shacklebolt. "Weasley? I did not realize you were involved in all this..." He commented with a bit of surprise.

"I'm not... but I have to admit I'm surprised to see you here. I thought you had retired..." Ron commented.

Kingsley snorted and smirked at that comment. "Semi-retired. I get to come back and get my hands into whatever interests me... and this entire episode with these children is quite interesting." he admitted. "So how exactly are you involved in all of this?"

"Didn't touch the feud, sir; I only stood guard, and it was a damned good thing I did. Could you just pull the memories so I can go home? I'm exhausted and I ache all over and I might just fall asleep in this stupid hard chair if you don't let me go soon..."

"I will handle this; you two go find another case to handle.” He assured. The two reluctantly left and Shacklebolt laughed softly after the door closed. “The new recruits are so enthusiastic, aren't they?"

"Like a pair of excited corgi puppies with their first chew toy." Ron smirked back at him. "But I've been gnawed enough..."

"Indeed." Kingsley smiled in agreement.

"Was I that bad...?"

“If you had finished the training program I think you would have been infinitely worse, if one considers your brothers as an example…” The older man chuckled and used his wand skillfully to extract the necessary memories. "There we are... and you do look like you need to see a healer, Mr. Weasley.” He said with a bit of concern.

"I will... I need to because I have practice tomorrow afternoon... Merlin, I hope I'm up to it...” he sighed, rising with a grimace of discomfort, hesitating a moment before he straightened fully.

"See the healer, sleep, then decide if you should go practice." He advised, rising with a wince of his own. “I'll deal with the two who were interviewing you later; right now I think we each need to head home…”

“Not home for me; I'm to go to the Malfoy manor.” Ron said, rising and walking out the door with Kingsley.

“Malfoy Manor...? By Lucius’ request, I hope?”

“Yeah... feels weird. Not sure if I want to go there tonight, honestly.” Ron grinned softly.

“Go… you may never have this particular chance at Malfoy hospitality again.” Kingsley chuckled softly.

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When they arrived back at the manor, Hermione was sitting in the Floo room beside the fireplace, half dozing. She woke and sat up slightly but Lucius brushed past her without a second glance.

Harry gave her a reassuring smile. "Ron ought to be along soon. Glad to see they let you stay and wait..."

"Tonks wanted to wait for Severus to get back. And he's refusing to leave so she is as well." she said
with a wry smile. "I'd much rather be here anyway, as long as I'm allowed... the ministry room they
gave me is making me claustrophobic and there's absolutely NOTHING to do..." Her voice trembled
slightly as she described her 'safe' room.

"Well put it out of your mind for now; you're in Malfoy Manor for the night at least." Harry said
reassuringly. "I need to go see Dray..."

"Of course... I'll stay out of the way, I swear." she said softly, lowering her eyes. She still wasn't sure
at all where she stood with him.

"Ron will be along soon." Harry said, walking off and leaving her to relax back into the chair.

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Lucius left the others to their own devices and strode briskly through the halls. He paused outside
Angel’s door only a moment; he wished to see that she was well. She was in her bed and seemed to
be sleeping quite peacefully with the doll that he had bought her hugged close to her chest and her
kneazle curled up on the pillow beside her head. The kit raised its head from the pillow, clearly alert,
eyed him back a moment then laid her head back on the pillow. Satisfied, he quietly moved out of
the room and headed onward.

He went by his own bedroom to see that Narcissa was not inside; that brought him some relief. She
was well enough to be up; he knew that the medi-wizard would never have allowed her to be up and
about if she was as injured as he had feared she was. He moved to the nursery door and paused a
long moment to simply watch.

Narcissa was seated in the large rocker near the window, the panes of glass thrown open to the
gentle evening breezes, the white wispy draperies drifting lightly. She had one of the twins on either
side of her in their little bassinets, rocking them as she sang softly to them.

“I don’t think I would ever tire of seeing this scene…” Lucius murmured softly. Narcissa looked up
at his speaking and smiled. As he approached her he looked at her critically. She looked exhausted
but did not look as she had when he had left her in the care of Severus. And she seemed to be
looking at him…

“You don’t have to. We want you here, Lucius.” She said, smiling at him welcomeingly. “I’ve only
just come from the nursery and kissing our young men goodnight.”

“Mallek and Alerick…?”

“Yes. Mallek would have nothing less.” She laughed softly.

Lucius moved to her and she rose to meet him. He paused, one hand resting on her cheek as he
gazed at her. “Your vision…?”

“Restored.” She smiled at him.

“I must remember to give that man an extra bit in his monthly stipend for his efficiency...”

“Our Medi-wizard didn't have the chance to treat me. He was held up by a complicated birth and by
the time he got here I had already been cured." She answered.

"Then who did...? Severus...?"

"No, it was someone I did not expect. It was Mallek."
"How did Mallek cure your eyes?"

"Severus said it was a curse that had taken my vision, not a spell or any type of damage. And Mallek, it seems, has the innate ability to reverse curses." She said, smiling, one hand covering his.

He kissed her gently, and then gathered her into a brief embrace. "How did he manage this...?"

"You know how our little Mallek gets when he wants something. He wanted a kiss before bed, and when he realized I could not see him he decided that the thing he wanted most was just to have me look at him. The medi-wizard made it in shortly after this occurred.

"He checked you?"

"Of course, Lucius. He did a quite thorough exam and had me take another healing potion before he announced that I would be fine. He said that he had heard of the ability before but it was very rare; Mallek had used his innate ability to not only nullify the curse, he managed to reverse its effects as well."

"Really?" he asked with a wide smile. "Something we'll need to get him trained in controlling, I'm certain. Brilliant." he smiled, glancing down at the twins. They were sleeping quietly in their beds. He turned and guided her out of the room. "But for now, our family is safe and all in their beds, our home is protected, and I want you to come with me for a long soak in the tub then a very long, undisturbed rest..."

"As long as the babies stay asleep." Narcissa agreed, moving with him.

Hermione woke from her light doze as the fireplace flared with green flames once more and Ron stumbled out a bit unsteadily. "Dammit..." he grumbled, catching the edge of the fireplace to regain his balance.

Hermione rose quickly and moved to help him, looking worried. "Ron... are you all right...?"

"Mione?" he looked at her with clear surprise. "You're still here?"

"Obviously." She answered, eyeing him with clear concern. "Ron what happened...?"

"I guess you could say I was playing Auror..." he said sheepishly. "I'm all right, I guess..."

"No, you really aren't." She scowled at him. "Playing Auror... what got into you?" She asked as he straightened up.

"Had to. Harry and Mr. Malfoy were... well, they were too busy to look out for anyone coming, so I did it." He shrugged as if it had been nothing.

They both jumped at the loud popping noise that signaled the arrival of a house elf; the creature stepped toward them to get their attention. "Master Malfoy says redhead wizard must be tended by medi-wizard and redhead wizard will be having room to rest tonight." The creature told them, eyeing Ron.

"Yeah, he told me that... just show me where to go." Ron agreed.

"You is being too weak to being walking." the elf sniffed disapprovingly, reaching for him. The elf's hand touched his pant leg and there was another loud pop; Hermione was left standing alone by the
fireplace.

By the time she tracked down a house elf to take her to Ron again, he was already changed and settled in bed, the Medi-wizard putting his things back in his bag. He looked up as she approached. "Ah, I was wondering when they'd get you in here..." the trained healer smiled at her.

"I think they were keeping me out on purpose..."

"Probably. Malfoy's house elves are very efficient, if they'd wanted you in here while I was here they'd have brought you along with him." he chuckled softly.

Hermione moved to the bedside; Ron seemed to be dozing. "Is he all right...?" she asked softly.

"Yes, but I would not recommend that he go to practice tomorrow, and I have told him so. He is a Quidditch player, correct...?"

"Yes, he is. The Chudley Cannons." Hermione answered with some pride.

The wizard smiled at her. "I hear they have a chance this year at the World Cup. Make sure he gets to participate by keeping him in bed tomorrow. I insist on one full day of rest, minimum." he said, setting up several vials on the dresser. "He is to drink one of each of these each time he wakes; it will put him to sleep and continue to undo the damage done..."

"Damage...?"

"This young man was in a magical duel. His opponent was stopped quickly from what I understand, but he did manage to hit him with several rather nasty curses. He is quite fortunate that he has such a strong skill with protection charms; I believe that if his shield had been any weaker he would have probably been dead before Lucius could have come to his aid."

Hermione paled at that news but simply nodded to indicate that she understood the instructions.

“Good. All right, I will leave him in your hands.” He said, turning to go.

“Thank you.” Hermione said, moving to sit on the edge of the bed.

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“Severus, you just got back an hour ago, you can’t do this right now…” Tonks objected as Severus straightened his robes.

He sighed. “I expended little energy assisting in the search; it was Harry and Lucius who need to rest, not I. These children need my aid, Nymphadora.” He answered, using her full name on purpose simply to irritate her as much as he felt he was being irritated.

“Then I’m helping,” She said, rising as well and reaching for her robes.

“What? Absolutely not.” He scowled at her.

She met his scowl with one of her own. “I’m not forbidding you from doing what you feel called to do, so what’s’ the problem?”

“You’re carrying my child! Draco was exposed to the aftermath of a session gone wrong and nearly died, as did his son! I will not expose you to such risk!” he snapped.

“Yet you feel perfectly comfortable exposing the father of my unborn child to ‘such risks’ all the
time, do you not?” She shot back at him.

“That’s different!”

“How? I fail to see the difference!” She retorted. “I will not allow you do this on your own without the extra layers of protection I can provide!”

“It is absolutely unnecessary! There is no danger, I will be…”

“You will be working with me, like it or not Severus. You can’t forbid me from going anywhere in this house, Lucius has given me free reign and its HIS house. Where you go, I will. Its that simple.”

She wanted to scream and rail at him but she managed to keep her voice level and calm. She wanted to give him no reason to say that her pregnancy and raging hormones were causing her to be overprotective.

The two stood glaring at each other for several minutes; Severus finally capitulated as he turned away. “Do as you will; it is clear that I have little influence over you regarding the health of our baby.”

She half-chuckled. “Now that’s the pot calling the kettle black. You have as much responsibility toward this baby as I do, Severus Snape.” She answered with a bit of a smile. “Now stop your infernal sulking and let me help. You’re the one who keeps saying I don’t understand about these children. Let me see for myself.”

“Very well.” He shrugged. “But tonight I work on the most powerful of them; I have already had two sessions and there is much that Alerick knows that he should never have learned at his age.”

Nymphadora quickly dressed and was ready to accompany him to the nursery which had been turned into many little rooms. “This room used to be a lot bigger when Draco had it…”

“Draco did not have five little followers who were bound to him and would suffer greatly if separated from him, either.” Severus answered.

“But they were separated before we started hunting them all down…”

“Yes, and they were fed pain-killing potions to help them to get past the pain caused by separation. If they were exposed to the presence of their little Lord after their binding to him, once a week, for instance, the potions might even have been unnecessary.” Severus explained. “The bond between these children is more than simply an emotional one. It is physical; perhaps even a psychic connection. I know that Alerick was able to point out the general direction the other children were in when they were all apart, even though he would have had no way to know their locations.”

“CAN they be separated?” Tonks asked. “I mean, I know the little redheaded girl belongs with the Weasley clan; will she have to stay here?”

“I cannot answer that as of yet. It would likely be very dangerous to separate them physically for a period longer than a week or perhaps two. Children are resilient, but even a child can waste away and die for want of something they need desperately. And the dark circle have been conditioned to require the presence of their Prince at all times.” Severus moved to the dragon bed and gazed down at the sleeping children. Alerick lay on his side with little Mallek cradled close to his chest; both looked so innocent and pure. “I think such a separation would kill the one required to be apart.”

Severus said quietly.

“So they have to stay together.” She said softly. “Will they always be like this…?”
“Again, I cannot say for certain.” He said softly. “I am hoping the work I am doing will free them but it may never change.”

“How do we start?” Tonks asked, looking at the children in the white dragon bed.

“We get the nanny to fetch the child.” Severus answered, turning to gaze to the right at a darkened doorway. Tonks was rather surprised to see a woman was standing there hidden by the shadows, watching them in silence. “If you please, madam?”

“Yes, sir.” She said quietly, slipping into the room and walking on catlike feet to the bed. “Both of them were given the potion, per your instructions sir…”

“And how have Erik and Erin been behaving?” he asked.

“Oddly.” She answered in a slightly disapproving tone.

“Explain.” Severus instructed, watching as the woman gently disentangled the older sleeping boy’s arms from the younger boy.

She glanced at him then looked away again. “It is not my place to say anything…”

“Unless you are instructed to! You will explain your statement, woman!” Severus growled in an irritated tone; he knew this woman was the most dominant of the three nannies and constantly kept an eye on all of the children although her main focus was clearly the Prince and the Consort. If anyone would have opinions on the changes of the children she would be the best source.

“Yes sir.” She said softly. “The guardians are… confused. They know not what to do; they do not attend their lessons any longer and they do not have any idea how to defend the Dark Prince. Their magic has been stunted by the work that has been performed upon them. Erik in particular is very upset by the fact that he knows he used to be able to effectively guard his prince but now he cannot…”

“These children need to learn other things, madam; they need to learn to be children. They must learn to laugh, to play, to run and be carefree for their youths in the gardens and the copses of this splendid manor.” Severus retorted. Tonks bit back what she wanted to say; not wanting to interject her own opinion when she knew little about what was happening. Besides, Severus seemed to have the situation well in hand.

“And to be prisoners within it.” She said softly, lifting Alerick in her arms as if he weighed nothing at all yet holding him as if he were the most treasured thing in the world. She gazed at the boy, brushed a white-blonde hair out of his face, then rose to her feet and stepped out of the protective circle provided by the curved wings of the white dragon.

“Were they not prisoners before?” Severus asked pointedly, moving to take the boy from her. “They were locked within the confines of a single home and no one in the world ever showed them any true compassion or care except for you.” He cradled the blonde boy who seemed light as a feather in his arms. “You need to understand that things must change for them or the world will never accept them. They must become more like other children their age in order to be accepted for who they are.”

“But they will never be the same as other children…” she said softly. Her arms twitched but she did not make any move to take the boy back from Severus.

Tonks eyed the nanny with the eye of a professional Auror. She had clearly been conditioned by some method and it must have been quite extensive; the woman did not even dare to meet the gaze of adults very long. She doubted the woman would stand up to any request of the children at all, which
she believed could be quite dangerous.

"They're to have a chance to be. They will always be extraordinary, make no mistake. But for now they must have the chance to be children." Severus said, turning away.

Tonks followed as they moved out of the room, biding her time and saying nothing until they were out and the door closed behind them. "I think those nannies might need a bit of readjustment too, that one wants to undo everything you've done to help them…" she grumped, irritated by the nanny's attitude and comments.

Snape couldn't help but smirk but he managed to stifle the urge to tell her 'I told you so.' Instead he simply held his peace, leading her to the room set aside for his work.

She glanced about the room then drew her wand and began to set protections. Severus' scowl when she shielded him first was met with a challenging glare, but she did follow that first shield on him with one on herself equally as powerful. Briefly mollified, Severus set the boy down on the bed and prepared to set to work.

He laid Alerick on his stomach and slipped the pajama top off of the boy to reveal the partially open lotus blossom mark on his right shoulder.

"He has a tattoo?" Tonks asked quietly, looking at it curiously.

"Parkinson was not only mad, Tonks. There is much to this tale that must never leave Malfoy Manor, and that mark upon this boy's shoulder is the biggest part of what must remain silent."

"Mark... that... that wasn't a...?" she scowled. Certainly even Malcolm Parkinson, whose wife had been killed personally by the Dark Lord himself, would not have attempted to bring that madman back into the world...?!

"It was indeed a Dark Mark, an identical twin to the one upon my arm." Severus said quietly.

"But it's not a skull, it's a flower..."

"Potter's idea, I understand. He's the one that managed the change. I can tell you for certain that it is a living mark, not simply a tattoo; you will see that as I work with Alerick here." he said, settling his chair in place.

Changing the Dark Mark? That wasn't even possible that she knew of... "But how could Harry...?"

"Now isn't the time for such questions and I have limited time to work on this child." He looked up at her, unable to keep irritation out of his expression. "If you are done casting protection spells, could you at least relieve some of my OWN concern and sit over there by the window?"

"All right, but I'm not putting my wand away." she answered.

"As you wish, woman, just go and give me some room to work." he grumbled, disliking being kept from what he felt he needed to do.
The sun rose over the horizon to light the beginning of a beautiful day. It was the first full day of warm sunshine promised by the forecasters on the wizarding radio, and their statements seemed to be holding true so far. As far as the eye could see, the sky was a deep azure blue with only the slimmest wispy clouds drifting lazily across the sky and the crisp morning air was warming quickly and dispersing what little fog remained clinging in patches to the ground. The flowers in the garden sparkled with tiny drops of dew, drawing in butterflies and tiny flitting pixies to dance amongst their petals. Angel's kneazle kit Tia was skulking about in the bushes, hunting the pixies; she had already caught two by the time that the doors and windows of the great manor were thrown open to the gentle warm breeze to allow the air perfumed with new grass and the scent of honeysuckle and lilac blossoms to fill its many halls.

Lucius Malfoy strode out of the French doors and onto the back deck, used for entertainment of guests. He did not stop there, glancing back behind him. There was a literal parade of children following him; he couldn't help but feel like he was the Pied Piper, magically summoning the children away from stupid arrogant Muggles who had refused to pay the wizard's fee for ridding the town of rats.

In the lead were the Dark Circle children. Alerick was walking beside the nursemaid who carried Mallek, one hand up to hold the baby's hand as they walked. Behind him were the guardians, their faces still holding the sullen mistrustful look and ensuring that they remained between the Prince and anything or anyone else. Alyssa was right behind them, her horrible looking stuffed doll held in her arms, looking rather curious and excited. The five of them were the quietest out of all the children, asking nothing at all. Close behind them were Angel and Rose, walking hand in hand. Behind them were the other children, the littlest of all being carried by nurses. Astrid didn't seem to care at all, happily chewing on a piece of melba toast and getting the nanny who carried her covered with the cookie mess.

Draco and Harry followed as well, Draco holding their newborn son. The dew on the grass was dampening their shoes but no one complained, following the head of the Malfoy clan across the clean cut thick grass toward what looked like a giant overgrown shrub with tangled English ivy.

Lucius drew his wand and waved it; the shrubbery and ivy parted to reveal a pair of doors that were shut. He halted in front of it and turned to face those who followed him. "Now you all are to share what lies inside, do we all understand...?" He asked in a gentle yet firm tone.

"Yes, Lord Father Malfoy." The circle children chanted almost in unison. Angel half-giggled then repeated them, but Rose simply nodded her head.

"Very good." He said, turning and waving his wand again.
The great doors opened to reveal a vast play yard there in the western quarter of the grounds. A giant playground of wood that resembled nothing less than a castle stood with round parapets and towers and a maze-like interior. It had many swings for infants and young children, slides, bouncy toys, things to bang on to make music, and instead of a moat there was a track where children could race brooms without endangering others. There was a covered patio area with tables and easels and paints for those who preferred that activity, and there were play wands and clothes in open trunks to play dress up. There was even a small hedge maze and garden of flowers. A small merry-go-round was to the south end of it all, the creatures impaled upon the poles and waiting to be ridden were enchanted carvings, stomping and breathing puffs of smoke as the dragons, unicorns and other beasties moved around and around to the soft yet bright and sprightly music.

For the smaller children there was a miniature version of the castle, with much gentler angled slides and easier to climb steps but they had all the activities of the larger children.

The children seemed frozen, staring inside at all the things to do. Lucius smirked, gazing down at them. For one long moment Harry was reminded of Charlie and the Chocolate factory, with Willie Wonka standing in the way of the children and the wonderland he had created of an edible garden. "Well, shall we head back to the mansion or would you all like to get a bit of fresh air today?" he prompted, giving Alerick a gentle nudge.

"No, sir; please, let us play...?" Alerick said, gazing up at him. He still had the mannerisms of an adult but clearly was every bit child.

Lucius smiled and stepped aside to allow them all inside.

Draco moved in, gazing about in wonder and delight. "My goodness Father, this is fantastic! When did you manage to do all of this?"

"I've had time." Lucius shrugged modestly, strolling in himself. "The playroom in the ballroom works well enough, but it is coming time for the Solstice Ball and I must allow these little ones to continue to have a safe place to play. Besides, they need to be able to run and to learn to ride brooms, as all wizarding children do."

"It's brilliant. Absolutely brilliant." Harry murmured as the children spread out across the playground with squeals of delight. The ground was covered with a thick spongy mat of grass green that seemed firm when you stood still but when you moved it was soft and gave easily underfoot. "This will be fantastic on those good days in summer..."

"It will be fantastic year round." Lucius corrected. "There is an enchanted roof upon this play area; quite grown over with protective ivy and carefully tended shrubberies. Our house elves have been quite excited by the idea of an 'outdoor indoor' play area."

"You can't even tell there's anything up there." Harry complimented, gazing upward at the clear blue sky with wispy pale white clouds.

"Of course. I wanted the children to be able to see the sun. It will always be comfortable within these walls to play. The house elves, especially your elf, Draco, had a lot of excitement building all of this."

"I bet they did... but the ponies won't like the flooring." Draco commented, moving to where there were adult tables and chairs set up to monitor the children and taking a seat.

"No, the ponies do not like it. But the children can go outside of here in small groups to ride ponies." Lucius answered, making it clear that the idea had occurred to him as well. He watched with a smile
as Angel and Rose hurried to the broom races, joined only a moment later by Alyssa.

Mallek demanded to be taken to the top of the castle and Alerick snatched up a crown and followed, placing it on the baby's head as he sat on the throne in the top center of the castle, visible from all sides. Mallek giggled and kicked, clearly very pleased with himself.

The guardians walked around the perimeter, clearly checking the fence. Lucius watched them in particular; he knew that Severus was still uncertain of how these two were going to handle their lost memories and the fact that they could not perform as was instinct to them now. Erik led his sister back over to the adults and gazed up at Lucius. “Lord Father, are we safe here?” he asked softly.

Lucius’ smile grew; the boy was actually going to allow him to decide the safety of the situation instead of insisting on securing it himself. He would have to remember to tell Severus of this huge leap of faith by this little one. “Yes, Erik. This playground is completely enclosed, and rests inside the shields and wards that I reinforce myself every day. You will be safe.” He assured. “As will young Mallek.”

Erik bowed very solemnly and formally. “Thank you, Lord Father Malfoy.” He said gravely, then he and his twin looked at each other and broke into a run. To the surprise of the adults, they did not run after the wands or off to follow Mallek; instead they ran for the patio with the paints and easels.

Draco rose. “I think I’ll go and join them over there… they’re likely to get more paint on themselves than the paper…” he chuckled, moving off with his baby cradled contently in his arm.

Harry watched him go with a loving smile, then the upcoming situation impinged upon his thought again. He glanced at his watch; there were two more hours before the scheduled viewing of the vengeance that he and Lucius Malfoy had wreaked upon Malcolm Parkinson in the settling of the blood feud. He was NOT looking forward to that at all; each time he had gone before them it had been more than simply stressful. He had nearly gotten sick each time.

The first time he had gone before the Wizengamot was when he was nearly kicked out of school for protecting his cousin Dudley from the Dementors just before his sixth year of school. The second time he had to appear before them was shortly after the death of Voldemort. Because the man had been killed by magic they wanted to put Harry in Azkaban for using the forbidden curses. That had not been pleasant at all, but their decision, which was barely in his favor, acquitted him of any time in that hellhole.

Then he had been forced to appear several times to defend Draco; first to clear his name of the accusations that had been laid upon him then to continue to defend his name. He had been before them again just a year after the loss of Andie. Someone had gotten into their head that Draco had turned to dark magic in his grief following that time and that Harry was covering it up. He had submitted his own wand to have all its previously worked spells viewed by the panel of wizards, proving that he had not nullified any dark magic spells cast or evil potions brewed by his husband.

That's when Harry had proceeded to have a field day, telling them that he was going to seal his memory of this in a phial and if any of them accused his husband again of any sort of evil magic without some sort of base in reality, he would personally file a suit against them for fouling the name of Malfoy. He had put in no uncertain terms that he would seek financial retribution against them each and every one if they dared to harass Draco any longer. He hadn't known about blood feud at the time, or he might have even been angry enough to file that against them and use it as leverage... all he had wanted and still wanted was for them to simply leave the two of them alone.

Harry considered his drink a moment more, then looked at Lucius. Something had been bothering him for a very long time and he simply had to ask; there would be no more suitable time than the
present. "Mr. Malfoy, may I ask you something...?"

Lucius looked over at him, quirking an eyebrow curiously. "Of course you may, Potter, but I may choose not to answer."

"I know you loved my dad deeply, I've seen and understand that completely. What I don't understand is why..." Harry struggled to put the words in the proper order; he did not want to offend this man who seemed to be finally forming a bond with him.

Lucius flicked his still drawn wand and produced a privacy spell; the children needed to know none of this and he would explain to his son if he asked. "Why did I choose to follow the Dark Lord while James still lived?" Lucius finished for him.

"Well, yes." Harry agreed quietly.

The elder Malfoy called for a house elf and had drinks brought and Harry looked rather surprised at the familiar little ceramic bottle of Tullamore Dew. "I know its early, but we have a stressful and trying time coming up this morning. And it is still not easy for me to speak of such things." Lucius said dismissively, pouring them each a small shot of the amber liquid. He sipped his whiskey, still amazed that muggles could make a drink that was so powerful and smooth without a bit of magic. The Tullamore Dew that Harry had introduced him to was now his favorite drink, though he had learned to sip it quite slowly or risk being completely drunk very quickly. Harry remained silent; waiting for the reply he was sure that Lucius was about to give. "The Dark Lord was a very powerful man; in those days his power was nearing its peak. The mad, twisted creature you battled with the created body had perhaps three quarters the power that he had possessed before his near destruction."

"I didn't know he was even stronger..."

"You had no way to know that." Lucius brushed it off as lack of knowledge and sighed softly as he decided to change focus for a moment. "You were muggle raised, weren't you?" he asked. At Harry's nod he asked a second question. "Tell me, Potter, what were you taught of the afterlife? In what religion were you raised?"

"My family were church-going, they went to the local Catholic church. But I wasn't allowed to go to church with them. I was, after all, just a freak and not worthy of going with them..."

"I see. I suppose that was the same with the Dark Lord, as he grew up in that orphanage. Had you been raised in a wizarding household you would have learned our view of death; it is not the end of things but only the next adventure. The immortality that the Dark Lord desired to grasp as his own was right in front of him; he just had never been taught how to see it."

"I don't understand either." Harry admitted.

"Your children, Harry. Your blood. Why do you think I was so angry with you marrying my Dragon? The Potter bloodline was dying with you. My James would never be able to return to me."

"Through my bloodline...? How? I still don't understand..."

"As long as the bloodline continues, a wizard has a chance to be reborn. James can only be reborn into the Potter line; with your marrying my son there would be no more Potter line."

"I see." Harry said softly.

"That's why Draco found James waiting in limbo. He is waiting for me to join him, so that when we
are reborn it will be together, at the same time. So we will be much as you and Draco are. The same age, acceptable as a couple, able to live our lives together.”

“That’s all quite intriguing, but what does that have to do with Voldemort?”

Lucius still flinched slightly at the statement of the name. He sighed at his own reaction and set his glass down. “Because I was lost. I was confused, I was almost mad with grief. After a full year’s relationship, James was suddenly cold as ice to me. He had turned from me and was not only refusing my advances; he attacked me twice to convince me he did not want any part of my attention any longer. He laughed at me when I asked where our child was. The Dark Lord saw my distress and took advantage of it, as he was wont to do; he told me that he was the one who had changed James.”

“How could he claim that? If he had used Imperious on my dad he would have done more than just try to make you leave him alone…”

“The Dark Lord claimed to have stolen his soul.” Lucius answered quietly.

“His soul…?”

“If the soul of a wizard is destroyed, they can be no more. They will never be reborn and they will be lost forever.” Lucius said. “The Dark Lord informed me that he had found a way to capture the souls of wizards, and that was the cause of James’ rejection and changed attitude toward me.”

“But how could he have…?”

“How did he find out to do any of the things he did, Potter? The man sliced up his own soul into seven pieces and put them into horcruxes to protect his own despicable life. If he could do that with his own soul, why is it such a stretch of the imagination to think that he could do that to the soul of another?”

“I can see how you could believe it.” Harry admitted, looking troubled.

"He said that he would destroy James' soul if I were to defy him in any way. I had no choice; as long as the man I loved and who had once loved me so deeply rejected me I believed the Dark Lord’s story. I complied with most of his commands but I did not kill for him. I never killed for him."

"That's what saved you at the Trials."

"Yes. I intended to kill the Dark Lord once my James had died... but I dared not. James' soul was trapped, held by him and there was no knowing what he would do with it, where he had hidden it. If his soul was destroyed I would never be able to rejoin him... when the Dark Lord was stopped in his mad rampage by you, Harry, I started to search. I made it a personal goal to obtain every item, every relic that the Dark Lord had ever touched, to try to free my James..."

"But you never succeeded because it was all a lie."

"I did not know that until Draco showed us both the truth. Now I know that he awaits me..." his eyes turned to the children on the playground. "And I have nothing to hold against you, marrying my son. All the little ones out there; they are our immortality." he said, allowing himself to smile as he imagined his future.

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Lucius stepped out of the fireplace, taking a moment to use a spell to purge his robes of any trace of
He was in his most formal robes, clothing specially selected to impress upon anyone who might look his way that he was important and influential and it would be unwise to get in his way. He flicked his long white hair back over his shoulder and glanced at the next fireplace where Harry was arriving. Harry started to brush his clothes clean but Lucius rolled his eyes, using his wand to rid Harry's clothing of the soot as well.

"Oh... um, thanks..." Harry said softly, smoothing his robes a little self-consciously. He was not used to wearing formal robes at all and they felt like they were choking him.

"There is only one chance to make a good impression, Potter." Lucius said, turning on one heel and leading the way. Harry fell into step beside him, walking quietly. He was nervous as hell and he thought that if he hadn't had that bit of whiskey today it would even be worse. The walk down the halls where the Wizengamot held court was fraught with memories he couldn't help but recall... He glanced at Lucius, who had a faint smile on his lips and strode onward with purpose and no hesitation whatsoever.

Lucius gestured with his wand to open the door as they approached the viewing room and strode inside without even hesitating. Two chairs awaited them in the stands, clearly left empty for them. In the center of the room was a large penseive and a strange device over the top of it; it looked like a reversed funnel with the tip barely touching the swirling silver liquid in the bowl. A ministry employee that Harry remembered from their visit the other night was standing beside the shallow marble bowl, clearly waiting to activate the device.

The Minister of Magic had been sitting in his seat at the head of the panel of wizards and witches that made up the Wizengamot. He rose when both Harry and Lucius had taken their seats, pounding his gavel on the sounding block until the room came to silence. “Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen; thank you all for your interest in this situation. You all know the severity of any blood feud called within our worlds; with good cause and reason blood feud was declared by these two wizards…” he gestured at Harry and Lucius, “… because of atrocities that had been perpetrated against their families.”

“They know that, I’m sure.” Lucius drawled, quite relaxed in his seat.

The minister gave him an irritated glance but continued as if he had not been interrupted. “You have assembled to view the outcome of the blood feud…”

“That has not yet been concluded.” Lucius interrupted once more.

“…that remains open.” The minister confirmed. There were multiple whispers all about the room at that statement. “Begin the viewing.” He ordered his underling.

The minister employee turned to the funnel-like device and did a complicated set of gestures with his wand, muttering spells under his breath to activate it. The silvery substance began to swirl faster and then seemed to be sucked up into the funnel; an image was projected upward above the wider opening, showing Malcolm Parkinson bound up in front of both Harry and Lucius, Ron still in the room. It was as if the torture was about to be done there in the center of the room; the funnel and penseive were no longer visible.

The room was completely silent as the memory began to play out.

Harry watched himself and Lucius proceed with the torture and he closed his eyes; he didn’t need to watch what he had already experienced. Lucius watched with cool detachment, showing no emotion as things progressed.
When the entire scene had played itself out to the end the room returned to its normal setting. The room sat in silence for a few moments then people began to talk in soft murmurs as they rose to their feet.

Someone muttered “I knew Malfoy had that in him, but Potter…?”

Another answered “Hey; that Parkinson stole his kids. Potter’s always been all about families.”

“Never expected that level of violence though…”

“They did to him what he did to them…”

“Bastard deserved worse. I would have healed the bastard up and then done it all again, several times!” Another grumbled; clearly he had wanted to see a lot more gore.

The conversations quieted a bit when Lucius rose, turning to eye the audience. “I can guarantee you that the same fate awaits anyone who claims any connection to the Parkinson family name, should they demonstrate any of the madness that Malcolm Parkinson showed in his life. My blood feud remains active and will not be deemed closed until not one member of that family claims blood rights.” He announced to the crowd in a strong, confident voice. “And they can expect, at minimum, the same treatment that you all just viewed.”

Harry rose to his feet as well, finding he really did not want to look out over those who had come to witness this. He would rather not know who was here and who was not; he wasn’t interested in anything more than to get back home to his family. “Can we leave now?” he asked Lucius in a very quiet tone.

“We can.” Lucius nodded, turning away and back to the door. He turned on one heel and those exiting the room cleared a path before them. Lucius smirked and gestured to Harry, who led the way out of the room without a single word.

The moment they left the room the level of conversation rose exponentially as those who had viewed the torture discussed the methods used and what they would have used themselves. Harry felt rather nauseated at the whole procedure; he would not have attended this viewing if it had not been required of him.

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AUTHOR’S RESPONSE TO REVIEW:
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Hey all; we got a review with a lot of pertinent questions that we felt compelled to answer. The review was from Casse01 2010-05-10 . chapter 38

Okay, first of all the scene with Lucius as Pied Piper was cute. Now onto my questions...

1) Okay, so one of the reasons that Lucius wants to kill off all the Parkinsons is to keep Pansy and her dad from coming back?

2) I do not remember reading anywhere that Warrington has told Lucius/Harry that Alerick has to bond with Mallek by the time he is 13. This might be a bit weird since Mallek will only be 10 1/2.

3) I don't remember seeing anything else about the Prophecy since it was mentioned to Tonks by Beibel. Has it been followed up?
4) Is Harry going to continue on the blood feuds against the families that were carrying his daughters when they died? There hasn't been any further mention of that, and Harry seems to be pretty sick of the entire mess at this point.

Still enjoying the story and watching the Dark Circle children evolving back into children has been very interesting.

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First and foremost, thank you for the review! We think that its great that we have some readers that are paying close enough attention to see these details! Let's get your questions answered for you.

1. You hit the nail on the head. Lucius wants to be sure there will be no return of Malcolm Parkinson or his wayward daughter. His beliefs would not allow him to act any differently, and if his family magically disavows their connection to the Parkinson name all bonds will be severed.

2. Very astute of you to catch that. There are a lot of things that Warrington knows about the children that he has not felt it necessary to divulge as of yet. It will be years before that tidbit has to be revealed, and it will be revealed, not to worry. Yes, it would be very weird if there had to be sexual contact to activate the bond, but thankfully that is not a requirement. A simple bonding ceremony will take care of that; an exchange of promise rings will be all that is required since the two of them are not being kept apart.

3. The prophecy. It was a sideline that we may soon focus on; at least a brief look to check on its validity and its source. As Bebel was located in Germany a trip there might be required in order to find the information and the one who gave the prophecy.

4. You're very right; Harry has had his fill of vengeance. The trial for Hermione is coming up, the ones who hurt his baby girl are dead, and he has his husband and is surrounded by children. He wants to be happy. He has no intention of pursuing it any longer.

Remember, though, that the girls were also Lucius' grandchildren. And he has no problem pursuing each and every one of them, especially as they all had, at one time, willingly followed the Dark Lord and most bear Dark Marks.
Author's notes: Those responsible for the theft of the progeny of the Potter, Malfoy and other wizarding families have been stopped. The trial of Hermione Weasley will soon be under way... what will be her fate?

This room wasn't small, it really wasn't. Twenty feet by fifteen feet was actually quite a lot of space. But when you knew you were not allowed to leave it or risk being labeled as an escapee, it seemed incredibly tiny. Hermione stood for a long moment at the window that was her only contact with the outside world, a window that she had been instructed never to open. She had been told not to even move the curtain, just allow it to block away all the light and the view that she longed to take a look at. Anything to distract her from the monotony of these four artfully wallpapered walls.

When she'd first arrived here, the room had been a typical muggle hotel room in downtown London. A double bed with a nice bedspread, a telly, bible in the nightstand, the whole works. Tonks had left her here then with specific instructions never to open the window nor to move the curtain. She had two changes of clothes; as she changed one she was to drop it in the hamper and they would be cleaned and returned to her when she had need of them. Her meals were served by house elf as well; they simply appeared on the table then vanished when she was finished eating. The first night had almost seemed like a holiday; she had slept through the night with no bad dreams for the first time in months.

That had lasted until the night she returned from Malfoy Manor. Another Auror with a very sour face had come in and had altered the room and everything in it. The pictures and shelves of pretty little items were gone from the walls, the decorations on the table vanished, the dresser and its mirror as well as the mirror in the loo were gone, extra towels and other amenities that one expects in a hotel were gone as well. The bed had been changed to what looked like a solid block of wood with a strangely soft top; impervious to damage. She had been left a single blanket to cover up with but no pillow. There was no nightstand; only the small table that was magically stuck to the floor and a single backless little stool to sit upon. All of the items that were pleasing to the eye had been removed including the area rug under the bed; the only decoration placed in the room was a painting of an ancient female Auror. Hermione had not objected to the change at the time; to the contrary she had felt rather guilty for the luxury she had been living in.

Hermione had attempted to speak with the witch in the painting, since it was clearly a wizard-made painting. The old woman was constantly moving; little twitches or shifting in her overstuffed chair or bewitching needles to do some knitting from the basket of yarn at her feet Hermione was sure that her purpose here was to monitor her behavior. That woman did not speak to her at all, though sometimes Hermione could hear her muttering under her breath. Anything she did in the room was monitored by the old hag, but she could escape her baleful gaze by slipping into the loo. The more restless she had become, the more that the witch in the painting had become amused, the old goat.

This room that they had called a safe house was where she had been placed the night that Pansy had gotten away from Tonks. If she had not been depressed when she had come here, she certainly would have been by the absolute dearth of anything she had to do.

She began to pace the room, her eyes closed in thought. She halted a bit before the wall without opening her eyes, turned, and began to slowly pace back. She went over in her mind for the thousandth time just what had happened, and how she could have stopped it. Could she have...?
What happened to the old Hermione? Hermione Granger would have stepped right up and stopped all that mess. Hermione Weasley was a totally different woman. She'd become complacent in her life; wrapped up more in her own business and her family. She'd been too busy to notice all the little signs that had been right in front of her eyes. She should have noticed that the work she was doing was not being documented and was not part of the regular services of the clinic. She should have seen that Pansy was separating her from the others, grooming her to take over the 'business' and to be a main part of that business. She should have noticed that the samples left by previous pureblood wizards was vanishing from the stores. But she hadn't, until she had felt there was no way out for her.

She almost jumped clear out of her skin when the door opened, looking around with wide eyes. Tonks had almost frozen in the doorway, looking a bit startled at what she saw. "Bloody hell, Hermione, what did you do in here…?"

"Nothing. I don't have my wand, I turned that in to you." Hermione answered, moving to her, almost elated to see anyone. She would have been excited to see Severus Snape at this point in time.

"Where'd everything go? And what the bloody hell is that?" she said, glaring at the old woman in the portrait, who gave her a dirty look and turned her back on them.

"Auror Burke came the day I came back and changed it to this. I thought it was what you told him to do so I didn't object." Hermione said, feeling her hands trembling.

"I can't believe he had the balls to do this, but it really does make sense." Tonks said with an irritated snort. "Burke is an old traditionalist; he misses throwing everyone straight into Azkaban to have everything tortured out of them… That old buzzard." she sighed with a half-chuckle.

"Could I… could I at least have a book to read…? Anything; a muggle book, a potions book, a book on molds and fungus I don't care at this point…" Hermione asked.

"One book?" Tonks smirked teasingly. "You'd read an entire book in an hour. I'll get you a dozen or so, and I'll get you some parchment and a pen as well."

"Thank you…" Hermione said and Tonks pulled her into a hug. She wasn't surprised at how hard the woman hugged her.

"I'll get this room set to rights. Maybe even get the telly back in here so you can keep up with the muggle news."

"I can't thank you enough…" Hermione let her go, finding that she had tears on her cheeks. "But this can't be why you came here…"

"Of course not… but are you sure you're all right, love?" she asked, leading Hermione to the bed. Hermione was trembling and looked pale, but never once looked away from Tonks.

Tonks drew her wand and several books appeared on the table. "There we are… those should keep you busy for a little while, all right? This room is horrible when its empty…"

"I don't care, I'll read them all a dozen times rather than sit here and stare at that horrible old lady…" she looked at the painting.

The witch with the hooked nose and grey hair snorted, smirking, quite entertained by what was going on. "The view isn't that great from this side either, missy." she said bitingly.

"Oh shut up you old harridan." Hermione said in return, not even looking at her. The woman in the photo cackled and was silent. "Can I cover her up or get her out of here…?"
"Yes, again, that's Burke's choice and not one I approve of. I'd better talk with him about overstepping his bounds." she sighed. "All right; I came here tonight to tell you that we have the date set for you to be seen by the Wizengamot."

"Please tell me it's soon..." Hermione said in a pleading tone.

"Another week. Sorry, I tried to get it sooner but they wanted it to be next month some time..." she said apologetically.

"A whole week?" she asked softly, then took a deep breath. "It'll be all right, I'll be fine..." she assured.

"Good." she said, rising. "I really need to go..."

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Hermione found she couldn't look up; she was afraid of the accusation she would see on everyone's face. She had said everything she could have said in her own defense but all of it only felt like it was making her more guilty than ever. She stared at the base podium of the head of the Wizengamot, waiting for them to tell her to get off the stand so they could deliberate.

Minister McLaggen, the head of the Wizengamot, stood and tapped his gavel to get attention back to the center. "Mrs. Weasley, you may step down off the stand." He instructed, then waited until she rose, trembling slightly and feeling weak and dizzy, and made her way back to the seat she had been provided on the back of the floor of the room. The stands of the chamber were full today; many had turned out for the trial of the only person left who was known to be involved in the entire sperm-stealing scheme. It was not until she sat down that he spoke up again. "I understand there is another witness for the defendant?" He asked, eyes wandering the faces that were there.

"Yes."

A voice that Hermione had not expected to hear sounded clear and confident yet somehow oily and unctuous at the same time. Severus Snape? Hermione bowed her head, heart sinking. Any hope she had was gone now; he'd surely nail her to the wall for every little thing she'd done. He'd made it abundantly clear that he thought that she was responsible for the entire mess.

The leader of the Wizengamot took a seat. "Please speak your name and title for the court."

"Severus Tobias Snape; retired Potions Master for Hogwarts and currently a Pediatric Medi-wizard on-call." he answered, striding forward to stand just to the right of the witness seat. He was immaculately dressed today in wizard's robes of deepest blue, a color he did not normally wear, his hair combed and free of its potion to prevent it catching fire in his work, looking every bit in control of everything in his world.

"If you will take a seat, Mr. Snape?" McLaggen gestured to the seat with a bit of impatience.

Snape sat down, clearly completely at his ease, then looked up at the Minister of Magic. "May I proceed, Minister?"

"By all means." He agreed, sitting down once more.

Hermione found herself gazing over at Ron, who sat silently in the first row, with his mother on one side and Blaise on the other. There was a lot of red hair out there; it looked like Ron's entire family had come... where was Rosie...? Her eyes wandered to the left of Blaise and she saw Draco, then she saw Harry and tears came to her eyes. Harry had come...! She only hoped that he had not come
hoping to see her condemned. Her attention was yanked back to the front when Snape began speaking.

"As some of you know, I am currently working in the medical field in hospitals, both in the muggle and in the magical community. As such I have become familiar with the procedures that were being performed at the fertility clinic."

"We are all rather in the dark about those procedures, except for what Mrs. Weasley explained." Cho Chang said; she sat to the left of the minister.

Snape nodded. "Then I shall explain," he agreed, and did so with excruciating detail, explaining each point until not one of the council had another question on any of the process. He was sure, however, that a good three quarters of them had absolutely no idea what he was talking about. He suppressed the urge to smirk at their willingness to remain ignorant simply to avoid looking ignorant.

"All right, then, that is the process that was followed. What do you have to contribute to the case against Mrs. Weasley?" The Minister of Magic asked pointedly.

Hermione closed her eyes; she knew his testimony would be harsh and would likely mean her permanent residence in Azkaban.

Snape took a deep breath; he knew exactly what he was going to say. "Mrs. Weasley was involved in a plot not of her own creation to create children. Although she came to know that the... shall we call them samples...? she came to know that the samples were not acquired with the free will and acquiescence of any of the wizards they were taken from. She hid her knowledge from her husband, from her friends and family. She did indeed use one of these samples herself to create a child who sits in this very courtroom, but that case is not being pressed against her as the child is currently in the custody of her father."

Hermione bit her lip, listening quietly. It sounded so horrible when it was put like that…

"She used the stolen samples to create children, using her newly created methods and magically altered eggs to create children. Her verbal testimony under veritaserum, her memories pulled and viewed by this entire Wizengamot by pensive, the readings from the spells cast by her wand as well as the documented proof found in our raid on the clinic the day of its closure confirms this..."

"So far you haven't told us anything we didn't already know." Millicent Bulstrode said from her seat a row back behind the Minister, scowling. She had only grown more bitter after the years, especially after losing her fiancée in a potions accident. She had never liked Hermione, and was clearly pleased to see her held to crimes that could result in imprisonment.

Snape gave the woman an acidic glare, scowling now. "Mrs. Weasley could have continued to hide this scheme. She could have simply faded from our view, never to be seen again in our lives. She did not do this for her husband, for her daughter nor for herself." he growled, eyes fastened on Millicent, who scowled and sat back. Severus allowed his flashing black eyes to scan the faces up in the stands. "She turned herself in with the full expectation that not only would she be subject to spending the rest of her life in Azkaban; she expected to be sentenced to the Dementor's Kiss." he added. Several in the room gasped softly, and there were murmurs of disagreement that any such thing should happen.

"And why should she not? Over thirty children created by her hands without consent or knowledge..."

"Not only by her hand." Severus interrupted with a sneer. "Or did you not read all the
"Of course I did!" she blustered, angry now. "But...

"This is my time to speak, is it not Minister?" Snape asked, and the minister nodded, gesturing that Miss Bulstrode should be silent. The woman fell silent but continued to mouth swear words under her breath. "Thank you, Minister." he said with a smirk at the woman, and then he resumed his speech. "The children were created by Mrs. Weasley, mostly without her knowledge that anything was stolen. An oversight at best, sheer ignorance at worst. The children created by Malcolm Parkinson and his cohort August Bebel were not created in such innocence..."

"They are not on trial here!" Bulstrode growled.

"Be silent!" the minister turned on her and she subsided once more, her face suffused with anger.

"Hermione Weasley had no knowledge of what she was doing. When she was finally exposed to the truth, she dithered a bit, that is true. But then she approached Mr. Potter and spoke with him and turned in not only herself, but her wand. She has since then not only handed over her notes, she was instrumental in the location of ALL the children of concern, including those in the families of those among the Wizengamot; blood children that some of you did not even know you possessed. And blood children to be true heirs to your lines. If it was not for this woman..." he pointed at Hermione. "...we would not have found even half of them. By the time that we had found out anything, even with the help of the detective agency looking into the situation, the children would have been long gone."

This time Millicent had nothing to say, though she clearly wished she could refute the facts, grinding her teeth. Hermione watched Severus Snape in complete and utter shock. He was defending her...?

"Without the aid of the woman you hold accused of all of these crimes, the only children we would have located are ones who ended up in the hospital. I had located two of them myself due to complications with their birth, and one due to an accident that she suffered." Snape added. "Mrs. Weasley could have stopped assisting us when she turned herself in, but she did not. She could have sat back and watched but instead she enabled the Aurors to infiltrate Parkinson's operation. She procured files for us that showed us who had these children, and files showing which families were attempting to spawn a child -- a boy child only -- who would have the power of the dark lord." Severus paused a moment to allow that information to sink in. "Those files also revealed that innocent young witches were murdered because they were the wrong gender for those prospective parents. And she did not stop there, either. This woman remained where she was long enough for us to catch Pansy Parkinson in the act of rape of not just one, but THREE wizards!" Severus finished.

The room was silent for several long moments, then the Minister rose to his feet. "Please clear the room; we must deliberate." he ordered, then pounded the gavel to emphasize his command.

Hermione rose and found Ron at her elbow, helping her to her feet. She gave him a grateful smile then moved away from him with the Auror.

Ron gazed after her, watching until the door closed that would isolate her until the judgment was reached. He sighed and turned back to his family to find both Blaise and Harry waiting to reassure him next to the door. He took a deep breath and put a smile on for them, deeply worried despite the words that Severus had said in her defense.

The waiting area was full of redheaded people; every one of Ron's siblings had come to support him, and their spouses and adult children who had been able to get away. Even Percy had managed to get away from his work long enough to give emotional support to his youngest brother.
"It will be all right, Ronald; you'll see." Molly tried to reassure her son, but her face betrayed the fact that she was very worried.

Hermione glanced up nervously at the stands of witches and wizards who would decide her fate as the Auror led her back into the large room and back to the center. The chair was gone, only a small stand with a railing to rest upon remained. She stepped up onto the stand, unable to force herself to look back at Ron or anyone else. This was the moment...

The Minister banged his gavel and the room fell silent. "We have deliberated at length upon this issue. We have considered each action taken by the defendant, both positive and negative, and weighed the importance of those actions in what occurred. Although we are aware that many among those of you in the gallery today are desirous of one outcome or another, we assure you that we will not change in our decision..."

Draco leaned close to Harry. "I think that man just likes to hear himself talk." he whispered, and Harry had to stifle a chuckle.

Ron sat still as a statue, looking as if he was going to be ill at any moment. He was as pale and white as Hermione was.

The minister went on and on about the great responsibility of the court and of the medical field toward the public and it almost sounded like he was about to launch into a political speech when someone behind him cleared their throat. He flushed and rearranged his papers. "As I was saying..." he said in a clearly disgruntled and irritated tone. "We debated upon each possible decision and have come to this decision." he turned his eyes to Hermione and she felt like she was completely alone, staring up at that panel of dozens of witches and wizards all up staring at her. She felt so incredibly small and unimportant... she expected nothing but the worst.

"For the crime of Accessory to the murder of five Potter children, we find the defendant..." he took a deep breath for dramatic effect, then let it out. "Not guilty." he finished, then turned the page.

Nearly everyone in the place burst into conversation, a gabble of confused voices and sounds that Ron found he couldn't make any sense of at all. The minister scowled, pounding his gavel for silence several times before he finally got compliance with his wishes. When silence again was achieved he eyed the audience. "If you cannot remain silent we will remove all except the accused for the reading of the judgments!" he snapped.

There was no sound now, except for an embarrassed cough or two. He cleared his throat importantly and continued. "For the crime of twenty three counts of Theft by Deception, we find the defendant..." again the dramatic pause. "Guilty, of one count, not guilty on twenty two. For the crime of Aiding and Abetting Pansy Parkinson in murder of children, we find her not guilty on all counts. For the crime of Aiding and Abetting Parkinson with stealing not only the 'seed' of wizards unwillingly, but for the theft of the heirs of no less than ten wizarding families, we find the defendant guilty." he said firmly, clearly quite pleased that he had not been interrupted this time. "For the crime of rape leveled against her..."

Hermione looked started at that accusation and Ron came to his feet immediately. "She did no such thing!" he snapped.

"Sit DOWN AND BE SILENT!" The minister growled at him. Harry grabbed his sleeve on one side and Blaise on the other and they pulled the resistant redhead back down into his seat, seething with fury.
"For the Crime of Rape levied by Radivar Mulcider, the court finds her not guilty." he said quickly, trying to get his words out this time before the crowd started talking again. Someone in the back yelled his objection, and Ron turned to see the man accusing his wife being taken out of the room by Aurors. Hermione watched him go in utter confusion. Who the hell was that guy...?

Tonks watched him leave with great relief from her place just to the right and behind the Minister. She was NOT unhappy that that cruel man was getting escorted out at all; it was she who had been in Hermione's stead the night he had all but raped HER... and he had the gall and nerve to press charges for rape. The sick bastard...! Her eyes turned and fell on her wolfing mate's face; Lupin's expression held nothing but pure hate and the clear expression of the hunt. Oh Merlin. He clearly had remembered the scent of the man that had been on her the night she had been so shaken up; now he had the name and the face to go with that scent. Radivar was a dead man walking and he didn't even know it if she couldn't get Severus to help her talk Remus out of it... if she even wanted to.

"What in the bloody hell is he talking about? Rape! Hermione never! Not once did she do that shit! Tonks even said so...!" Ron hissed quietly to Harry, who urgently gestured for his friend to be quiet so they would not be thrown out although his own whisper had barely been audible above the general level of conversation that had arose from the accusation.

The minister glared about the room and pounded his gavel again, refusing to speak again until he had total and complete silence. "For the crime of Improper Use of Magic in the creation of living creatures, we find the defendant Guilty."

Hermione bowed her head at that; this crime usually meant the removal or blockage of any magical ability of the accused at all.

"For these crimes that you have been found guilty of, Mrs. Weasley, the punishment could range from immediate incarceration to Azkaban to probation under close observation. Again, we did consider all possibilities on this case, and..." the minister seemed about to wax eloquent once again but someone in the audience wasn't going to allow it.

"Come to the point you overblown windbag!" a female voice muttered, though the voice was quite audible and could be heard all about the room. Harry wasn't sure, but he thought that it was Molly Weasley who had spoken up that time.

Several people laughed softly at the comment and the minister turned red again. "Hermione Weasley, for the crimes that you have committed against both the wizarding and muggle worlds, you will be sent to Azkaban..." Ron went ashen, and Blaise put a supporting arm around him.

The babble of the crowd at that announcement drowned him out; that wasn't about to stop the Minister from completing his pronouncement of the sentence. He touched his wand to his own throat and invoked the sonorous spell, making his voice boom out over the crowd in the room as he went on, "...for a period of one month...!" he added.

"You're barking mad!" George growled.

"That's insane with all the help she gave to the Aurors!" Molly snapped angrily.

"You're trying to make a political statement with her sentence and all its going to do is lose you that position you hold so dear!" Percy accused him. "She does NOT deserve Azkaban!"

"Yeah! And he'd know 'cuz he's the only politician amongst us!" Fred said in a half-jab at his brother.
"You can't tell the Ministry what to do!" someone to the left of the Weasley clan said in equal outrage.

The minister, finding even his magnified voice was being drowned out, began pounding his gavel on the sounding block and the sound crashed across the crowd, drawing attention back to him and bringing some lowered voices. "You will all sit down or you will be removed from this proceeding!" he demanded, red-faced and angry that any moment he could have in the spotlight had been interfered with.

"We demand that a poll of the members of the Wizengamot be made!" Arthur Weasley spoke in a voice that had lost a lot of its power over the years, but he was still clearly heard over the angry mutters and confused whispers of those in the stands, coming to his feet as he spoke.

"A poll of the members is not necessary, I..."

"Wizarding Law states that ANY member of the wizarding public can demand a poll of the Wizengamot when a sentence comes into question." He answered. "That law has remained unchanged since the formation of the Wizengamot and I choose to invoke it!"

The Minister's face went a shade redder and he sat down suddenly, a pout on his rather handsome face. "As you wish... Ms. Bones, if you will...?" he passed the responsibility on to her, clearly very put out and angry by the entire situation. It was clear he had decided the sentence before the hearing had even begun.

Amanda Bones, a row down and several seats to the right of the Minister, rose in her place and turned to the panel that sat in judgment. "A poll has been called for: those amongst you who feel that the crimes that Hermione Weasley has been found guilty for are heinous enough to warrant her being committed to Azkaban please indicate now by raising your hands." she instructed, standing quietly to take the poll.

Some hands did rise, including Millicent Bulstrode's and at least a dozen others.

"And those who do not feel that her crimes warrant her being committed to Azkaban...?" she asked, raising her own hand. Nearly twice as many hands went up indicating the lack of support for the Minister's sentence. "The result is clear, Minister; the Wizengamot does not support a sentence in Azkaban for this case." she reported the obvious verdict.

The entire room was silent now, waiting for the final determination expectantly. The minister raised his wand and cast a spell of privacy that encompassed the stands occupied by all the members, allowing those within the Wizengamot to speak in private without anyone in the gallery hearing.

A soft babble of whispered conversations rose from the audience. Ron barely breathed as they waited, not daring to hope for anything positive. Blaise put a comforting arm around him, telling him to relax that it would all be all right, somehow.

Hermione simply sat quietly with her head bowed; she was going to accept any sentence that was pronounced by the wizarding council. She was stunned that Severus Snape had actually testified on her behalf; she had trouble wrapping her mind about that simple fact.

"I think the Minister is dead-set on putting her in Azkaban!" George growled, arms folded, eyes narrowed as he glared at the Minister, who had his back to the room and was gesticulating grandly.

"Probably is, the idiot." Warrington had no idea why he was here but George had insisted he come, and with Alyssa's backing he hadn't any choice. He hated coming to the ministry and only the fact
that no one had learned the details of his involvement in this entire mess had kept him from sitting in
the same seat that Hermione was now. "I never liked him in school; he was really self-absorbed and
doesn't seem to have changed at all."

"Yeah… I thought the same damned thing." George smirked at him faintly, still highly irritated as he
watched the Minister.

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"Policy and history demand that for the crimes she was accused of…" the minister began.

"Policy and history be bloody well damned!" Cho Longbottom-Chang snapped in response. "She
was not found guilty of the charge of rape and that's what you want to hold her to!"

"She's right, that was Pansy Parkinson, not Hermione Weasley!" an aged wizard snapped. "She
was not guilty!"

"She was guilty of Theft by Deception, aiding and abetting Pansy Parkinson and one count of
Improper Use of Magic! Isn't that enough to put her in Azkaban? Just because she doesn't have a
Dark Mark and she associates with Potter you all just want to let her walk away from this!" Millicent
Bulstrode growled, eyes narrow. "There is no Dark Lord anymore, we must stop worshipping at the
feet of Potter and everyone he associates with!

"Oh, come on Millicent; you know as well as I do that this has absolutely nothing to do with Potter
other than the fact that it all BEGAN with him!" Cho scowled.

"And no one said they wanted to let her walk away!" Amanda countered immediately. "But she
should not be treated with undue harshness because you cannot find a way to bring back the
Parkinsons and punish them yourself!"

The minister was clearly flustered. "I… this isn't about Parkinson or his daughter, this is about…"

"Isn't it? You've been on the edge of your seat since this entire thing began!" Amanda countered.

That made the minister bluster. "This isn't about me either!"

"It is, because the German wizard's council demanded the return of August Bebel. You have no one
else to showcase as taking the blame for this entire situation!"

"That woman has broken the laws of the wizarding world and must be punished for doing so!" An
old witch said. "She could easily have exposed us to the muggle world with her intermingling of
wizardry and muggle technology!" She eyed Cho. "Are you saying she should not be punished?"

"I'm not saying that and you know it, Gertie." Cho answered. "But Azkaban is for killers. Hermione
hasn't done anything to warrant that severity of treatment!"

"What do you suggest, then? A slap on the wrist and let her back out to do the same bloody thing?"
the Minister demanded, red-faced.

"Of course she's not! Don't be a bloody fool, none of us are idiots!" a wizened old wizard grumbled.

"Then what do you suggest? I only was putting her in for a month!" The minister seemed to be
beginning to whine now, folding his arms, scowling deeply. It was all getting away from him and he
didn't like being out of control of the situation at all.
"You all heard the testimony of Severus Snape…"

"Oh, that's an impressive point; he's a most trustworthy man." Gertie said in sour sarcasm.

"Even if you don't believe a single word he's said, you've seen the penseive testimonies of all the aurors involved! If it had not been for Hermione Weasley we might never have even found half of those children. And from the interviews that were done on those returned to the families of their fathers, it is clear that they would have suffered much abuse to try to mold them into new Dark Lords to take over our world again! Because of Hermione Weasley, that threat has been eliminated!"

"Aren't you being a bit dramatic?" Millicent asked.

"Am I? I took the time to read ALL the reports and watch ALL the penseive testimony, not just what looked like what it might be juicy." Cho said, eyes narrow.

"Ladies! Minister, please…” an old wizard spoke up from the back of the gallery; he had been on the panel for over a hundred years and rarely voted much less spoke during debates. All eyes turned to the man, who cleared his throat and pressed on in a shaky voice. "Minister, if you must place her in Azkaban, do so for a period of no more than two weeks. Then proceed with whatever probationary process you wish; I am quite weary and am ready to head home." He suggested.

"Is that the consensus of all of you?" McLaggen demanded, looking around.

"I'd prefer no time at all, but yes, that will do." Cho said with a frown.

"Then let's get this done; I'm more than ready to have this all behind me!" The minister growled, returning to his seat and snatching up his gavel before he lifted the curtain of silence.

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Minister McLaggen felt assaulted by the babble of voices that struck him when he lifted the silencing spell, but he began banging his gavel on the sounding block and calling for attention and silence. Finally the babble quieted down but McLaggen was waiting for complete silence before he proceeded, glaring at the audience as if accusing them of spoiling a very important moment for him. "The dominant desire of the Wizengamot is that you will stay in Azkaban, Mrs. Weasley; your stay will be limited to a fortnight." He said, glancing about as if daring anyone to naysay him now. No one said anything though there were rumbles of discontent from the gallery.

Hermione nodded, not raising her eyes from her hands, clasped in her lap to hide the fact that they were shaking.

"Upon the completion of your stint in Azkaban, you will be moved to a low-security prison in Bristol and will be assigned to work in the hospital there. You will be continuing your studies under your current collegiate program, though you WILL change your focus from genetics to general physician. You will be working in the emergency clinic with muggle patients. You will NOT be allowed the use of your wand for a minimum of three months; you will be watched closely throughout that time. ANY misuse of your magic and you will be returned to your cell in Azkaban! You will not be allowed to travel, but you will be allowed to have visits from friends and family. After a period of a full year, you will be allowed to return to your home and released under probationary restrictions. Details will be worked out with the Aurors; this case is closed." he slammed his gavel down a final time and turned to walk out, followed by the rest of the wizarding council. Millicent Bulstrode stayed seated for longer than the others and was one of the last to leave, scowling and angry still.

The room erupted in a cacophony of voices; two Aurors stepped forward and escorted Hermione
away.
New Medi-Witch

Author's notes: Hermione Weasley has completed her time in Azkaban per the wizengamot's determination of her guilt, but she is not allowed to tend to any of her patients from the past. Who will be attending to her patients from the clinic in her absence?

***************************************************************************Author's Note***************************************************************************

Hello readers! Sorry it's been so long between chapters; life has really snuck up on us and it's been hard to get anything done. Between school (back to back classes) and kids (two emergency room visits in 3 days) and girl scouts and t-ball games and work, it's been hell even getting a moment to type much less to focus on storylines. This part is done, and I want to get it posted... the other half of the chapter will be up as soon as I figure out what the end of it is... two more are in the works. Enjoy!

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"What do you mean I can't come back?" Damitri scowled at the nurse who refused to allow him past the desk. Terry hesitated just inside the doorway but the medi-witch was tugging on his arm to get him to move along.

"Come, sir, we have a dozen more waiting to be seen!" she urged, pulling him through the door into the back. Terry gazed around the place with a great deal of trepidation, unsure if he even wanted to be within ten miles of this place. The clinic where he had seen Ms. Weasley had been so bright and clean and airy, lots of natural lighting and relaxing music, and beautiful babies and pictures on the walls. This place was nothing like that at all.

It was austere and clean, walls painted simple white with black rubber trim to keep things from scuffing up the wall if they ran into it. The waiting room had photos of sunsets and skylines and everything just was so antiseptic... The smell of cleansers and sterilizing solutions assaulted his sensitive sense of smell and made his stomach turn over the moment they had walked in here.

Once he got inside, it was even more inhuman feeling. The pictures on the walls were of cutouts of human heads and chests, showing intestines and blood vessels and things; there was nothing soothing to look at for someone like himself who could not read.

The nurse led him along and he followed numbly, barely able to answer the questions she rattled off as she took his temperature and blood pressure and his weight, asking him if he knew what his weight gain had been. When he mumbled that he had no idea, she smiled at him and led him onward to a tiny room with cabinets lining one wall and a strange table with silver things sticking up from the side that he had no idea what their use could be... She handed him folded up gown and a sheet and instructed him to get undressed, as the medi-witch would be in shortly to see him. She then walked out with clinical efficiency, leaving him alone.

Terry wanted to yank the door open and go and find Damitri; he was terrified to be closed in here without him. He had experienced a horrible childhood and Damitri was the only secure thing he knew. With trembling fingers he began to disrobe, casting frequent fearful looks toward the door. He gazed at the gown a moment, confused once he had pulled it on. The front didn't flap over? How was he to wear such a thing and not expose himself to these women he didn't know? He decided to use the sheet not just for his legs, but to provide him some coverage. He shook out the sheet and he
wrapped it around his back and to the front under his arms, then crossed the flaps over his chest and tied the corners up behind his neck like a Hawaiian muumuu. Feeling as if he was at least decently covered up, he stepped up to take a seat on the table.

By this time he could hear Damitri out in the hall and his heart leapt with joy. When the door opened and Damitri stood there Terry gave a little cry and ran to him.

Damitri closed the door firmly behind him and gathered his husband into his arms. “Easy now, Terry, I’m here. And none of these harpies are going to separate us again.”

“I’m sorry Dimi, I… I guess I’m still such a baby…” Terry gave his husband a tremulous smile, trying to be brave.

"Nonsense. They had no right to separate us. Your new medi-witch should be in here soon." Damitri said soothingly, moving to help him sit up on the table and wait until the medi-wizard showed up.

Terry had just begun to calm down and feel that things weren’t so bad. He was safe and comforted in the warm embrace of Damitri’s arms, resting against him as he waited, seated on the bed.

Nearly half an hour passed before there was a brisk knock on the door followed by it opening and the two men got their first look at the one who was to replace Hermione Weasley as Terry’s midwife-witch. And the mere look of her nearly sent Terry back into tears.

It wasn't her uniform that made her frightening; no, Terry had seen his share of medics and psychologists and the lot and he had long since learned to relax around them especially if his Damitri was allowed to remain. No, this woman's uniform was as pristine as the office; not a fold where it should not be, creased and pressed to perfection.

The thing about this woman that set Terry on edge the moment he saw her was her face. She couldn’t have been older than Mrs. Weasley, if one judged by her smooth skin and her carefully coiffed hair that was blonde and shot through with gray streaks. She wore no makeup whatsoever and the line between her eyes from worry or anger seemed to be permanently etched there from her brows constantly being drawn together. Her mouth was small and was held in a tight-lipped, clearly disapproving frown that gave her an overall pinched appearance. "I am Miss Shalder. I will be your midwife-witch for the rest of your term and I will be the one who delivers your child." She told them both in a flat tone.

"Can't we get someone else?" Terry asked Damitri in a whisper.

Unfortunately for Terry, Midwife-witch Shalder heard him. She glared at him a moment, then answered in a tart tone; "With the shortage of midwives right now, I seriously doubt it, Mr. Zabini." she then resumed her personage of professionalism. "Let's get down to business." She announced, looking at Damitri. “If you will step back sir?”

Damitri kissed Terry’s hand, then stepped aside to the corner of the room to allow the medic clear access to his husband.

“All right: Terry, is it…? Yes. Terry, lie back on the bed and I will check your progress… it seems none of the notes from the clinic have been released even for medical reasons at this time.” The pinch-faced witch commented, taking a moment to look at how Terry had concealed his body. She scowled further and moved behind Terry, untying the knot without ceremony and letting the sheet fall to the sides. Then without explaining or asking permission, she tugged the covering gown up and sheet down to expose Terry's slightly rounded stomach.
Terry glanced at Damitri nervously, reaching for his hand.

"Please, sir, you must stand back!" The witch ordered, scowling at Damitri when he stepped forward. Terry drew back his hand as if it had been burned. "You'll interfere with the scans and I have a lot of work to document before your husband leaves."

Damitri returned the scowl, refusing to back down. "My husband needs some reassurance, and without it I can almost guarantee you will not complete a single bit of your necessary 'work' without my presence." He retorted, stepping up beside the bed out of the way, taking Terry's hand in his. "I'll take it to the Head of the Hospital if you deny me my right to be with him!"

She glared a moment, and then whipped out her wand and, continuing with her habit of not bothering to explain, she performed several spells over the stomach of the slim, effeminate man lying prone upon the examination table.

"Dimi, what's she doing...? Is the baby all right?" Terry whispered softly, his feeling of nervousness and near panic rising up once more. There must be something wrong, she never said a single word!

"Shush!" She insisted without even bothering to meet his eyes, now laying her hands directly upon Terry's skin and probing for a few moments.

Terry silenced immediately, tears welling up in his eyes. He closed them tightly at her touch, biting his lip.

Damitri's anger only grew at the offhanded treatment of his husband. Granted, he was a squib but he was as much a member of the wizarding world as anyone else was.

"Scans show that things are normal, nothing to fret over," she announced, tugging the sheet back up to cover him. "Your baby seems to be doing fine." she turned away.

"When do we come back for our next checkup?" Damitri asked, unable to keep from noticing that Terry was trembling now despite his best efforts to hide it.

"Checkup? Whatever for?" She looked at him askance as she used her wand to make notations in the file.

"For the baby...?" Terry murmured timidly but silenced at her glare at him.

"Your baby is fine. Go on home and call us when you have any problems." she said, turning away again.

"Madam, you will arrange a follow-up appointment for us. My husband is a squib and we require specialized care; we need a follow up appointment to ensure the continued health of our baby." Damitri clarified, working quite hard to control his anger so as not to further frighten Terry. At this moment he would like nothing better than to hex this thoughtless witch!

"If you must have one I'll go and get you the day and time," she grunted, snatching up the case file and bustling out the door.

Terry began to weep, trembling, and Damitri gathered him into his arms, soothing him. "Easy baby..." he murmured.

"I don't like her Damitri... she's going to hurt me or she's going to hurt our baby. I don't understand what she just did or why she's so angry at us we haven't done anything wrong..." he wept. "She says that our baby is okay but... but I want Ms. Weasley back, Dimi... this woman is going to hurt our
baby…”

"No one's going to hurt our baby..."

"I don't want to come back here, Dimi... not ever... I hate this place, please don’t ever make me come back here, it scares me...!" he whispered, trembling.
The Minister Embattled

Author's notes: The Potters/Malfoy clan had been robbed of children, both they and other pureblood wizarding families from more than one country. The lost children are with their rightful families and those who perpetrated the crime have been punished. Now, overloaded with patients, one particular medi-witch has infuriated several people awaiting the happy arrival of their babies. What will they do to get Hermione Weasley back as their medi-witch?

Damitri moved into the most opulent area of the Ministry of Magic; the offices of the Minister himself. There was a large room at least fifty feet across of white marble floors with paintings in gold frames. Runners of various colors adorned tables set with attractive vases full of flowers were placed underneath each of the paintings; the flowers seeming to coordinate with both picture and runner they were set upon. The room had a large fireplace that seemed as if it was useable for the Floo Network but Damitri knew that it had been closed off for transportations recently.

About the room was arranged some furniture covered in plush velvet of white with wood polished to a golden sheen. There seemed to be two couches and five or so chairs in little conversation groups set up, but more chairs had been summoned that did not match the rest of the décor. Somehow this room did not seem designed to hold as many chairs as there were presently, not that he was surprised. They had to accommodate the thirty or so individuals who were seated here waiting to see the minister.

Ernie MacMillan was pacing the floor of the elegant lobby, his face flushed with anger and robes fluttering about his legs as he walked. He glanced at Damitri and sighed. “Good luck to you, no one else has been in to see that balmy bloke all morning.” He growled. “I have a feeling I’ll be speaking for many when I do get to see him.” Damitri said, giving the man a respectful bow, and it was returned despite the man’s clear irritation. He then moved forward to the only desk in the room, set a good twenty feet away from the nearest chair.

Behind that desk was a woman easily in her late nineties, her silver white hair caught up in an attractive bun that reminded Damitri of photos he had seen of women in the eighteen hundreds – what was that style…? Gibson Girls; that was it. Her face bore some of the wrinkles that one would expect of a witch her age, but she still had plenty of the strength and vigor of youth evident in her every movement and was very alert. And she was not unfamiliar to him at all; she had been one of his father's classmates when he had attended school. She smiled as he approached, rising to her feet. “Well this is a nice surprise, Mr. Zabini…! You look wonderful; how are your sisters doing…?”

“Mrs. Chantiron.” Damitri smiled warmly, moving to take her hand and bow to her before kissing the back of it. “Such a pleasant surprise to see you here… I didn’t realize you were working for the Ministry…”

“Oh, a witch has got to keep her hand in it you know, and there’s not too much that I’m suited for anymore…” she chuckled good-naturedly.

“Nonsense; I’m sure you could still out-hex half of the ministers. I’d even lay money on that…”

“Never said my skills got rusty, did I?” she asked with a merry twinkle in her eye. “And you’re avoiding my question about your sister in law, I notice…”
“Not avoiding, specifically… she’s well as she can be. She rarely comes to visit; her life doesn’t give her time to do much family socializing.”

“Shame about Blaise, you know. That poor child; your elder sister was such a raving beauty but she never had a moment to spare for him. He was very fortunate to have an uncle to raise him like you, Damitri.”

“You flatter me, Mrs. Chantiron.” Damitri chuckled.

“And your dear sister Kinder; I know she was so attached to that fellow Severus Snape, how did she take him becoming a triad with Nymphadora and that Lupin fellow…?” she asked him.

“She took it hard at first; but after a while she realized that it was actually the best thing for all involved. Severus was never satisfied with only female companionship and she was simply not what he needed. She has found companionship of her own, off in America. She was last out here in the fall, visiting with Blaise and attending two of his games.”

“Across the pond…? What a shame she had to go too far to find her partner…” she sighed sadly. “I do miss visiting with your family; you should bring them about every once in a while. I haven’t moved out of the old family home, you know.”

“Yes, I know. I’d like you to visit with my husband; he’s quite the charmer.” Damitri smiled. He knew that Terry might be nervous around this regal-looking old woman at first, but he would warm up quickly enough with this old family friend.

“I’d love that… bring him over for tea on Thursday; I’ll make something special.” She said, winking at him, and then she sighed. “Although I would love to pretend that you came up here to visit with me, I’m certain that you have something else bubbling in your cauldron…”

He chuckled at the old phrase and nodded. “Unfortunately, yes. I must speak with the Minister.”

That made the woman grimace. “Who doesn’t? I’m sorry, Damitri, the Minister isn’t seeing anyone today…” she said apologetically.

“Is he even in?” Damitri asked pointedly.

She sighed, glancing at the door. “To be perfectly honest, I’m not sure. He said he was going to be out this afternoon.” She answered. She had been given instructions not only to divert any of the magical community away from his office, but also to not allow any of them to even know his whereabouts. "You'll have to visit with the head Auror concerning the case and I believe there are eight others ahead of you. Would you like me to contact Ms. Lupin for you...?" she offered pleasantly.

"If I needed to speak to her I wouldn't have come up here." Damitri said reasonably. "I will speak to the Minister and no other about this..."

"I'm sorry, but he's not here." She answered.

“Perhaps I could simply step in and leave him a message.” He suggested reasonably.

“I don’t know…”

“If it causes you any inconvenience whatsoever, dear lady, I will take care of anything and everything that may come up. Agreed?”
“Oh, I know you will, Damitri. All right. Just in to put in a note.” She said, glancing at the others waiting in the room. She moved to the door with Damitri at her heels and stood at the door a moment with her hand resting on the knob. Then she waved her wand to release the spell once the door’s recognition charm had scanned her identity. She swung the door open and stepped inside, glancing about. Nothing was out of place, no sign was there that the Minister was here. “Don’t be long, young man.” She winked, then slipped out, leaving the door open.

Damitri stepped in and strolled to the desk, glancing around the room. Everything in the room was carefully matched, carefully crafted to impress. Gold, silver, expensive silks, and crystal were everywhere; the lighting was provided by magically lit chandeliers that hung from the ceilings. The room had high arching ceilings and stained glass windows high on the walls allowed muted light in from outside. Two tall statues stood on either side of the fireplace that were probably supposed to have been his parents, had they been charmed to have every blemish and flaw removed; the end result was that they looked angelic and regal. Damitri smirked; he had attended school with the Minister’s father and knew the man was nearly a foot shorter than the majestic statue, and he had a harelip, which the sculptor had neglected to reproduce. The woman he had taken to wife was nowhere that beautiful, but such was art…

He shook his head and moved on to the desk to find a notepad with ostentatious initials across the top written in gold. He picked up the notepad and glanced about the room again; something in this room did not fit. There were plants in the room, carefully sculpted shrubberies enchanted to grow specific ways, but one of the plants was not twisted in the same way; it was a rather plain shrub. He smirked slightly but showed no other sign that he had noticed; he picked up the notepad and produced a quill form his own pocket; he jotted down a quick note on the pad, speaking the words out loud as he wrote.

“Minister, I need to speak with you immediately on a very urgent matter. If I do not speak with you today, I will be taking this up with the entire Ministerial council and have your appointment brought into question…” he said in a firm tone, turning his eyes to the bush. He pulled the paper off the pad. “I WILL have you removed from office. Make no mistake.” He growled, turning to face the bush, which shivered slightly. His eyes narrowed. “I will give you five minutes, sir, to see me. If you do not deign to see me within that time, I assure you I will have you expelled from office by the end of the week.” He said in a dangerously promising tone, tossing the note at the bush and walking out the open door.

He pulled it closed behind him and moved back to the desk the elderly lady, who was explaining to yet another of the wizarding community that the minister was not available. This woman was clearly very pregnant and looked so large that in his opinion she could deliver any moment.

“I’ve had quite enough at being ignored and treated like a child because I happen to be pregnant,” she growled. “I tell you I won’t be put off! They’re much too busy over at St Mungo’s to deal with simple pregnancies; I need the services of Hermione Weasley!” She snapped, one hand over her stomach. It was clear she had no intention of backing down at all.

Mrs. Chantiron grimaced, wishing she could at least give this woman a different answer but she had not received any notice from the Minister and had nothing else to tell. “I’m sorry, Mrs. Bullock, he’s not in…” she said apologetically.

“Like bloody hell he’s not…! I swear I’m going to stay right here until I see him! I swear to you that I’ll give birth to this baby right here in the lobby and bleed all over his fancy furniture if he doesn’t see me!” She snapped, her face flushed and looking a bit pinched with pain.
“Easy, madam,” Damitri said soothingly, moving forward. He was certain that he recognized her; she was the one with the muggle husband who had been in a coma for nearly a year. He had been in the Ministry the last time she had petitioned to get him transferred to St. Mungo's for treatment. He had believed that she would finally be successful but he had read the unfortunate news that he had passed away just a month ago, still in that muggle hospital. “You really ought to be sitting down…” he said with clear concern.

She glared at him too with one hand on her swollen abdomen, quite ready to do whatever it took to get her way. It was actually hard to understand how she had been unable to get her husband the treatment he needed. “I have no idea who you are, sir, but don’t you DARE go cosseting me just because I’m pregnant, I’ve had quite enough of that for a lifetime!” she said, her eyes glinting.

Damitri held up both hands open in a gesture of non-combatant status. “I assure you I have no intention of cossetting you, madam, but I am quite concerned. You do seem to be in pain…” he replied, hiding the smile he felt coming forth because of the woman’s sheer stubbornness and spirit.

She hesitated and then nodded briefly as she took a moment to consider her own condition. “I am, a bit…”

“Then if you will, please have a seat. If you will allow it, I will remain here with you for a while, and fetch a healer should the need arise.” Damitri offered, gesturing to a nearby couch.

“I can’t do that, I have to see the Minister.” She insisted.

“As do I, madam. I must see him for the same reason as you. My husband is quite delicate and absolutely refuses to return to the medi-witch who was chosen to be the midwife; I wish nothing less than the reinstatement of Mrs. Weasley to her post as midwife.” He answered her in a clear and concise tone.

“I’m Andrea Bullock; please stop calling me madam. I don’t run a bloody brothel.” She grumbled crossly walking with him.

Damitri found he was unable to keep from chuckling at the comment. “As you wish, Mrs. Bullock.”

“Of course he will know him. He will know your husband through you, dear lady. He will know how much he was wanted, and how much he is still wanted and loved. And he will know what kind
of man your husband, his father, was by the stories you share.” Damitri said softly.

The woman gave him a sad smile. “Yes… and I have so many memories to share…”

“Excuse me, Mr. Zabini…?” Mrs. Chantiron said, clearly not wanting to interrupt since Damitri had managed to get Mrs. Bullock calmed down and resting quietly with a cool glass of water.

Damiitri looked up at her questioningly, though he knew precisely what he was being called for. “Yes?”

She smiled at him. “It seems the Minister has just arrived, and is asking to speak with you, sir.”

“The minister’s here?” Mrs. Bullock said, putting down her glass, her face flushing again, bracing herself to push back to her feet.

“I will speak to him on both our behalf. You have told me quite enough already, I assure you, to present a case strong enough to stand before the wizarding council.” Damitri soothed her.

“Well…” She hesitated, and then nodded briefly, subsiding in her chair. “All right. But don’t you let him talk you around to anything!”

“You have my word, Mrs. Bullock.” He agreed, rising and giving her a very respectful formal bow before he turned to follow the Minister’s secretary.

Others in the room overheard the conversation and several had risen to their feet as well; everyone had clear intention to swarm the office as they had on the previous occasion.

“The minister’s finally got here! I’ve been waiting four hours to speak to him!” Eddie MacMillan broke off his pacing to stride toward them.

“I’m afraid not, Mr. MacMillan. Mr. Zabini has been requested, sir, and I cannot allow you in…”

“I’d like to see you bloody well try to keep me out!” He snapped, his eyes locked on the partially opened door.

Damitri stepped forward but Mrs. Chantiron waved him aside. “I may be a lady but I can handle this.” She assured in a quiet tone, not even producing her wand. Ernie looked rather shocked when he ran into a barrier several feet away from them, as if the room had been halved by something not visible but very tangible.

“I cannot allow you to disturb the Minister until he is ready to see you, Mr. MacMillan. I assure you, he has been given every detail of your complaint and he will get to you when he is able…” The secretary remained calm and even had a pleasant smile on her face, though she was faced by the anger of easily half the individuals in the room.

Ernie, angered by his long wait and the fact that the Minister was ignoring him yet again, growled and drew his wand. “I CAN get through any shield you can throw up!”

“I wouldn’t do that if I were you, Mr. MacMillan.” Damitri cautioned but he may as well not have spoken at all for all the attention the younger man paid to him. Zabini simply stepped back another step; he knew this woman’s history and that she had been quite the witch in her prime. He doubted she had lost any of her sharpness despite her age.
Mrs. Chantiron gave MacMillan another chance despite his clear intention to press onward right through whatever obstacle there was. “I understand your frustration, Mr. MacMillan. You could probably breach my shielding but can you do it before I have ten Aurors up here to take you into custody?” she asked in a gentle tone. “I recommend, sir, that you simply have a seat. It will be all right, I promise you…”

“You don’t have the authority to promise me anything! My wife isn’t getting the treatment or attention she needs and she’s going to have her baby soon! The minister doesn’t do anything! You can’t promise me anything at all! Finite Incantatem!” He snapped.

"Protego!" the silver-haired woman spoke the word at the same moment, turning and whipping her wand about in a complex motion to cast a second spell a heartbeat later.

Damitri kept his wand at the ready but as per his family freind's wish, he did not interfere other than to cast a protective spell again to keep anyone else from being hurt by any spells.

Ernie surged forward past the shield he had shattered as the little old witch’s spell took effect. The small Persian rug laid out to protect the expensive marble flooring animated; it curled up off the floor the moment that his foot touched its fibers and wrapped around his legs, wrapping tightly around both his legs and causing him to fall hard.

"Reducto!" he snarled, pointing a wand at the expensive little area rug exploded into a thousand pieces of wool and thread, showing that he had also caused himself harm as his robes were singed and shredded his legs beneath them were shredded and burned as well. He clearly showed no care for himself or his injuries as he began to force himself to his feet again. "Bombarda! he snapped, wand pointed at the wall beside the door.

The wall shivered than exploded toward them, a shower of rock and dust and the physical blast itself knocking all three of them to the floor with the resultant shock wave. Ernie was in the middle of that blast wave and was bowled over and thrown backwards, and both Damitri and the elderly lady were shoved to the floor with violent force, obscuring the sight of the wall, several woman screaming in fear as they shied away from the destruction. Damitri's protective shield ensured no others were hurt by flying debris, though a big cloud of dust did result.

Ernie struggled to his feet and returned his eyes to his focus; staring in shock half a moment. The wall had not been breached by his attack but there was a very deep indentation in the stone and half of the thickness of the wall was gone. One more blast should do it... he coughed and tried to get a clear breath, squinting through the dust.

It cleared with startling suddenness; Mrs. Chantiron was already on her feet and finished clearing the dust away with another gesture of her wand.

Ernie panicked, knowing that he had no chance now of seeing the Minister and likely would face charges for what he had done. He struggled wildly, tears streaking the fresh dust and grit on his face. "No! No, I have to see him! You don't understand...!"

"On the contrary, I do understand, Mr. MacMillan." She moved forward to him, bending to gaze at his injuries and deciding that they were not life threatening at all before she took a moment to gaze at her fallen foe with no malice in her eyes. "I understand, but that wasn't the way to go about getting what you need."
He sagged onto the floor, the fight gone out of him. "My wife...!" he whimpered.

"Your wife needs you to be with her, sir, not in Azkaban. Now relax and I will see what can be done." she said quietly, rising to her feet as several loud pops announced the arrival of at least a dozen Aurors.

“Are you all right, Mrs. Chantiron?” Damitri asked, moving up to her.

“Not to worry, Damitri, not to worry. Run along and see the Minister, I will handle this… easy there, be gentle with that man…!” she scolded two of the Aurors now pulling Ernie to his feet.

One Auror looked at her with more than a little surprise. “But he attacked you…!”

She had no intention of allowing the Auror, whatever his station, to overrun what she intended. “He’s not in his right mind I tell you. Be easy with him!” she ordered once more, waggling her wand warningly.

Damitri, seeing all was well in hand and there was no injured to deal with, turned and moved to the door of the Minister’s office. He opened tapped firmly on the door, then opened it and moved into the room.

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The minister’s office had not actually been breached by the blast thrown by that desperate father, but on the inside of the wall there was a clear area that was bowed inward where the bombardard spell had impacted. One more blast clearly would have broken through, and there was a bit of dust still settling on things inside.

The office seemed to be empty, but Damitri noticed with a faint smirk that the plant that did not seem to belong that he had spoken to earlier was nowhere to be seen. The Minister was himself, in this room somewhere. “You called for me, Minister?” Damitri asked, glancing about.

“Oh! Um, yes, of course, Mr. Zabini…” The Minister of Magic, duly appointed leader of the wizarding world, crept out from behind his desk, clearing his throat and dusting off his robes in an attempt to pretend that he had not just been hiding under his desk like a mouse trying to avoid a fox. “Good day to you, sir…”

“And to you, Minister.” Damitri returned the pleasantries, but would not remain so for long. He had an agenda to get done and had no intention of allowing this man to get away with taking needed medical treatment away. “We need to discuss this and see if this can be reasoned out.” Damitri answered, allowing the man to try to salvage some of his self-esteem and pretend he had not been cowering.

The Minister gave him a completely uncomprehending look. “Discuss? Is there anything to discuss? You’ll have to explain, sir, I can’t imagine what you’re talking about…” he began in a completely innocent tone.

Damitri eyed the man and sighed; his attempts at civility were clearly being wasted. “Since it’s abundantly clear that you insist on being dense, I will put it in the simplest terms possible.” He said in a tone bordering on sarcasm. He ignored the outraged spluttering of the Minister and continued to speak; drowning out anything the man might have said. “My husband is pregnant. He is a squib. He would be allowed to deliver in St. Mungo’s but he refuses to return there. To be honest, I think that they would rather he not return as well and a simple birth will kill him.”

The Minister’s face brightened; clearly he saw a way to deal with this particular situation. “Well why
didn’t you say so? I’ll just jot down a note to the head of St. Mungo’s! He’s a close personal friend of mine and as a matter of fact owes me a favor!” He snatched up a quill and parchment and prepared to write. “I will arrange for a special healer…”

“No.” Damitri said immediately, cutting off the flow of chatter with that simple word.

The Minister stared at him, uncomprehending for a moment, the quill tip hovered a fraction of an inch above the parchment. “I… what…?”

“No, Minister. I’m afraid a special healer won’t do.” He answered again.

“Of course it will. I can even have my own healer…”

Damitri scowled, folding his arms. “And how many children from wizards has he delivered?”

“Oh, well, um…”

“And how many children has he delivered for squibs?” He pressed further.

“…well, I… I couldn't say, I...” he stammered.

“As I thought. I will not place the life of my husband and child into someone with little or no experience, sir.” Damitri’s voice was hard and cold. “I will have a woman whom has proven herself as a skilled maternal healer and who has delivered many children for wizard and witch alike as well as squib parents. I will have a woman who has proven her capability to deal with the special personality of my husband and his delicate mental balance. I will have none other than she for our midwife-mediwitch.”

“What…? You can’t mean Weasley…!” he spluttered.

“I mean Hermione Weasley and no one else. She enabled us to have a child when I truly held out no hope for that miracle, and I know that she has done that same service to many others. The proof of her aid to others is sitting in the lobby there, and that mark upon your wall..." he pointed at the rounded indentation, "...is proof of just how far they are willing to go to get her back. Everyone in the lobby is in agreement, sir; we will have our medi-witch back.”

“But that's not possible! Her punishment was confirmed and set by the full Wizengamot…! It would take a vote of the full Grand Wizarding Council to reverse that sentence and that has never been successfully done!”

“It may have been three centuries ago when it was last successfully done, but it can and will be done." he answered coldly. "Everyone in that courtroom heard you going on and on until you set the first sentence. We all heard that you had a sentence all mapped out for her before she even had her trial; you had determined her guilt without even hearing any evidence."

"I did no such thing...!" he objected immediately.

“There's no point in arguing about facts. At this time, Minister, she has completed her time in Azkaban and we all feel that we have been sentenced to the same sentence you gave to her.”

“How can you all be so angry about it? She is serving a purpose; she is serving as a medical worker and tending to the public...”

That drew a bitter laugh from Damitri. "The public? Be more specific, Minister. She is tending to the MUGGLE public! She is not allowed to touch her wand and any performance of magic will send her
back to Azkaban!” He answered, and then eyed him. “Or are you claiming that you don’t even remember the sentence that you yourself designed to assuage your anger?”

"It wasn’t just to make me feel better! The point was for her to understand the mechanics behind healing, not just the magical aspects of it all, I..." he started in a weak tone, trying to defend himself.

"She was going to a Muggle college to learn all of that already.” He said sourly, eyes narrowed. "I work as an investigator, Minister, I would be an absolute fool to go to a medical clinic and not have done some background checks on the person I’m dealing with. I know a bit of Mrs. Weasley’s background."

"Ah! That’s what’s important, though! She's back in her classes!” he said as if that was a triumphant event, seizing on it as if it was a ray of hope.

Damitri’s glare swept all the excitement out of the man over his last statement. "Yes, she’s back in her Muggle College taking Muggle classes while she tends to Muggle women. Meanwhile all of the women and men in the wizarding community who depended upon her and now carry children that she should be attending to are unable to even see her.” He said bitterly.

"The sentence was approved by the Wizengamot! Even as Minister of Magic, I cannot change it!"

Damitri, who had never bothered to take a seat, glared at the minister. "I demand that you call for the full Wizarding Council to convene.” He commanded quietly.

The minister flushed deeply but did not stand up. "Don't you understand? It will do no good...!"

Zabini moved to the front of the desk and leaned on it with his knuckles, eyes narrow. "One of two things will happen, Minister. The first option is your best choice; you will take action and you call for the Grand Wizarding Council and to get our mediwitch reinstated to her post…”

“But that can’t be done; the sentence was set in stone when it was set down by the Wizengamot…” The minister tried to interrupt him, his voice getting squeaky and cracking a bit with desperation.

The older man did not raise his voice at all; in fact it became dangerously quiet. “The second option is that you do what you are doing now; nothing. Then I shall use every ounce of my influence to call an immediate meeting of the Wizarding Council and after I have her reinstated, I shall be sure to have you removed from this post!” He growled quietly.

The Minister paled, sitting very quiet and still for a long moment. Damitri did not move, allowing the promise to hang between them like a thundercloud, eyes locked on the younger man.

The silence stretched and the minister attempted to speak but nothing came out. He coughed, cleared his throat, and then pushed to his feet, still pale. “You can’t threaten me like that, Mr. Zabini, I don’t care who you think you are. I’m the Minister…”

“At the moment, you are.” Damitri straightened of the desk, standing taller than the other man and clearly looking down on him. “What you will be when all this is done and over is clearly debatable at this point. You have thirty minutes. In that time you are free to do whatever it is you wish to do. As I am a member of the Wizarding Council, I will know if you choose to take action or if you don’t. In one hour, there will be a meeting of the full council.” He stated and turned away.

“I’ll try, but…”

Damitri paused, glancing back at him. “That’s the problem, Minister. You try, you promise, you speak eloquently but you produce nothing. If it weren’t for your Aurors and ministerial staff you’d
never get a thing done besides personal appearances. Why don’t you ask your secretary to get it done; I have far more confidence in the skills of that woman than I have ever had in you. As far as I’m concerned, your career is over.” He said, turning and walking out.

Minister McClaggen stared after him, his knees suddenly giving way as he fell back into his plush chair. Everything was coming apart around him... it was all going to be over, because of this mess, and there was nothing he could do about it.

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Precisely one hour later, having received a summons to attend a meeting of the Grand Wizarding Council, Damitri stepped out of the floo opening into the grand entryway of the Ministry of Magic. He took a moment to dust himself off fastidiously with his wand and then looked about him. After the defeat of Voldemort, the ministry had felt it was a good investment to repair the old building and make it more inviting to all. The new Office for Nonhuman Affairs was housed on this level, in a new area built on the spot where that horrid fountain had been of the wizards treading on anything not of wizardkind.

Damitri smiled at the meaningful placement of the office and turned, starting to walk to the lifts. The black marble tile that had shone before had been replaced with white marble shot through with hues of gold, making the place seem brighter, warmer, and more inviting. The flooring was not marble, however, but soft carpeting that almost had the feel of grass; he wasn’t quite sure what it was but it made little noise when trod upon even by the centaur several paces ahead of him. It was a good change and not made too soon, in Damitri’s opinion.

Although the Wizengamot met on level nine for their inquests, the Grand Wizarding Council was to be gathered in the Council Chamber, on level seven. This group was rarely called, but Damitri was determined to see this through and get what was best for his little Terry. He smiled and greeted individuals he knew when he stepped into the lift, being introduced to those he did not. There were new members to the council that he found rather surprising. Up until this year, non-humans were not allowed to be members of any of the wizarding councils though they were frequently called before them in judgment.

“Damitri, this is Secron; he’s the Grand Wizarding Council representative for the Centaur nations...” his old friend Todd Grandein introduced.

The tall centaur was dressed in the finest ceremonial garb he could muster. A blanket was draped over his back that appeared to be silken, but the hues changed as the fabric moved down his back and legs until what nearly touched the floor trimmed in tassels was dark blood red. He wore a chest piece that matched that seemed to be armor but was clearly ceremonial as well and bore a tall staff in hand hung with feathers and painted with subtle colors that gleamed and showed astral symbols when the light struck them just right. “It is a pleasure to meet you.” Damitri said, granting the man a ceremonial bow.

The centaur eyed him, and then returned the bow without pulling his eyes away. “It is good to meet someone who doesn’t tell lies when he speaks to me.” He said. His voice was very soft, yet clearly resonated with strength. He appeared to be young, but exuded a sense of calm and control that made everyone around him feel at ease.

“I have no reason to speak falsely to you or anyone else.” Damitri smiled warmly. He was going to enjoy this meeting, “I am pleased to see the Grand Wizard Council is allowing others, but it has been years since I could attend a meeting. Tell me, are there any other nonhumans on the Council?” He asked.
“Not yet. The goblins have been granted a seat, but they cannot decide whom they should send to occupy it. The vampires and werewolves are trying to get seats but I have heard they were told they are human, at least partly, and thus are represented already.” His friend said.

“The same argument they gave Centaurs for years.” Secron commented.

“Bunk and nonsense, that’s what it is,” The other man scowled. “Absolute rubbish. Werewolves and vampires have different concerns than the run-of-the-mill wizard, and not all of them are wizards anyway…!”

“Well progress takes time… I am glad at least to see that Centaurs are on the council.”

“Elves are as well, there is one, and one House Elf. Those two simply do not get along…” the third commented as they moved to their seats in the Council room. Damitri allowed the others to move along and waited near the doorway, intending to speak. In ones and twos the members of the council arrived, taking their seats and chatting quietly for the most part. The elf representative arrived, a humanoid creature with a stature of just under four feet tall yet proportioned properly to reflect humankind. Her slim tapered ears were adorned with several colors of crystals and she was wearing colors of soft gray in a sophisticated and beautiful pattern that made it look as if she floated as she walked across the room.

Damitri knew that Elves were distantly related to House Elves, though elves had rejected the idea of being bound to humans or wizards. Instead, Elves had remained free, hidden for the most part from the wizarding and human worlds until after the death of the Dark Lord.

The house elf representative was clearly one who worked at one of the richer family homes, dressed in a clean towel and looking very clean. He did not hold himself with the same pride as the free Elf, but he did know where his seat was and scurried there quickly.

Finally the seats were full except for one or two that had been unable to respond. The head of the Grand Wizarding Council was a man of almost two hundred years of age, a wizened old man with a beard that brushed the floor in four separate braids. He called for order in a voice shockingly clear, having to only tap his gavel twice before silence fell upon the room. He eyed everyone with a rheumy glance, searching the faces until he found the one he wished.

“Minister McLaggen, you have called for this Grand Wizarding Council to meet on the pretext of reconsidering the sentencing laid down by you, as leader of the Wizengamot. Is this correct…?”

“Yes, it is sir.” The Minister of Magic stood when his name had been called, looking as pale and frightened as errant child facing an angry schoolmaster.

“I’m much too old to fiddle with niceties, so let’s get to the crux of it all. Why do you wish to change the sentence?” He asked pointedly.

McLaggen glanced at Damitri, then back at the head of the Council. “Because to leave the sentence intact is a disservice to the wizarding community as a whole.” He answered, finding the words that would make it sound as if this was all his idea.

“Why?” He probed again.

“Mrs. Weasley was working in a clinic that served to give children to witches and wizards who had no hope of bearing children. She had helped dozens within our community who had been barren to have children, doing a great service to…”

“To herself, from what I hear.” The wizened old man interrupted. “Did she not use that clinic to
create children for profit?"

“Yes, she did, and she has already completed her sentence in Azkaban for that…” the minister answered, trying to make it clear but he clearly was not getting through.

“And why would you wish to suspend her sentence?” he insisted upon a direct answer, irritated at having to ask so many times.

“I want to ALTER it to allow her to serve the individuals whom she aided…”

The man glared at him. “You, sir, are an idiot.” He said bluntly, making the minister blanch and several round the room stifled laughter at his statement. “You are a buffoon and I see no reason that we should even consider…”

“May I speak, Grand Councilman?” Damitri asked, stepping forward from the doorway.

The man looked at him, his eyes taking a moment to focus. “Zabini, is it…? Very well.” He agreed, taking his seat.

Damitri strode forward to the center of the room, gazing at his fellow council members. He knew what he needed to say and that the Minister never would have gotten this message across. “Hermione Weasley may be many things, members of the Grand Council, but she is not a criminal. It is true that she was put on trial for the stealing of progeny of wizarding families, but she was not aware of what she was doing.” Several voices rose in protest to argue but Damitri merely held up one hand to indicate he was not finished; the complaints died down to silence once more. “Despite what was reported in the newspapers, she was not the one stealing the seed that allowed the young to be created. In fact, she had no idea that the essences she worked with were stolen; she was in charge only of doing the laboratory work that created children from them. Once she learned the true nature of her work, she turned herself in to the Aurors, surrendering herself and her wand to them.”

He paused to allow the others to absorb this information and indeed several murmurs went about the room. “She did not simply sit in a cell and await her conviction; on the contrary she offered her aid in bringing to light the true nature of the work of those she had been working for. She allowed an Auror to infiltrate the laboratory undetected and aided in the retrieval of files that enabled the return of all the stolen children to their rightful families. She risked her life to get that information for the Aurors…”

“How could working in a lab be risking her life?” someone asked pointedly.

Damitri smiled; he was hoping someone would ask that. “Because, sir, millions of galleons were on the line. The Parkinsons were garnering thousands of galleons for each attempt at pregnancy, successful or not.” He answered. “You all know how greed can strike those who do not have wealth; the opportunity to secure such funds is irresistible and any method is acceptable to defend its source.” Again murmurs went about the room, his arguments were being considered, exactly as he wished. “And the Parkinsons had killed in the past; what would have stopped them from adding her life to their list?”

“Killed…? Pansy and Malcolm Parkinson didn’t kill anyone…!” Someone objected.

“No one who bore a name that you know of. But they did kill. And they did kill more than once, both of them. Malcolm Parkinson killed several children in his mad attempts at creating a perfect child. Pansy Parkinson killed even more children in her lust and greed for money, mostly of the Malfoy and Potter lines.”
“Why was that not brought up in the trial of Mrs. Weasley?” The council head demanded.

“Because she as not guilty of it and had no hand whatsoever in those deaths.” Damitri answered for the Minister, who looked like he would like nothing more than to crawl under a stone.

“Then why such a sentence?” The Council leader scowled at McLaggen.

“I…” the Minister faltered. His eloquence at speeches was useless in self-defense.

“From my perspective, sir, it was clear that the Ministry needed someone to punish for all the crimes that had been perpetrated by the lab. As both Parkinsons were dead, and Bebel was spirited off by the German Ministry, there was no one left to place the blame on but Mrs. Weasley. Thus the decision was made before her trial that she would be held accountable, to ease the ruffled feathers of the public.”

The Minister of Magic had turned white, then red with horror and embarrassed outrage. “That’s not true!” He spluttered.

“Although the Minister may defend himself as he wishes, those who were present at the trial of Mrs. Weasley know what they saw. After a very longwinded speech, the Minister pronounced the sentencing on Mrs. Weasley. He did not discuss that sentencing with the Wizengamot as he pretends to have done, he had her sentencing decided before she even arrived that day.” Damitri countered, not even looking the man’s direction.

“No member of the Wizengamot is to make such decisions without the full agreement of the panel, this is written in Wizarding Laws.” Secron said, his voice clear above the murmured shock of the individuals on the council.

The Council leader glared at the Minister. “You made a decision without consulting any others?”

“No! No, I didn’t, I… her sentencing did not stand until AFTER it was discussed by the Wizengamot members!”

“But you pronounced that sentence before you consulted with them.” Someone else pointed out.

“I knew it would be contested, I wanted to see what the best venue of punishment for her was! She insisted herself that she needed time in Azkaban for what she had done!”

“Even in our society, the prisoner does not get to decree their own punishment.” A musically lilting voice was heard; the elf had her head tilted as if confused by the argument. “Why would you allow her to decide she must spend time in such a prison? She only created life; she did not take it away.”

“I’m not on trial here! I am just asking to change her sentence!” The minister backed toward the door. “I made a mistake with her sentence and she should be allowed to go work with those she worked with before!”

“Under observation, at least…” The head of the Grand Council now ignored the Minister completely. “Mr. Zabini, as you are personally involved in this situation you must sit out of the decision process… are any others here involved in this in any way?” He asked. Seven council members rose to their feet quietly. One of them was very clearly pregnant. “Humph. Well, I guess you are, without a doubt…” he mumbled, then raised his voice again. “Please step outside with Mr. Zabini while we begin the decision process.” He ordered.

Damiytri gave the Grand Wizarding Council a formal bow, and then quietly exited the room.
***** Author's note*****

Not sure what happened, there was supposed to be another section to this. My computer ate it and I have to retype. Next chapter may be up soon, can't promise, but will post the missing section.
Author's notes: Harry Potter and Draco Malfoy, married for years, finally have the big family they both have dreamed of. There is more life and laughter in Malfoy Manor than anyone would have dreamed. Will Hermione be allowed to work with witches and wizards again? Severus is making progress with the Dark Circle - will they all become normal kids?

*Author’s note – thank you to Casse01 for the idea of the story for the prophet!

Damitri Zabini glanced at the bedroom where Terry was getting dressed to go out for the day. He’d chosen his hair color for the day and Damitri had changed it from pale blonde to something that would undoubtedly match his outfit he had planned.

Deciding that he had sufficient time to read for a bit, he picked up his copy of the Daily Prophet off the pile of letters he had to go through for the day and his eye was immediately caught by the headline as he settled in his chair to wait.

"Minister of Magic Mistake Endangers Unborn Babies!

Story by Casse Calalilly.

Ever since the final trial and sentencing of Hermione Grainger regarding the children who were born with the aid of the Parkinson Clinic, the Prophet has received multiple complaints regarding the availability of proper care for those who are presently carrying children. The sudden increase of patients to the obstetrics and maternity wing of St. Mungo’s Hospital has caused an overload of their system and many are more than simply dissatisfied with the treatment they have received.

Our reporter interviewed Damitri Zabini who stated: 'Hermione Weasley is more than simply a midwife-healer. She treats every person she meets as an individual and knows how to handle even those with the most delicate of sensibilities. She was key in helping several wizarding families to have the children they most desperately desired and needed to carry on their family lines, greatly benefiting the wizarding community. We have been overjoyed with the prospect of having a child, my husband and I, but with the overzealous sentencing set in place against Hermione Weasley we are having great difficulties finding any healer who will treat my husband with proper care. Such a sentence might have been appropriate for someone who took life and did horrible things against the community, but Mrs. Weasley has only created life. This sentence is more of a punishment of the community than against Mrs. Weasley for any crime.’

Our reporter also tracked down several of witches and wizards who were aided as reported by Mr. Zabini and most were in complete agreement with his statements. One in particular is a tragic story reported by the Prophet two months ago; Mrs. Bullock is the widow of a muggle struck down by a motor vehicle and with the help of Mrs. Weasley she was able to carry the child of her husband. That child is due to be born sometime this week, but because of the sentencing of the Minister, she has had little care during the past two months. She states, “I need to have Hermione Weasley to help me with my delivery; she’s the only one who cared enough to help me in my time of need.’

Ernie MacMillan, whose wife is well along in her pregnancy as well, states that if his child does not make it to full term he will hold the Minister personally responsible and has already begun the
documentation to file blood feud against the McLaggen family.

The Prophet has discovered that a secret emergency meeting of the Grand Wizarding Council has been convened by our own Minister of Magic McLaggen. It appears that the Minister himself has doubts about his own sentencing of Hermione Weasley two months ago; was the severity of her punishment in error – or was it done just to give the appearance of getting something done?

Many are under the impression that the Minister has used Mrs. Weasley as a scapegoat for all the crimes perpetrated by the Parkinson’s against the wizarding world, as he had no other to pin any criminal blame upon. Is the Ministry returning to the traditions of Cornelius Fudge, who became so paranoid that he accused several of trying to usurp his power?

The Daily Prophet approached the office of the Minister of Magic and we were told that he has taken a brief sabbatical. Is this mini-vacation due to the current severely plunging public opinion of Minister McLaggen’s policies or for some other reason? As his image grows more and more tarnished it is becoming clear that his reputation is too damaged to allow him to function effectively…”

Damitri was distracted by his perusal of the paper by Terry, who came out of the bedroom dressed in a light sundress, his rounded tummy clear for everyone to see. He was so slim that at five months he was clearly carrying a child. His bright blonde hair was tipped with pink today, drawn up into two long curling ponytails that draped on either side of his head. “Oh good… come along, we’re going to be late…”

“But Dimi, I really… I don’t want to go for another checkup; we just went a few days ago. Really, I feel all right…” Terry said, moving over to him.

“It’ll be all right, you’ll see.” He assured with a soft smile. “I’ve found someone much more suitable, we won’t be going back to that harridan anytime soon.”

“Well, okay…” he smiled up at him trustingly, though it was very clear he was still quite nervous.

Terry glanced about the room as he and Damitri moved into the lobby. This wasn’t where they had gone last time nor was it the clinic he had liked so much. It was a building to the side of a huge hospital, with people constantly walking in and out the front doors. For a few minutes Terry had thought they were going in there, but Damitri had guided him to the smaller building. Inside looked nothing like that last place; it was meticulously clean, of that there was no doubt, but the walls were painted a muted tan and not harsh white. There were pictures of landscapes on the walls, muggle photographs that caught the beauty of the sunrise over the mountains or sunset over the sea.

On the wall just left of the window where Damitri signed them in for their appointment, there was a six foot by four foot tackboard. Terry wasn’t sure what kind of board it was, really, for the board was completely covered in various muggle shots of little babies, proud fathers, and overjoyed mothers. Terry nibbled on a fingernail, moving with Damitri to take a seat and snuggling close.

“Terry Zabini?” A voice called and he couldn’t help it, he jumped, his nerves completely on edge.

“That would be us.” Damitri said, rising to his feet.

“Will they let you come?” Terry asked timidly.

“I’d love to see them try to stop me.” The darkskinned man smiled, slipping his arm about the still trim waist of his lover.
The nurse, to Terry’s intense relief, did not even comment on Damitri coming in with him; in fact, she held the door wider to allow them both through. They went through the normal muggle procedures of weighing and listening of heart and lungs, and taking of pulse but the normalcy of it all just seemed to make Terry all the more nervous.

He tried to hide it when the nurse left the two of them alone but soon was fidgeting on the table, getting down and moving to Damitri to snuggle in the warm protective embrace of his arms. Each moment felt like a year as they waited, and Terry kept glancing in fear at the doorway, expecting that other woman to come in and poke and prod at him like he was some sort of beast.

Nearly half an hour had passed with no sign of their doctor. Terry finally glanced up at Damitri. “They’re too busy… really, Damitri, I’m fine, the baby is growing and must be fine too, can’t we just make it easier on them and go…?” he suggested hopefully.

“Be patient.” Damitri soothed him gently. “I know this is taking a lot longer than even I expected it to, but we must be patient.”

When finally the knock came to the door to indicate the arrival of the doctor, Terry jumped and began to tremble, fear doubling. “Oh Merlin…” he murmured, memories of that last visit clearly replaying in his mind.

When the door opened and the mediwitch’s identity was clear, Terry froze a moment in shock. Damitri let his arms fall away from the sides of his lover and suddenly Terry gave a cry of relief and joy as he rushed to seize the newcomer in an uncharacteristic hug. “Miss Weasley!” he cried out.

Hermione gave a soft, delighted laugh at his enthusiasm until she realized that he was crying. “Oh my goodness, Terry, whatever is wrong…?”

“Please oh please don’t ever go away again I need you because you don’t think I’m stupid and you talk to me and that other woman was awful and she hated us and she hated me and she was going to hurt our baby and she was angry and…” Terry said rapidly, trembling as he wept onto her shoulder.

“Was she truly that bad…?” Hermione asked, glancing at Damitri, who gave a very serious expression back and nodded shortly. She took a rather unprofessional moment to hold and reassure Terry, stroking his soft pale hair.

“She was worse, she wouldn’t even let Damitri come into the room and wanted him out and got mad cause he came in…”

“Sounds like she was horrible…!” Hermione commented, pulling a handkerchief out of her pocket. “Now, now, it’s all right, Terry. I’m back. The minister said that I can come back to work, use my wand, and take care of special people just like you.” She soothed, gently drying her tears with the cloth. “And I don’t plan on going anywhere, at least until well after your little one makes their arrival here…” she assured with a warm smile.

Terry gave her a watery smile, taking the hanky and blowing his nose. “It was really awful, I couldn’t stand it…”

“Well, all I can say is if she didn’t like you, Terry, she never took the time to know you at all.” Hermione said. “You’re a perfectly lovely person, and I know your baby is going to be absolutely beautiful. She just had no idea just how special you really are.” she reassured.

Terry gazed up at her, eyes gleaming with tears. “You really won’t go away again…?”

Hermione smiled at him; it was so easy to like Terry. “I think I can promise you that.”
“Why did we have to wait so long for you to come in...?”

Her smile grew. "That wasn't intentional, I assure you. You and Damitri were my first appointment today and I was on my way when I got a call to go to the delivery room; I had another patient who insisted I be present to help her with her birth and babies don’t wait. Little Andrew Bullock decided that your appointment time was the perfect moment to make his arrival…”

“Mrs. Bullock just had her baby today?” Damitri asked, rather surprised. The amount of pain she had been in back in that waiting room, he was sure she would have had that baby that night.

"Yes, she's just delivered her son ten minutes ago, yes. And both baby and mother are resting happily in the same room. He’s strong as a mule and has lungs to match, judging by the way he cries…” she chuckled.

“Oh, I love little babies… that’s wonderful!” Terry smiled, getting some of the sparkle back in his eyes, wiping at his eyes with the handkerchief that Hermione had given to him.

“They couldn’t be happier… now, Terry. Shall we check on the progress of your little baby?” Hermione asked, gesturing to the examination table.

“Yes, oh can you let me see him? That other woman wouldn’t let me talk at all and she just was an awful person. I never want to see that woman again.” He said in an earnest tone that left no doubt whatsoever.

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SEVERAL DAYS LATER
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George stepped through the fence into the play yard to see a scene to make him smile. The small castle was busy with children; the twins had begun to toddle and Narcissa was out helping little Lilly to stand and climb to reach the small slide. Most of the children were up and playing, some painting, others riding broomsticks. He heartily approved of the organized chaos; it made him believe that life had finally come to this musty old place and there was nothing anyone could do to change it. He didn’t have trouble finding Warrington, sitting on a bench silently watching Alyssa as she built a tower out of blocks along with Lazlo.

George moved over to join him, sitting beside him and watching the play in companionable silence. Jerrod didn’t even bother to scowl at him, he had grown accustomed to the red-haired man’s constant visits and simply tolerated him now. “Isn’t that the one who pushed Alerick and got attacked by the twins?” George asked after a few minutes.

“Yes; he will have the scars from that for the rest of his life. The twins can’t stand him anywhere near Mallek or Alerick, but they tolerate Alyssa playing with him. After all, it is her job to make friends.” Jerrod answered.

“To draw them in, yes…” George said with a soft frown. He’d thought that Severus had dealt with all of that already, sealing away the memories of the so-called training that Parkinson had arranged for them, the madman. He was glad the man was dead or he’d have taken out a blood feud on him himself for what he had planned to do to Alyssa alone. “Did she influence him…?”

“There is enough to get him to play with her that was it. The others are busy and she doesn’t like to play the rough-and-tumble stuff that the others have been doing lately. No one really plays with Lazlo since he was such a bully so Alyssa decided he needed to be her playmate for the afternoon.”
“So where’s Angel?”

“Off with her fathers and baby brother for a dance recital. She and Rose have been placed in the same dance class I understand.”

“Lazlo didn’t want to go?”

“He’s not connecting with Harry or any of the other grownups yet; he refused to go anywhere with them.”

George frowned; that little boy who was such a bully must have been horribly abused to refuse the attention and affections of people who were, to him, strangers at best. “That’s mental. Kids need to have love and to be happy…”

“He gets happy, but its usually when he’s bullying one of the others.”

“Hm. Well, I’ve come up with a little something I think that the kids’ll like… hey ‘Liss!” he called out.

Alyssa looked over, lighting up as she came to her feet. “Papa George…!” she said happily.

“Don’t call her ‘Liss.” Jerrod scowled, but George only smirked, holding out his arms for the girl.

Lazlo watched her go, frowning, sitting back, a block in one hand.

Alyssa hugged George, eyes sparkling. “What did you bring today, Papa George?”

“Have you completely forgotten your manners, my Lady?” Jerrod demanded, and Alyssa flushed, stepping back.

“I’m sorry… Hello Papa George, it is really good to see you.” She said in a very formal, quite grown-up tone, giving a formal bow as well.

“Now you don’t have to do all of that with me, I’m your papa.” He answered, pulling her back into a hug and tickling her.

Jerrod could only frown in disapproval, but he bit his tongue and said nothing else.

“What did you bring me, Papa George?” she asked, gazing up at him with her blue eyes sparkling with anticipation.

“Just a small thing today.” He answered, drawing a box from his pocket that looked much too large to fit in there.

Alyssa ignored that fact, happily taking the box and opening it. Inside was a simple ball with a ribbon attached to it. She picked it up and looked at it curiously, then up at George.

“Go on, toss it.” He encouraged.

She did as he instructed and the ball hit the soft surface of the play area, then bounced higher and at a new angle, the ribbon streaming behind it. George reached out and caught the ribbon and Alyssa giggled, reaching for it again. “Can I play with it? Please?”

“Of course, of course; just grab the ribbon and it will stop, and you can play again.” He chuckled, giving the ball back to her. “Don’t forget to share it; I’ll have more here by this evening for all of you.”
“Thank you, Papa George.” She said, moving to hug him tightly, then she bounced the ball again and was off, chasing after it. She caught it after the third bounce and giggled in delight at her new simple toy.

Lazlo sat where she had left him, watching with pure jealousy on his face. To his shock Alyssa moved back over to him after catching the ball and offered it to him. “Want to play with me, Lazlo?” she asked.

“Me…?”

“Uh-huh, want to see who can catch it first?” she offered again, using a bit of her influence to get the reluctant boy to agree. “No pushing, though…”

He seemed to think for a long moment, then nodded, pushing aside the blocks. “Sure, I guess…”

George watched as Alyssa encouraged the boy to his feet and to play the game with her. “Huh. Guess she can use that skill of hers for something good…”

“His main focus was the guardians; Alyssa has done nothing to harm any of the other children. He has only just finished working with Alerick; I believe his next project will be Mallek.” He answered, watching as his daughter ran laughing after the toy, Lazlo actually playing without showing any sign of cruelty or aggression toward her. He knew she was using her powers to influence him to play nice, but he didn’t see any harm in that at all. She was teaching him to be a better kid by putting her influence on him.

George remained seated by Jerrod’s side, only talking occasionally. He turned the subject to something that he knew that Jerrod was comfortable with; their school years.

He grinned softly at the slightly younger man. “You gotta admit, that was an awesome effect…” It had taken him weeks to be able to sit beside the redheaded man to relax enough around him to enjoy a quiet moment of conversation with just the two of them, and he intended to take advantage of every moment he could.

“All right, I’ll admit it…” he couldn’t help but grin as well. “I don’t think I ever had a bigger laugh than when that old bat went screaming out of the great hall with your firework dragon hot on her tail.” He said with a soft chuckle. “Especially when it tried to take a bite out of her…”

“We’ve made a lot of improvements on them, I can’t wait for you all to see what I’ve come up with so far…” he smiled.

“I like what you’ve come up with already.” Jerrod said, his eyes moving across the yard where Alyssa and Lazlo were running and playing. “She’s so happy when she plays with the things you bring; I don’t see her smile like that very often.”

George couldn’t help but chuckle. “Perhaps you haven’t noticed, Jerrod, but that girl lights up whenever you give her any attention at all. She likes me, sure; but she’s been single-minded about having you becoming her father.”

Jerrod flushed slightly, picking up his drink. “I don’t know how she got so attached to me.” He said softly. “I still don’t think I’m qualified to raise such a beautiful little girl. I didn’t want her to be
attached to me at all.”

“No parent has ‘qualifications, Jerrod, to think so is just mad. She’s your daughter, and she knows it; that’s a simple fact that nothing can change.” George said.

Jerrod sighed. “But it makes no sense.”

“Love never does.” George chuckled softly.

Jerrod hissed softly as he felt the scars upon his arm linked to his bonding react, burning and squirming to warn him of danger. Danger to the kids…? Yes but not the Prince… the danger was to Alyssa. He glanced over at her again; she and Lazlo were on their way over to them.

“Daddy, can we go and play in my room?” she asked, skipping up to him and leaning on his lap, big eyes sparkling, pale cheeks flushed with excitement. “Lazlo promises to be nice and not to break anything.”

“It’s naptime, my Lady, once you’ve finished your game.” He said gently, stroking her cheek.

“But daddy…” she pouted.

“Naptime. We don’t want you grumpy when it is time for dinner with Lord Malfoy, do we?”

“No… but daddy Lazlo doesn’t have to take a nap…”

“Lazlo has turned six years old.” He reminded.

She sighed and collapsed melodramatically on his lap. “Oh all right daddy… but just a little nap!” She complained.

Lazlo smirked but did not show any other emotion. “I’ll play with you again after your nap if you want, Alyssa.” he offered a bit shyly.

“Really?” Alyssa popped up again off her father’s lap and sent a stunning smile his way. “We can chase the ball again or play one of your games…”

“The ball is okay.” He smiled faintly.

“All right then, daddy, let’s get this nap done.” Alyssa decided, straightening and taking his hand, pulling on him.

“I’m going to get her settled.” Jerrod said, rising.

“Need a hand?” George offered.

“No, no, I can do this… just… hang out. I’d like to talk some more.” He said, one hand touching his right forearm where the scar was twisting and aching. Something was coming that would harm his daughter and he had no choice; he would stop it. He kept the worry from showing and turned, walking off with Alyssa.

George relaxed, though he watched Jerrod walk away with an appreciative grin.

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Jerrod settled his daughter in her bed, not feeling the least bit guilty about using a bit of magic to help them along to sleep once she had her blankets tucked all about her. She sighed and closed her eyes,
her sweet heart-shaped face peaceful as she began to drift off to sleep. He quietly closed the door most of the way behind him.

He turned to see Severus Snape entering through the outer door to the little suite of rooms and his arm’s scars pulsed in response to seeing him, identifying him as the cause for alarm. Jerrod simply halted in the doorway, the only entrance to his daughter’s room.

“One side, Warrington.” Severus said quietly, drawing his wand. He had finally found the time when he had sufficient energy to work on the little siren child; he was definitely ready to set to work. This child trusted him and he would be able to use a spell to help her to sleep deeper while he did his work.

“No.” Jerrod said in the same tone; his wand was in his hand and he was not quite sure how it had gotten there.

Severus scowled at the man facing him; he’d never thought that he would have the backbone to stand up to him. “You’re wasting my time. You’re bonded, and I have instructions from Lucius to do this; you have no choice but to allow it.”

“No.” Warrington said flatly, eyes narrowed, wand in hand but held in a non-aggressive manner. “You know as well as he does that I have more than one layer of bonding, and that some run much deeper than others. You will not do anything to my child.” He said, trying to maintain his temper and keep it from flaring. His bond was urging him to stop this threat and he would do anything he had to in order to protect his daughter.

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Irritated at being stymied and ready to get done with his work with the children, Severus sent a house elf to fetch Lucius to settle the matter. Until his arrival, Jerrod simply stood as he was, tense yet not attempting to be threatening in any manner with Severus glaring balefully at him. He blocked any access to Alyssa’s room with his own body and refused to move.

“What is the problem…?” Lucius asked warily as he approached, quite glad now that he had not brought Remus Severus along with him. It was clear this could easily escalate as both had wands drawn, and he did not want his son exposed to that sort of behavior at such a tender age.

“He’s the problem. Warrington won’t let me get my job finished.” Severus answered crossly.

“I won’t let him hurt her, he means.” Jerrod retorted.

“I tell you it will not harm the girl!” Snape growled, irritation growing.

“It will! You may be a brilliant Master of Potions and a complete wonder at mental healing and manipulations but you clearly need to study up on cross-bred sirens!” Jerrod growled at him.

“Why are you so certain it will harm the girl?” Lucius asked for clarification. “He intends only to lock away her learned spells and memories, Warrington. She will not be injured by the loss of these memories, and she will be less able to manipulate you if she does not have these things at her disposal. Do you object to that?” Lucius asked.

“You know I don’t like it when she does that, I never have!” he growled, feeling highly defensive about that. “But neither of you seem to understand; she isn’t like the others! The powers that she has are not learned or practiced, they are not like the skills that the others have! You cannot lock away
innate skills that are inborn as hers are or you will cause her permanent harm!” His eyes narrowed, his fist tightening on his wand though he did not raise it. “There will be no work such as was done on the others performed on my daughter!”

“Why are you so certain it will cause her harm?” Lucius probed further.

Jerrod rubbed his right forearm slowly, where the scars that had been reinforced more than any other were still burning in warning. The intricate scars that indicated the event of his binding to the circle were aching and throbbing in time with the beat of his heart. “The bond tells me so. He’s not to touch her, mentally or physically. I simply can’t let him. Even you can’t make me step aside, Lucius.” He said quietly.

“What I need to do should have nothing whatsoever to do with her siren heritage, Warrington.” Severus said sourly.

Warrington scowled. “It has everything to do with it!”

“Papa…” Alyssa’s voice came from within the room behind him, sleepy and disturbed by her father’s anger.

“Go back to sleep, my Lady…” he said in a far gentler tone.

“But papa you’re angry…” she answered.

“Go to sleep, I can handle this.” He said softly. There was no reply as she seemed to be complying with his request.

“Severus, leave it for tonight. Let me talk with Jerrod for a while and I will let you know when you can proceed, all right?” Lucius suggested.

“Very well, but this is a waste of time. I don’t know when I can get back to work on her after tonight; it may be another full week before I’m free and have sufficient energy.”

“Understood. Thank you for coming, Severus.” Lucius said, stepping back to allow the man past.

Severus glared at him a long moment in disbelief; he was extremely put out that he was being brushed off.

“I understand.” Lucius agreed. Severus snorted and stalked off, leaving the two men standing in the hallway. Lucius watched him a few moments, and then sighed. “Jerrod, go to my study. I shall be along shortly.” Lucius left him to deal with his emotions and moved off to wrap up his own business.

Warrington hesitated, staring after Snape as if to ensure that he was not coming back the moment he was forced to abandon this door. He pulled the door shut behind him and whispered a spell to seal it from outside intrusion before turning to go into his bond master’s study. He paced as he waited; clearly aggravated by the situation. It seemed an eternity passed before Lucius Malfoy entered the study.

He wasn’t going to wait for politeness or manners; he just plunged right into what he had to say. “I can’t let him.” Jerrod said when Lucius moved in. “I can’t do it…”

“Sit down, Jerrod.” Lucius instructed, gesturing to a chair and fetching them both a glass of firewhiskey. “It is not only your daughter I wish to discuss, but all of the children. It has been a while and I have several points I require you to provide information about.” He said, moving to pass the drink to his bondservant.
Jerrod hesitated, and then slowly took the indicated seat. “I’ll tell you what you need to know.” He agreed quietly.

“Make me understand about your daughter, if you will. She is part Siren, I understand that. Explain how what Severus wishes to do will harm her.”

Warrington’s eyes were dark, overshadowed with clearly unpleasant memories and he sighed softly, taking up the glass of whiskey and taking a long drink, nearly draining the glass. “I don’t like to talk about it. Can’t you just accept that I know what I’m talking about?” He asked quietly.

Lucius studied the man who had reluctantly agreed to bound as his servant. Time had done the man good; only the oldest and most chronic of his injuries continued to give him any problems. He had gained in self-confidence, his capabilities growing by leaps and bounds. Lucius had granted George permission to pursue the man, but so far had seen nothing else but grudging friendship; he was almost tempted to put a love potion in Warrington’s drink the next time George came to visit, or influence Alyssa enough to order the two to wed. The man was the most hardheaded, stubborn, and emotionally stunted creature he had ever met who was not completely mad. And although he had been working for him for months now, he knew little that the man had not initially shared with him about his own personal background. “It would be easier if you would explain.” He answered.

Jerrod did not look up, grinding his teeth a moment as he pulled his thoughts together. “It will kill her.” He said, rubbing his arm for a long moment; the scar was still twinging in response to the possible danger. “Blocking her powers…”

“Blocking her power is not the intention.” Lucius responded.

“There’s no other way that Severus Snape is going to do be able to do it. I tell you, she’s not like the others. Her powers come from within her. They are innate, not learned. And if you allow Severus Snape to do anything to make her forget, she won’t be… she won’t…” his voice broke slightly.

“Jerrod…?” Lucius frowned in slight concern.

He drew a long shuddering breath; he had not spoken of this in decades. “It will kill her. She’ll die like Jessica.” He said softly. “My… my younger sister.” His long hair hung over his eyes, shadowing them from view. “I know what caused her death and I don’t care what anyone tells me.”

“I had not known you had a sister…”

“Mother wasn’t too attached to her; she didn’t form bonds easily. And dad… well, you knew him. Her death almost destroyed him; we kids were everything to him. I think perhaps mother had the memory of her very existence removed from his mind to help him recover. Jessie was strong, like Alyssa; began to display her powers before she could even walk. My father, the idiot, bragged of her strength and the Ministry insisted on having her tested. Naturally, the Ministry thought she was too strong and they had someone like Snape come in and seal away her abilities. She got very sick, very quickly… The Ministry insisted it could not have been what they did, sealing away her powers and refused to undo what they had done to her. She… she faded and… died…” his words faded away and he wiped roughly at his eyes. “Before her third birthday…”

“I had not heard of such a thing…” Lucius said softly.

He scrubbed at his eyes with the back of his hand. “I won’t allow it to be done to my daughter.” He said flatly.

Lucius nodded, thoughtful. “I understand now.” He agreed quietly, taking a few moments to
consider the problem in its entirety. He would never agree to something that would take the life of any of these children, could it be avoided at all. “If I do not allow this to be done, Warrington, you must understand that this will place a great burden upon your shoulders.”

“A burden, sir…?”

“Precisely.” He agreed quietly. “The education of your daughter Alyssa will be entirely your charge.”

“Mine…? But I don’t know…”

“You will learn. You have the same abilities she has, in some form or another. You must work to manage those talents that you have never bothered to harness. You will not only manage them, you will learn how to use them to their utmost to enable you to educate your daughter.”

“How am I to do that?”

“That is your challenge, is it not? You have completed the potion I desired of you; now it is time for you to return to your job of teaching. You must monitor her very closely. You teach her well, Warrington, and she will not have to endure the suppression of her power.”

“It shall be as you wish, Lord Malfoy.” He said softly, not looking back up. He took another drink, finishing off the glass of alcohol. “Thank you. I swear I’ll not fail you or her.”

“I trust that you will keep your word.” Lucius agreed, then quietly rose from his chair and moved to stand and gaze out the window for a while, giving Jerrod a few minutes to calm down.

Finally Warrington glanced at him. “You had other things you wanted to ask?”

“Yes.” He turned back to face him. “I wish to know more details regarding my youngest son, Alerick.” He took his time walking back to his seat and did not continue speaking until he was comfortably seated. “You mentioned a bond between Alerick and Mallek. They are together now, but the time will come when the two will have to be separated; there is a gap of three years in their ages.”

“You mean school…? You’re not seriously considering sending Alerick to Hogwarts…?”

“He must have a proper education as a Malfoy; of course he will be attending Hogwarts. The question I have for you is whether it will have a negative effect to separate them.”

Warrington was quiet for a moment, considering his answer. “For the first couple of years it will be all right.” He said softly.

The wording of his reply was not lost on the Malfoy patriarch. “The first couple of years only, hmm? What happens then, Warrington?” he asked, scowling. Even after his death that bastard Parkinson was going to be an absolute headache for them all. He had changed so much about the normal nature of these children that they were hardly human anymore.

“Alerick will need to be with Mallek… it won’t be good for them.” He was frowning slightly as he worked to bring up the memories. “Parkinson wanted to have Alerick totally dependent on Mallek, he intended to have them completely home schooled after all…”

“And they were already well ahead of most fourth year students at any of the formal education schools.”
“He wanted them to be adults by the end of the year. The aging potion would have brought them all forward four years then he was going to give them another one in six more months.”

“That ISN’T happening to them.” Lucius said, eyes narrow.

“I haven’t worked on that potion at all, I swear it. But that’s why they were on such an intensive training program. To prepare them for being adults.”

“Understood, but you haven’t answered my question, Jerrod. What will happen to the boys during that year, the year that Alerick turns thirteen?”

“Mallek will be more and more possessive of Alerick, and Alerick will probably get will begin to lose strength every day that he is away from Mallek. He will become very sick and depressed, and be able to think of nothing but his Dark Prince…”

“…making schooling absolutely impossible. Is there any way to halt the effects?” Lucius asked.

“The only way to stop the cycle and let them be apart is if…” Jerrod looked uncomfortable for a moment; he had not wanted to tell Lucius Malfoy what he was about to tell him. “They will have to consummate their relationship.”

Lucius looked physically ill at the thought. “Don’t be daft; Mallek will be only ten years old. No one could expect him to…”

“They did expect it of Mallek. You see, Alerick would have been trained in the sexual arts already for months if not years, trained to be a submissive to serve every whim and desire of the Dark Prince. With the aging potion Mallek would have found his sex drive awakened quite early and by then Alerick would have been quite willing to do whatever he wished.”

“That’s just…” Lucius fished for the proper word to describe it all, his lip curled in disgust at the idea of children being forced to consummate anything. “…depraved…!”

“I never said that Parkinson was playing with a full deck. Besides, Parkinson wanted them to be adults.” Warrington reminded. “They would have been adults when the bond was secured, within the span of two years from now.”

Malfoy scowled. “I want the choice of being consort or not to be Alerick’s, when he is truly old enough to understand what it all means. This bond is going to force him into submission whether he wishes it or not.”

Warrington shrugged, finding that even though the present topic was not comfortable to discuss at all, it was better than having to talk about his history and his family. He preferred to never discuss them if possible. “It was kind of their way of ensuring that even if Alerick’s foster father chose to move him away from the Circle he would be drawn back into it.” He explained; it had been the only way that that sick bastard Verden had been able to explain it all and make Warrington understand when it had first been discussed around him. “I truthfully don’t know any way around the entire thing; I don’t really even know how they got it all set up for them. I don’t dabble in that type of magic, you know that.”

Lucius scowled, his eyes fixed upon the bookshelf somewhere past Jerrod’s back and he resisted the urge to turn and see what he was glaring at. “Unfortunately, I believe you.” He finally said.

Warrington was confused. “Unfortunately…?”

“Very unfortunate, indeed.” Lucius agreed, his scowl deepening. “You see, if you knew something
of how it had been done to them, you would also hold the answers to reversing the process.” he sighed.

“Oh.” Warrington answered, feeling rather slow-witted at not figuring that out himself.

Lucius stroked one hand along his chin in thought, leaning back in his plush green velvet chair. “Tell me, Jerrod. Who was part of the ‘training’ that was to be done and was already done?”

“The training hadn’t begun yet, not the active sexual stuff, though Verden had wanted to start when they started on the seductress. Verden said that true submissives had to be taught from a very young age. Made no more sense to me then than it does now. Karkaroff, Verden, Moran and Parkinson; they’d all be the ones who were involved in it all, and all are dead.”

“You left out that Bebel bloke. He did not want them ‘linked’ in such a way?”

“Not particularly, he just wanted them to be allowed to become the perfect creatures that he had created. He used to talk like he was the ultimate power in the universe for creating them…”

“Naturally.” His couldn’t resist a sneer at the man’s god-complex for creating the children. “And the other three? Surely they had designs for what was to happen to each of them as well, if they had this much figured out for the Prince and his Consort.”

“Of course; Parkinson had a plan for every detail of their lives and he was willing to do whatever he had to in order to ensure his plans came to fruition. He wanted his enchantress to bond with the guardian, thus making the circle complete and dependent upon each other with the Dark Prince able to control them all with a word. He also wanted the guardian subservient to the Dark Prince, and the enchantress to the consort. That way they would have any needs met regardless of their sexual preferences and would never need to look elsewhere…”

Lucius snorted in derision. “Malcolm Parkinson had everything so conveniently arranged, but their lives are not going to turn out that way. That is never going to happen.”

“But it was already working.” Warrington countered. “I remember when we first arrived, Alyssa would not sleep in a separate room; none of them would. Alyssa would only sleep at the feet of Alerick and the Dark Prince, as she was conditioned to do. I think they started with her early because of the skills she had already displayed. Lady Alyssa is quite attached to your son, you know. She wilts when he pays her no attention and she glows when he smiles at her. She behaves much as Alerick does when he gets attention from Mallek.”

Lucius frowned softly. “I had noticed some of that…”

“Being here has helped, though. She has found the willpower to go and play on her own with Angel and the others outside of the circle, something she would have been severely disciplined for in the past. She does not spend all her time doting on the ‘leaders’ of their little circle like Erik still does most of the day. She can sleep in her own bed and not have nightmares if even a wall separates her from the others.”

“Having their training hidden away for their future has helped Erik and Erin to become more stable as well; Erik remains sulky and hyper-reactive, but Erin has turned into a much more likeable little child.” Lucius commented. “But will this ‘programming’ return to them all when they grow to adulthood?”

“It won’t wait until they’re adults. Malcolm and Bebel were adamant that they were to be considered adults and capable of making adult decisions at thirteen. I don’t know why he chose that age.”
“Well, we have to find a way around this geas that has been placed on my son.” Lucius said, scowling thoughtfully. “Severus has found nothing of the sort in either of them; the spells that bind them must be much deeper…”

“It runs through their veins.” Jerrod said softly.

“What?” He shot him a sideways glance; that was an extremely odd thing to say…

Jerrod looked back at him, rather surprised at his statement, but he knew somehow that it was the correct answer. “It… it runs in their veins.” He repeated. “I didn’t know I knew that…”

“What does that mean? What runs in their veins?”

“Oh.” Jerrod closed his eyes to try to pull up more details. He hadn’t been aware that he knew this information; he must have been doing something when the others were discussing it. “Well, it is what it sounds like; it runs in their veins. It’s… they put the spell on their blood.” He said.

“It’s going to be a bit difficult to remove that and leave them alive, Jerrod.” Lucius said dryly.

Warrington shrugged; all he could do was give the truth. “I believe that was the idea…”

Lucius focused on his servant a moment, making the man uncomfortable. “I am beginning to believe that I should ask Severus to root around in your memories after all, someone seems to have altered them somewhat to hide things from you.” Lucius said softly, and was displeased to see his servant pale at the suggestion.

“Must I? I’m willing to tell you everything I remember, I swear I’m not holding anything back…”

“You don’t think you are.” Lucius responded. “But clearly there is information there that you are unaware of. I must have all the information I can get in order to be able to properly take care of the children.”

Warrington remained pale but looked resigned. “I don’t have a choice, do I?”

“Severus is the only choice, regardless of how you feel about him. He is the only one who can not only get this information; he knows how to keep secrets that are necessary, such as the true purpose of these children. If we bring anyone else in, they may be unwilling to keep that information from the Ministry.”

“As you command, Lord Malfoy.” He murmured.
The Prophecy

Author's notes: Harry and Draco have helped to locate all of the lost children and now must figure out how to allow their special five to have a normal life... the Prophecy is revealed.

Tonks gazed up and down the quiet street; this little town in the middle of the mountainous region of Germany seemed to shut down as the sun had gone down. No one was out and all the curtains were closed; only two of the all the dozens of buildings even had lights burning in their windows even though the sun had only set an hour ago. She sighed and set out on her way; her informants had told her that the person she sought was here, hidden away in this flea-speck size of a town.

She rubbed her back and sighed, glancing at the house numbers until she arrived at one that looked identical to all the rest of them. It sat at the end of a little row of houses, one of the longer streets in town with six houses all lined up on the south side of the street with a fairly sharp drop-off of about sixty feet just a few feet to the north side of the road. Beyond her house was a sheer rock wall that went up several hundred feet. This town was literally carved out of the side of the mountain.

The lights were still on in the windows, indicating the occupant remained awake. She knocked firmly on the door.

After a few moments the curtain over the door’s window was flicked aside. A woman’s face appeared a moment, clouded with a bit of confusion and lack of recognition. The curtain fell back into place and the door opened. “Yes…?” she asked quietly.

Taking half a moment to assess the woman she saw before her, Tonks immediately noted that this woman looked nothing like any of the other seers she had ever met in her life. She was sure that no one on the street who did not know who she had been or what she did would have suspected that of her either. She was compact and well muscled; with deeply tanned skin and face that revealed that she spent a lot of time out in the sun rather than sequestered in dark rooms somewhere reading tea leaves in cloyingly sweet atmosphere. She looked more like a weapons master or even a blacksmith rather than any sort of soothsayer. “Good evening… You are Cecily Harkiss?” She asked, eyeing the woman doubtfully.

“Depends on who’s asking.” She scowled at her; she had very little of the native accent that Tonks had been struggling to comprehend all day.

“I am an Auror from the English Ministry of Magic…” she began.

“Why in the name of Merlin would a British Auror be interested in anyone in this tiny town?” She started, and then her expression cleared with understanding. “Oh, I think I understand. Some idiot was talking and you’ve decided to hunt me down for some damned-fool prophecy for your child. I don’t do those anymore!” she began to close the door.

“I’m not… I mean… how did you…?” she spluttered; Tonks was only three months along and had not even begun to show yet; her nausea had finally passed and she was allowed only to take on jobs that had little danger level. She certainly had not advertised the fact that she was carrying a child and she doubted that Severus had, as paranoid as he was about everything. She wasn’t about to allow herself to be locked out now; she blocked the door with her steel-toed boot to prevent it from closing.

Cecily looked quite irritated at the boot, but did not attempt to shove the door closed anymore. She
sighed and turned away, allowing Tonks to take control of the door. “You in England are so blind, tied to your limited forms of magic taught by your wizarding schools.” She scoffed. “I need no such training, or potions, or spells to detect your child, Lady Auror. Your aura simply screams to all who have learned to see that you carry a very healthy child.” As she had not asked her to leave, Tonks followed the woman into the room. It was very austere, with few things to show anyone really lived here. The only concessions to making it “homey” was a wizarding picture on the wall, no larger than four inches by six inches, of a little girl with wild curls and a couple of fur blankets on the bed. “Let me get this done and get you out of here; I have business to attend to. What is it you want to know about your daughter?”

“My… it’s a girl?” she asked, stunned again as she moved to take a seat.

The woman sighed. “You didn’t know…?” she began, the shook her head with realization. “Of course you did not know, you’re British. I wanted to know the moment I conceived what my child would be…”

“I wanted to know, but the tests aren’t completely accurate until; the middle of the second trimester…” Tonks rested one hand on her only slightly rounded tummy. It was a girl; Severus had always wanted a child and now she would be giving him a daughter…

“All right; that is your prediction. The child will be a girl, healthy and strong. There, we’re done, and you can leave anytime.” She said, moving to pick up a bag off the floor that had been hidden behind the bed.

Tonks shook herself out of her reverie. She had to get back to business and find out what she really needed to know. “No. That’s not why I’m here.”

Cecily hesitated with her bag already slung on her shoulder, scowling at her. “I don’t have time, I told you…”

She ignored the woman’s complaints and pressed on. “I have been told of a prophecy…”

“Old news, Miss English Auror whatever-your-name is. I haven’t done that type of prediction in many years.” She said, taking two more steps.

“Perhaps, but this would have been no less than five and no more than six years ago.” She responded, watching the woman’s face and body posture closely. “Most likely in the fall or wintertime…”

Cecily had tensed up at the time frame, her knuckles whitening as she gripped the shoulder strap with unnecessary strength. Her face lost two shades of color as the blood seemed to drain out of it. “I don’t do prophecies anymore; I’ve completely lost the gift. I want you to leave now.” She said, with a scowl.

“I don’t believe you’ve lost your talent. I need to hear this prophecy.”

“If you need it so desperately, why don’t you ask the one it was done for?” she demanded, clearly looking for a way out.

“I would, if it was at all possible. He’s dead.” Tonks answered smoothly.

“Are you Aurors or murderers with license from your Ministry to kill? It was you that killed him, I suppose?” she asked acidly.

“No it was not, though I would have done so if I had the chance. I would really have preferred to
have him alive, to tell the truth. He was killed by the ones he had harmed, not by me. He stole an
innocent child and was hunted down as part of a registered Blood Feud. Even your country
courages this as a method of stopping the escalation of feuds between families.”

She didn’t look happy about that last statement but she could find no fault with it. “Stole a child, did he…?”

“Yes, he did. He snatched her up in broad daylight, in the middle of Diagon Alley without even
knowing her identity. He had no compunction in hurting this little girl either. He was trying to make
your prophecy come true.”

“If he is dead, his prophecy will never come to pass, will it? It is, after all, only a prediction. Time is
a forever mutating thing, it is always in flux, it…”

“Oh do shut up about all that claptrap.” Tonks sighed irritably. “I need to hear the exact prophecy,
preferably directly from your memories.”

“I have no intention of doing what you wish of me.” She scowled at her. “You should leave.”

“If I leave, two more Aurors will come, and we will have to alert your country that such a prophecy
exists. I’m certain they would be more than a little interested to hear of it, considering what it is
about. I’m sure that then ones from your country will begin to show up on your doorstep as well…”

Tonks examined her nails, relaxed in the overstuffed armchair.

Cecily frowned at her. “So let me get this straight; you’re threatening to plague me day and night and
never leave me alone until I provide you with a memory that I don’t even remember?” she asked.

Tonks seemed to consider a moment, and then she nodded. “I think you’ve hit the nail on the head.”
She agreed with a smile. “Oh, we know that memory is there, and I have someone I could call in
who could find the memory without too much discomfort, whether you agree or disagree with the
entire situation. We know the name that it is specifically liked to; the Dark Prince.”

“Dark Prince…?!?” she repeated the words and her face lost several shades in a heartbeat and she
suddenly dashed toward the door.

With a spoken word and a gesture from her wand, the door slammed and sealed itself shut, as did all
of the windows. “It took too bloody long to find you; I have no intention of letting you run away that
easily. We need this prophecy. And if I have to sit here all night, that’s exactly what I’ll do. I have
nothing but time on my hands.”

“But you can’t… he was mad, I tell you. Absolutely mad… I did not want to give him the prophecy,
I resisted him with all I had but he… he…”

“He killed several wizards, witches and infants on his way to discovering that he could, indeed,
create the little creature you told him he could Cecily.” She answered coolly.

“He… he did not! He could not have recreated that creature, that madman…”

“He found a way. There is a Dark Prince, Cecily.” Tonks answered coolly. “And this prophecy will
be what allows us to determine if he should live or die.”

Cecily shakily moved to sink into a seat, clearly stunned by the news. “There’s… no. There can’t be,
this isn’t true, this isn’t happening…” she murmured.

“Whatever you hoped would not happen has come to pass. It is true. I need to hear the prophecy.”
She repeated.

Ms. Harkiss swallowed hard, and then bowed her head. “All right… but these children… they may look innocent but you must eliminate them. Destroy them; they are evil, unnatural things…”

“The prophecy.” Tonks said again; she would not listen to instructions from this woman to destroy any child.

Cecily took her wand and, hand trembling violently, touched the tip to her temple. Tonks rose and produced a bottle from her vest pocket as the woman drew a memory from her mind and allowed the silvery threads to drift into the proffered vessel.

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Although she was sure that Cecily had assumed that she would go back to England with her little phial of memories, Tonks simply retreated to the closest hotel. She hurried through the lobby and to her room, knocking rapidly on the door in a set pattern. She waited for exactly one minute then opened the door.

“She produced the memory?” Severus asked; he had insisted that she would not be coming on this trip alone.

“She produced a memory. Whether it is the right memory or not has yet to be seen.” Tonks said skeptically, moving in and closing the door. She moved to the cabinet that they had brought and opened it; inside was a penseive waiting for this particular memory to be added. Severus allowed her to tend to that, securing the door and windows with every protective and warding spell that he had in his arsenal. “She was really freaked out about it all; she told me if the Dark Prince existed that he should be eliminated.”

“He has not been twisted as they hoped to do. He is simply a rather spoiled child at this moment.” Severus answered, rolling his eyes. “The others were seriously indoctrinated already, having been trained for several years…”

“You really haven’t told me that much about them.” Tonks reminded.

“I can’t, Dora. The less you know, the better it will be for all involved.” He answered.

“I’m an Auror, Sev…! I know how to keep a secret.”

“And if you will recall, part of your duties as an Auror, Nymphadora, subjects you to intermittent mind scans, to determine if your behavior has met standards. I don’t want this tidbit of information floating about for any schmuck to find.”

She paused, looking over at him with a grin. “Schmuck?” she repeated, clearly humored at hearing him use such a word.

Severus sighed, unable to hide a wry grin. “Overexposure to the telly and American shows, I suppose. Yes; schmuck, idiot, dolt, grunt, peon… use whatever derogatory term you wish…”

“I kind of like schmuck. Seems to fit somehow.” She said, pulling the stopper out of the phial that held what should be the prophecy. “Well, bottoms up.” She declared, pouring the silvery memory into the liquid of the penseive.

Severus sat himself up to remain as guardian over his mate as she leaned over and lowered her face into the now rapidly swirling liquid.
The scene cleared into a much different view of the seer’s austere home. She had decorations all about that reminded Dora starkly of the professor she had endured at Hogwarts for divination; Professor Trelawney. Pink and purples and veils and soft overstuffed poufs were all over the room, making the decent sized room seem almost claustrophobic. The lower light level increased that feeling of being closed in, but no one present seemed to care about that.

Cecily Harkiss was bound to a chair with magical bonds that wound round her hands, her arms, her legs and her upper body, preventing her from moving at all.

Sitting on the divan looking utterly bored was Pansy, dangling her wand from her fingertips lazily. “Really, father, is this necessary?” She asked as if weary of the whole situation.

Malcolm Parkinson looked more than a little mad; his eyes were wild and his hair disheveled. He ignored his daughter completely as if she was not there at all. “Another seer told me you are the one. You are the woman I have spent the last five years searching for; you will give me the prophecy I seek. You will give me the directions for my life from now on.” He said to Cecily urgently, his eyes gleaming with fanaticism. Harkiss turned her face away from him and Malcolm snarled, seizing her jaw and forcing her to look at him. “You will tell me! Give me my prophecy!” he commanded.

Eyes narrowed, she wrenched her jaw out of his grip. “You can’t force me to use my skills, no matter how hard you try!” she retorted.

“I can get it from you. IMPERIO!” he snapped, wand pointed at her.

She stiffened a moment, and then with her face twisted in anger and concentration, she raised his eyes to him. “You cannot control me with your foolish little spell, I do not care who you are!” she said.

Malcolm gazed at her in surprise; he had never seen someone shake off his controlling spell that easily before. “Well lucky for you, that spell was not my only choice. Let’s give this a try, shall we…?” he asked, releasing her only long enough to uncork a bottle that he had drawn out of his pocket. The fluid inside the bottle was vivid neon green and very thick. “Shall we see whether I can force you?” He asked in a dangerous tone, teeth bared.

“Father, we haven’t tested that yet! That’s my only bottle!” Pansy complained, coming to her feet with every intention of snatching her phial out of her father’s hand. Her response was much too late; he had forced the entire bottle down the throat of the seer, who had struggled and fought to keep from drinking it.

Malcolm waited breathlessly for it to take effect. He would have his future… “My prophecy. You will do what it is you do and give me my prophecy about my Prince!” demanded.

“Father, it took me a long time to work out the base for that Imperious Potion!” Pansy pouted, folding her arms and stalking back to her chair. “I didn’t make it for the likes of her…”

“Be quiet, you infernally loudmouthed girl!” He snapped at her. She sat in the chair and sulked, clearly irritated and angered by his treatment of her. The seer’s eyes glazed over from the effects of the potion as it took all ability for self control away from her. “Ah, yes… now… give me my prophecy, Seer Harkiss.” He instructed in a firm tone.

The woman’s eyes focused on something not visible to the naked eye as she slipped into the trance required to deliver the prophecy. “A new power will arise in the land of Merlin.” She murmured. “A
power to cause even the most powerful wizards to flee his presence. He shall be born of the same blood as brought back Tom Riddle, known to Britain as Lord Voldemort. He will not suffer the same loss of sight as that man, though; Riddle never understood love. The Dark Prince will surround himself with trusted servants who will submit to his every command. He will have a guardian, to protect and to support him in everything he does. He will have a consort, to lend him comfort and to give him distraction and release whenever he desires. He will have a seductress rich in the blood of non-humans to ensure that the populace will be drawn to him. You, Malcolm Parkinson, will ensure that these children are born, with the aid of your daughter’s clinic. You will be the father to them, the one the little ones trust for aid and succor; you will always ensure their welfare. The children will grow to be bound one to the other, with the Dark Prince always holding the reins of power. As adults they will depend on no others but those within the circle. They will grow swiftly in power, taking over first Britain then all of the European countries; there will be nowhere to hide from his wrath. Dark and terrible, he will be…” her voice tapered off, trembling from the stress caused by the side effects of the controlling potion.

“Dark, yes; but only terrible to those who give him cause to punish them. He will be so beautiful, raised to be a child of power instead of cast off like human refuse in some damned fool muggle orphanage…” Malcolm murmured, his eyes beginning to gleam with a mad sparkle. He would be the one to raise the circle of power; the Dark Circle would be all his, and would look to him. He would enjoy ultimate power as their instructor and father, not some useless peon that could be easily brushed aside…

“That has got to be the biggest load of hippogriff shit I have ever heard.” A slow droll voice broke through his reverie.

“Silence!” Malcolm hissed at his daughter, infuriated that she had no belief. He had just been given the greatest prophecy since the prediction of the fall of Lord Voldemort and there she was, lying on that couch and looking at him as if he had a screw loose.

Pansy pushed to her feet, rolling her eyes. “I want nothing to do with this father. I think I’m going home. You can run about here in the backwoods of nowhere and play your little mind games; I’m done.” She said, slipping her wand away as she strolled gracefully to the door.

“Leave this room and I will share NONE of the riches I garner with you, child!” he warned.

She snorted. “Another Dark Lord? HELL no, father! I have had more than enough of any of that insanity; I intend to stay completely clear of you and your little plans.”

“Until you pay off my clinic, you don’t have a choice.” He growled.

Gazing pointedly at him, she deliberately and with exaggerated emphasis took the handle of the door in hand, pulled it open, and then walked out with a flourish and a swish of her satin and silk witches’ robes.

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“…and that’s the prophecy.” Tonks finished in a quiet voice.

She glanced about the room at the faces there, lit only by the fireplace in Lucius’ dim study now that the sun had stolen away the day. Everyone involved was here; Harry and Draco, Lucius, Narcissa, Severus, George, and even Warrington.

She couldn’t help but notice that Jerrod did not look surprised at all at the revelations of the evening, though she knew quite well he had not been there when the prophecy had been forced from Cecily
Harkiss. More secrets; she was certain that at some point that man would have to be tied down and forced to allow Severus to sift through his memories to find all the little details. She didn’t trust him and wasn’t sure why in Merlin’s name everyone else seemed to.

Severus stood near the fireplace, not deigning to take a seat. He much preferred to stand and watch Tonks as he had been since they had gone on this research trip; he was still finding it hard to wrap his mind around the fact that he was going to be a father. He saw how Tonks was looking at Warrington with clear distrust and calculation and gave a very slight smile.

“Two parts of that prophecy have come true; the children have been born and they are bound together.” George murmured. The revelation of the prophecy had stunned him and left him without words for a few moments; all he could do was repeat what he had heard.

“Two parts of that prophecy, yes, but it is invalid now because the prophecy specifically stated that Malcolm Parkinson would be the one who raised them in some mad grab for power and glory. He had to be the one who molds them into their adult selves, acting as a father figure to them.” Lucius countered. “None of them are going to think of that madman as a father. Not one of those children is going to look back upon the memory of that man with any tenderness at all.”

“Well, from what I have seen just with how the nannies treat the children, I wasn’t very surprised that they showed hardly any emotion but anger and fear.” Narcissa added in a quiet tone.

“How could they know any other emotions if they never experience them?” Draco asked. “They were denied the simple tenderness that a true parent would show to a child…”

“That is because they received no tenderness from him nor any of the others that raised them.” Narcissa added.

Warrington felt somehow that he was being targeted. He had been involved in their upbringing too.

“I didn’t abuse them.” He interrupted with a scowl.

“You were under very strict orders regarding them. You weren’t allowed to give them affection, were you?” Lucius returned to him.

“I could… if there was nothing else that could be done.” He rose and walked away from the others, his back to them all, tense with anger. He had done everything he could to take care of those kids, even things he had been told not to do. They wouldn’t ever understand the things he had done any of the punishments he’d endured for disobeying the instruction of his masters. Somehow it was all still his fault…

“Did Malcolm even know of your gift of the stuffed toy to your daughter?” Lucius asked him.

He shrugged. “It’s the past. Doesn’t matter anymore.”

“Of course it matters.” George countered, rising and following Jerrod. “You risked a lot to do things for all them little kids. I heard that you even gave some of the other babies proper burials…”

“I couldn’t just destroy their bodies… those poor things. They had no chance at all. What other choice did I have?” He murmured softly. “It wasn’t their faults.”

George slipped a comforting hand up onto his shoulder; he could almost feel the pain that Warrington was fighting to hide. “Of course it wasn’t. You did right, Jerrod…” he told him softly.

Lucius noted that his servant did not shrug away the contact as he usually did, but he had no patience for their little romance tonight. “Warrington, you will return here and sit down. This subject will be
fully discussed tonight.” Lucius said firmly. “And you will answer the question.”

“Give him a bloody break, Malfoy!” George growled, scowling at him.

Jerrod touched the hand on his shoulder with the closest to any kind of response that George had gotten to his advances, and then he turned back to return to his seat. “Don’t worry about it. I’m used to it.” He murmured softly but his eyes remained lowered to the floor as he made sure he would meet no one’s gaze.

George scowled, still angry at Malfoy. “You’re a human being, you’ve got a right…!”

“I’m a bondservant. It’s my place; get used to it George. That’s all that matters most of the time.” He shrugged, trudging back to his seat. He took a deep breath and sat, letting it out in a sigh. “No, Master Malfoy. He didn’t know of my gift to her but I was punished if I dared to pick up and hold any of them.” He answered quietly.

“That bloody dirty bastard.” George growled, now standing just beside Jerrod, one hand moving again to his shoulder.

“Look. I really would rather not…”

“This is the time, Jerrod. You have to give us all the information you have on how these children are raised, so that we can get them deprogrammed as much as we are able without injuring them.” Harry said in a gentle yet firm tone. “We want our children, your daughter as well, to have a healthy and normal life. You may well be our only hope of having that happen…”

“Severus Snape might object to that; he did a lot of work with them.” Jerrod said, glancing at the man.

“Its nothing you would not have done, had you been able.” Severus shrugged it off easily; he would not have himself made the focus of all this. “And there is little more I will be able to do for them.”

“But the entire prophecy is wrong.” George said after a few moments. “It said that the kids would be born with the blood of the Dark Lord…”

“They did try to get his blood, didn’t they?”

“Yes, we visited many places trying to find some sample, but none of his attempts were successful.” Jerrod answered, not raising his eyes from his shoes. “We finally resorted to raiding crypts, trying to find bits of Riddle’s parents. We got that and Bebel did something with it all and used it to try to recreate him. The results… well…” he shrugged, not really wanting to go on.

“Those were the most twisted of the infants?” Lucius suggested.

“Yeah.” He said softly, his tone haunted. “They weren’t… well, none of them ever got strong enough to actually be born breathing.”

“Then they didn’t use his blood to bring them back. So the entire thing is just an empty prophecy?” George asked hopefully.

“Voldemort used my blood to regain his body when he returned.” Harry told him quietly.

“Bloody hell, Harry… I didn’t know.”

“Not something I wanted to really brag about, to tell the truth.” He shrugged; it was so far in the past
that talking about it didn’t even bother him at all.

“So they got the blood that brought him back. How does that make these kids evil? I mean, they’re Harry’s blood, not Moldyshort’s…” Weasley said, taking his seat back beside Jerrod again.

Jerrod couldn’t help but give a snort of laughter and look at George in disbelief. “Moldy…?”

“You give more power to the name by refusing to use it, that’s what Hermione always said; right Harry?” George asked.

“Moldyshorts wasn’t his name.” Harry smirked slightly.

“All right, Voldemort. Tom Riddle. Whatever. I don’t see any reason to give that man any respect for what he had done to the wizarding world.” George shrugged, giving Jerrod a grin.

“It doesn’t mean the children are evil, Mr. Weasley.” Lucius responded, choosing to simply let the insult of past nightmares slide off uncommented upon. “…But if word of this left this room these children would be in danger every day of their lives.”

“In this day and age, what kid isn’t?” He replied. “I mean, stuff happens every day. Someone loses their temper or goes off the bloody deep end and kids just happen to get in the way; tragedies happen all the time.”

Draco ignored the comment, wanting to focus. “The prophecy said they’d be bound… was that what the mark was?”

“Yes, the lotus blossom now.” Severus smirked. Flower power, indeed…

“So three parts are true.” Draco said softly.

Lucius frowned. “But the main part of it required Malcolm to be the father figure.”

“He’s dead, he can’t possibly…”

“He had Alerick for nearly five years. He had Alyssa for nearly four.” Narcissa put in.

“He used to visit each of them one day out of the week, and be back at the lab to check on Bebel on the days he did not visit children.” Jerrod supplied in a quiet tone.

“You never told us that before…”

“You didn’t bloody well ask.” He grumbled, sending an apologetic glance Narcissa’s way. “I can’t… I mean, I… I want to tell everything but I have to wait for the right question.” He said helplessly.

“Why?” Lucius asked. “You’re my servant now, not Parkinson’s.”

“I… I don’t know why. I swear on my life that can’t tell you things until it’s the right time…”

“Someone has meddled in your mind before, have they Warrington?” Severus asked, eyeing the man now. Was there no end to what this man had hidden away in that skull? He watched as the man physically flinched at the question.

Jerrod ground his teeth and shook his head jerkily. “N… No…” he murmured.

“Tell him who meddled in your mind, Warrington!” Lucius commanded.
“No one else did anything to me!” he said immediately, and then quieted down for a long moment. “It wasn’t anyone, it was... me. I... I did it.” He finally whispered.

“You did what?” George asked.

“I’ve damaged my memory. I just...” he bowed his head, fists clenched tightly together to keep them from shaking, knuckles white from the strain. “I didn’t want to remember having to handle all those dead babies.” He whispered, his face hidden by his long hair.

“Oh, Jerrod...” George slid an arm around the man. “Hell I can understand that, I might have even done the same thing...”

“I’m a thrice-damned idiot for trying it; I have no talent at mind manipulation at all.” He muttered.

“You tried to get help for this problem?” Snape probed further.

Jerrod sighed softly, his entire body sagging slightly as he forced himself to keep talking. “Yes; I went to St. Mungo’s, told them it was an accident and they needed to find a way to reverse it. They told me they could commit me to the mental ward for a month or so and dig around in my head... I walked out.” He said bluntly, not giving himself any leeway. “I haven’t had much problem living with it.” He shrugged.

“Severus?” Lucius looked over at his old friend. He knew the man was capable of many things that even St. Mungo’s labeled as hopeless.

Snape looked thoughtful, drawing one finger down one side of his jaw, stopping at his chin, cupping it with that finger and one thumb. “I have never heard of such a thing; the closest I’ve known is when that idiot Lockhart obliviated himself with Weasley’s wand.”

“He did that to himself?” Draco asked, eyebrows rising.

Harry felt he needed to fill in the blanks there; after all he had been the only one there when it had happened. “Well I can assure you he had no intention of doing that to himself; it was pure accident. He meant to obliviate Ron and me both. It was that same year that Ron broke his wand...”

“Oh, I remember. The year he made himself cough up slugs for what, half a day...?” Draco smirked slightly.

“Nearly the whole day; that was priceless.” George couldn’t help but smirk.

“He’d rather not remember it, I’m sure.” Harry answered, stifling a grin as well.

“As amusing as all that is, gentlemen...” Snape interrupted haughtily, though a smirk had crept across his face as well at that fool Lockhart hexing his own memory into oblivion. “We have issues concerning the future to discuss.” He eyed Warrington but the man would not even raise his head. “It would be rather interesting to see if I could solve this...”

“No.” Jerrod said, “Mr. Malfoy, don’t make me go through with anything like that... please...” he mumbled, hiding his face in his hands as well; they were trembling.

“You need to regain your ability to control what you can talk about, Jerrod. I will allow this.” Lucius said quietly.

“There are some things that even you can’t force me to do.” Warrington said, shoving to his feet and shaking off George’s hands. “I won’t have anything to do with this a moment longer!” he said,
stalking out of the room.

“Perhaps not.” Lucius said, rising to his feet. “But I know who can.”

Lucius decided that the abnormal upbringing of these children that had made them unusually mature for their age could be used to his advantage in this situation. He immediately sought the girl out where she sat quietly playing with that odd toy of hers, the stuffed Chthulu that her father had given her.

“Alyssa, I need to speak with you.” He said quietly, giving the girl a bow.

She glanced at the others then stood, gazing up at him. “All right, My Lord Malfoy…” she said in her soft musical voice. “Is this about my daddy?”

“Oh no ask that?” he asked, gesturing for her to accompany him out of the playroom. She glanced over at Mallek, who was ignoring her completely as he played with Alerick. The blonde boy looked her way and smiled; she nodded and turned to follow half a step behind the much taller adult.

She touched the pendant about her neck, stroking the cool stone slightly. “Because my daddy’s upset.” She said softly. “He don’t want to do what you want him to do, Lord Malfoy.”

Lucius gazed at the child, impressed by her comprehension of the situation. “You are correct; he does not wish to do what I need of him.” He agreed. “But he must.”

“Why?” she asked, tilting her head slightly as they moved to a seat just outside the room.

Lucius sat before he answered her question, gazing into the child’s eyes directly. “He has damaged his memories. I need him to be intact. You and your other father need him to be intact as well.”

“But he’s not hurt; your doctor saw him just yesterday and his ankle is even better. The doctor said that he was okay.” She argued.

Lucius nodded. “Physically, yes; he is improving quite a bit but he will never be completely healed. Your father has suffered a lot over the past several years and I believe that you are doing him a world of good, Alyssa.” He gave her a reassuring smile.

“I want my daddy to be here for me.” She said with a bit of a blush on her cheeks at the compliment.

“The problem we are facing here, Alyssa, is that his mind has been damaged.”

“But why?” she asked, gazing at him.

“Jerrod has little skill with the mental arts. Some very bad things must have happened to him, and he tried to make himself forget them.”

“My teachers said bad things happen and they make us stronger.” Alyssa said in a soft, grave voice.

“They can, but we must deal with them before we can become stronger. I need you to use your special talent and to make your father allow us to take care of him.”

Alyssa looked down at her shoes, biting her lip for a long moment. Lucius waited, knowing the girl needed time to think it all through. He had not lied to her and she surely would think of that as well as she mulled it all over. Finally she looked up at him, her eyes full of worry. “My daddy… he’s going to be mad at me if I do this…” she murmured, hugging her stuffed toy tightly against her. “I
don’t want daddy upset with me.”

“Your daddy will understand once he’s all better. He will love you all the more for your courage, little one.” He said reassuringly.

She was silent a few moments more, her eyes searching his as if looking for help to make up her mind; he would do nothing to influence her further. The decision to use her power must be her own. Finally she nodded timidly. “All right… I want my daddy stronger, I want him all better. What do I need to do?” she asked.

“Come on, Daddy…” Alyssa said softly, holding Warrington’s hand, leading the man down the hall, following Lucius. “You need this daddy; they have to make you better so we can be a good family too…”

“Alyssa… please don’t… I…” he whispered, voice shaking slightly as he tried to fight the child’s influence over him.

“Come on…” she spoke over his words, not allowing him to resist further. “I want us to be happy, I want you all better so we can be a family…” she said, putting more power behind the words and his face went blank; he silently followed her lead without any further resistance.

Lucius opened the door and gestured to the bed in the room that Severus had used for working on the children. Alyssa led her father to the bed and in a soft tone she commanded him to lie down.

Lucius moved to stand beside Severus where he stood beside the head of the bed. “Are you ready to begin?”

“As ready as I can be, considering I have no idea what this man has done to his mind.” Severus answered quietly, watching as Warrington lay down on the bed, moving as if entranced.

“You’ll be extra special careful with him, won’t you Master Snape…?” Alyssa asked softly, gazing down at her father, taking a moment to brush the hair back out of his face.

“I will give his safety every consideration, little one.” Severus answered in a quiet and very serious tone. “You should leave; go and find Mr. Weasley. We will let you know when he is ready to see you again.”

She hesitated, then turned and threw her arms about him. “Thank you for helping him Master Snape…” she said, voice trembling slightly with tears.
Twisted Memories

Author's notes: Now that the stolen children have all been saved, what is behind their upbringing? The mind of Jerrod Warrington may hold some answers...

“Are we all ready?” Severus asked, irritated by the entire situation. There was no reason that he could think of that this group of people should view these memories; the reason for their revealing was for Warrington to be able to face the truth of his past. They should be limited to Warrington only. Lucius had insisted that he view them as Warrington’s ‘master’, and George had asked permission to view as well. Jerrod had just shrugged noncommittally as he had believed that there would be nothing to see. He figured that if these people wanted to see his own blocked memories of several mangled, tortured babies that was their sick twist, not his.

“Let’s get this over.” Jerrod grumbled.

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They arrived within the first memory; the smoke about them clearing to reveal the inside of the old Parkinson Manor. There had clearly been quite a battle in this room; half the furniture had been blasted and lay in pieces upon the floor. Pansy Parkinson stood off to the side, looking quite bored and irritated at even having to be here, arms folded.

Malcolm Parkinson stood over Jerrod Warrington who was on his knees, his wand broken before him. “I told you, Warrington. You are meant to be my servant, which is why you’ve lost to me. You were born to be a servant and you will remain a servant your entire life.” He sneered at the beaten man. “Now give me your arm or your father dies!”

Pansy Parkinson rolled her eyes, arms folded as she waited for the time to come to do her part. Her father was so damned melodramatic lately it just got on her nerves.

Jerrod, decades younger, was clearly defeated. He was pale and bore multiple injuries; his face bore several small cuts and scratches, his robes tattered and slashed, hanging from his beaten and bleeding body. His hand trembled as he complied with the command, slowly raising his right arm without raising his eyes.

Although Parkinson also showed injury, he stood tall, looming over his opponent triumphantly.

“This is SUCH a waste of time!” Pansy complained. “That little mouse isn’t worth all this effort, father. I don’t have any idea why you want this fool bound to you. Why not bind someone who can actually fight? I could use a new guard down at the clinic…” Pansy sighed as she drew her wand, stepping forward.

“It is not your place to question me, Pansy.” He snapped at her, irritated at her questioning of his grand plan. She scowled at him, but objected no more; what was the point? She waited for Malcolm to take hold of Jerrod’s wrist and then force Jerrod to hold onto his own before she touched them both with the wand.

“I didn’t duel Parkinson.” Jerrod said frowning at the scene as Pansy spoke the words of the unbreakable vow, binding the young man to her father.

“Yes, you did.” Severus answered. “You chose to block this memory.”
Lucius spoke up then. “I wonder if Parkinson saw your potential where others did not…”

“What bloody potential? I was only a few years out of Hogwarts there… I hadn’t accomplished anything.”

“But you did, Jerrod. You have accomplished something that very few have even attempted to do; you have thwarted the capabilities of a centuries old spell that has never failed.”

“Yeah.” Jerrod said bitterly. “Who gives a bloody damn? I accomplished something that I’ll take to my grave and no one will ever know that I did it.”

“Nonsense. You figured it out, your notes ended up in the ministry’s hands, did they not?” Severus asked.

“No. My notes were at the mansion. And they’re in my head. There’s a new valley where the mansion was, about ten feet deeper I hear. The only one who’s been in my head is you.” He said, glaring at Severus.

“Even so, the reversal of that spell is quite valuable. You could potentially make quite a bit of money on that potion.” Severus shrugged, watching as the scene progressed.

“…Do you swear to serve Malcolm Parkinson in every capacity asked for, including situations that may end in your death?” Pansy asked pointedly.

“I so swear.” Jerrod murmured in agreement.

“And do you swear to report all to Malcolm Parkinson that you hear, whether it is against or for him?

“I so swear…” he whispered, and then cried out as the binding of the spell took hold. The tendrils that had sprung forward with every statement Pansy had made sliced down into his skin, leaving marks like burns up his right arm in flame-like patterns.

Malcolm released him, smirking. “Go and find your father then. Get him out of here so we can get to work.” He commanded.

“Find…? You said you had him…” Jerrod looked up at him.

Parkinson smiled a wicked grin and laughed at him. “Perhaps Pansy is right and I’ve made a foolish choice in you; you’re such a simple creature. I never had your father, you fool.” He rolled his eyes. “He is in St. Mungo’s. Go and take him home, ensure his safety however it is you wish. Then you will return to me; I have work for you to do.”

Jerrod looked at the dumbfounded expression on his younger self’s face, then scowled at Severus. “What the bloody hell is all this?! You’ve twisted this memory somehow! That’s not how this happened at all!”

“You saw me extract the memories directly from your own mind. You were not sleeping, Warrington. You’ve convinced yourself that you saved your father with your fight, but you were fooled all along. You must face your past before you will be strong enough to go on.” Severus answered him calmly.

“Face it?” He snorted derisively. “Strong talk from a man who didn’t take a minute to show any kind of…”

“I truly don’t care if you believe me or not, Jerrod. I have long ago come to terms with my past with
the aid of my mates.” Severus replied, cutting him off. “You must learn of your past, it seems, before you can deal with it. And you seem to be following my example whether you wish it or not…” he gestured at George. “…you have invited your mate to help you through it…”

“That’s not why I… I mean, I… Merlin’s balls, man, he is NOT my mate!” Warrington retorted, face reddening.

George just smiled faintly; he had friendship with this man, a relationship was just the next step as far as he was concerned. Living with his brother and his brother’s idiosyncrasies had taught him a little patience over the years, where relationships were concerned.

The scene around them changed; the shadows of the past swirling and reconfiguring themselves to a sterile room. Jerrod lay upon a table in this room, bound magically to the table. His skin was nearly so pale as to be transparent and grey; he bore a bandage wrapped securely about his throat and another about each wrist. All three wrappings had been heavily stained with blood. That was shocking enough, but what really drew the men’s eyes was the fact this memory of Jerrod had a clearly swollen stomach – he was pregnant.

Parkinson tore the stopper out of a bottle and forced it down the barely conscious man’s throat. “Drink this you traitorous bastard!” he snarled under his breath.

“That is a blood-replenishing potion.” Severus said, studying the bottle.

“You were to be monitoring him in my absence, Bebel! Tell me how the bloody fucking hell he managed to do this?! How could this have happened?!” Parkinson was clearly infuriated; his face was flushed and a blood vessel stood out pulsing on either side of his forehead.

August Bebel looked exhausted, as if he had not slept in days. “I am working on the genetic makeup and trying to come up with another version that will not result in a mutant!” he retorted, not backing down in the slightest. He clearly considered himself quite valuable and beyond punishment as Jerrod was not. “You ask too much of me, I am only one man! I am accustomed to working with an entire lab!”

“I can’t get more in on this, the secret will be out!” he snapped.

“I understand that, but I cannot continue to babysit that useless human incubator while I do my experimental alterations! Your daughter does little more than waste galleons upon foolish Muggle toys; you should put her to work watching this fool, not me! The genetic DNA that I am manipulating requires complete focus! Distractions cause mutations!” he snapped back.

Parkinson snarled with frustration but could not argue with the facts presented to him. He turned his attention back to look at the man on the table, who had lost a little grayness but still looked more than half dead. “Did he manage to kill the baby…? Does he still live?”

“Yes, Master Malcolm. The infant is sustained by his magic; he will die before the infant dies. It has taken nearly all of his power to sustain it, but the baby lives.” He nodded, moving over. “It may be one, perhaps two weeks before he is fully conscious again, without or without blood restoration potions.”

“Well at least something has gone right.” Malcolm grumbled. “I would rather keep him unconscious anyway; it makes less work for all.”

“We should have realized he would try to kill himself again when he failed to poison himself, Master
Malcolm.”

“That would have been a success if you had not thought quickly. Your bezoar definitely saved our little infant.”

August smiled at the praise. “Thank you, Master.” He said warmly. “This child has more potential than our last experiments; he is still living. The last three were stillborn.” Bebel moved over to check the bulge again. He waved his wand over it and the bump against the blankets pulsed once blue and then faded. “The magic that keeps it alive is still strong.”

Jerrod watched and listened, aware that he did vaguely recall such a conversation… but it hadn’t been about him. It hadn’t. It had been one of the women. It wasn’t him on that table with a baby in his belly, it couldn’t be. For a moment he was lost in the memory, battling with total disbelief.

“Four babies… did you even know, Jerrod?” George asked softly.

Jerrod jumped slightly; he’d forgotten the others were here at all. “What…? No. No, there weren’t any babies.” He answered in a vague and distracted tone, staring at his corpse-like face. “This isn’t real. This didn’t happen…”

“It did. And now we will see what else hides within your memories…” Severus said as the scene faded.

Again the shadows slipped about them, though the figure on the bed remained stationary. The bed had changed to one with a cushion of air, but Jerrod was still fastened to the bed with magical bonds. The wild, overgrown look of his hair and unshaven face made it clear that he had not been moved off this bed in months.

George growled in disapproval at the treatment of the man he fancied.

The memory of Jerrod was awake now; sweat covered his brow and soaked his hair, his face twisted into an expression of agony and effort. His stomach was swollen and stretched to full term, rippled and convulsed with birthing contractions.

The baby that slid into view caused all four men to nearly become ill. Normal babies had fingers, toes, noses and eyes; their heads were a bit larger than they ought to be, but they were undoubtedly easy to look at and even cute. This… child…? …it had none of that. Its head was much too small for its body; almost appearing to lack a brain; its skull was misshapen and there was certainly no room for a human brain within that cranium. It had no nose, and its upper lip had been split almost like a serpent’s mouth. Its eyes were sunken and lidless; the body was twice the length it should have been while its limbs were stunted and fingerless. It almost looked like a crossbreed between human and snake. The memory of Jerrod stared in fascinated horror at it. No… no. He had not birthed that creature… that wasn’t possible.

“Another failure.” Bebel sliced the umbilical cord and laid the infant upon a cold steel table without covering it. It gurgled and tried to cry; squirming snakelike upon the table, half-drowned in its own fluids. It quickly lost blood and did not suffer long. Its blood pooled around it and it moved no more.

“The women have had no better results… at least his was alive.” Malcolm said, glaring at the dead baby as if he wished he could throttle it. “

The scientist was very angry and he pointed an accusatory finger at the baby. “Can you not see that this is not working, Parkinson? The DNA we got out of the tombs is clearly incomplete; this has
been the fourth experiment birthed by this man that has turned out this way! The infants born to women are no better, they don’t even breathe! You must see that this is not working!”

“Then we will keep trying until we get it right!” Malcolm growled back at him. “The prophecy was clear; I will be father to the new Dark Lord!”

“But they did not say he must be born with the same DNA! You follow the wrong path, pursuing the remains of Voldemort! Even that madwoman Lestrange did not have any sample to provide you for his re-creation, and that woman was nearly rabid in her desire to see that madman reborn!”

“I wiped her mind; she does not even remember that we approached her.” Malcolm waved his hand dismissively.

“She will be a danger to our cause, should she gain any knowledge of it.”

“I know, I know. But how are we to create someone with as much power as the Dark Lord without recreating him?”

Bebel had begun to pace, thinking quickly. Something else was there, something they were clearly missing. “You mentioned that a spell was cast, when this Potter of yours says the Dark Lord was reborn…”

Malcolm nodded, curious as to what Bebel had in mind. “Yes; Pettigrew bragged of it frequently before his death. It has to be the one spell he got perfectly right, besides his ability to become a rat.”

“Perhaps a clue to what we must do is held within that spell.” Bebel suggested.

Malcolm frowned, dredging up the memory. He had tried to forget the time he was with the Dark Lord; he had nearly lost his mind the day that his wife was murdered for disappointing Voldemort. “As the Dark Lord never truly died, it was not a reincarnation. It was, instead the recreation of a body; Peter said they had to use a stolen bone from his father’s grave and then required blood of the enemy taken unwillingly, so he slashed Potter with a silver knife and put drops of his blood into the pot. The last ingredient was flesh of the servant, willingly given. He added his own hand to fill that requirement…”

Bebel had nodded; he had heard all he needed. “These two men, Pettigrew and Potter.... do either of them live?” Bebel asked.

“Pettigrew was the last of his line; he never had any children that the Ministry knew of.” Malcolm said thoughtfully. “But Potter still lives. He has a residence in London…”

“Then it is his blood we seek.”

“Potter’s?” Malcolm couldn’t help it; his lip curled in distaste at the name. Potter had brought about the fall of the Dark Lord, that was true, but he was vastly overrated in strength and talents; he hadn’t even gone after the Ministry as everyone had expected him to. “Why the bloody hell would we want him?”

Bebel looked impatient; his expression irritated, rather like a man trying to explain quantum physics to a five year old. “You said yourself that your prophecy claimed that the new Prince would be born of the blood of the Dark Lord.”

“All these failures have proven that to be false.” Malcolm scowled at him.

“THESE have proven false, not the truth of the statement. It was not Voldemort’s blood that brought
about the Dark Lord’s rebirth; it was the blood of Potter. Your Lord Voldemort bound his family and his bloodline to the Potter family when he took that blood from that boy to use in his spell for creation of his body.”

Malcolm looked thoughtful, and then he nodded. “Yes… yes, I see what you are saying,” he murmured. “Potter had friends… perhaps we should secure their DNA as well and gift our little Prince with his own circle of friends. After all, it was with the help of his friends that Potter managed his achievement.”

“Then we must get Potter’s sperm. It is the best way.” Bebel said firmly.

The scene changed once more, reforming into a room where Jerrod leaned against the wall, his back bleeding profusely. Parkinson stood over him, a long whip stained with blood curled in his hand. “I told you to destroy those babies and get back immediately! Where the bloody hell did you disappear to for three hours?!?” He demanded.

“Nowhere… I saw no living person, Master Parkinson; I swear it upon my life and soul. I swear it upon my father’s soul…”

Parkinson snarled and gave him another lash with the whip, its tips now bloodied. Jerrod endured it without even a whimper, eyes closed tightly. “You are NEVER to leave property unless I directly instruct you to! You are to go nowhere!”

“I will go nowhere, master.” Jerrod whispered, his voice trembling in pain and exhaustion, sinking to his knees.

“And I will ensure that.” He snarled back, drawing his wand and pointing it at Jerrod’s ankle. “Gerent!” he growled the spell in German. The separation spell smashed against both of Jerrod’s ankles, his right ankle taking a direct hit from it and the left only getting half the damage. Jerrod, who had not screamed for the whipping, began to do so now as the tendons ripped themselves loose from bone at command from the spell inside both ankles, leaving him crippled and unable to walk. “Try to walk now.” He snarled back, then whirled and stalked out of the room.

“You twisted, sick son of a bitch!” George snarled, starting after him.

Lucius reached out and caught his arm. “This is a memory, Mr. Weasley. Calm yourself.” He recommended.

“He’s the reason Jerrod can’t walk properly! How many times did he do that to you?!?” He demanded, turning to the other man.

“Once… I think. Once was more than enough.” Jerrod answered quietly, watching as his past self writhed in total agony, and then resorted to suffering through it all in a fetal ball, sobbing faintly.

This time the scene resolved into a bedroom; Warrington lay sleeping in his bed, blankets tossed aside. His ankles were still horribly swollen and purple, braces and wraps around them as much as he could bear them to be. Several pain potions and sleeping potions bottles stood on the nightstand.

Parkinson moved into the room with clear disrespect for the younger man’s privacy. He snarled, seeing that Jerrod was still sleeping. He stalked to the bedside and picked up a walking stick from beside the bed, then smacked the bottoms of both of the sleeping man’s feet with it, “Get up out of
bed and get to work!” Parkinson snapped, and looked quite gratified to hear Jerrod’s cry of pain as he was instantly awakened. “I need those potions TODAY!”

Warrington had nearly curled into a fetal position in defense, trying to get control of his breathing as he realized what had happened. “I have… one. The other is so complex; I haven’t gotten it to be permanent…” he murmured.

“Leave him the bloody hell alone!” George growled, fists clenched at his sides.

“Get up and fetch it for me.” He ordered.

Jerrod took hold of his legs and slipped them down to the floor; he then lowered himself off the bed to his rump to cause the least amount of pain to his still recovering ankles, clearly trying to ignore his pain. He then used his hands to pull his body across the floor without using his feet at all. Taking hold of the bars mounted to the wall, he pulled his body up rung by run using only his arms until he hoisted his body up high enough to scoot onto the stool that stood beside the table, trembling with effort by the time he settled. He reached out and picked up a phial on the table, hand shaking.

“Here… the _________ blood potion you wanted…”

Parkinson, who had watched him labor to simply get to the potions table on the other side of the small room, snatched the phial away from him and glared at it. “That’s all? This is only two doses at most…”

“I can make more. The other potion – the one to block detection by hereditary spells – there’s no existing recipe for such a potion. It’s never been done before; it’s not as easy to create as you seem to think…”

“You’re nearly useless to me. At least Bebel has shown some improvement over the months…” Parkinson glared at him.

“I’m doing my best.” He mumbled, as he attempted to settle his feet so they ached a bit less.

“Clearly your best is not half good enough; you can only create potions with recipes. The greatest potions masters didn’t simply reproduce other people’s work! You say you want to be worth something at potions, show it!” Malcolm growled. “Press your limits! Stop sleeping so much and get this job done, I need that other potion immediately!”

“Yes, Master Parkinson.” He said softly, pulling his cauldron closer.

“Did you ever manage that other potion he wanted…?” George asked, still angrily glaring at the form of Malcolm Parkinson with disgust in his eyes.

“Yeah. Took years.” He answered, glancing at Snape.

“Irritatingly, yes, you did succeed.” Snape agreed. “I never would have imagined you were capable of such a feat, judging by your performance in potions class…”

“It’s amazing what one can achieve with the right kind of motivation.” Jerrod shrugged.

“That wasn’t motivation, it was torture!”

“He’s dead, Weasley; it doesn’t do any good to snarl at a memory.” Snape pointed out, rolling his eyes.

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The image they watched blurred and reformed again, a solitary man upon a windy mountainside. Jerrod, older and far more careworn, stood gazing at the grave he had just dug.

There were twenty-three crosses dotting the rugged ground; tiny monuments that marked the final resting places of children unfortunate enough not to have survived testing.

He wiped his brow and tossed aside the shovel then knelt beside the hole in the dirt. The sweat on his face mingled with slowly rolling tears. He turned and picked up a bundle wrapped tightly in white; blood stained the outer wrappings. It was the proper size and shape for a newborn child.

“Good night little one… I hope your next life takes you far away from here.” He whispered as he laid the deceased child inside the hole. Just a few feet to his left was a hand printed sign that said “Nowhere Cemetery”.

“You named the cemetery ‘nowhere’…?”

“That way I could tell the complete truth when I told him I was going nowhere. It worked for me.” Jerrod shrugged, not looking. “And by doing that I could continue to take care of the little ones.” He recalled this part; the burying of the babies and handling their lifeless bodies. But he hadn’t remembered the sheer numbers of them. And he knew he buried more after this little one as well…

“Intelligent of you.” Severus commented and that earned him a glare from Warrington.

The memory Jerrod drew a wand from its holder on his arm and used magic to cover the grave over. He pushed unsteadily to his feet and sighed sadly. “Angels watch over you, little one.” He murmured, and then turned away.

The four found themselves inside a sterile laboratory once more. Upon the table lay an infant, convulsing and screaming in an unnatural tone, his little face red and a trickle of blood coming from the corner of his mouth.

Warrington looked nauseous as he watched his past self staring at the baby with pain in his eyes as the baby’s body twisted and shook violently. An hour ago this child was happily nursing on a bottle, now he couldn’t stop his blood-curdling scream as the poisonous potion ate him from the inside out, burning holes through his intestines.

Parkinson scowled as he watched, clearly angry that this was occurring but doing nothing to stop it. “I thought he had the right combination of blood to survive…”

“He does not have enough Siren within his blood; more manipulation of the gene is necessary. I must eliminate any trace of the father to come up with a fine enough bloodline… if our child survives then that child will be able to father pure siren children once he matures.” August Bebel murmured thoughtfully, also clearly ignoring the agony the baby was going through.

“Aren’t you going to do something?!” Jerrod demanded, unable to take his eyes off the suffering baby. The little boy managed to get off another loud scream of agony.

“It will die soon enough.” Malcolm shrugged.

“Avada Kedavra!” Jerrod snarled, ending the pitiful struggle and intense pain of the baby. Malcolm glanced at him curiously; the baby’s agony had not affected him at all. It wasn’t the proper child; it needed to die in his eyes. He then returned his attention to the scientist.
“Merlin, I’m going to be sick… I can’t stand this anymore.” Jerrod whispered, watching as his past self moved forward with a deathly pale face to the child he had just killed. He wrapped it up in the blanket it had laid upon, covering its tortured face which still dribbled blood. The baby’s nose and ears showed signs of bleeding as well; if the potion did what it was reported to, it would not stop damage to the child’s body until the acidic level of the potion had been neutralized by eating completely to the bones. There wouldn’t be anything left of this child, and he would not have to do anything to it…

“This was the first time you used that Unforgiveable?” Lucius asked softly

“It’s the only unforgiveable curse I’ve used.” He murmured softly. “Malcolm made me study and work to try to master the Imperious curse; I simply can’t do it. Merlin knows I tried. I am also incapable of performing a Crucio with any more force than a heavy tickle…”

“Taking the life of that child was the most humane thing you could have done.” Severus said, watching as the “master” and the scientist continued to argue about what to do next while the clearly grieving memory of Jerrod lifted the child born of his blood into his arms to carry away, which he was clearly expected to do. “The death it would have caused would have taken hours.”

“I couldn’t allow that to happen. Not… not again.” He whispered, voice trembling. “It’s all I could do. He was in so much pain.” He turned away, knowing that his past self was scooping up the dead infant to whisk it away for burial while Parkinson and Bebel argued about what steps to take next.

George was incredulous. “He killed more than one baby with that poisonous muck?! What was the purpose of killing those babies?! he demanded.

“It was to test for the purity of his blood. They were looking to isolate the siren from my genetic matter; that little boy was the third they gave it to. The first was so weak it took only moments for him to die; the second was much stronger magically and physically; it took nearly an hour to kill him. The dose that Malcolm gave that little boy would have damn near killed me…”

“That poisonous shit kills them! It doesn’t test for anything!”

“It does… the blood potion made from the ________ has no effect upon pureblood sirens…”

“But they’re not gonna be pureblood! They used mine and your seed to make them didn’t they?!”

“Yes, but they were isolating the genes… I have no fucking idea how but they got a little closer each time…”

“Did he give that to Alyssa?” George demanded, hands closing into fists. He clearly wanted to bring Parkinson back and participate in his even slower and more torturous murder.

Jerrod did not look at him, nodding his answer to the question. “She got a tummy ache and cried for a while, but it had no lasting ill effects upon her. By morning you would never have known she had been given that nasty stuff…” He murmured, clearly disturbed by the memory.

“Is that the same potion you made?”

“Yes… I swear that I had no idea what he was going to use it for…” he murmured, then looked at Severus with impatience and anger. “Are we finished with this madness yet?!” he demanded.

“That depends upon what you have left for us to view.” Severus said as the scene about them began to fade.
The mists darkened until they resolved themselves around them in a dark dungeon-like room. The walls were of gray stone stained black with age and smoke; and this room had no windows at all. The roof was high, but held up by heavy wooden beams that looked as ancient as those in Hogwarts castle, and from those beams, all about the edges of the room, hung sacks of some unidentifiable, others clearly definable parts of animals and creatures, most likely intended for potions ingredients.

The room smelled strongly of sulphur and brimstone with a faint aroma of violets that only served to further irritate the senses. The far side of the room had a curved table that hugged the wall of the circular room, and on that table were several cauldrons bubbling away as their contents continued on their way to completion. Other than this table and a few odd chairs that were shoved tightly against the table, there were no other furnishings visible in the room at all. The center of the ceiling was particularly black and in the direct center of the floor, taking up most of its space was something of great interest to Snape.

"Why the bloody hell are we here? I remember this!" Warrington objected, glaring at Severus.

"Perhaps there is something more to be revealed; something your own memories will not allow you to remember – until the right question is asked.” Lucius suggested, pacing forward to gaze at the scene before them.

A basic circular pentagram had been permanently engraved into the floor of the room, its channels filled with a grey powdery substance. In the same powder there were several symbols written about the circle in a language so old that most of them looking on did not understand them. Severus knew, though, from his constant study to free the children that this very old, dangerous, and unconventional magic had been used to bind them all.

The memory revealed four individuals in the room; Malcolm Parkinson looking irritated and impatient, Jerrod Warrington holding a baby swaddled in his blanket in his arms, and a strange woman. She looked like she was at least a hundred years old; her eyes were tiny and her skin so wrinkled that she seemed almost shrunken by magic. Her hair, pure white and bound into tiny braids, draped down her back and flowed around her shoulders and back as she moved. Her pale skin showed she rarely stepped outside of her home, and her robes were an almost indiscriminate color of brown that might once have been pink under all the stains and wear they had received. In her hand she held a wand made of the wood of a rose; the thorns were still attached.

"Who is that woman?" George asked, glancing at her a moment before dedicating himself to glaring at the memory of Parkinson, clearly wishing to do him harm.

"Her…? Madame Ascalene.” Jerrod answered distractedly. He was trying to figure out what about all of this that he had somehow forgotten…

"And she still lives?” Severus asked.

"How the bloody hell should I know that?” Jerrod frowned.

"You would know if you had seen Parkinson kill her.” Severus responded as if to a student who was incredibly slow.

Warrington scowled at that. “I didn’t see him kill her.” He said flatly. Severus merely lifted an eyebrow thoughtfully, turning to watch the progress of the memory once more.
The memory of Jerrod stood to the side, holding the baby with the wild black hair that seemed to be sleeping. The man looked highly worried and even nauseous, as if preparing himself to watch another horrible assault upon a child, as they all knew he had many times.

The woman pointed her wand at the floor and a silvery grey dust drifted out in a very fine line; she used this and drew out a second circle, interlinked and dominant over the first circle, each move deliberate, whispering in a crackling voice as she moved. Although she appeared to be older than time itself, her steps were light and careful and graceful as she moved, preparing her circles of power. She drew a third circle, this one subservient to the other two. Each circle had a clear place in the center, clearly intended to be occupied.

Finally she finished, turning to the man holding the child with her narrowed eyes. “It is ready.” She announced. “Place the child in this ring…” she pointed at the second one. “And mind the lines!” the woman snapped.

Jerrod nodded slightly and stepped forward, carefully placing his feet to enable him to get to the center of the secondary ring and place the baby in his blanket there in the center. He paused a moment to check that the infant was still sleeping, and then he exited that circle then with equal care, the woman watching him with a scowl.

“You. There.” She gestured to Malcolm Parkinson to take the dominant ring.

Grinning gleefully, Malcolm stepped eagerly into the ring and took his seat, infinitely careful to not so much as cause a breeze to smudge any of the careful work of the old witch. Everything was coming together; just as he had planned… he would soon be the most powerful man in the world!

Jerrod’s memory watched him but did not have long to ponder.

“You, servant, will be seated there and remove your shirt.” She glared at Jerrod’s memory, pointing at the smallest ring.

Clearly he had not expected to be involved. “Me…? Oh no; it was just to be the master and the baby…” Jerrod argued.

Malcolm looked angry his objection. “Warrington, it was to be your job to serve these children. Sit down.” Malcolm said firmly.

“Me…? Wha…?”

“Sit down, Warrington. Now.” The older man commanded.

Jerrod moved unwillingly in response to the command; he was bound to follow directives and could not refuse. Dragging his feet, he smudged two of the lines as he moved into his place.

“He knew just how to rein you in, didn’t he?” Severus observed.

“And I found ways around most of his commands.” Warrington growled back at him. “I don’t expect any of you to understand. I did what I had to in order to survive…."

“He was a manipulative bastard who forced you into his service by deception.” George growled. “I don’t hold you to blame for the things he forced you to do…”

“Mind the lines!” the woman snarled. She bustled forward and repaired the damage done, growling the incantations now. She glared at him with a baleful eye as he slowly sank into place at the center of the circle. “Now remove your shirt!”
He did not move at her command but when it was put in terms he could not find his way around by Parkinson, he was forced to disrobe to the waist. “I don’t see why the bloody hell I need to be the one who…” he mumbled.

“Silence, Warrington, you will speak not one more word without being asked to for the rest of the day!” Malcolm commanded, and Warrington found himself without a voice. He continued to mouth words though no sound would come out.

“Did he do that often?” George asked.

“No… I usually knew when to shut the hell up. I was mouthy that day.” He shrugged as if it really hadn’t mattered. “You should have done that hours ago. I personally would have had his tongue removed for such insolence.” Madame Ascalene grumbled after she had finished the circle again.

“I need him to have a tongue, Madame. Can we get under way?” he asked impatiently.

“Wizards nowadays have no appreciation for finer ancient magic…” she said with a disapproving snort, moving around the rings to the center of the largest ring. When Malcolm did not answer her, she sighed with great irritation and began the casting of the spell.

Severus watched with great interest, clearly taking mental notes as the spell proceeded. The power was concentrated upon Malcolm, filtering through him to the baby who must have been drugged to make him sleep so soundly, finally down to Jerrod.

“You give this servant to be bound to this child?”

“Yes, his blood and soul are to be dedicated to this child.”

“Blood and soul…?” George murmured. Jerrod was silent as he watched his past self undergo the binding as well as the creation of the Dark Mark with perfect clarity, miniaturized upon his left shoulder.

The bindings included those that Warrington had already confided to Lucius; those that required him to protect not only the Dark Prince but every individual that was given the new Dark Mark as well as the requirement to obey their direct commands. He was to protect each of them to the death, if necessary. None of this was any surprise to any of them.

“You are bound to the Dark Circle to the death. If any of them die before you, you are required to seek blood feud on any who caused them harm. Regardless of whether you are given the license to pursue a blood feud, you will hunt them and their entire family lines to the death.” Parkinson announced in a commanding tone, knowing that his words were being bound into the very mark upon the man’s shoulder. “Further you are to be a release for the Dark Circle. Any of those within the circle can command you to submit to them in any way. I will not have our little circle unsatisfied.”

“Mentally, physically and sexually as well?” The witch weaving the spell asked.

“Yes; in every way possible.” Malcolm said cooly.

“…what…?” Jerrod murmured, not believing his ears.

“Finish the spell; bind him.” Malcolm ordered.

Severus watched the completion with interest, noting that it was very similar to the process that had
been utilized by Voldemort to complete the marking process, though it was clear that the Dark Lord had put a lot of extra theatrics into it all. This woman wasted no energy or time, simply completing the spell quickly and efficiently. As the Dark Lord had done, the tattoo itself was tied into the lifeblood so that attempts to remove it by anyone other than the one who had commanded it to be placed would cause the individual’s death.

George glanced where Jerrod had stood and the man was no longer there; he had pulled himself out of the memory stream. “Bloody hell.” He murmured softly.

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There had been one more memory, that of Alyssa receiving her tattoo. She had been the last of the children to be marked; following her marking the woman had indeed been killed by Malcolm Parkinson. He had not used Avada Kedavra to do the deed; instead he had utilized a muggle weapon and had shot the woman in the head with a single bullet. Malcolm had then drawn his wand and used Obliviate to take the memory of the murder from Jerrod’s conscious memory.

Lucius, Severus and George withdrew from the memory stream as well once the memories had played themselves out. Jerrod was seated in a chair beside the fire, taking a long drink from a glass of firewhiskey, looking ill.

“So… now we know the entire story.” Lucius said softly.

“It’s not real. That was a hell of a show you put on for us, Snape. I knew you were a sadistic bastard but I never knew you’d sink to these kinds of depths.” Jerrod said, not looking over at them.

“It’s real, whether you wish it to be or not.” Severus answered calmly. “Everyone here saw me extract the memories. I did not tamper with them; we all viewed them for the first time just now.”

“It can’t be real!” Jerrod snarled, throwing his glass into the fireplace. “Why the bloody hell would Parkinson command me to be some sort of a sex slave to the kids?!”

“Why the hell did Parkinson steal my granddaughter and wife and abuse the bloody hell out of them? Nothing that man did made any sense.”

“None of that is what we ought to be focusing on!” George interrupted them all, clearly disturbed by what he’d seen. The others looked at him, rather surprised; he had always been fairly quiet around Snape and Lucius. “The real problem is the things that that madman did to Jerrod!”

“We know now what was done; the trick is to undo it.”

“How the bloody hell can you do that? They’re part of my Mark. I can’t remove it any more than they can get rid of theirs!” he said, gesturing at Snape and Lucius.

“Parkinson is dead, but you forget there is one who can change the commands built into the Mark.” Severus said coolly, refusing to get riled as the others had.

“Who?! Mallek isn’t bloody well going to…”


“What?”

“Potter and Mallek share the exact same physical makeup. Parkinson never foresaw that Potter would find his precious circle much less discover the true origins of that child.” Severus explained.
“And thus Potter has control of every facet of the mark. How else do you think he was able to change the mark as he did?”

“And Harry won’t want anyone held under the instructions that Parkinson left you under.” George said firmly.

“I can’t ask him to do that…”

“I can. And I will.” Responded George, turning immediately for the door.
The Final Chapter

Author's notes: All the loose ends are coming together in this final chapter of this story. A lost treasure is found, and another treasure is saved.

“No peeking, love.” Harry scolded as Draco tried to pry the blindfold up to peer out at where he was being led.

“But Harry, where are you taking me? We’ve walked miles…!” he complained, but let the blindfold alone.

Harry had come to him this morning to tell him he had a surprise for him. The mansion had been so busy, so full of life with all the children and the new babies and nannies and well, just life going on that the two of them had not had a moment to themselves at all in months. He chuckled softly at the exaggeration of the distance. “Don’t be silly, Dray, it hasn’t been THAT far…”

“It feels like it…” Draco complained. He trusted Harry but walking along he could feel the breeze on his skin, the sunlight warming his skin, he could hear the birds singing in the garden and smell the scents of flowers and freshly trimmed grass.

“We’re almost there, really. Just bear with me a few moments more.” Harry requested with one arm about Draco’s waist as he led him on across the expansive grounds of Malfoy Manor. Harry had made a change to the grounds that had just been completed this morning, with Lucius’ full permission, and he was quite excited to show that change to Draco.

“But it’s taking so long to get there…” he complained.

“You have no patience.” Harry laughed teasingly.

“I don’t see why I have to be blindfolded…”

“It won’t be a surprise if you see before we get there.” Harry answered. He finally got Draco where he wanted and halted him. “Here we are…”

“Can I take this bloody thing off now?” Draco asked, his voice nearly a whine now.

Harry laughed and reached up, releasing the knot on the blindfold.

Draco blinked, momentarily blinded by the bright sunlight after having his vision blocked off. He found himself gazing at one of the hedges that bordered the property on the south end. It was late in the season so nothing was growing on it, only dense greenery; the flowers he knew were there in spring hand long gone.

“Well, Harry, the bush is quite interesting, but I’m sure if I’ve seen it once I’ve seen it a thousand times. I would much rather be back at the mansion holding our son, you know…” he complained, glancing to his left at Harry.

Merriment and excitement shone in Harry’s eyes. “Now Dray, would I really get you all the way out here just to look at some shrub? Surely you know me better than that.” He chuckled.

“Well if it isn’t the bush then what is it?”
“Look about you, silly.” He answered.

Draco turned to his left and saw the mansion was out of sight, screened off nicely by the bit of forest planted just to the north end of the children’s new play area. He turned to his right and could not miss the change that Harry had been talking about. The stream that meandered across this corner of the property had been broadened considerably, allowing for the small island that now was in its center at least twenty feet across. A small footbridge had been fashioned out of wrought iron, the scrolling metal leading from their side to the shore of the island. And in the center of that island, with its branches drooping down to brush and almost hide the entire island was a weeping cherry tree. He stared a moment in disbelief. “It looks just like the tree in the park… But how…?” he murmured.

“Amazing what a bit of gold can convince muggles to part with.” Harry answered, releasing Draco to allow him to move to the bridge.  

“Its… you mean it’s really our tree…?” Draco looked at him.

“Yes. I know you were worried about the Muggles doing something to our tree out there in the park, so I bought it from them and planted three in its place. And now this is really our tree, now and forever.” He smiled, moving to join him.

Draco took his hand and together they walked across the bridge, the floor of which was wrought iron as well with the words ‘Love’ in the ironwork as well as the word ‘forever’. “It’s beautiful… oh how I’ve missed this tree so much,” he murmured as he parted the branches, which allowed them into the shadowed shelter of the tree.

“The children won’t see it either. I’ve put confundus charms and special protection charms to keep the children away from this part of the property, with your father’s permission. There are also silencing charms cast upon the island and the branches of the tree itself; nothing we do here will be seen outside the branches of this tree. This is our retreat, Draco, for those times when we just need a moment or two to ourselves…”

Draco seized him and pulled him into a long, deep kiss to express his joy over the gift his husband had given to him; Harry was quite content to return that kiss with the same passion and more in the shelter of their own private retreat within the branches of the willow.

Later that day…

Harry and Draco strolled back into the mansion arm in arm to hear the clear wailing of one of the children; it had to be horribly loud to carry this far through the building. They glanced at each other with concern and followed the piteous sound. It led them to the children’s west wing, which over the last several months had been modified into a complex of children’s rooms and nurseries that surrounded a central play room. The area to the eastern quarter had a single corridor that ran off it, and that corridor led to the rooms of the Circle children.

There, just beyond the opening of the corridor, lay a young child dressed in deepest blue with golden trim and matching boots. He looked like he had fallen over, as if all the muscles in his body had stopped working for him at the same moment. His lungs were all right, though, for he let loose another wail that sounded heartbroken and so lost. Lucius Malfoy stood only a few paces away from the child, impassively watching the performance.

Draco hurried over, moving as if to pick the boy up. “What’s happened, father, why is he…?”
“Don’t.” Lucius cut him off, knowing what his intentions were, his voice calm and level.

The younger man paused, and then straightened, letting his arms fall to his sides. Mallek wailed louder, reaching for Draco and making him feel awful for not picking up the boy. “Don’t pick him up? Why ever not…?” Draco asked.

“It is far easier to show you than to explain. Follow me.” Lucius said as he turned his back on the child lying sprawled on his side on the floor, crying hopelessly.

Draco hesitated, but then he and Harry followed his father out of the room, out of sight of the wailing little boy. There was a moment’s pause in the crying, then a hiccup and silence.

Lucius gestured to let them know to watch the doorway they had just come through. After several seconds had passed, Mallek came looking in through the door, not crying at all. The moment that he spotted the three adults, he crumpled back to the floor and began to cry all over again.

Harry and Draco stared at the boy. What the bloody hell…?

Lucius gestured to them to follow again, and the two did so without question this time. The moment they were out of sight, the crying stopped again. This time Lucius took them around a second corner to make it clear what this little child was doing. Moments passed, and Mallek came peering around the corner clearly looking for them. The second he saw them all his knees folded and he fell to the floor again, screaming piteously.

“How long has he been doing that?” Draco asked, trying not to laugh, covering his mouth with a hand to hide the smirk at the child’s antics.

“About twenty minutes so far. The way he had been raised by the nannies and his foster fathers has convinced him that if he screams he can get anything that he desires.” Lucius said, leading them through another door to regain distance between him and the crying. “I banned the nannies from picking the boy up unless there has been some sort of physical hurt. When he refused to stop crying I simply walked out of the room. Then he did what you just now saw; he got quiet, searched for me, then threw himself upon the floor and began crying all over again.”

“Why is he throwing a fit anyway?” Harry asked.

“He’s been separated from the others, without asking his permission; they’ve been gone nearly two hours now. Clearly he thinks he ought to be with them; he was crying for Alerick at first and has gone through calling for each of the circle children.” The three of them halted and again there was silence that lasted just until Mallek could see them again; he crumpled to the floor and began to weep and wail again.

“I’ve never seen a kid do that…” Harry couldn’t help but chuckle. “How are you going to handle it…?”

“Let him scream. He’ll get tired eventually and go to sleep. By the time he wakes up the others will be back.” Lucius answered evenly. “I refuse to be out-lasted by any infant.”

Draco put his hands over his ears as Mallek got even louder, his voice cracking as he tried to scream louder. “I hope your ears can take it father… I don’t think mine could.”

“The answer is easy.” Lucius walked into the next room and once the others followed the cacophony ended. “I simply have to act Scottish.”

“…act Scottish…?”
“It’s an old joke I once heard… Merlin, it must have been Dumbledore who spouted it to me. To act like one of those Scots who play that hideous bagpipe instrument, you simply walk. After all, they walk to get away from their own music.” Lucius smirked. Both of the younger men laughed at that comment. Again Mallek followed and fell to the floor wailing with gusto. “And I will simply keep moving until he gets tired of this game.” He said, moving again.

There was a muffled ‘bampf’ and a house elf appeared, bowing low before Lucius. “Master Lucius there is a visitor for you sir…”

“Is there? I suppose I couldn’t hear the chimes over all the caterwauling…” he said as Mallek found them again. His crying was getting more broken; clearly he was being outlasted by the stubborn Malfoy patriarch. “Damitri Zabini said he would be by sometime today to speak with me.” He glanced at the boy on the floor, who was sobbing now but there were long patches between his strong wails now. “Draco, could you fetch the head Nanny and have her simply watch him until he has finished with this nonsense? She is not to pick him up nor touch him until he is no longer crying at all.”

“Of course, father.” Draco said, turning to go.

“I’ll wait till they come back if you want.” Harry suggested. “I think Damitri might have some questions for you.”

“Most likely, though I haven’t a clue what they would be. I’ve given him every bit of information I had.” Lucius said, turning to go as well.

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Lucius moved into the foyer to see Damitri standing beside the door, clearly waiting for him. “Good afternoon, Zabini…” he said, giving the man a formal bow.

“Good afternoon, Malfoy.” Damitri said, returning the formal gesture of greeting.

“Do you have more questions? I don’t see what I could possibly tell you; I think I’ve told you everything…”

“No, I have information for you. And more.” He glanced toward the door, which was left open just a hair.

“More…?” Lucius asked, curious for just a moment, and then it dawned on him. “Don’t tell me you’ve found her…?” he asked softly, afraid to even believe it.

“Yes, I have.”

“Is she here…?” he was at the door in only a few strides and he pulled it open; but there was no one upon the front steps or in the yard, waiting to see him.

Damitri felt his heart go out to this man; he had been waiting all of his life to meet this young woman and she almost refused to come today. “No, she’s not here, but she is waiting nearby. She has been raised to believe the old rumors about you and your family during the reign of the Dark Lord. It took quite a bit of convincing to even get her to come to London; she agreed to come today only if she could meet you in a neutral place.”

“She must place great stock in your trustworthiness and ability to protect her, if she thinks me such a monster…” Lucius murmured.
“She has been raised as such to protect her from your father; you must remember that.” Damitri cautioned.

Lucius took a deep breath and nodded sharply. “I’ve dealt with people thinking I’m some crazed creature all my life it seems, I can handle it now. Where do I meet her?”

“I can take you now, if you’ve time.”

In answer to that question, Lucius simply moved on through the open door.

When the pair arrived on front of the small restaurant in a rather lucrative side of the muggle town of London, Lucius found is insides were still whirling as much as they did when he was apparating. Would he even know his daughter when he saw her? Would he look into her face and see the man he had loved so much and been forced to let go? Would she somehow reflect his own father’s features more than his…? He found his nerves building and simply did what he always did when he found his tension growing; he slipped into the habitual mask of the Malfoy. He would not let her see how truly frightened he was that she, his last link to James, would reject him. He missed James so much…

Damitri’s voice interrupted his woolgathering and building of fears. “She will be in the back booth; it’s up to you if you want me to come or not…” he offered kindly.

Lucius thought for a moment; then he sighed with clear resignation and reluctance. “Regardless of how much I wish to immediately pull her into the family I doubt that it would be a possibility right now. Its clear she has a great deal of confidence in you, else she never would have agreed to come here and meet with me, whether you are here or not. And you might have some answers that I do not yet have… If you do not mind, I would like you to accompany me.”

“Of course, Lucius. I truly find Ariandi a very lovely young woman.” Damitri nodded, gesturing for Lucius to precede him into the restaurant.

The Malfoy patriarch stepped in, straightening his robes. He wished for a moment that he had worn his more formal robes but then brushed that thought aside; he had no idea how she was dressed and did not want to make her feel inadequate to be part of his family. He glanced around; the back booth was empty but there was a drink and two untouched glasses of water upon the table.

Lucius found himself feeling more than a bit depressed that he could not pick her out of those present. “It looks like she’s changed her mind…” he murmured.

“I don’t think so; it’s possible she just nipped off to the loo. Let’s have a seat and wait for her.” Damitri suggested. His companion nodded and took a seat to wait, as did Damitri. They did not have to wait long; in only a few minutes the two looked up as a woman approached the table.

She was dressed stylishly without being overdone in muggle-style clothes; a smart jacket and skirt combination in deep blue that hugged her feminine curves, covering the pale cream silk blouse she wore with heels that matched the skirt. Her hair was unmistakably of the white-blonde that seemed to dominate the Malfoy clan, though it was not straight as Lucius’ own was; it was clearly at least wavy if not downright curly. She wore it mostly confined in a bun though several strands hung like a pale halo about her face. She was of average height and build, and her skin had a healthy glow. Her eyes were James’ without a doubt; they had the same deep green with flecks of gold that seemed to draw the eye in.
“You must be Lucius Malfoy.” She said softly as she halted beside the table.

He rose to his feet even as Damitri did. “Yes, I am. And you are Ariandi?”

“Yes.” She said, moving forward and taking a seat. Lucius didn’t miss the fact that she placed herself as far from him as possible and ensured that Damitri was placed between herself and him nor did she follow the muggle tradition of shaking hands and offer him her hand in greeting. “Mr. Zabini told me you wished to meet me.”

“More than you can possibly know.” Lucius said softly. “I see you are dressed as a muggle…”

“I was raised as a muggle child.” She shrugged. “My father… I mean, the man who raised me was a squib and my mother was muggle. I’m quite comfortable in these, much more than in robes and other flashy wizarding gowns.”

“I understand that… and I want you to know that there are many things you don’t know about me. You don’t know me very well at all.”

“I’ve heard plenty.” She answered quietly, her face closing up in a Malfoy-like mask of dislike.

Lucius sighed softly; this young woman had definitely been hardened against him and any facet of the Malfoy family. Perhaps another tack was in order to reach out to her.

“I have no doubt on that fact… but what have you heard about the one who gave birth to you?”

She blinked. “What…? Well, no, nothing really. My father spoke of him only rarely; he had no details to give me. All he knew was that the young man was still of school age and his name was James. That’s all I’m really certain of.”

“I will tell you anything you wish to know about him.” He answered softly. “He has left us both but I can tell you all about him.”

“Why did he not want me?” She asked softly.

“He did, so very much… and you will never understand just how much I wanted you myself.” Lucius answered, unable to raise his eyes to look at her. It was all so painful; he was sure he’d need a few drinks simply to get through this. “He was still in Hogwarts when he conceived. He was really too young to make his own decisions but neither of us cared; we were going to elope and flee Britain. We were going to live in America and raise you.”

She glanced at Damitri, who nodded his assurance that Lucius spoke the truth. “Then why?” she asked again.

“The stories you have heard about me pale before what my father was.” He answered. “When he discovered James was with my child he was infuriated. Like all pureblood wizarding families, he had my entire life mapped out for me before I was six years of age. He would tolerate no diversion from his plan for my life; indeed, it has gone pretty much as he desired up until the Dark Lord’s death. It was his decision and his doing to remove you from the minds and lives of all of those whom you mattered to; I was not even aware of your birth until days later. The removal of you from our lives and from the memories of anyone who mattered was his decision; his doing. He even ensured that James had no memory of you and at the same time convinced him that he never wanted anything to do with me again.”

“How did he do all of that?”

Damitri spoke up to answer. “Abraxus Malfoy was quite adept at memory manipulation without
wand or physical contact. He made your father, James, believe that the reason that he was so weak and sore following the delivery was actually due to a vicious dark magic attack by Lucius. He twisted the mind of James’ father to believe that there had been no baby. His mother had always been very delicate and prone to moments of confusion regarding reality, so no one paid any attention to her when she said there had been a child. James did not remember, nor did his father so no investigation was ever done.” Damitri supplied.

“Others had to have known he was carrying…”

“Yes, they did. But at the time it was not unusual for those carrying unwanted children to ‘disappear’ and come back without any sign of carrying; it was inappropriate for anyone to have a child out of wedlock.”

“But you still knew about me.” She said, gazing at Lucius.

“My father planned it that way. He even altered my mother’s memories; she never regained the knowledge of you. I searched for months; lost my job at Hogwarts, lost any semblance of sanity for a little while. I nearly destroyed the family name trying to find you and I truly didn’t care. I had no idea where James had vanished to, that spring break. You were not due to be born until that summer, months away.” Lucius answered quietly and then fell silent for several minutes. It was clear that he was not finished, and Ariandi remained silent, wanting to hear all that he had to say. “I searched five countries for you; every place I knew my father had frequented, every property that he bought or even looked at, even those of his friends and acquaintances… I found nothing. I searched his offices and every place I could find to try to locate answers of where he had hidden you… I even drag Narcissa into it all to try to get my father to talk. I just wanted to know if you were dead; then I would have been able to grieve for you… but there was no body, no trace of you no matter how hard I searched…”

“Mr. Zabini found me.” She said quietly.

Damitri felt it necessary to speak up again; he had learned from Lucius’ own memories how hard the man had searched for his lost daughter. “Yes, I did, but only because Lucius had never given up the possibility that you could be alive. Lucius had been living with the evidence for decades and never knew it. His father derived years of pleasure from his son searching for something magically spelled against his finding it.”

“Hidden away in the old man’s study, I understand.” Lucius said with distaste. “I hated his study. I only went in there once after he died and I tore everything apart… of course I found nothing and I sealed the room so no one would use it again. The house elves restored the room once I gave permission but there was nothing for me to find in there.”

“It had to be someone else.” Damitri agreed.

“Why didn’t you just give him the information? He’s my father and supposedly so worried about me; why didn’t you let him look for me?” she asked Damitri.

Lucius snorted in derision. “Think about that a moment, would you Ariandi? Think on what you would have done, had Lucius Abraxus Malfoy shown up on your front doorstep. I highly doubt you would have welcomed me with open arms and invited me inside for a cup of tea; more likely you would have drawn a wand, cursed me as quickly as possible, and made your escape… not that I would blame you, knowing what history you must have been given on me…”

She sat back in her chair, considering this blonde man whom she had been told such evil things about all through her youth. She had never been threatened with the bogey-man; she had been
threatened with being taken away by Malfoy if she misbehaved. And that had been enough. “You’re probably right; I would have done just that. I won’t let my family be harmed.”

“Nor would I. And that is where that reputation you are so aware of has come from. I was merely protecting my son the only way I knew how.” He said softly. “And I was successful in that protection; my son is a fine man now.”

“Is he? I haven’t heard much about your son.” She commented.

“No…? His actions caused him many problems with the ministry; at one point I had to sue the Daily Prophet to ensure there were no more slanderous stories listed in that worthless rag about my son. He did no wrong in the time of the fall of the Dark Lord; he did all he could to survive.”

“The papers I saw only spoke of the heroism of Harry Potter and how fantastic a man he was… and then the disappointment when he married Harry Potter…”

“Yes, Harry Potter; only child of James Potter and Lilly Evans Potter…”

“He… He’s my brother…? Harry Potter…?”

“And so is Draco Malfoy.” Lucius agreed. “It’s strange, what fate decrees for us… my son married the son of my beloved James.” He answered. “Their wedding spread shockwaves through the entire wizarding population. Everyone expected Potter to marry the only Weasley girl. Your father and Lilly Evans married a few years after he… lost his memory and we lost you.” He said softly. “He never regained his memories of you nor of me, before he died.”

She was silent a few moments; digesting the information she had been given. Lucius allowed her that time, knowing it was a lot to take in. “I just… a lot that I had been told is… all wrong.” She said finally.

“Precisely why I agreed to meet you here. I wanted to talk to you on our own, before introducing the rest of the family.”

“I thought you had only one son.”

Malfoy lifted one elegant eyebrow. “You don’t read the Prophet, do you?”

“No, my father… do you mind if I still call him father?”

“He raised you. I can only hope someday you can see me as worthy of that title as well; no, I do not mind if you call him what he earned, raising you.”

“My father said the Prophet was worthless. We got our news out of Bavaria and Egypt, mostly.”

“Even they must have reported on the insanity of the Parkinson’s…”

“Yes. Something about stealing babies…?”

“More than just children were stolen, but we will fill you in on all of that later. Due to what they did, you now have several siblings and nieces and nephews.”

“I had one, a sister. She died about five years ago; she was a squib like father and…”

“The man you call father is not a squib, Ariandi.” Damitri told her.

“He wasn’t…?”
“No, he had magic. He hid them from you and the world to keep you safe.” Damitri continued.

“What?”

“Safe from your own grandfather.” Lucius was not afraid to answer. “My father wanted you to die that night. If it were not for that man who spirited you away, he would have succeeded in your murder. He never approved of the bond between James and me; when he found out about the pregnancy he said that I was young and stupid and did not understand what a burden I was putting on the Malfoy name, as I was the only son. He told me that you were nothing but a mistake. I had been betrothed as a child to Narcissa Black and he was determined to make that into my future.”

“Did she know about James and you? Narcissa, I mean?”

“Yes; my dear Cissa was my best friend. She not only knew; she had supported us every step of the way. She is the one who helped me keep my sanity after James was gone… she kept tabs on him and let me know where he was and what was happening in his life.”

“Didn’t you marry her anyway?”

“My father got his wish.” He agreed. “We did get married, because there was no hope that I would ever have my James again. We had only one son, giving my father the heir he so desperately desired for the Malfoy name. The birth nearly killed her; the medi-wizards told us both that another child would certainly take her life so we never attempted to have any more.”

“I can understand that.” She said softly. “So… what is he like? I’ve heard rumors but…”

“Rumors.” Lucius half-growled. “I can’t stand rumor-mongers; they’ve nearly ruined my life and my son’s as well.”

“So you were never one of the Death Eaters?”

“I was; I can explain all that to you some day. That was never a rumor.”

“And you never killed on that Dark Lord’s command?”

“I never killed on his command. That was pure fiction other people made up. I was cleared in the courts of ever having used the killing curse.”

She frowned in thought. “And your son…? He didn’t do that either?”

“No, and he is not and never was a Death Eater.” He answered.

She sat back, sipping her drink, silent a few moments.

“Might I be permitted to ask some questions?” Lucius asked, feeling it was better to ask permission at this point in time rather than assume.

“You can ask, as long as I can refuse to answer that question if I feel like it.” She agreed cautiously. The question he began with was not what she had expected; she had thought he would ask about her magical prowess or strength, or her education.

“Did you have a good childhood?”

She blinked at the question. “Well, yes, I did.” She agreed. “Father was always very watchful over us, taking care of our every need. Mother took care of us and father worked down at the magic store; we learned all kinds of tricks and sleight of hand from him but some of his tricks were just hard to
“Some of his tricks were true magic, I’m sure you understand that now.”

“If he was not a squib, yes, it makes much more sense to me.” She agreed.

“You and your… sister, you said…? …you two had a good relationship?” he asked again surprising her.

“We were sisters, or so I thought… she was blonde like me so it made sense that we would be sisters. Her hair was very straight and her eyes were green not hazel like mine. She was so lovely…”

“Was… you speak of her as if she was no longer alive.”

“She died when she was fifteen… it nearly destroyed father to lose her. Mother went… funny when she died. She was never the same after that and she died within a year of my sister.”

“What caused her death?”

“She was such an adventurous girl; almost anything you challenged her to do, she would go out and do. And if she couldn’t do it the first time she wouldn’t quit until she had managed to master whatever it was… she was horseback riding and they came across a snake on the path… the horse threw her and she landed hard on the rock path. By the time we found her it was already much too late.”

“My condolences; I know she was a sister to you and you clearly cared for her.” Lucius said softly.

“How old were you at the time?”

“I was twenty years old and on my own by then. I had to get a second job to put mother in a nursing home. Father didn’t need to go to a home until just last year; he tells me he’s only seventy but I think he’s much older than that…”

“He is closer to ninety years old than seventy.” Damitri informed her.

“That old…?”

“He was in his fifties, late fifties, when he took you in and married your mother.”

“Oh. I had no idea. He was always so strong and there for everything…”

“Being a wizard does have some advantages; especially when your strongest talent is to heal.”

“But he always was looking at those mail-order things squibs get to try to get magical talent…”

“While you were growing up, had you no accidents? Things that resulted in cuts and broken bones?” Lucius asked.

“I never had any broken bones. I sprained my ankle a few times and hurt my leg when I fell off the roof but I never…” her eyes showed comprehension. “Oh…! You mean father healed my broken bones…”

“I don’t doubt that he did, for both you and your sister.”

“But why would he hide such a skill? He could have gotten a lot of money for helping people…”

“And he would have exposed himself to the public eye and the wizarding world if he advertised his
power; my father surely would have tracked him down at that point. Your father hid himself and you so well that he never heard of my father passing, over twenty years ago.”

“Was your father truly such an awful person?” she asked.

“He was… a Malfoy.” Lucius shrugged. “Certain that there is no family in this entire universe good enough to be equal partner to his own. Obsessed with promoting the family name and its power, expanding our holdings… He was what he was raised to be by his own father, using whatever means he felt necessary. He tried to raise me the same as he was raised, and nearly succeeded in turning me into his own mirror image; but I take great pride in the fact that I never once abused my own son, nor treated him as I was treated… well, almost never.” He said softly.

“What did you do to your son that your father would have?”

“Forbade him from marrying the one he loved; your brother, Harry Potter. I know now it was jealousy driving me to keep them apart; I tried all I could without ostracizing myself from Draco to keep them from getting closer but there was no stopping their relationship at that point.” He sighed, ashamed of what he had done. “But now that I remember everything and know of all the details, I realize what I have done. It’s the only thing I am ashamed of in the entire raising of my son. I had treated him as my own father treated me; trying to arrange a marriage that was not suited to his tastes or his heart. And now I couldn’t be more content that he went against my wishes.”

“What changed your mind?”

Lucius could not help a soft smile. “There is an old saying that is so true, amongst both the muggle and wizarding worlds as well; nothing heal the heart like a grandchild.”

“How many are there…?”

“Draco has given birth to a son just recently, and has named him James. There are several others as well, not from the bond between the two of them. My dear little Angel, Alerick and Mallek. And of course the twins, Lilly and Remus Severus. There are several more as well but I would prefer that you would come and meet them for yourself, as I would love to meet your family. I never had any choice in whether to raise you, but I would like you to come to understand that I never threw you away.”

She was silent a long moment. “I think that would be good for me… and I would like to meet my brothers, though it’s odd to think they are married…”

“You will get used to it; it’s taken me years, but I have accepted it as well.” He said with a soft smile. He rose to his feet then. “I will have my wards about the mansion opened to you, and I will also ensure that my fireplaces are open to you through the Floo network. You have only to speak the words “Malfoy Manor” and you will be transported to my Floo Room.”

“That’s very generous of you…” she said softly.

“You are my daughter, like as not, and you will always be welcome in Malfoy Manor.” Lucius gave her a formal wizard’s bow of respect. “I hope to see you soon.” He said with true warmth. “Shall we, Damitri?”

“Yes of course. Good day, Ariandi.” He smiled at her, rising and bowing as well. The two wizards strode out of the restaurant leaving her gazing after them, bemused.
DEAR READERS:

Thank you so much for your kind attention and interest in the story, but this one has wound to a close. There may be a couple of epilogues coming, but everyone is set and back to where they belong; now they embark on the most challenging task that anyone can face. They must somehow survive the childhood of over a dozen children in the Mansion at one time and at least five highly talented wizards and witches in development.

Note: The scene with Mallek was borrowed almost in entirety from America’s Funniest Videos – thank you crying baby!

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